

The Advisory Alliance

60-Second E-mail™ – June 29, 2006

Rats Can't. Humans Can...But Not Always.

In this month's 60-Second E-mail™, we look at the unfortunate difference between rats and humans, and how we often embrace elements that undermine our very wellbeing and "survival".

Rats can't vomit. We humans can. But sometimes you wouldn't know it.

It is true; rats can't. Without getting into too much detail, it's the reason why rat poison is so lethal once consumed. Once swallowed, it's there to stay. However, rats do possess extremely acute senses of taste and smell, providing them with very effective first lines of defense. In fact, a rat will intentionally avoid anything that has made it even slightly ill in the past.

We humans, on the other hand, don't possess such fine senses of taste and smell. Yes, we can tell the difference between Limburger and mild Cheddar, but beyond that, we're not so adept. Sure, if you're a reader of Wine Spectator, you may have a finely attuned nose (or at least appear to us dull-nosed mortals that you have one). But by and large, in contrast to our rodent friend, our senses aren't much use to us in avoiding various "toxins" in our lives. Moreover, our vastly larger brain tends to be of little use either.

The human species is remarkable in its tenacity to do all sorts of things that undermine its longevity. We continue to smoke, eat and drink to excess, drug ourselves, avoid exercise, don't buckle up, etc. even though we know it's not in our best interests. Our reluctance and outright defiance to change is remarkable. In contrast to the rat, who avoids, almost forever, anything that once made it *feel* sick, many of us knowingly continue to "consume" those things that actually make us sick and put our wellbeing at real risk.

So why do we persist in such activity? I'm drawn to a recent 60-Second E-mail™ on change (*Where Have All the Burning Platforms Gone?* - April 27, 2006) and to comments made by readers. Several comments were directed at companies, at how they have failed their employees in getting them to change. While it is true that some companies have performed poorly in their attempts at motivating and getting employees to change in the face of a blatant need for change (the focus of that 60-second E-mail™), I would first argue the obvious, that many of us desire not to change, but I'd also go one step further and argue that we do so even when it's blatantly in our best interests to change.

Many a change management consultant have asserted that you need to make the case for change on rational merits, that you need to build a case based on such overwhelming and compelling reason and logic that any rational person would be convinced to such an extent, they'd be foolish not to change. I mean, who would ever do anything that would endanger their life, real or employment one? When it comes to change, who would ever not change if it meant they would not "survive"?

Tons of us.

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We smoke when we know it will make us sick or kill us. We drink or drug even though we know it will hurt ourselves and others. We refuse to develop new skills and knowledge that will secure us a better future. We work far more than we need to, even though it's at the expense of family, friends, and ultimately ourselves.

We are, at times, like the rat, which cannot rid itself of the toxin, but with one important exception. Unlike the rat, however, we do not avoid forever that which makes us ill. Instead many of us continue to consume it, and in many cases *prefer* to keep consuming it, notwithstanding the attendant consequences. Often, we actively *fight* attempts to help us, with the rationalization that this is who I am, this is how I've always been, and I prefer not to change, thank you.

Amazing how a species can fight for behaviors that undermine its own existence. The rat will avoid that which jeopardizes its existence. We, at times, embrace them.

Why is this so?

Some very preliminary thoughts and speculations will be shared in next month's 60-Second E-mail™

You can access this and past 60-Second E-mails™, as well as subscribe to our mailing list, via the following link to our newly updated web site: <http://www.advisoryalliance.com/newsletter.php>

Until next month, best regards,

David

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