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## Chapter Three

### *A Few Good Men.*

J. Walter Thompson had been the agency-of-record for the United States Marine Corps for more than 40 years. (It still is.) When they started, they did work on a pro-bono basis. (The work was done at or close to, cost.) When I arrived at JWT the account had grown into a bona-fide Government Contract. I use to argue with my Dad about Viet Nam. I had no military experience and my hair was too long. This was as close as I would ever get to military service. It's poetic, in a way, that I should serve my country as an ad man. I guess you could say Advertising is my MOS (Military Occupational Specialty).

The client, while as rigid and by-the-book as you might expect, was generally very flexible and appreciative. The agency had bent over backwards to accommodate the business with staff and service. It was a showcase account for the agency. My job was to support the recruitment and officer procurement mission for the First Marine Corps District, The 1stMCD.



*Maplewood, NJ 1986*

#### **Focus on a Mission**

Advertising is a little like war, but when your client is The Marines you can't help but beef up the military strategy words in presentations. We talked about targets and achieving our mission with direct mail drops, media blitzes and execution of objectives. It was great fun. This experience was the most

rewarding in my career to that point. I was working for a first rate agency (one of the nation's top ten ad firms). I was working on an account where the client allowed for the agency to make recommendations based on expertise and a tradition of trust. Everything was done within a very clear context of mission.

#### **The MOD Form, Cat 4.**

I am the absolute worst bureaucrat. I've learned throughout my career that my strength tends to be in outlining the bigger picture. The place I get in trouble is in the thousands of details it takes to run an advertising program. For example it takes hundreds of tiny steps to produce a print ad and get it to an appropriate publication. Fortunately I had a crackerjack assistant who understood the importance of those details.

Angela knew the ins and outs of the Marine Corps account. I had to supervise her activity even though, for the most part, I didn't appreciate or fully understand her efforts. Her greatest strength was in filling out paperwork to satisfy a regular battalion of auditors who were forever making sure everything was in order.

I never had any experience, prior to this job, with military service. But I began to understand how the military complex could pay \$600 for a toilet seat. Angela shielded me from 90% of this absurdity. I'd tell her what I had in mind and she'd prepare the necessary forms. It would go something like this:

**W:** I want to suggest the client add High School Newspapers to the media mix.

**A:** What will that cost them?

**W:** It depends on how many insertions, but I'd like to suggest they run in about 500 papers. Our media department has prepared an estimate for \$100,000. We'd be working with a firm that specializes in placement of High School Newspapers (*Cass Communications* and *American Passage* are two such firms).

**A:** Yeah, but that's just an estimate, we'll need to prepare paperwork for the exact amount.

**W:** Well, That's going to be a little difficult because High School newspapers are not always reliable and might miss insertions. In which case we wouldn't bill the client for the ads unless they ran a "Make good."

**A:** How are you going to assure proof-of-performance?

**W:** Well, The Marines will achieve their recruitment goals and this will help.

**A:** No. No. How are you going to prove these ads actually ran?

**W:** I guess we'll insist on tear sheets with the invoices.

**A:** Suppose some High School newspaper staff personnel miss the insertion?

**W:** We'll demand a "Make Good."

**A:** And if the ad doesn't run at all? Suppose the school year ends?

**W:** We won't bill the client for ads that don't run.

**A:** But that will mess up the paperwork.

**W:** So.

**A:** Well we'll have to prepare a MOD.

**W:** What?

**A:** A MOD. You know, a modification to the original estimate paperwork.

**W:** Great Angela. You prepare the MOD after you sort the tear sheets and figure out what papers missed the insertions.

**A:** Naturally.

There was no way in hell I was going to deal with the MOD forms and the tear sheets. But Angela had more job security because of tasks like this. She lived for minutia.

The Marines have their own language. They operate on Zulu time. They wear a cover when outdoors. An enlisted man who reaches his highest rank is called Top. Marine Recruiters are challenged to find qualified candidates for service. That means, among other things, that the candidate scores well on the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) Test. Those who don't score well fall into Category 4. It has become a clever insider insult to call someone a Cat. 4. A civilian would never even know he was being insulted but Marines know what it means. "That guy's a real Cat. 4, If I ever saw one.."

JWT is a world-class big-time agency. I was hoping to make a career at the place. I wanted to move to a new account for more experience in consumer advertising. Advertising is kind like a career game of musical chairs. There are only enough chairs corresponding to the number for which the clients are willing to pay. I managed to get an internal transfer from The Marine Corps account to The Burger King account, just in time for an historic account loss. (The largest in history up until that point.) I'll talk about the Burger King experience a little later, but suffice it to say, I was once again challenged to sharpen my job-hunting skills. Once again, I was forced to make a move on the proverbial Madison Avenue. In fact, this time I landed a job that really and truly was located right on Madison Avenue. 444 Madison Avenue, in fact.

Naturally, my agency experience, such as it was, recommended me for my new job at an agency called Sawdon & Bess. This medium sized agency located in the Newsweek Building in midtown Manhattan right on Madison Avenue had the

Matchbox Toys account and I was to be the account executive.