

Chapter One

Come to think of it, I'll have a Heineken.

In 1982, I was a newly minted MBA from the University of Miami, Florida. I was determined to have an advertising career. I felt I had to travel to New York City, the advertising capital of the world, to seek my fortunes. If I had any idea what the odds were against entry-level job, I never would have even tried to get in an advertising agency.

I wrote personnel offices. I dropped off resumes at reception areas. I called people who were quoted in *Advertising Age* and *Adweek*. I contacted friends of friends. I arranged courtesy interviews. I just kept going until finally I was offered a position as an account executive at SSC&B: Lintas, the agency that handled Heineken beer. How's that for a cool assignment for a kid just out of college?

The MBA, Luck, and good timing landed me a spot at SSC&B: Lintas. In 1982, when I joined the agency, it was in the process of increasing their stake in Lever International Advertising Services (the LINTAS in the name). Ammirati Puris, a smaller agency but with a bigger creative reputation merged with them years later to become Ammirati Puris Lintas. In 1982, SSC&B:Lintas was the 8th largest advertising agency in the world according to *Advertising Age*.

I thought I had died and gone to heaven. I was working on a household brand name at one of the world's largest advertising companies. (Well it's a household brand in my house anyway. I still think Heineken is the very best beer in the world.) I felt pretty lucky.



Hoboken, NJ 1982

The only thing constant is change

I was completely prepared in terms of education and basic understanding of the business. But, I was wholly unprepared for the dynamics and politics of the business. My boss called my initiation a “Baptism of Fire.” I was one of two guys directly responsible for managing more than \$22MM worth of advertising for Heineken and Amstel Light imported beer brands.

My boss was a guy named John Grogan, a slick account guy, who at 37 was a rising star at the agency. John insisted on breaking with the convention of hiring out of the internal agency training program in favor of me. In retrospect, I wish I could have lived up to his expectations but I just don’t see how I could have. I simply didn’t know what I was doing and there was no room for error.

The funny thing about a first job is the very fact that you have no frame-of-reference. I didn’t know anything about working in New York. I didn’t know anything about what I was supposed to be spending my time doing. And no one had any time to show me either. It was nothing like I expected. Heineken was way ahead in the imported beer segment but facing challenges from the growing popularity of new imported brands, especially from Canada and Mexico. Amstel Light, a new brand from the makers of Heineken, was already a huge success with the slogan “95 calories never tasted so imported.” Heineken was the

imported beer leader by a wide margin with the tag line “Come to think of it, I’ll have a Heineken.” Both brands were imported by Van Munching & Co. of New York, the client.

ASAP means nothing.

Maybe the most important thing I learned in my first job in advertising (on my own-the hard way) was this very important maxim: “ASAP Means Nothing.” I didn’t realize it but people resented my getting the job without any real experience. So, I found myself asking for help. I just didn’t have the right approach. People thought I was ordering them around. I guess I was. I remember several incidents where I’d leave a note on a guy’s desk. (It might be a media planner or a production specialist.) The note would say something like, “When you get a chance I need an estimate ASAP” or “The client wants to know how much it would cost to run in Sports Illustrated. Please get back to me ASAP.”

In almost every case I got no results. I might just as well have written “Whenever you damn well please” as “ASAP.” I assumed it was my lack of status and rank. Wrong. I just hadn’t learned that ASAP has no meaning at a busy advertising agency. It certainly didn’t come off as “Oh gee, Wes needs help and I can give him a hand and he’ll really appreciate it.” Instead it backfired. I had no allies. Needless to say, without any coaching and not doing so well in this “Baptism of Fire” I was an unemployed ad guy just in time for the Holiday season in New York. My first job lasted less than one year. I needed a new job ASAP.