

## **A profession with history. The need to go back to the biographies of the giant advertising executives of all times**

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In this paper I would like to argue that Advertising is a profession with a rich past. Secondly I would like to argue that students in our present time need to have a deep Humanism and Advertising history background. Finally I would like to argue that it is particularly important for our students to know the biographies of the giants of the profession. They cannot ignore or have a vague knowledge of the lives of the giants who forged the profession. In this way they may learn more about their human values.

### 1. Advertising is a profession with History

*The Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) in its 2<sup>nd</sup> edn defines “History” in its third meaning as: ‘That branch of knowledge which deals with past events, as recorded in writings or otherwise ascertained; the formal record of the past, especially of human affairs or actions; the study of the formation and growth of communities and nations’. The history of the profession of Advertising fulfills the first two statements of the Oxford Dictionary. It has a past with a beginning in the XIX century, a consolidation from 1870 to 1914, an expansion from 1914 to 1945, a Golden Age, from 1945 to 1970, and a recent history since then. It has its records, among them the ads, posters and spots. Some agencies have donated their archives to universities. And it deals with ‘human affairs or actions’ since the persons are the main actors of the profession. These persons were free people who throughout time built the profession and they helped millions of people to take free decisions in the last two centuries. Therefore Advertising is a profession with History which the future professional has to know.

## 2. The need of a deep Humanism background and the need to know Advertising History since the profession is made by persons and has to serve persons

*The Oxford Dictionary* (1989) in its 2<sup>nd</sup> edn defines Humanism in its second meaning as: “The character or quality of being human’. In its fourth meaning it states: ‘Devotion to those studies which promote human culture; literary culture; especially the system of the humanists, the study of the Roman and Greek classics which came into vogue at the Renaissance’. I would like to stress the second meaning ‘the character or quality of being human’ and the first part of the fourth meaning ‘Devotion to those studies which promote human culture’.

From my point of view a future professional has to have the two aspects of humanism. On the one hand to be human, that is to have human values, and the social ability to gain the trust of other human beings (future advertisers and consumers). In other words the future professional has to be the better person possible. Secondly the future professional has to have a ‘Devotion to those studies which promote human culture’. He has to have a deep knowledge of history, literature, music, arts, psychology, sociology etc. In this way he will be better prepared to understand mankind and its problems, and he will have the intellectual sensitivity one needs, when dealing with persons and about human matters which is the core of advertising.

Advertising History is in my view one of the main ‘studies which promote human culture’ in the case of the future professional. A student who studies Advertising History will enrich himself with the culture of the profession, and will understand how Advertising History sustains that culture, because the present can not be explained without the past. There is need to know the roots of one’s own profession. In a sense Advertising History is our curriculum vitae. If we do not understand ourselves without our own curriculum vitae the student will not understand deep enough the profession.

## 3. The benefits of knowing particularly the biographies of the giants

*The Oxford Dictionary* 1989 in its 2<sup>nd</sup> edn defines biography as ‘a written record of the life of an individual’. I want to propose that a specific way to grow in humanism and knowledge of advertising history is to read and study the ‘written records of the lives’ of the giants of the profession, the classics of advertising history. It will enrich students’ culture of the profession. And most important of all the new generations of professionals will need in some way to know which are the permanent values which

define the quality of the advertising work. We can know a lot of data about the past, the advertising “philosophies”, the classic ads and campaigns of advertisers, but before that one has to know the person who has done that. In a sense we have to study not so much what advertisers did, although this is very important, but what they *were*, because the persons are much more than what they do.

It is obvious that there are many giants in Advertising History. But one has to choose some and leave others. Besides the aim of this paper is not to discuss the advertising contributions, the ‘philosophies’ and the campaigns nor the complete biographies of the classics selected. Nevertheless some times it is very difficult to separate the human factor from the more specialized professional factor. The examples chosen are Claude Hopkins, Raymond Rubicam, Leo Burnett, David Ogilvy and William Bernbach.

#### 4. Claude C Hopkins (1866-1932)

‘On a list of the great copywriters of all time, most students of advertising history would rank Hopkins first’ (Fox 1984, p. 52).

Claude C Hopkins studied bookkeeping (Smith, Tommy, V. 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 195). Among the values he had throughout his life we can mention: intuition, imagination, knowledge of the human soul, love for truth, a great work capacity and a sharp analysis spirit. From what we know about his human character he was reflective, prudent and modest in looking and behaviour. He had a great love for work and was an enormously keen of his profession. Hopkins persevered with effort in the daily work, he worked fast and he never improvised.

He liked doing research and had intellectual curiosity as when he visited the Factory Schlitz and learned the process of producing the beer. One of the permanent values Hopkins also had was the reading and studying capacity. One of the reasons of the success in the Pepsodent campaign was that while studying books he discovered the famous substance that was deposited in the teeth, which he called ‘film’ and which Pepsodent would take away.

Hopkins liked truth in advertising (Smith, Tommy, V. 1994, in Applegate, Edd, p. 198)’. At the same time in *Scientific Advertising* he sated that “frivolity has no place in advertising” (Hopkins, Claude, C. 1987, p. 182).

He wrote *Scientific Advertising* in 1923 because he wanted to tell his advertising experience so that the readers would start where he had finished:

‘Naturally I learned more from experience than those who had a lesser chance. Now I want that experience, so far as possible, to help others avoid the same difficult climb. I set down these findings solely for the purpose of aiding others to start far up the heights I scaled. There is nothing to be gained for myself save that satisfaction. Had someone set down a record like this when I began I would have blessed him for it...(Hopkins Claude C. 1990, p. 2)

Stephen Fox (1984, p. 56) tell us a lesson based on Hopkins experience for future professionals:

He lived to write advertising, and in that calling found the bulk of his happiness. Later in life claimed to have worked twice as hard as anyone else in business-and wondered whether in his dedication he had missed something. He would not advise his son to follow his example, he said: “Life holds so many other things more important than success that work in moderation probably brings more joy”.

##### 5. Raymond Rubicam (1892-1978)

The great work of his life was the foundation of Young & Rubicam in 1923 as a creative agency. It is not the purpose of the paper to describe its interesting history. From the point of view of Advertising History Raymond Rubicam is one of the greatest giants. Stephen Fox (1984, p. 127) has written:

Previous advertising leaders had excelled at one or two functions. A man of balanced temperament and steady habits, Rubicam excelled at everything he tried, combining the copywriting talent of Elmo Calkins, Helen Resor’s teaching and supervising gifts, Stanley Resor’s recognition of social science, the drive and imperial vision of Albert Lasker and the unbending ethics of Theodore MacManus. Not merely the great adman of his generation...

He did not go to university like Hopkins and yet he had a deep culture. ‘...He was well read and careful about grammar and punctuation... He read mysteries for relaxation, and history, biography, and social commentary for his mind’ (Fox 1984, p. 136).

Among the values and talents that he practiced in his life were: the obvious great talent for original and sharp intuition in copywriting, perseverance as shown in the search of his first job in advertising, hard work capacity, the humility to learn advertising from his fellow copywriters and study, and the responsibility for advertising to behave (*Ogilvy in Advertising* 1983, in Hebert, Elsie, 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 292).

He had many professional skills. He was a copywriter, supervisor, administrator, professional regarding clients, teacher, an executive with drive and ethical convictions (Fox 1984, p. 127).

Fox quotes Dexter Masters of Consumers Union saying ‘When Raymond Rubicam was in the room one could think of advertising as a profession’ (Fox 1984, p. 127). When the Depression took place and there was a danger of false advertising Rubicam maintained the ethical standards (Fox 1984, p. 127). Given the prestige and talents of Rubicam he could lead Young & Rubicam by example, without pride because of his natural talents (Fox 1984, p. 137). He treated his employees very well.

Regarding the activities outside advertising as Stephen Fox (1984, p. 136) mentions he liked theatre, golf:

...until buying a farm...where he turned his attention to breeding Aberden Angus cattle and Berkshire Hogs. The farm also released a quiet, contemplative aspect of his personality. Occasionally he would attend a Quaker meeting...At other times he simply sat in a chair and meditated.

As Fox sums up ‘Rubicam ultimately became one of the most complete practitioners in advertising annals’ (Fox 1984, p. 127).

## 6. Leo Burnett (1892-1971)

Stephen Fox (1984, p. 219) wrote: ‘Three leading figures in the new advertising – Leo Burnett, David Ogilvy and William Bernbach...and none looked or acted like the popular stereotype of the adman’.

Leo Burnett, founder of the ‘School of Chicago’, and responsible for one of the most important campaigns in Advertising History, the Marlboro

Man, graduated in Journalism in 1914. He founded his agency in 1935 at the age of 40.

Among the values and talents he had we can mention modesty, leadership (Fox 1984, p. 219), his hard work capacity, high ethical standards, the respect for truth and his passionate dedication to his way of advertising (Morrison, Deborah, K., 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 83).

A landmark in his early biography was to work close to Theodore MacManus, the founder of the school of image in advertising. He admired MacManus for his trust 'in the power of truth told simply'. Burnett's agency 'would later pass on the best aspects of the MacManus tradition, its ethical standards and polite manners' (Fox, 1984, p. 220).

Other interesting values are related to his agency and his employees. He was demanding on employees and on high creative standards. The slogan which described the ethics of the work was: 'When you reach for the stars you may not get one, but you won't get a handful of mud either'. Besides the agency was committed to honest advertising, work well done, integrity as the essence of their work and the importance of mutual respect in the relations with the client among others (Morrison, Deborah, K., 1994, in Applegate Edd, pp. 80-83). Burnett 'often cited literary authors – Dickens, de Maupassant, Flaubert, Thoreau- to make the point of careful writing' (Morrison, Deborah, K., 1984, in Applegate Edd, 1994, p. 83).

Stephen Fox (1984, pp. 224-225) writes about his activities outside the profession. He saw television and read newspapers and magazines but with the professional bias of looking at the ads. According to this author Burnett did not have serious interests outside the profession but:

He allowed himself two diversions...at his country home ...he drove a truck around the 140 acres, supervising the planting of trees and shrubs...And on occasional Saturdays he would bet the horses at the Arlington track.

Morrison considers that perhaps the most significant legacy from Burnett to the agency was what he wrote and delivered with the title "When to take My Name off the Door" (Leo, 1971 pp. 86-87, in Applegate Edd p. 84):

When you lose the restless feeling that nothing you do is ever quite good enough.

When you stop reaching for the manner, the overtones, the marriage of words and pictures that produces the fresh, the memorable and the believable effect.

When you stop to convenient expediency and rationalize yourselves into acts of opportunism- for the sake of a fast buck.

When you lose the humility and become big shot weisenheimers...a little too big for your boots.

When the apples come down to being just apples for eating (or polishing) - no longer a part of our tone, our personality.

Finally, when you lose your respect for the lonely man- the man at his typewriter or his drawing board or behind his camera or just scribbling his notes with one of our big black pencils –or working all night on a media plan. When you forget that the lonely man- and thank God for him- has made the agency we now have possible. When you forget he’s the man who, because he is reaching harder, sometimes actually gets hold –for a moment- one of those hot, unreachable stars.

THAT, boys and girls, is when I shall insist you take my name of the door (Morrison, Deborah, 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 84).

## 7. David Ogilvy (1911-1999)

David Ogilvy was a British-American advertising Executive and copywriter. *Advertising Age* and *Time* stated that David Ogilvy was ‘one of the greatest creative minds in the advertising business’ and ‘the most sought –after wizard in the advertising business’ (Terry, Danal, 1984, in Applegate Edd, p. 235).

David Ogilvy was born in London. He went to school in Edinburgh. He obtained a scholarship to study at Christ Church in Oxford University. ‘Here he failed. Concentrating in Modern History, he botched chemistry and in general was less than diligent. So he was expelled’(Fox 1984, p. 227).

Among the human values he practiced we can mention his insistence on ethics, the need to behave more professionally and to produce better ads (Fox 1984, pp. 238-239). Ogilvy was a good listener, writer and speaker (Terry, Danal, 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 233). He always submitted his work to his colleagues for review. Through his public speeches and written

works he made possible for others to start where he left. He contributed to the increase of the quality of advertising practice and the professionalism of advertising as well as having deep convictions such as “never do an ad which you wouldn’t like your family to see” (‘David Ogilvy , ‘Toda una leyenda del mundo de la publicidad y fundador de una agencia multinacional, falleció ayer (21-7-1999) en su hogar de Touffou (Francia) a los 88 años de edad’, *ABC*, 22 July 1999, p. 63) or ‘the consumer is not a moron. She is your wife. Don’t insult her intelligence’ (McDonough John, 2003, ‘Ogilvy, David 1911-1999’, *Advertising Age Encyclopedia of Advertising*, vol. 2, p. 1158).

He was a hard worker and when he discovered his advertising vocation he would read everything he could working until three o’clock in the morning every night (Fox 1984, p. 227). He was an advocate of truth in advertising. In a letter of Raymond Rubicam, one of his inspiring masters, after an interview with Ogilvy, Rubicam wrote ‘Obviously you *proved* that it is unnecessary for advertisers to tell lies and bamboozle the public’ (Fox 1994, p. 231).

Regarding his professional career he tells of the early period, when he was selling door to door, the Aga Cooker: “I learned to *sell*, which means listening more than you talk, knowing your product inside out, having a sense of humour and telling the truth’ (‘Keeping up with David Ogilvy’ 1989, *Viewpoint*, p. 17). When he was 25 he started writing copy in London. Much of this copy was influenced by the best New York agencies whose work he knew (Terry, Danal, 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 232).

He founded the advertising agency Hewitt, Ogilvy Benson&Mather, a British agency in the United States, in New York in 1948. He had executive skills:

‘...his abilities as a manager cannot be denied. His influence on his staff was inspiring...But despite his success at leading the massive organization, it became an unpleasant chore providing little satisfaction. ‘I have developed an almost uncontrollable distaste for my job: the paper, the unappreciative clients, the perpetual firefighting, the humbug’ (Fox, p. 261).

As CEO he found it difficult to relinquish the job of copywriting to his staff...’ (Terry, Danal, in Applegate Edd, p. 234). The agency:

‘was built on clearly defined principles reflecting the view of its founder. Ogilvy stated these principles early in his career and rarely

amended them. He believed the function of advertising is to sell and that it is possible to determine empirically which techniques are most likely to produce sales. While still in London in 1936 he insisted that “every advertisement must tell a whole sales story...every word of the copy must count” adding that “permanent success has rarely been built by frivolity, and people do not buy from clowns. Fifty –six years later in a speech to the Association of national Advertisers in the United States, he sounded the same theme: “If you focus your advertising budget on entertaining the consumer, you may not sell as much of your product as you like. People don’t buy a new detergent because the manufacturer told a joke on television last night. They buy it because it promised a benefit” (McDonough John, 2003, ‘Ogilvy, David 1911-1999’, *Advertising Age Encyclopedia of Advertising*, vol. 2, pp. 1157-1158).

When he had to hire new staff he would look for people with ambition- “men with fire in their bellies”- who had liberal arts, not advertising at University. He had contempt for advertising undergraduate courses (Fox 1984, p. 234). On the other hand he was very good in dealing with clients (Fox 1984, p. 234). He would normally did the writing of ads at home. One of the ways he had to get inspiration was to listen to Bach, Handel and Mozart ‘with an occasional military march...’ (Fox 1984, p. 235). He would read magazines in order to be up to date with advertising (Fox 1984, p. 235). He encouraged employees to use gentle manners (Fox 1984, 235). In the 1960’s he said:

‘What we ´re trying to do here is to return to the eternal verities of the advertising business. The first concern of an advertising agency should be to produce good advertising’ (Fox 1984, p. 239).

In 1964 Ogilvy & Mather, after the merger of his agency with Mather&Crowther, ‘became one of the top ten agencies worldwide’ (Fox 1984, p. 261).

In 1963 he wrote *Confessions of an Advertising Man*. The book introduced the reader on Ogilvy’s theory about good advertising (Terry, Danal, 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 235). It became a best seller. ‘By the late 1990’s his active involvement in agency business had ended. He died at home in Chateau Touffou on 21 July 1999 shortly after 88<sup>th</sup> birthday’ (McDonough John, 2003, ‘Ogilvy, David 1911-1999, *Advertising Age Encyclopedia of Advertising*, vol. 2, p. 1157).

## 8. Bill Bernbach (1911-1982)

Bill Bernbach is possibly one the most important advertising giants of all times. He was an advertising Executive and copywriter :

‘A copywriter with a sense of design, an acute judge of competence and a nurser of artistic egos, and especially- an inspired teacher, he was the most innovative advertising man of his time. More than anyone else, he invented the creative revolution of the 1960s (Fox 1984, p. 240).

Bernbach ‘was hailed as a creative leader who added much needed class and distinction to a profession often attacked as vulgar’ (Danna, Sammy R., 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 56).

He was a very good communicator, but he didn’t say much about himself (Danna, Sammy R., 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 60). He did not publish any book.

He was born in the Bronx, New York. From an early age he liked poetry and art. After attending school he went to New York University ‘where he studied English, music and philosophy, showing the easy eclecticism that would later let him range across disciplines in his advertising career’ (Fox 1984, p. 240).

Regarding his personality Bernbach had:

‘...a strong sense of himself and a fully adequate ego...But his strength was the kind that not need to trumpet itself...He was utterly sane and balanced, uneccentric to the point of dullness...He prided himself on never spending evenings or weekends at the office... “I work very hard during the day and then take it easy”. His hobbies were predictably calm and easygoing, no sports, nothing strenuous, just reading and listening to music. His literary tastes run to philosophy, sociology, and fiction...’ (Fox 1984, p. 242).

When he died *Time* stated ‘that Bernbach preached “that honesty sells”...’(Danna, Sammy R., 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 56).

In relation to his human values, Allan Kaufman in the October issue of *Madison Avenue*, explained that Bernbach took his ‘work seriously’. He was ‘meticulously fussy in his pursuit of excellence’. He did not agree with the theory that advertising should be aimed to a ‘12-years old’s mind’. He quotes Bernbach saying: ‘it is impossible to

overestimate the intelligence of your audience' (Danna, Sammy R., 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 60).

He had a good capacity to persuade clients (Danna, Sammy R., 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 61). He loved creative freedom. One of the DDB creatives, Phyllis Robinson said:

'I don't think Bill set out to make a revolution or a fortune. The whole idea was creative freedom. His ambitions were only large in terms of room to breathe. What excited him –and us- was the idea of running our own show and doing the kind of work we loved to do without having to filter a noncreative management' (Danna, Sammy R., 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 61).

Before Bernbach started his advertising career he had 'no background in the field, and with little interest in advertising history, then or later, he had at least an uncluttered mind open to new ideas' (Fox 1984, p. 240).

When he got a job at William H. Weintraub he met there Paul Rand, the art director of the agency. Bernbach was very impressed with him. Together they would visit museums and art galleries. They would talk about the armony between copy and art. Paul Rand helped Bernbach to perfect 'his interest in the fine arts' (Danna, Sammy R., 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 56).

While working later on at Grey Advertising he met there Ney Doyle. 'Both realized the importance of client opinion in the formulation of sales messages, but on the other hand, both men were tired of pandering clients, often to the detriment an ad's message' (Danna, Sammy R., 1994 'William Bernbach (August 13, 1911-October 2, 1982)' in Applegate Edd, pp. 56-57).

Bernbach founded Dane Doyle (DDB) Bernbach in 1949. The agency as well as Bernbach would cause the creative revolution of the sixties: 'Under Bernbach's 25-years leadership, DDB was credited with upholding a creative revolution that changed the face of much of American advertising...' (Danna, Sammy R., 1994, in Applegate Edd, pp. 57-58).

'Don't be slick. Tell the truth' he would advise his creatives once he had founded his own agency (Fox 1994, p. 252). Attributed to Bernbach are the following statements: 'Let us prove the world that the good taste, the writing of good copy, the good drawing and illustrating can sell well'; 'Originality must be based in something which is worthwhile saying'; 'The

acknowledgment by the management of the preeminence of creativity in advertising is not a license to be pretentious...or to make abstract acrobatics in a sheet of paper’.

In DDB creatives were given responsibility with a few general ideas from Bernbach: respect the audience, tell the truth and show photos of people with true and natural expressions. Bernbach would trust talent, intuition and good taste. He knew how to attract people with talent and create an atmosphere where they gave the best of themselves.

For his campaigns ‘Bernbach and his agency relied on humor and warmth’ (Danna, Sammy R., 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 57). At the same time he sought realism in his ads (Danna, Sammy R., 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 58).

Bernbach ‘was willing to tackle impossible tasks in all his ads because he believed in the power of advertising to move people’ (Danna, Sammy R., 1994 in Applegate Edd, p. 58).

One of the greatest contributions to advertising was the idea of the creative team, that is, the copywriter and the art director working together in the same ad. ‘Bernbach respected the creative process above every other aspect of the advertising business and demanded that others respected it, too (Danna, Sammy R., 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 58).

Finally another contribution was the ‘to open up the ad industry to creative Jewish people, but ‘that had nothing to do with their being Jewish. It did the same thing for Italians and other minorities. My only requirement was that they be talented’ (Hixon Carl, ‘The Bernbach Fantasies’ 1986, p. 28, in Danna, Sammy R., 1994, in Applegate Edd, p. 61).

## 9. Conclusion

We have explained that advertising is a profession with history. Secondly, we have argued the need for students of Advertising of knowing humanism in its double meaning and Advertising History, because the profession is about persons serving persons, and always good values can be learnt from the past.

Thirdly if Advertising students know the biographies of the giants they will enrich their culture of the profession and will know some of the permanent values of the profession.

Finally with the examples of Hopkins, Rubicam, Burnett, Ogilvy and Bernbach I have tried to prove that a lot can be learnt from them: love for truth, high ethical standards, respect for the audience, hard work capacity, professionalism, seriousness against frivolity...Obviously that was not the reason for they becoming giants and have success in the profession. Yet from my point of view the human values did not hindered but helped them in becoming what they became.

We would like to think that the study of the biographies of the great advertising personalities may be a small contribution to the future of Advertising Education in Europe.

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