**The Worst Job in the World**

Every October a group of esteemed judges come together to decide who among the hundreds of applicants will make the final cut for the Communications Council Graduate Trainee Program – and it’s no easy task making the calls...

Gwen Rudner,
Business services/advice manager,
The Communications Council

For five, maybe six, days of the year it is the worst job in the world. Come late October, it’s a series of judgment days when, together with trusted colleagues, we sift through the hundreds of hopefuls and create a short list of candidates for what will be our twenty-seventh Graduate Trainee Program – the industry’s leading training internship. A few short weeks later, together with representatives of participating agencies, the going gets even tougher as graduates from around Australia undergo the intense scrutiny that sorts the wheat from the chaff as agencies select their chosen candidates and set them on a course that can be the beginning of a brilliant career.

**It’s the fish John West reject...**

For all the satisfaction in following the careers of former grads to the top, it is this very task – this often very uncomfortable task – of picking ‘winners’ that can make it the worst job. As Jon Steel, now running the prestigious WPP Fellowship from his new home in Perth, explains: “I look at the large cardboard box that contains the ‘no’ pile, and wonder, not whether I have made a mistake, but rather how many mistakes I have made. Who have I missed? And what might they have achieved had I decided to place them on the pile on my right, rather than the one on my left?”

**Free your right brain**

A product of the right pile, Rick Benger was an AFA graduate from Sudler & Hennessey, picked from some 1,700 applicants for the WPP Fellowship. After 12 months in London with JWT, he is now in New York with Johannes Leonardo, an agency co-founded by Class of 1999 grad and creative wunderkind, Leo Preumtico. At university Benger chose to sacrifice neither creativity nor analytics. I recall him telling the interviewing panel: “I balanced art and science, right and left brain, theory and practice.” In fact this prompted us to create a quick quiz for advertising aspirants: check out freeyourrightbrain.com.au

**D’ye ken John Peel?**

On-line applications for the program are peppered with questions designed to eke out the person behind the applicant and highlight well-argued opinions. Our objective is to seek those who demonstrate a unique understanding of contemporary marketing communications. That said, we often select – successfully too – graduates from accountancy, law, philosophy, engineering and other disciplines.

As David Ogilvy liked to say; “Advertising is a business of words.” But words can work against you. Again Jon Steel has an opposite example of how to end up in the ‘no’ pile. Spelling, he recounts the story of an application that addressed him as ‘John Peel.’ And spell-check will not necessarily save the day either... especially if the word ‘advertising’ emerges as ‘adversity’ as happened with one hapless candidate.

**Tell me a backstory**

I’m told that participants in reality shows – from Master Chef to The Biggest Loser – are screened for their backstories. Great advertising people are often great story tellers. So tell us a story that makes us want to meet you, to continue the conversation. The outstanding story of last year involved a young man by the name of Dylan Parker, now kicking goals at BMF (where co-founder Matthew Melhuish is an alumnus from Class of 1989). As a teaser Parker sent us an anonymous red box filled with paper planes. A couple of days later, his application explained that whilst still at the University of Canberra, he was admitted to hospital with a brain tumour the size of a golf ball. Despite losing 16 kilograms in 10 days, he survived surgery, recuperated by folding and flying his aircraft, and a couple of weeks later went on to become Australian Paper Plane Champion.

**The Normal Gestation Period**

 Needless to say The Communications Council Graduate Trainee Program depends upon the participation of member agencies which take on their chosen grads for a period of nine months. For 2011, we expect to place thirty bright young hopefuls. It is likely that BMF will take on a number of trainees again, as will Clemenger and Badjar Ogilvy (STW boss Mike Conneghan was a grad at Clemenger in 1988). We’ve approached long-time supporters of emerging talent George Patterson Y&R, Saatchi & Saatchi and M&C Saatchi and the high profile newbies like Three Drunk Monkeys, AJF Partnership, The Works and Droga5. Agencies like DDB, H&T, Lavender and Loud have been part of the Program for years. All agree, however, that selecting and nurturing young talent is the best way of ensuring the future of our industry.

The worst of jobs? Yes, but also the very best of jobs. As Dickens might add, “... the age of wisdom ... with everything before us.”