
Chapter Eight

A Decade of Learning

By 1991 I had almost a complete decade of experience in the advertising business. The years really seem to fly by. I kept the year-end issue of Advertising Age from 1989 that ran a cover story on the decade-in-review. I was kind of surprised to see that so much of what had happened in that time-span had pretty direct influence on my own career. Account shifts (most notably Burger King), agency mergers, shrinking agency margins. Lists of the top agencies included several of the stops on which my career had taken me (J. Walter Thompson, BBDO, etc.)

The mystique of working for a big agency in New York was losing its appeal for me. I'm a person who believes in setting goals. Achievable goals. Achieving them, and setting new goals. I think a lot of people get kind of settled and lose enthusiasm in their working lives because they stop being motivated by a personal and professional mission.

I knew that I could refocus my energies a bit and concentrate on a kind of "quality of life" with more balance. I wanted life to be an adventure. I didn't want to compromise my career. I was determined to get out of the New York area. I felt that I would likely have to consider smaller, more independent agencies. I thought that would lead to smaller budgets and possibly more difficult clients. I was afraid to leave the Advertising Capital of the World, New York. I was also afraid that the quality of the work might be compromised. I thought I would be forced to work with less talented people. I was wrong.

I decided to become a diversified marketing communications specialist. There was a lot being written about integrated marketing. It was finding its way into books on marketing. Several universities are now offering coursework on the subject. The gist of Integrated Marketing is that all communications would work harder if it were well coordinated and part of a

more unified vision. It's a logical argument. The next logical question is "Who's going to be qualified to guide companies to make Integrated Marketing a reality." Why not me?

I wanted to become a more diversified expert. So here are some of the steps I took:

I joined the Business Marketing Association in 1990 and participated in their certification program to become a Certified Business Communicator. (Now, I can add CBC to my business card. I think it was a useful challenge and a good learning experience.)

I joined the Public Relations Society of America in 1995 I studied the Public Relations discipline. I figured the language, the purpose and tactics of Public Relations could complement an advertising profession. Or at least make sense for a person interested in the future of marketing communications as a whole.

I joined the local advertising club. I became an officer and active member. I participated in annual awards shows that featured distinguished judges. I met professionals from around the country and found a new enthusiasm for producing great work.

I taught advertising and marketing as an adjunct professor at a local college. Nothing forces you to crystallize your professional thinking better than a room full of curious students. It's rewarding for them to hear from someone with real world experience. They'll challenge you. They'll ask questions in fresh ways that make you examine things differently. The personal benefits far outweigh the benefits the students get. You'll be amazed how much you get from such an effort.

I took an active role in mentoring interns who are smart enough to find a way to get some exposure to an advertising agency before they are in a real life "job hunt." Again, the rewards are significant because I found myself catching their enthusiasm for the future possibilities.

I've had the pleasure of working on projects on a freelance basis. There are so many talented people who miss

opportunities. There are charities and worthy organizations that benefit from advertising donated by people willing to give up some time. This can be very satisfying and a great experience. There are no more grateful organizations than charities. The next most grateful group is paying clients with shoestring budgets. And both of these groups are more likely to allow creative latitude.

I joined the local chapter of the American Marketing Association. The AMA offers a full array of services including monthly speaker/luncheons. I find the speakers are often interesting. But the greater benefit is networking with business professionals. I'm sure I learn as much from people at my table as I do from the average lunch speaker. I must admit my original motive was to meet and network with new business prospects. I've found it's better to build your network before you start milking it. (Harvey Mackay's book *Dig your Well before you're Thirsty* is right-on when it comes to networking.)