

## Maybe he is right?

A perennial question that agencies ask us is, "How do you keep the client out of the creative?"

Our first response is, "Do you really *want* to keep the client out of the creative?" Or do you want to keep her/him from butchering good ideas?

"Is it possible that his presumed interference in work he is paying for, and certainly should contribute to, is only the perception of the creative staff's delicate psyches?"

Many of our problems in this area stem from elitism and/or insecurity on the part of allegedly creative people. Some of these types are unwilling to acknowledge the fact that every idea and its execution can be improved. Furthermore, an idea doesn't know or care who has it.

They should be made to write on the blackboard 1,000 times the admonition which Bill Bernbach, one of advertising's greatest creative directors, carried on a piece of paper in his breast pocket, which read:

"Maybe he's right."

Sometimes even a client can have a very good advertising idea.

The latest research from Forrester discloses that clients still rely on the creative abilities of their agencies. Clients aren't in a rush to replace the creative process, they are just impatient with agencies that don't understand or grasp the client's business problems and present solutions in a creative manner.

Some so-called agency creative people fight hysterically for their ideas, because they are not really creative. Truly creative people can have ideas faster than they can get them onto paper, and their reaction to rejection is David Ogilvy's: *"That's all right, if you don't like my best idea, here's my second-best idea."*

We can tell you from frequent experience that this remark, accompanied by the display of all the rough copy and layouts which were discarded along the creative way, usually causes the client to look with new respect on what he assumed were the first, and only, idea the agency was capable of having.

The problem in today's agency client relationship is that agencies want to block the client from becoming involved in the creative process. When the client isn't involved, sees the copy drafts, the rough layouts and the two or three final concepts, he has no buy in and finds it easy to reject the agency's offering.

Elitism and defensiveness have no place in an agency or the business--which we assume is what you are running--and should not be tolerated.

Having said that, how do you handle the client who really is a butcher of good creative? Let's just say you have involved him in the process, but he continually slaughters ideas right and left.

Here, as elsewhere, we believe that anticipation and a good offense are the best defense.

Assume that the approvers at the client are innocent of the knowledge of good advertising. Yes, I know many are very savvy too.

Require the account manager to educate these people with the active help of the creative director. (You do believe, don't you, that all selling is education in action?)

The account manager and creative director should take all of the creative work involved in making an ad (not for this client) to the client's office, and they should lead everyone who is involved in approving the ads through the entire process. Be sure to present your process as a client-centric process.

The process should begin with the approved marketing brief and continue through approved final art, including an explanation of the reasoning behind every creative decision. Often, the reason will be "our professional judgment". Reasonable people will accept this answer, because they expect their customers to accept their professional judgment.

Solicit questions and respond to every question asked.

Along the way, the agency instructors should implant the belief that it is the client's responsibility to decide *what* is to be said, and it is the agency's responsibility to decide *how* it is to be said. Again, reasonable people will subscribe to this proposition.

Conducting these sessions will go a long way toward educating your educable clients to the degree that they will hesitate to tamper with soundly reasoned and deftly-executed creative work.

Those clients who cannot be educated cannot be helped. Arrange to disembark them at the first convenient port.

Are you protesting, "We can't afford to spend all that un-billable time teaching Advertising 101 to clients!"?

Then don't. You can always spend it doing the ads over because some uninformed client insists on butchering your work.