



By Richard D. Czerniawski

COACHING FRAMEWORK - A MORE PRODUCTIVE WAY TO LEAD THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERSHIP ADVERTISING

Recently I blogged, “How to Provide Direction to Make Your Brand Messaging Matter More”: <http://bdn-intl.com/how-to-provide-direction-to-make-your-brand-messaging-matter-more>. I suggested “coaching” instead of “evaluating” work—yours or someone else’s. It’s an essential characteristic of an effective leader.

Evaluating is pointing out what is wrong. Coaching is identifying what’s needed to make whatever work you’re doing or shared with you more productive—as in effective. Think of the definition of a coach: a vehicle for transporting people to a place they cannot get on their own. That’s what we’re doing! That place we are helping to transport our ad agency is the creation of “leadership” advertising.

Coaching is about directing your agency on what they need to do to create and make their creative ideas work in developing advertising that will profitably grow incremental sales and market share. It’s filling the proverbial glass that’s half full. It’s helping to make their work more effective.

The direction we provide our advertising agencies, or any support group for that matter, can make a difference in the results we achieve. Garbage in; garbage out. We need to develop the skill of coaching to provide sound direction.

To start, we obviously need to know how to assess work. We can’t coach what we can’t assess. If we do, even using a best practice like coaching, it will not get us to the outputs we need and require to achieve leadership advertising.

I’ve tackled how to assess agency creative submissions and other marketing work products in previous DISPATCHES and MARKETING MATTERS posts. You can find them and many more at www.bdn-intl.com.

Instead, I’d like to tackle a framework for coaching. Frameworks help leverage our skills. As James Clear, author of ATOMIC HABITS, proclaims, “We don’t rise to the level of our goals; we fall to the level of our systems.” A framework is a system.

The coaching framework consists of three steps, which I detail below. However, let me repeat; it’s

absolutely essential that you *know what you think* of the agency's creative work before you formulate your coaching response. Otherwise, you'll trip over your tongue while commenting on their work to them. The three steps are:

1. The Overview
2. Coaching Direction
3. Next Steps

The Overview – The overview is your conclusion regarding the agency's work. It addresses the reason for the meeting. When the agency shares its creative ideas, they want to know if they are on the right track, whether there are some ideas worth pursuing, and, if so, which ones. They also want to learn what, if anything, needs to be done to enhance their work. That's the point of the meeting.

Let's not confuse an overview with a routine (pseudo) compliment: "Thank you, agency, for coming for taking your precious time to present your work." No, it's not a compliment but an assessment of their work. It's what they want and need to know before proceeding with additional work.

As mentioned, you must know what you think before crafting your overview rather than slogging through mindless comments.

There are three basic responses:

- "Overall, I could not be more pleased with the work. There are several ideas that I'm ready to move forward into the next stage. Specifically, these are ..."
- "While I think we have additional work to do, I believe we have a few ideas worth pursuing. These are ..."
- "Unfortunately, we need to go back to the drawing board. Our strategy calls for ... yet the proposed ideas appear to be promising ..." Or, "I need to see complete Campaign Ideas articulating the Naked Idea (i.e., creative concept), Core Dramatization, and Key Copy Words tied together in a compelling single-minded message."

You fill in the "..."

The three primary responses make it perfectly clear what you think about their submission. It gets to the point. There's no mitigating speech to obfuscate how you feel about their work.

Coaching Direction – Only talk about those submissions that you believe have potential and want the agency to continue doing further work. You may ask, "Don't they need to hear what you think of each submission?" In a word, No! If they are interested in an idea you are not addressing, they will ask about it. If they do, you handle it. We want to focus on those ideas that can become BIG Campaign Ideas. They do not need a lecture from the client.

When discussing specific ideas, identify what you need to see to make it more effective, not what is wrong (i.e., what sabotages productivity). Indeed, we all see what's wrong. Expressing what we don't like or feel won't work. Yet, we've been trained from our earliest school days to point out what's wrong. Throw away the red pencil!

Moreover, when looking for what's wrong, we'll find it and miss what is right and can be made right. Get in the proper frame of mind to collaborate in building upon an idea rather than abandoning it in its nascent stage.

Ask yourself, what's missing that you need to see to make the work more compelling and emotive? Identify and speak to what you want the agency to do. For example, let's say the agency lifted the strategic benefit and used it word for word as the Key Copy Words. That's a no, no. It will neither win minds nor hearts. You might coach them to "provide alternate Key Copy Words that capture our strategic promise in compelling customer language that expresses the Naked Idea."

Take note, in the previous example, I did not say, "Make the Key Copy Words say ..." That's being prescriptive. We want our agency partner to use their expertise and creative muscle to solve the problem. It's not just because we pay them for their service; they are better suited and prepared to do it. If you believe you're better at it, you're on the wrong side of the business. You should be working at the ad agency.

Now, have I ever been prescriptive? Not really. I might provide the agency with an illustration of what I'm mean. I make it clear that it is an example. If they push back, I back off and restate the direction and charge them to take it on.

Indicated Actions – The indicated actions summarize the coaching direction you provided the agency. I might say to the agency, "As per next steps ..." Or I might ask the agency to summarize what we need them to do to make their work more effective. Both ways work. I'll also ask when we can expect to follow up with revisions and schedule it on the calendar.

One other note, the agency will provide a call report 24 – 48 hours following our working session, confirming their understanding and pursuit of the indicated actions. The call report acknowledges that we understand each other. If their account is inconsistent with the summarized indicated actions, it's back to coaching using the framework.

The framework will become more familiar to you the more you use it, AND the better you become at assessing creative work and knowing what you think.

Use the framework. Don't just use it when you have an agency creative meeting but whenever someone shares work with you and in your life.

“NINETY-NINE PERCENT OF ADVERTISING DOESN'T SELL MUCH OF ANYTHING.” David Ogilvy

Is your advertising among the ninety-nine percent? Read Chapter 9, Brand Communications that Suck, in **AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing**. It will identify those critical errors and, importantly, point the way to developing advertising in the Top 1%. Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors>.

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Also, please follow me on LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/in/richarddczerniawski/>, where I share my perspectives from 50 years of successful worldwide brand marketing experience.

Peace and best wishes,

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