

# VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS

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## **From a No Show to the One Show**

*A tale of two creative superstars who weren't always stars*

Ad people are nothing if not judgmental.

Few other industries have such a cult of personality—a well-read person can learn which ad people are doing what campaigns at a particular shop.

And if you're not fortunate enough to regularly appear in the trade press, ad people will judge you more harshly, and think less of you.

That can be a problem, because for most job seekers in the ad business, a quick glance at a resume or a few samples will be the only way a prospective employer determines if a person is a superstar worth hiring—or a hack worth ignoring.

Is history destiny?

I don't think so. And to prove it, I'd like to introduce you to Mr. X and Mr. Y.

(I will conceal the names and agencies to protect the innocent, the guilty, and the fact they don't know I'm writing about them.)

I met Mr. X and Mr. Y many years ago at when they worked as copywriters in the Z agency, a second-rate shop in a second-rate ad town. X and Y were hired by creative directors who were looking to raise what was obviously a fairly low bar. Despite their talents, X and Y couldn't overcome a culture of mediocrity at this particular shop. Their efforts were futile. So they didn't last long (and neither did their CD's), and were gone after a year or so.

A career of mediocrity, however, was not the destiny of Mr. X and Mr. Y.

Their careers have been simple to follow. That's because Mr. X and Mr. Y are now true creative superstars, doing award-winning work.

Mr. X went to a shop that was just beginning to make waves. Now it's arguably the best shop in the country, and Mr. X is a Creative Director there, doing awesome stuff.

Mr. Y took a more circular path. He went to a couple of shops, making progressively better moves, until he landed at one of the top creative shops in the country.

Both X and Y are now doing the type of work they could never have done at the Z agency.

How did they catch those breaks?

What did Mr. X and Mr. Y do to convince people that they could rise above their time at the Z agency? A little luck, a little timing, and a lot of persistence I'm sure.

I know how frustrating it can be to work at a shop that prevents people from producing the kind of advertising they're capable of. I'll bet the majority of creatives and even other types of ad folks feel the same way.

That's why I keep an open mind when I encounter frustrated ad people at second-rate shops. So many of us work under circumstances seemingly beyond our control.

What happened to Mr. X and Mr. Y works in reverse, as well: Many great ad people left wonderful agencies to take jobs at mediocre agencies. And then weren't able to produce equally good work. These people haven't lost their talent, but still they can't recapture the magic. It happens.

For better or for worse, the people in our industry should be tagged with the disclaimer most investments come with:

Past performance is no guarantee of future results.

Just ask Mr. X and Mr. Y when you see them. You're bound to find them at the One Show.