

VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS



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Hey, Luke, Squeeze This

A plea for some useful advice

If I see any of the following phrases again I'm going to scream:

"Push the envelope."

"Good enough is not good enough."

"Tell the client what they need to hear, not what they want to hear."

"Get your book together and quit your measly job if you're not getting into CA."

I don't fault ad people for the volumes of books and op-ed columns they write to inspire us. I'd just like to see some advice for those of us who spend our days at agencies where greatness is in short supply. At shops struggling to get to "the next level," which are the majority of agencies, the hurdles to producing great ads are much more fundamental.

Recently, I was thumbing through my well-worn copy of Luke Sullivan's *Hey Whipple Squeeze This*. It's a great book. Luke's a genius. I personally just can't seem to use much of his advice.

Here are a few of Luke's tips:

"Insist on a tight strategy."

Good one. I'm a big believer in strategic thinking, and on a few occasions, I've been allowed to contribute to the process. So what happens when you don't have a strategy at all, much less a tight one? What should you do when you don't get a creative brief, and you're not in a position to change that? Insisting on a tight strategy is futile when "increase sales and increase awareness" is all the insight you get.

"Cast and cast and cast."

Luke's talking about radio here. I love writing radio, and I know that casting is essential. So what do you do when a client wants to record new radio spots, but doesn't want to pay for union talent. Or pay for non-union talent. He simply looks around the room at the two thin-voiced writers and says "You guys have nice voices. Why don't you do it?"

"If the client says he has three important things to say, tell the account executive the client needs three ads."

In my experience, this tends to go over like a lead balloon. I could tell an AE that all day long, and the AE might be sympathetic, but I'll still end up with an ad that has a snipe on the top, a snipe on the bottom, and a starburst in the corner.

"Don't let advertising mess up your life."

Well, it's too late for that, I'm afraid. Sometimes I think the sole purpose of advertising is to mess up people's lives.

In a perfect world, we could all throw out a choice Luke Sullivan, David Ogilvy, or Bill Bernbach bon mots and our fellow co-workers and clients would instantly see the light of day.

But the world isn't perfect. There's a legion of ad professionals who aren't doing two-page spreads with near-invisible logos. Who only have \$20,000 to do a TV commercial. Who have clients that would rather art direct or rewrite an ad than approve one. Who work in agencies that are understaffed or improperly staffed, which compromises strategic thinking, planning, concepting and execution.

Where's the advice for us?

I've heard the statement that "90% of all advertising is crap." Lord knows, I've done my share. But it's been my experience that producing "crap" is a group effort, requiring the collective efforts of clients, agency management and staff.

I'm only one person, with no power over anything other than this column. How can I overcome the poorly trained yes-men and yes-women who lurk in every facet of the ad making process?

Help me, Luke. I need you. Together, we can bring that "crap" percentage down. We should be able to get it to 89% in no time.