

Pitching in with wisdom.

I recently came across the re-post of a blog - Pitching in with wisdom written by the inimitable

Dave Trott.

Written some seven years ago, the insights and conclusions around the pitch process are as fresh, insightful and relevant as ever.

For anyone involved in pitching, agency or client-side, who missed it first time round, this is what's added a new perspective to our next new biz presentation.

It's a gem.

Enjoy.

"I went to a NABS talk the other evening.

Helen Calcraft and Martin Jones were speaking about new business.

Pitching, to be specific.

What was interesting was the difference between the male and female presentation.

Martin talked first.

He'd been the head of the AAR, the people that handle around 50% of all new business pitches.

So Martin knows what he's talking about.

He put up lots of useful facts and pointers, lots of tips.

He'd seen just about every agency pitching over the years.

He analysed what worked and why, what to do, and what not.

Each chart had an interesting line of useful information.

All the men in the audience were nodding along, taking it in.

Then Helen Calcraft spoke.

And as she talked you felt the room shift.

All the women came to life.

Helen is the founder of MCBBD.

She's also the most successful new business person in London.

Helen's presentation was much less about the facts and much more about the emotions.

Helen went through the experience of pitching in a way that brought it to life.

First she described the whole process like this.

"Each client is like a superstar.

Immediately they announce their business is up for pitch, every agency in town will be all over them like paparazzi.

But clients don't know, or care, anything about advertising agencies.

So what we have to do is the equivalent of getting Johnny Depp to pick us out of a crowd of adoring fans, ask us for a date, and then in four week's time ask us to marry him."

Immediately she moved it away from the simple mechanical world of solutions that all the men understood, into the world of seduction and relationships that women understood.

Of course everyone was riveted.

To show what clients thought of ad agencies she put up a slide of Hugh Hefner and his Playboy Bunnies.

She said “Clients see us just like this. We may think we’re fabulous, but to them we all look identical.”

Then she said one of the most important parts was deciding how committed we were before the process started.

Did you really, really want the account?

And she put up a picture of Tom Cruise.

She said, “You may initially find someone attractive, but do you really want to get into a long term relationship with someone who jumps up and down on Oprah’s sofa?”

Then she talked about the various stages of the process.

She said the chemistry meeting was like the first date.

She put up a picture of a pouting Jordan and said, “Don’t be needy. Don’t keep talking about yourself: how famous you are and what you’ve done. How boring is that on a first date? Talk about them, find out what they want.”

Then she talked about the tissue meeting.

She said the tissue meeting is like the first weekend away.

And she put up a photo of a woman shaving her legs and a man sitting on the toilet.

She said, “On the first weekend away together, don’t leave the toilet door open, don’t shave your legs. You don’t need to let them know all the less attractive parts about you. That’s too much information.”

And Helen went through the whole pitch process like that.

Not just for the rational side of the brain, but to let her audience know how it feels.

But I’m a bloke, and I’m a creative.

So the two tips that resonated with me were the ones where the headline played off the visual, like a really good ad.

She had a picture of Camilla Parker Bowles and the headline “Never Underestimate The Competition.”

Like a really good ad, it takes you a minute to get it.

So that, when you do, it sinks in.

She gave the example of MCBBD being beaten by a big, dull, old agency that they hadn’t taken seriously as a rival.

Then she showed a picture of Anne Widdecombe with the headline “Being Right Isn’t The Same As Being Irresistible”.

This really resonated with me.

All creatives think if we get the ‘right’ answer, as far as the consumer’s concerned, the client must buy our solution.

But in a pitch the consumer isn’t the target market.

In a pitch the client is the target market.

So the right answer may not be the ‘right’ answer.

What Martin did was take us through the pitch process in a way we could understand.

What Helen did was take everyone through the process in a way everyone could empathise with.

And that’s why she’s the most successful new business person in London.

Because she knows feelings are more important than facts.

As she and Martin both said:

If a client like a particular agency, they’ll make the facts fit that feeling.

If a client doesn’t like a particular agency, they’ll make the facts fit that feeling.

Or, as the philosopher David Hume said, “Reason is the slave of the passions.”

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