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Special Report
WHAT YOU WON'T LEARN ON TV

by Robert Urbanowski

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The Power of TV

Television and television advertising has had significant impact on our society since the explosion of its popularity after World War II. In the past 60 years, TV has influenced our thoughts, beliefs, behaviors and actions. We remember 10 per cent of what we read, 20 per cent of what we hear and 70 per cent of what we see.

No other source of information – even the Internet - comes close to the power of television. Television combines the compelling images, music and drama of the movies, with the immediacy of radio. It should come as no surprise that television is the primary source for people to learn about what's going on in their neighbourhoods, their country and across the world.

If we look at what has happened over the past 60 years, we can learn some valuable lessons about how our beliefs have been altered, and how those altered beliefs have shaped our lives.

The FACTS:

- The average American watches 4 hours and 35 minutes of television per day.
- The average American household has a TV on for 8 hours, 14 minutes (more than a third of a day).
- During the 2004-05 season, 15.9 million American children aged 2 to 5 watched an average of 3 hours and 40 minutes of television a day.

Besides our work and sleep, television consumes a significant portion of our day. It's no wonder we're influenced by the repeated messages we see and hear on TV.

WHAT DO WE LEARN ON TV?

Television promises us the unattainable, unimaginable and inaccessible. If we believe all the messages we see and hear, it's easy to think of life as happening in an instant. Instant love, wealth and gratification – all a moment away when we want and how we want it.

After repeated images and sound bites, television also normalizes behaviors where:

- Violence is normal
- Sex sells everything
- We're challenged to trust no one
- There's an increased demand for instant gratification: entertain me right now! Amuse me this moment! Spare me from boredom this instant! Please me right now, or I'll switch channels!

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DOES TV AFFECT OUR ACTIONS?

Yes, television can profoundly affect our actions and reactions. Let's look at some examples.

Violence is on the increase.

Today, 60 per cent of TV programming contains violence. According to a recent study published in the journal *Science*, teenagers who watch more than an hour of TV a day are much more likely to become violent than the rare adolescent who watches less.

The study, published in the journal *Science*, found:

- 28.8 percent of those who watched three or more hours each day committed aggressive acts daily.
- 22.5 percent of the adolescents who watched between one and three hours each day later engaged in violence.
- 5.7 percent of those who watched less than one hour a day committed a violent act.

"We are social beings, and we tend to want to try out things that we see other people doing, especially if we see the person rewarded for what they did or portrayed as a hero for it," says Jeffrey Johnson, the psychiatric epidemiologist at Columbia University who led the study.

"It has been shown that viewing media violence leads to a desensitization effect," says Johnson. "The more violence that they see, the less negative, the more normal, it seems to them."

The desire for riches has replaced the desire for a meaningful life.

An extensive survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute found nearly 9 out of 10 college freshmen say their primary goal is getting rich. That's a 43 per cent increase over what the typical college freshman thought in 1967. And as for developing a meaningful life? Only 45 per cent found it to be of any real worth. That's a 29 per cent drop. What does this mean to you?

According to research collected by Pew Research for the MacNeil/Lehrer Productions' *Generation Next* project, 18 to 25 year olds listed the following as their top goal in life:

- Be rich—81 per cent
- Be famous—51 per cent
- Help people who need help—30 per cent
- Be leaders in their community—22 per cent
- Become more spiritual—10 per cent

Clearly, the messaging on TV is impacting the values of our youth making what they want what they see on TV.

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THE TRUTH

The power of TV is in its repetition of images, sounds and messages. After repeated exposure to all these sensory inputs, we begin to assume what we see and hear is the cultural norm. However, what we experience on TV is NO reflection of the truth or reality. And unless we search hard, there are few places we can go to get the truth. Let's consider a few examples.

TV promotes happiness as having and getting more of what you need – more money, more sex, more stuff, more fame. And that any form of success requires “looking out for number 1”, “trusting no one”, and having the right brand of car, suit and shoes to go along with the right image.

Is this true? Let's look at the evidence.

Media Myth #1 - MORE make us happier.

Study after study proves that more does NOT make us happier.

University of Southern California researcher Richard Easterlin surveyed 1,500 persons annually since 1975 and found:

Many people are under the illusion that the more money we make, the happier we'll be. We put all of our resources into making money at the expense of our family and our health...The problem is we don't realize that our material wants increase with the amount of money we make.

The study discovered happiness was NOT related to wealth, but to quality time with loved ones, good health, being friendly, having an optimistic outlook, exercising self-control, and possessing a deep sense of ethics.

The TRUTH is, as a society we have more than ever before, yet we are no happier. According to a recent study by the World Health Organization and Harvard Medical School, America may be the saddest nation in the world. Researchers found that nearly one in 10 Americans suffer from depression or bipolar disorder—the highest among the 14 major nations polled.

Media Myth #2 - Kids today are more materialistic and are pleasure seekers than ever before. They aren't interested in long-term commitments and reject the guidance of their family.

If you believe everything you see and hear on TV, kids today are almost over the top in their rebellion, their interest in material goods and how they look at their future. But this too, is far from the truth.

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You might be surprised what makes 13 to 24 year olds happy. According to an extensive survey conducted by the Associated Press and MTV, the results show that spending time with family (73 per cent) makes young people happiest.

Nearly half of young people surveyed mentioned one of their parents as their hero, with mothers (29 per cent) ranking higher than fathers (21 per cent). After family, "relationships with friends" was most likely to make youth happy.

The sad part is many parents are less available to spend time with their children. The combined, average weekly work hours for couples' with kids under 18, is a staggering 91 hours.

Media Myth #3 – More sex, more sex, more sex – makes us happier.

This same group of 13 to 24 year olds did not list sex as something that makes America's young people most happy. And they are right. Research shows that being sexually active actually leads to decreased happiness among 13 to 17 year olds.

Media Myth #4 – Success is about “looking out for #1” and maintaining the right image.

But what do people REALLY feel success is made up of? A 2006 study conducted by Success magazine uncovered some surprising insights into what Americans believe.

When respondents were asked to identify "the most important factors for success", the vast majority linked relationships to success:

- Good relationship with family—nearly 90 per cent
- Good relationship with spouse—nearly 90 percent
- Good relationship with God—86 per cent

REPLACING MYTHS WITH THE TRUTH

So while the media and advertisements seem to be doing a good job of tempting us and encouraging actions that are not healthy, deep down we are aware that those things do little for our overall happiness.

On television, we don't learn the truth about how people really feel about life, happiness and success. What we learn is one dimensional. While we spend 4.5 hours per day watching TV, deep down we all long to be spending meaningful time with the important people in our lives, where the opportunity for real connection and love exists. Spending a little more time with our families and friends may be a great starting point.

A little more money won't make you any happier; however, a little more time with those you love, will.

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THE GOAL

The goal of the book Kickback is to restore what people, at their deepest level, know to be true.

The message of the book does that by:

1. Changing the current media induced perceptions and myths about how to be successful, happy and fulfilled.
2. Encouraging societal change by revealing the truth about how to achieve and be happy in life, work and business.

Kickback reveals the truth behind how to achieve a life of true success, fulfillment and purpose. In the 4.5 hours that most people would spend watching TV in a single day, you can read this book and have its message powerfully impact your life and the lives of those you love. Start today! Skip television tonight and start on the path to genuine happiness and success.