

## Chapter 2: Avoiding the Snake Oil Trap



I hate [infomercials](#). Not that I've ever watched more than about 10 seconds of any single one, but it was enough time for me to see that these are the modern equivalents of [snake oil](#).

While the phrase *snake oil* originally referred to "medicinal" concoctions that included oil from snakes accompanied by outrageous claims of being magical curealls for every physical ailment in the world, the use of the phrase has evolved to refer to anything that is faddish, fraudulent, unsubstantiated, and promises a

comprehensive and instantaneous one-shot-fix for everything.

While modern snake oil salespeople used to be confined to late-night cable TV, the advent of daytime talk shows (featuring celebrity gurus), the internet and social media has broadened their scope and base of people to dupe. They are literally everywhere and all us are bombarded with them everywhere we turn. It's enough to drive a sane person mad.

The snake oil formula is pretty simple. Create a recognizable salesperson and give him or her expert credentials (doctor, chef, wellness expert, financial expert, fitness expert, etc.) and elevate that person to demagogue status (if "X" or "Y" says it, then it must be true). Saturate people with their pitches. Get a lot of positive and glowing testimonials about whatever is being promoted. Laugh all the way to the bank. Oh, and sweeten the pot - and the profits - by creating pyramid selling channels to get your devotees to advertise and sell the product and give them a monetary incentive to do so.

Let's face it. We humans tend to be a pretty gullible lot. We also are very susceptible to promises of little effort, quick-one-size-fits-all-solutions, and great benefits instantly. There is something hardwired in our

natures that make us gravitate toward snake oil solutions.



This susceptibility, though, can make us unwittingly blind (or willingly refusing to comprehensively research and prove or disprove the veracity) to outright deceit, inexcusable ignorance, twisting facts, limiting facts, angling facts, manipulating facts, omitting facts that snake oil promoters are masters at doing. Snake oil salespeople are the ultimate spin doctors and the human race is their all-too-willing victim.

I'll give an example I saw recently.

As well as being a quintessential leader passionately committed to developing quintessential leaders, I am also, because of extensive first-hand experience with my mom, a committed and passionate researcher, educator, counselor, author and blogger about dementias and Alzheimer's Disease.

I have been involved in exhaustive research about these neurological diseases for several years, first because I needed to get through all the misinformation and ignorance out there to be the maximum help to my mom with her specific dementias diagnoses (multi-infarct dementia, Lewy Body dementia, and Alzheimer's Disease), and now because I see the misinformation and ignorance largely continued. In this area of disease, there are tons of snake oil premises and solutions.

One of my primary missions is to reveal them for what they are and counter with *all* the facts. It doesn't always get me kudos because we humans desperately want that silver bullet that will solve everything at once and anyone who says there is no silver bullet and backs it up with exhaustive research and facts rains on the silver bullet parade.

So I was quite dismayed to see [this article](#) that continues the ignorant claim that Lyme Disease causes Alzheimer's Disease. That is patently untrue and the person who wrote this article, if he or she is a doctor, could have easily found that information.

How do I know this? Because I've [written comprehensively](#) about [Alzheimer's Disease and its neurological genesis and physiological, behavioral, and mental manifestations.](#)

In summary, here's my response to this snake oil claim. Alzheimer's Disease is a type of dementia. Not all dementias are Alzheimer's Disease. [Infectious dementia](#) can be an advanced/late-stage outcome in a minority (10 to 15 percent) of Lyme Disease patients, but it *is not* Alzheimer's Disease.

Does that seem overly picky to us? Are we thinking that it's all about the same thing, so why should it matter? If that's our reaction, then we're snake oil adherents.

Because truth matters. Precision matters. Complete and comprehensive education, knowledge, and understanding matters.

Without these, we, as quintessential leaders, will unconsciously or knowingly fall into the snake oil trap of always promising quick fixes, fad solutions, and instantaneous relief to complex, multifaceted issues and problems that will end in failure and disaster.

And the real casualty of the snake oil trap is [trust and trustworthiness](#), a must have for all quintessential leaders. Once people don't trust us and we have proven ourselves to be untrustworthy, we are no longer quintessential leaders.

In fact, we're not leaders at all. We are mere pretenders standing at the back of a long line of snake oil promoters and salespeople who have preceded us.

Is that what we want our legacy to be? I'm convinced it's not.

Today I urge us all, as I join you because I do this continuously in my own life, to examine our lives, our thinking, our leadership principles, and our leadership toolboxes to see if we have allowed snake oil traps to creep into the way we do things and who we are.

If we have - and we are all so susceptible to this - then today is the day to get rid of them. Diligent education, knowledge, and understanding and vigilant care, watchfulness, and awareness - of ourselves and about everything else in our lives - are the keys to both avoiding and eliminating the snake oil trap.

How are we doing?