A bit of advice

HGTV (one of my favorite channels) has a show called Real Estate Intervention. It features a truth-telling real estate agent Mike Aubrey who brings a dose of reality to homeowners who are having a hard time selling their house. While we could discuss the fact that HGTV has had to adjust to the reality of a hard housing market (as this blogdiscusses) what I want to talk about is giving advice.

As a marketing consultant, I am required to give advice. I deal with questions like should you do a brochure, update your website or what your tag line should be. You would think that clients, who are paying for my opinion, would listen to it, but often, this is not the case. Many times, people want an outsider to bolster their ideas. For instance, if you think your website is fine as is, you want me to agree. If I don't agree, you dismiss me.

In the Real Estate Intervention show, people seem reluctant to listen to Mike because they often do not like what he has to say. His advice (usually, lower your asking price) is not what they want to hear. In spite of the fact that Mike shows comparable houses that sold for much less, the homeowners seem to believe that their houses are better and that people would pay much more money for it (even though they have not been able to sell their house at the asking price). The show really illustrates how hard it is to give advice.

Advice is tricky because people have preconceived notions. Most people think that they know as much or more than you know and if your advice does not match up to their ideas, then you must be wrong. Even when all evidence points to the contrary. We've seen lots of businesses pushing back against social media, for instance. Business owners don't believe it can help. Even though it does. But because it is not their reality they push back.

What can you do if you are in the business of giving advice? Well, the best is to be like Mike Aubrey. Make your case in the most concrete way possible. Facts and figures are very helpful. Never say “because I think so.” That won’t cut it. In the end, advice will only be received well by someone who is receptive. Accept this.