

---

## Chapter Two

### *We take you there.*

In hindsight, I'd gotten that first job with such relative ease. I just figured I'd waltz into another agency and I'd be back on the Madison Avenue payroll. Hell, now I actually had some experience (albeit, less than a year's worth). It took some doing. My in-laws helped bankroll another job-search. (God bless 'em, they never tried to talk me out of the advertising business even though they suspected it was going to be a rocky road ahead for their son-in-law, daughter and grandchildren if I continued to pursue this death-wish of a career.)

I was offered and accepted an assistant account executive position at Marsteller, Inc. I was assigned to the JVC Consumer Electronics account. I was petrified. I already failed miserably (I thought) on the Heineken account but I understood beer (I thought). I knew nothing about the technology that makes High Fidelity and Video equipment work. I learned pretty fast, though, and I realized that product innovation was ongoing and moving quickly. So, in fact, by reading all the trade magazines and consumer "buff" books I could be smart enough to get by. Just smart enough.

I recruited internal agency allies early this time. I played on the agency Volleyball team and found ways to get people more interested in helping me. Gone forever was "ASAP" from my vocabulary.

### **Accountability**

Part of any account executive's job is this little business of accountability. After all, you are expected to be a good steward of the client's money. I arrived at the agency in time to get fully immersed in "accountability." It seems the agency had not been very careful about routine estimates and client approvals. This situation can happen anywhere. If the symptoms aren't treated it can grow into an ugly problem.

Nothing justifies a client launching a search for a new agency better than poor management of the money. (The client's money.) There's really nothing subjective about it. But the severing of agency-client relationships are rarely about only one thing. Like some marriages you just reach a point where there are "irreconcilable differences" and nothing you do or say will fix things. There was a little more to this particular bad marriage.

### **Oh my God, Art Directors who can't draw**

Most advertising agencies are pretty much the same. But it's the nuances of the people that make it interesting. Marsteller, Inc. had art directors who liked to rely heavily on swipe art and found pictures to communicate a layout idea/concept. This is an interesting way to show ideas. One reason for this approach, which is not uncommon: not all art directors can draw. This is even truer now because of computer illustration and design technology. I had experience as a graphic designer and part time employee of my Father's design studio when I was in High School but it did not prepare me for artists who couldn't at least roughly sketch an idea. It surprises me to this day. Technology is making it easier and easier to use computers and borrowed images to show concepts. The artist who is a great freehand illustrator/artist is pretty rare.

If I could offer one piece of advice to the next generation of art directors it would be this: LEARN TO DRAW. You can save a lot of time, money and aggravation for everyone if you do.

### **The \$40,000 print ad**

I worked as a Graphic Designer while I was still in college. I managed mostly small printing projects (i.e. brochures, business cards). However, print production in the big time caught me by surprise on the JVC account. JVC was a heavy print advertiser. The creative team at the agency had convinced the client that they should have an "umbrella" theme for all their products. The idea was to build the brand name recognition with a cumulative effect of a lot of smaller product oriented campaigns. The idea

was for JVC to be able to compete with SONY.

I hadn't counted on the run-away train that some creative development can become. This campaignable idea manifested itself in the form of *We take you there*. The campaign thematic treatment could be applied to High Fidelity, Audio, and Video products by suggesting that the sight and sound experience with JVC products was just like being there, live. For example, an ad for a new model of VCR from JVC resulted in a proposed concept showing a scene from Sci-Fi movie. Simple enough concept, right?

Wrong, our art director and writer wanted to create the ultimate print ad. The ad would show a generic space battle on a rocket ship with laser guns. The client was sold but the client also expected an ad around \$7,000 in production costs. Well, the cost of building a rocket ship, photography, retouching, and color correction of a movie scene, (we actually built the equivalent of a movie set for this ad), resulted in a \$40,000 ad. The client, after this debacle, insisted on written and approved estimates in advance. This is a dramatic example of the gap that needs to be bridged between concept and execution. Needless to say, this was the beginning of the end of *We take you there*.

### **Japanese Management Style (Consensus)**

Ultimately, I was accountable for a lot of the runaway production costs caused by art directors who couldn't draw or imagine a solution other than building an original movie set for a print ad. Hindsight again is 20/20 but when I think of the meetings I attended while on that account, I kind of laugh. You see, JVC was a Japanese company and I would find myself in meetings with very agreeable Japanese gentlemen nodding what I thought was approval to proceed. What I learned later, was a fundamental difference in management style between American and Japanese business cultures. You see, Japanese culture encourages consensus while American prize decisiveness. Here these people were nodding to show understanding, while I thought they were approving \$40,000 print ads.

The next time these gentlemen were nodding, they were

nodding at the idea of looking for a new agency. JVC fired Marsteller and the Marsteller fired me. Okay, technically I was laid-off. But in advertising agencies, you never get your job back. It's not like the aerospace industry where you hire the mechanics to come back to work the next time you land a big defense contract.

So, where do I end up next? I landed a new job at J. Walter Thompson on a bona-fide defense contract. I was the JWT rep for the First Marine Corps District, an area that included New York, New Jersey and all of New England.