

When the Shark Bites

Written by Bob Snyder
28 June 2018

Sharkonomics. That's a title of a book that takes a big bite out of the subject of how to compete against bigger competitors.



Author Stefan Engeseth from Sweden, corrected us when we asked him at CEBIT 2018 about the metaphor his book title suggests.

“This is more than just a metaphor,” explains Engeseth. “This book explains real shark behaviour and applies the principles to business. The shark is one of nature’s top predators, highly strategic and efficient in survival. Our species is an animal. We can learn from other animals.”

The Founder and CEO of Detective Marketing, Engeseth studied sharks for three years, enlisting the aid of one of the top university professors studying sharks in the wild. He was swimming with the sharks, literally.

Compared to nature, business competition is nothing to be scared of. In nature, everybody is on the menu. “A giraffe can’t send an email to a lion and scare them off with a lawsuit,” adds the author.

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And just like our takeovers and acquisitions, there's cannibalism in the wild. While sharks may work together if they can share a big prey, if one sees a weakness in another, it could be an intraspecies mealtime.

The idea came from an experience where Engeseth was hired by a global enterprise to attack it, to simulate how an outside competitor might strike lethally at its business.

While the inspiration and the book hooked corporates on hiring Engeseth for conference keynotes speeches, he is proudest of his workshops. "A lot of speakers talk in concept, but in workshop we actually help executives get into shark mode," notes Engeseth

What is "shark mode?"

Prey and predator have a relationship-- in a way they do a tango. Without stealing too much of the splash of the book, the shark is known to circle and investigate prey.

"Experts say when you see a shark it is already too late if you are on their menu. Their decisions are made in stealth mode," he elaborates. "We talk in the book about what's under the surface: the Unthinkable, the Visible (shadows) and the In Your Face (when it's already too late)."

The book also offers 10 strategies for attack and 10 for defense.

One fan of the book is Chris Fallows, the South African shark expert and the author of *Great White and the Majesty of Sharks* (his work is frequently on *Discovery Channel*, *BBC*, *Nat Geographic* and *Animal Planet*.)

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He says “Businesses can’t fail to learn something valuable from *Sharkonomics* and Nature.”

We usually label it “Mother” Nature. So it is probably not shocking it’s the female shark that Engeseth asks his clients to most emulate.

In a world where #MeToo may be inspiring new waves of feminism, it’s probably a good time to ask all those predominantly white male businessmen to think occasionally like females. You see, the female brings a superior pattern-less attack—they probe the prey more intelligently and attack more aggressively.

*Oh, the shark, babe, has such teeth, dear
And it shows them pearly white...*

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