

“You have no right”

Then I started crying.

Thirty minutes later, the same client phoned me. He said that my boss had in no uncertain terms told him he was completely out of line and was to phone me immediately to apologise, which he was now doing. I was stunned. How had this happened? How had they managed to turn this around?

The first lesson

It was the first, and most-important, lesson I have learnt as a suit in advertising: respect. It is the start, middle and end of being a great suit. When it exists, great partnerships, great work and great friendships flourish in an open and honest manner. When it doesn't, everything is stillborn.

As a young suit, you come up against disrespect in all shapes and forms in this business because it's easy to shout at the person in the middle. I have seen average suits disrespect themselves, their clients and their creative partners in these

situations, all in the hope of “being liked”.

Your first job as a suit is not to be liked. It is to be respected. Then liked.

How?

The very best suits demand and command respect. How? They know their client’s businesses better than they do. They know everyone in the client’s organisation, from the receptionist to the CEO (and remember all their birthdays, too). They study their client’s category and their competitors’ every move. They love, debate and share great ideas with them. They get under their skin. They build their foundation off a deep and smart knowledge of the business.

They obsess about the work

They share their passion and knowledge inside the agency, continually trying to align business problems and creative opportunities. They never try to curry favour or play both sides. They obsess about creating and making the best possible work, because they love the work more than anything else. They understand that the product that gets made in the end might not have their name on it, but it does have their indelible fingerprint on it. They build their foundation off a deep and passionate knowledge of the power of creativity.

They care deeply

They understand that both clients and agency people are human with the same fears and dreams. They know how to connect with all of them in a real and authentic way. They call them on their nonsense and help them when they are in trouble, using a persuasive mix of intellect and compassion to align everyone behind the same goal: the best possible work. They build their foundation off a deep and authentic human understanding of what makes people tick.

Will it get rid of the sometimes-rampant disrespect in our industry? Not always. But now it’s a decision, because it’s very hard to disrespect someone who has the confidence and knowledge that comes from a strong foundation and the right attitude.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason Harrison is the Managing Director at M&C Saatchi Abel.

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