



## MARKETING MATTERS

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### HOW TO TALK WITH CREATIVES – PROVIDING DIRECTION

**Coach – a vehicle for transporting people to a place they cannot reach on their own.**

When it comes to providing direction to agency creatives, or anyone whose work you are invited to assess and contribute to, it is far better to coach than evaluate. Evaluation is about identifying what's wrong with the work whereas coaching identifies what actions are needed to make the work more productive.

Imagine your boss approaches and says, *"I want you to come to my office immediately. I need to tell you **why you are not getting promoted here!**"* What is your reaction? Probably one of horror. You are girding yourself to be assaulted with a barrage of all the things s/he thinks you are doing wrong. That's "evaluation." It goes under the guise of "constructive criticism." However, there is no such thing. All criticism is destructive!

Now imagine your boss approaches and says, *"I want you to come to my office immediately. I need to tell you **what you need to do to get promoted here!**"* Your response is likely to be very different than when being evaluated. When you are being evaluated, you are not likely to hear what your boss has to say, and/or your defense mechanisms will be triggered. When being evaluated, your ears, mind and heart are open to listening, understanding and, importantly, taking the direction so as to put yourself in position to be promoted. That's what coaching does for you.

Coaching is the vehicle or, in our case, the practice for getting people to a place they could not or, if you prefer, may not reach on their own – including agency creative personnel. It is not about telling others what is wrong with their work but, instead, what you believe they need to do to make the work more productive. Evaluation, at best, only addresses one part of the equation – what is not liked. It does not address, as coaching does, what one needs to see or have for the work to, well, work! It is collaborating as opposed to serving as judge, jury, and

executioner. Evaluation triggers the one being evaluated to feel shame and/or inadequate. Coaching empowers individuals and teams.

Quite frankly, I wouldn't say I like others to evaluate my work. Do you? Who are others to evaluate my work or yours? What gives them that right or "supreme" position of power? I feel confident that creative personnel feel the same way. When it comes to advertising or any creative product such as packaging development, logo design, etc., the creatives have the interest, talent, and experience that marketers do not have. So, who are we to evaluate their work? Who are you to evaluate mine? Or me yours?

This is not to say that one cannot coach the creative team's, or my, or your work. We can and should. Coaches of professional sports can and are expected to coach athletes and players who are far more skilled than they are at the sport. Similarly, while I will resist evaluation, I am open to coaching because it will provide the direction needed to make my work more productive. I'm all for it, as you will be, and so will your creative personnel.

When providing direction let the creatives know what you need to see to make it more effective, not tell them what's wrong! Instead of saying, *"it doesn't have or, you left out, the key copy words,"* try saying, **"I need to see you include key copy words."**

Also, provide direction rather than being prescriptive. Let the creatives solve the problem. Instead of saying, *"make the key copy words say ...,"* try saying, **"I need the key copy words to capture our strategic benefit in compelling customer language."**

Give it a try. You're likely to see what you don't like, what's wrong. However, before you speak to your creatives, identify what you would need to see in order for the work to be more productive. That's coaching. That's something that will help transport them to a place they may not reach on their own.

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