

“How does it look now?”

One of my favorite social entrepreneurs lived more than 500 years ago . . . and his career is filled with ingenious strategies for meeting customer demands . . .

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When you enter the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence, you turn left and pass through a doorway, then glance down a large room to your right.

When I did that three years ago I began to cry . . .



I simply do not understand, and I will never understand, why one work of art will move me and another will not. Why do I always weep at the first movement of Mozart's *Prague Symphony*? Why am I entranced by Monet's *Terrace at the Seaside*, *Sainte Adresse* and Van Gogh's *Wheat Field with Crows*? And why did the sight of Michelangelo's *David* bring me to tears when I first glimpsed it from 50 yards away?

I was 22 when I discovered Florence and the *David*, but in 1967 I had only a wisp of artistic sensibility. I knew the statue was special, but I didn't know why, either intellectually or emotionally. The only thing I remembered, for years, was its height -- 17 feet from base to crown.

By the time my wife and I entered the Galleria in 2009, however, I had been to dozens of museums all over the world and had opened myself, in some mysterious way, to the emotional power of paintings and sculptures. I still cannot tell you why I came undone at that first glimpse of the statue three years ago. All I recall is a wave of emotion that flooded my senses and left me physically unstable.

Last fall Linda and I returned to Florence and once again headed for the Galleria. This time we followed a tour guide who shared a dozen stories about Michelangelo and his life. But her tales about the *David* were my favorites.

When a group of political and religious patrons gave 26-year-old Michelangelo Buonarroti the commission to create the statue, he knew he would never get anything done if they were observing him while he worked. So he erected a giant wooden wall that completely surrounded his work space and for three years labored on the project without letting anybody else inside (probably one of the world's first skunkworks).

Eventually came the day of unveiling, September 8, 1504. It had taken four days to move the cloaked sculpture from the workshop to the *piazza* in front of the town hall. Michelangelo invited his patrons to attend, unsheathed the statue, then waited for their reactions.

One particularly officious politician stared at the figure looming above him, moved around to different vantage points, then turned to Michelangelo and announced, "I don't like the nose."

What?

"It's too long."

Now, this politician and his colleagues were Michelangelo's customers, the people who commissioned the sculpture. They needed to be satisfied with the finished product.

Which meant Michelangelo had to do something about the nose.

So he placed a ladder next to the statue and climbed up near the head, his chisel in hand.

Then, very carefully, he leaned forward, gripped the chisel in both hands and began to slide it along the nose.

Or so his patrons believed.

Unbeknownst to them, Michelangelo had secreted marble dust in one of his palms – and as he *pretended* to scrape away at the nose, he slowly released the dust and let it filter gently toward the ground.

After two or three moments of careful labor, he sighed, straightened up and stepped back down the ladder.

"How does it look now?" he asked the meddlesome politician, who gazed upward, looked at the nose from various angles and finally gave his verdict.

"Perfect," he said. "That's *much* better than it was before."

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Genuine entrepreneurs need the freedom to create. None of them want to have people looking over their shoulders, demanding weekly reports, insisting on changes. But they are also sleight of hand wizards, masters of mis-direction. They have a sixth sense that tells them when to zig and when to zag.

Peter Senge described the entrepreneurial spirit this way in The Fifth Discipline: "The committed person brings an energy, passion, and excitement that cannot be generated if you are . . . compliant The committed person doesn't play by the 'rules of the game.' He is responsible for the game. If the rules of the game stand in the way of achieving the vision, he will find ways to change the rules."

Sometimes all it takes is a handful of dust . . .