

“Celebs without make-up -- see the shocking pictures” read the blaring headline as I tried to pass through the land of impulse purchases at the grocery checkout. Such “shocking” pictures are the golden ring of the paparazzi photographer -- a famous diva without the benefit of her \$3,000 a day troupe of make-up artists and hair dressers. Why are we so “shocked” to learn that the beauty doesn’t roll out of bed and magically look picture perfect? We are “shocked” because the fashion elite are more like you and me than we would like to think -- and that shatters our dream. It stomps on our hope.

Seeing a once-glamorous model in his or her natural state is a bit unsettling. It’s like peering behind the curtain in the Hall of the Great Oz to find that the wizard is a short, dumpy, aging Midwesterner with a joy stick. If, in that moment, you feel betrayed and tricked, well, you read the moment correctly.

Welcome to the world of perfect pixels -- not perfect people. A pixel is the tiny building block in digital photography by which a picture, any picture, can be “manipulated” to the level of a new reality. By changing pixels we can slim, trim and dim. Glamour photos are about flattering lights, heavy make-up and pixel painting. Trim a waistline, shorten a nose, raise a cheek bone, whack a pimple, smooth a wrinkle -- instant glamour and perfection made possible by pixels.

Couple the skill of a digital artist with that of the world’s best makeup and hair designers and you have a work of art. It is a beautiful rendition of a seemingly beautiful person designed to elicit a response. And therein is the problem.

Their world of glossy glamour magazines does no harm until we suggestively toss the elegant pages into the hands of a compulsive soul who says, “If only I looked like that model I would be loved, successful . . . happy.” Ironically, as we compare the gap between who we see in the mirror and what we see on the page, we are comparing reality to something that does not exist. The model we see before us is not, let me repeat, not real. His or her image is a carefully calculated mental trick of “if/then” logic. “If” I buy the product advertised, “then” I will be as slim and beautiful as the model. Sorry friend. Not possible. The model isn’t that slim and beautiful. No one is. Advertising uses glamorous people in glamorous settings to do one thing -- separate you from your money. However, there are more serious implications to the seemingly benign sales offer. In its purest essence, we might call it “product failure.”

Oh sure, the shampoo cleans your hair. The lipstick does indeed make your lips the advertised shade -- but you don’t end up looking (or feeling) as glamorous as you believed you would, because the product failed to meet your underlying emotional needs.

There is an old adage that marketers know and use: We buy emotionally. I will add to that adage that we buy and fail emotionally. When the product does not meet our physical, and ultimately emotional, expectation as presented in the “benchmark” ad, we experience a

feeling of failure. This failure is what marketers label as “post purchase dissonance.” It is a negative reaction to an unfulfilled marketing promise. Fortunately for those who make these ad claims, they anticipate that you will experience this kind of dissonance. They know that the human desire to seek “happiness” will fuel a future purchase. Ad executives understand that human pride is always unrealistic in its behavior. They count on it. They bank on it. Need proof?

Think about the many things you have purchased thinking the promised result seemed too good to be true -- yet you bought anyway. We as consumers are forgetful and forgiving when it comes to chasing the illusive, glamorous dream of selfish happiness.

To end this cycle of hope-through-commerce we must recognize the distinction between what we have and who we are. The iconic model as a spokesperson for the reality of who we should be is a dangerous message for any consumer. Our truest hope is not found in what we buy, but rather in who we are as a soul; as a creation of God. When we fail to believe that, we trade the free offer of “abundant life” for the shallow promises of a pixel-perfect model that does not exist.

Throw off the paradigms of the “buy to be” context of commercialism and simply “be” who God created you to be. (No retouching necessary.)

Excerpt from Simplify by Rod Brace – Available at Amazon.com or your favorite online bookstore.