

## ***Drill or Be Dropped***

*Agencies lose accounts for basic reasons, not because they blow the trick plays*

Football season's here again, and as the teams practice I can't help but notice how much time they spend in drills, perfecting tackles, running without fumbling, and learning to block effectively.

Come on - don't these guys know all that by now? They've been playing football, most of them, since they were little. Shouldn't they be concentrating on the complicated stuff like trick plays and other more sophisticated tactics?

No. Because what loses games? It happens when somebody blows something fundamental that everybody supposedly knows. Watch carefully and you'll see the winning team usually executes the basics consistently while the losing team muffs the simple stuff.

Same way with agencies. Accounts walk because of cumulative basic bloopers. 9 out of 10 times failure to do the basics right is the reason clients leave one agency and go to another, believe me.

For instance, here's a list of issues at a DR agency having problems. This is what the client is telling them are serious miscues (no news to the agency, by the way):

1. Missed drop dates
2. Wrong address, phone number, website address
3. Misspelled client's name several times (!)
4. Frequently late with concepts, copy, layouts, proofs, delivery, etc.
5. Poor communication – infrequent or no status reports, meeting reports, inconsistent follow-up

Duh. This litany indicates they don't know how to run and pass without dropping the ball.

But here's the best part. The agency CEO told me what he really thinks will move the agency ahead: creating a high-level strategic planning and research department!

You know where this speech is going. *Unless you deliver on the basics you'll never be able to sustain more 'sophisticated' services.* Clients tell us all the time in **Client Satisfaction Audits™** that they'd give their agency more work if they'd just get the simple stuff right.

So here's a suggestion. Call a meeting with the desired outcome of generating 20

changes you can make immediately to improve delivery of the basics.

We use this technique all the time and it works. Have everyone in the room write 1 to 20 on the left side of a page then, working privately, tell them to list 20 specific improvement ideas.

The easy ideas, maybe the first 6 or 8, will come quickly. But then everyone will hit a wall around 10 or so. Make them struggle to come up with a total of 20.

The magic of this is that what's generated from items 12 to about 18 will often be breakthrough because people move from snagging the easy ideas to reaching and stretching for the less obvious. The other reason it works is that thinking individually generates more unique solutions than brainstorming as a herd.

Demand everyone read each of their 20. Make a master list – you'll have a lot more than 20 ideas when you're done – and rank by asking the question, "Which 3 ideas on this list if implemented would have the most *positive impact* on our success with our clients?" Then work on putting into action only those 3 until you've got 'em nailed. This is an operating principle we call *Singular Focus for Multiple Results*.

Yeh, I know it all sounds a little hokey. But then again running through a row of tires or charging into a blocking sled probably isn't much fun for the football boys either. But it's essential because to help make sure the basics are executed well.

Because all the sophisticated plays in the world won't mean anything if you can't hang on to the ball.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Grant". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.