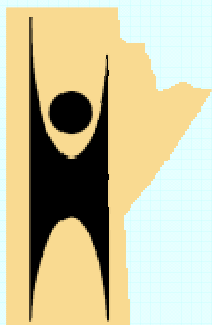


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Humanist Association of Manitoba

Upcoming events

Summer Party
Friday, August 28, 2009

6:00 pm to ?

Location: Degrees Diner
3rd Floor, University Centre
Fort Garry Campus
University of Manitoba

Dinner: Order from the Diner's Menu

Free parking in lots A and P after 4:30 pm,
but avoid the parking spots with red posts

Mark Your Calendars!

Monthly Meeting
Saturday, September 12, 2009
Viscount Gort Hotel, 1670 Portage Ave. at Route 90

Topic: TBA

TAM 7 REPORT – STEVE CUNO

Once again, we journeyed to Las Vegas for *The Amazing Meeting*, hosted by the James Randi Educational Foundation. TAM is a conference on skepticism and science. Here is a summary of one of the stand-out presentations.

According to Steve Cuno, we atheists have an image problem. Steve is the CEO of the Response Agency, and the author of the book [“Prove It Before You Promote It: How to Take the Guesswork Out of Marketing”](#). He gave an interesting talk at last year’s meeting, and this year’s presentation was even better.

He started out his talk by asking the question, what is a brand? What comes to mind when you think about a certain company? He used the example of Nordstrom’s, but we could also use Tim Horton’s. Or Wal-Mart versus The Bay. You get the idea. Each of these brands has automatic associations that come with it. In Steve’s opinion, a brand or image is more than an eye-catching logo or a snappy catch-phrase. A brand is better defined by the experience you (the company) create for your customers.

Steve used the term skeptic, but mentioned that it also could encompass the terms atheist, agnostic, rationalist, freethinker or humanist (while he did acknowledge that they weren’t all interchangeable).

Since there are segments of our society that think of “we of little faith” as worse than pond slime, that we’re ruthless amoral beasts who eat kittens and torture puppies, we need to make sure we don’t add to that perception. As well, since we atheists (humanists, freethinkers, skeptics, agnostics – take your pick) are an independent lot, and we have no dogma or central authority, we need to police ourselves.

So, to summarize, Steve had some ideas for improving our brand image:

1. Delay giving yourself a label. It might not be the most popular thing to introduce yourself by saying “Hi, I’m Bob, I’m a godless atheist.” We really don’t have to say anything until the subject comes up. And it allows others to get to know us and appreciate us as a person first, and not assign us a label.
2. Stay positive. When the time does come to discuss beliefs, or if someone asks you for your opinion, don’t lead with a negative. Baldly stating that you don’t believe in a deity, is more negative than stating what you DO believe in. Here are some positive examples:

“I believe what the evidence supports.”

“I believe in honesty, equality, personal responsibility and the scientific method of inquiry.”
3. Walk the Walk. Spend some time doing good, and become an activist. Join those organizations that are involved in causes that you care about. We certainly don’t want to brag about the things that we do, but if someone else notices, it certainly can’t hurt. And, it makes you feel good.
4. Pick the right time and place. Focus our efforts on those who may be swayed, rather than badger those who are steadfast in their own beliefs. Just annoying them further is not going to win us any prizes, or popularity contests. Our “brand” IS for some, but it may not be for everyone. Some people don’t want to change.

I certainly see value in Steve’s ideas, and I think most of us are already aware on some level that these approaches will work better than some others, but it’s a nice reminder.

“Any movement, skepticism or other, that treats people like prospective customers that it cares about, rather than as enemies to beat down with clever words, will do far more for its brand ... than coming up with some hollow ad campaign.”

- Steve Cuno

- Donna Harris

Wanna Go To Camp?

I was thrilled to find out about an opportunity for us to have a great time while learning about various skeptical topics and meeting other like-minded people.

Host a Skepticamp.

Unlike Camp Quest, which is a residential camp for children of the non-religious, a Skepticamp is a locally organized event for adults, as well as children of all ages.

Skepticamps are informal, community-organized events born from the desire for people to share and learn in an open environment. Everyone from casual skeptics to the experienced participate, give talks and get to know each other.

SkeptiCamp focuses on science, critical thinking, pseudoscience, paranormal claims, alternative medicine and the hundreds of topics of interest to skeptics.

The big difference is that it doesn't rely on a big-name lineup of speakers. All of the attendees, if they don't actively give a presentation, are at least expected to participate somehow.

Skepticamps don't have to be lengthy or expensive to put on. They can be 3 or 4 hours on a Saturday afternoon. A meeting room with Audio/Visual capability is the main requirement.

For more information, check them out at skeptcamp.org. If you'd be interesting in signing up or helping out, send me an email.

- Donna H

And he's godless too? Darn that Angelina

So, Brad Pitt is not only talented, a great dad, rich, generous, caring and hawt, he's also non-religious? Wow.

As reported all over the internet recently, when asked if he believes in a higher power, the movie star smiled and responded, "No, no, no!"

He had the same response when asked if his soul was spiritual!

"I'm probably 20 percent atheist and 80 percent agnostic," says Poppa Pitt. "I don't think anyone really knows. You'll either find out or not when you get there, until then there's no point thinking about it."

Brad is not only an atheist, he's publicly spoken out against the ban on gay marriage in the U.S.:

"I have love in my life, a soul mate—absolutely. When someone asked me

why Angie and I don't get married, I replied, '**Maybe we'll get married when it's legal for everyone else.**' I stand by that, although I took a lot of flak for saying it—hate mail from religious groups. I believe everyone should have the same rights. They say gay marriage ruins families and hurts kids. Well, I've had the privilege of seeing my gay friends being parents and watching their kids grow up in a loving environment."

Sigh...

- DH



Bertrand Russell's Ten Commitments

1. Do not feel absolutely certain of anything.
2. Do not think it worthwhile to produce belief by concealing evidence, for the evidence is sure to come to light.
3. Never try to discourage thinking, for you are sure to succeed.
4. When you meet with opposition, even if it is from your family, endeavour to overcome it with argument and not by authority, for a victory dependent upon authority is unreal and illusory.
5. Have no respect for the authority of others, for there are always contrary authorities to be found.
6. Do not use power to suppress opinions you think pernicious, for if you do, the opinions will suppress you.
7. Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric.
8. Find more pleasure in intelligent dissent than in passive agreement, for if you value intelligence as you should, the former implies a deeper agreement than the latter.
9. Be scrupulously truthful even if the truth is inconvenient, for it is more inconvenient when you try to conceal it.
10. Do not feel envious of the happiness of those who live in a fool's paradise, for only a fool will think that is happiness.

Decide For Yourself – Do Rats Laugh?

I just recently came across an interesting story. A couple of researchers are stating that rats are capable of laughter.

Two American scientists are claiming to have discovered that rats "laugh" when tickled.

Jaak Panksepp and Jeffrey Burgdorf, of Bowling Green State University in Ohio, found that young rats chirp vigorously during rough-and-tumble play sessions.

They also chirped more than their older relatives when tickled. According to the scientists, this fits in with the idea that children are more ticklish than adults.

Mr Panksepp and Mr Burgdorf believe

the tickling experiments show that a "primal form of laughter" evolved well before primates appeared.

Mr Panksepp told New Scientist magazine: "We'd be surprised if rats have a sense of humour, but they clearly have a sense of fun."

So, decide for yourself. The video is easily found at Youtube by searching for "Rats Laugh When You Tickle Them".

Personally, I was a little skeptical until I saw the animals following the researcher's hand around. They certainly weren't ready for the fun to stop.

Let me know what you think!

- Donna H



Euthanasia in the News – Muddy waters ahead

Quebec Physicians have tentatively proposed that euthanasia be legalized and a few of the newspapers have picked up the story. A quick review of the opinion pieces written on this topic show attempts to be objective mixed with lots of opinion. This is probably due to the shortness of the articles and a lack of room to express a full evolved argument.

It should come as no surprise, the arguments for and against euthanasia call for a personal opinion, in many cases and it can be quite tough to ferret out the finer points of each argument in a way that does not seem to be biased. The only point that I find to be universally agreed is that IF euthanasia is ever accepted into society controls need to be in place to prevent abuse. Amen to the controls.

When a doctor is giving pain relief to a patient near the end of a terminal illness the medicine eventually becomes toxic due to the amount needed to kill the pain and it shortens the life of the patient. Where does the doctor draw the line? Does she let the patient live slightly longer but in extreme pain? Or should she administer a final dose right near the end in order to end the suffering after the medicine can no longer kill the pain? Isn't that Euthanasia? What are the considerations that a doctor would need to make in such a matter? Certainly, the opinion of the patient who is suffering would be most important since they are the ones who are in pain. Hopefully they are competent enough at the end to express their wishes clearly.

In the National Post, Barbara Kay argues that Euthanasia empowers no one, while attempting to knock down the arguments of those who demand freedom to make a personal choice on the matter. She states, "Take for a

representative example one of the "letters of the day" in the Post's July 22 edition, from Alexander McKay of Calgary. Mr. McKay argues for assisted suicide with the conviction of one endorsing, rather than flouting, received wisdom. The notion that the individual not only has the right to control his time of departure from this Earth, but has the right to society's complicity in a death deliberately chosen, is embedded in the calm and confident air with which Mr. McKay projects his reasons for wishing, when his "wonderful life" dwindles down to a putative final season of debility and suffering, to "consider my options."

After a few paragraphs Kay goes on to disagree and summarizes her argument in this manner, "Well, here is where my sense of "logic or morality" leads me. The idea behind legalized suicide is that it will free the elderly, the infirm and the pain-wracked from their misery. In fact, those who will effectively be freed will be the young and the healthy. By removing the sanctity of life from the equation and replacing it with logic, we will be shifting responsibility for the care of the old and the vulnerable from their loved ones and society to themselves alone."

The arguments for and against euthanasia are rooted in logic, dogma, personal opinion and concern for those who suffer. This will not be an easily resolved debate. In my opinion I hope that freedom of choice will prevail, with controls to protect those who may be exploited.

- Jeff Olsson

A very faithful woman

An elderly lady was well-known for her faith and for her boldness in talking about it. She would stand on her front porch and shout "PRAISE THE LORD!"

Next door to her lived an atheist who would get so angry at her proclamations he would shout, "There ain't no Lord!!"

Hard times set in on the elderly lady, and she prayed for GOD to send her some assistance. She stood on her porch and shouted "PRAISE THE LORD. GOD I NEED FOOD!! I AM HAVING A HARD TIME. PLEASE LORD, SEND ME SOME GROCERIES!!"

The next morning the lady went out on her porch and noted a large bag of groceries and shouted, "PRAISE THE LORD."

The neighbor jumped from behind a bush and said, "Aha! I told you there was no Lord. I bought those groceries, God didn't."

The lady started jumping up and down and clapping her hands and said, "PRAISE THE LORD. He not only sent me groceries, but He made the devil pay for them. Praise the Lord!"

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