

Stop surprising me with your “tips”

In the last few weeks, I have been noticing an inordinate amount of posts with this type of formulaic headline:

[Insert number, generally 5 or 7] [insert hyperbolic adjective such as surprising or best-ever] **Tips to** [insert desired action, generally improving or achieving] **Your** [Insert success-oriented result such as expert knowledge or success]

Example:

5 Tips to Exponentially Improve Your Business Success

This is a headline formula sure to get attention. It is well-known that people love lists, tips and any headline with a number in it. Combine them all, and well, you have guaranteed clicks (also known as click-bait). And click-bait is exactly what these are. Very few, if any, of the articles attached to these headlines provide anything substantial. Certainly, not anything surprising. And many seem to forget what a tip is.

Although the word tip has many meanings (including the point of a pencil, to topple something) the definition most of these posts refer to is this, from Merriam-Webster:

a piece of advice or expert or authoritative information

or

a piece of advance or confidential information given by one thought to have access to special or inside sources

But here's the thing. A lot of what I am reading barely seems like advice and most of it is certainly not authoritative. For example, I read one of these articles entitled something like

5 Tips to Improve Your Writing, and one of the “tips” was “don’t lie.” Seriously. Don’t lie is not a tip, it’s a given (and some of the religious persuasion would say it is a commandment).

And then, there’s an article I read last week about “surprising” ways to land a job. Here’s one of the surprising ways: network. They may have well put in “fill an application” or “send a resume.”

I understand why people are writing these headlines and constructing their posts like this. After all, following a formula is easy, and it usually gets attention. The problem is that when you don’t deliver on the promise of the headline, people won’t read anything you write anymore or at least won’t look at it seriously.

Here’s my non-surprising tip: avoid click-bait posts.