

## I Have a Booger Hanging Out and No One Is Saying Squat

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I've had my share of embarrassing moments, but one blunder taught me an important lesson that stayed with me and helped me up my entrepreneurial game. A few years back I was in a big deal meeting with three people, looking to close a serious partnership. Right away I noticed all three of my colleagues were avoiding eye contact with me, but ignored it and kept on yakking. About forty-five minutes in to my pitch, I felt the call of nature and excused myself to go to the bathroom.

After I did my business and washed my hands, I looked in the mirror to check out my 'do. Sure enough, a booger the size of caterpillar was hanging out of my nose, flapping around each time I took a breath. What the hell? I'd been sitting in a meeting for nearly an hour with this slug crawling out of my nose, and no one said squat!

No wonder everyone seemed so uncomfortable. No wonder no one could look at me for more than a second or two, they were trying to avoid eye to eye to booger contact. Nice job, Michalowicz. Way to make a great impression. Not.

As I tried to "free Willy" with paper towels, I imagined the conversation going on while I was out of the room. "He's a nice guy, and his proposal is awesome, but he's a booger hanger." Now if my colleagues were also my close friends, they would have told me about my booger (almost) right away. Who am I kidding? My friends would have busted my ass, pointing, laughing, and then IMing everyone in their contact list with the photographic evidence.

As annoying as it is to have your friends revel in your embarrassment, at least they *tell you* about the booger, the wet spot, or the bird poop in your hair. Business associates won't tell you; they'll just suffer through an hour-long meeting and

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smile, even though they'd give anything to grab a tissue, reach across the table and wipe that booger right off your face.

So why is it only our best buds will tell us the truth? It's risky to point out a social gaffe to a colleague, that's why. What if you offend the decision maker in your big deal by telling her that her dress is caught in her underwear? What if a key player is so embarrassed that you noticed his toupee was falling off, he never wants to see you again? What if when you point out the spinach caught in your associate's teeth his feelings are so hurt he can't continue with the meeting?

As entrepreneurs, we're self-starters that move quickly without worrying about perfection, often at the expense of social and business etiquette. We're about getting the job done, not looking pretty. But while your appearance (and basic hygiene) may not be an issue when you're pulling all-nighters, you've got to up your game if you're going to make it big.

You may have many proverbial boogers all over you, and no one is telling you. One thing is for sure; they sure are grossed out. But you can knock this problem out with a one-two punch. First, get to know the most common missteps. Here's a list of some of the classic hanging boogs:

1. **The Dominator** – You know this guy, the one that won't let anyone get a word in, period. He's a speed-talking fool that never comes up for air, totally oblivious that he's offending everyone in the room. Worst of all, he comes off as not giving a shit about anyone's opinion but his own – even if he really does care.
2. **The Over Perfumer** – Your eyes start to tear as she approaches you, and by the time she sits down, your nose hairs are singed and your throat's closed up. You hate it, but you say nothing, so she keeps cranking up the Chanel No. 5. God forbid you get stuck in an elevator with her!

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3. **The Low Talker** – This is the guy you literally can't hear, even when he's speaking into a megaphone. Everyone is frustrated, but not a word is muttered, as he lowers his voice even more to the point where he can't even hear himself.
4. **The Dead Fish Greeter** - This is the woman who gives you the limpest, sweatiest handshake you've ever received. Literally, a slimy squid tentacle would have shown more handshake confidence. But no one mentions anything to her, so she keeps that dead fish a' floppin'. (Guys are guilty of this too, by the way!)
5. **The Crusher** - Even under excruciating pain, you say nothing when this guy crushes *all the bones in your hand*. Instead, you pray you never have to see this person again, let alone shake his hand. He thinks his grip exudes confidence; everyone else thinks he's a freak.
6. **The Stinker** – You know exactly who I am talking about. This is the guy you pray won't say another word, not because he isn't sharing important information, but because his breath is killing you. You think, please, please, please take ten steps back, or stop talking. But still, you say nothing.

Do any of these types sound familiar? Perhaps too familiar, as in you recognize yourself in this list? Even if you're not guilty of any of the above, there is a possibility that you do, in fact, have one of these or countless other boogers hanging on to your person, or your personality. There is a chance that people are offended by you, or disgusted by you, and you don't even know it.

Many of these "boogers" are chronic, happening over and over again because *no one is telling* the offenders the truth. And yet I guarantee these blunders influence important business decisions. If you have to choose between two vendors with

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nearly equal proposals, will you choose the guy who interrupts you and has bad breath or the guy who listens intently and is well groomed?

Which brings me to the second part of becoming booger free: becoming aware. Take a good, hard look at yourself and what needs to be improved, fixed, or eliminated. Here are a few tips to help you get real:

1. **Ask Your Friends** – Your true-blue buds will give it to you straight, and love every minute of it. So set your pride aside and ask your closest friends what you need to change. This is NOT the time to be defensive. Let them show you all your grossness and then fix it RIGHT AWAY.
2. **Become a Keen and Constant Observer** – Watch how people react to you. Get tuned in to the subtle actions of those around you, the little clues that tell you how you're coming off. If someone looks at you and wipes their nose, take the hint and wipe yours too. If people are backing away when you talk, check your breath or shut up for a minute – maybe they just want to get a word in! If people lean in when you talk, raise your voice and learn to articulate.
3. **Be Prepared** – Just in case you end up like me, trying to negotiate the deal of a lifetime with a mongo booger hanging from your nose, it's best to come prepared to every business meeting or event. Stow breath freshener, deodorant, tissue and a lint roller (hello, cat freak) in your car or in a bag in your briefcase. And by all means, stop in the restroom *before* your meeting for one last check.

You must be on the constant prowl for the subtle clues from colleagues, and take action accordingly. Once I became aware of the common "boogers" and started looking for signs, I made a better first impression and ended up with markedly better results.

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Just be careful not to set off the infamous Booger Circle. It starts when one guy wipes his nose, and you follow suit, thinking it was a hint for you to wipe away a dangling boogie. But he actually *needed* to wipe his nose, and when he saw you wipe yours, he thinks *your* sending *him* a clue that he missed something and needs to wipe again! You see the guy wipe again, get the signal, and do the counter wipe and blow. He follows up with a behind-the-napkin pick and a double blow. You come back with a triple-snort, three pass wipes, a double blow and an upside-down spoon inspection. It's a vicious circle, a Booger Circle. There are ways to navigate this, but I'll save it for another day.

Excuse me while I go blow my nose.