

Make a bad decision from time to time

By [Adam Weber](#), issued by [M&C Saatchi Abel](#)

16 Aug 2017

Why creative success requires bravery and intuition

In a pivotal episode of the classic series, *Band of Brothers*, it's mid-winter in the Ardennes forest region. The frozen and exhausted soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division, Easy Company, advance towards the Belgian town of Foy.



During the attack, their commander, Lieutenant Norman Dike falls apart in the ensuing panic and mayhem. He has no idea what to do, so he orders his men to stop in the middle of an advance, without cover. A German sniper begins picking off the exposed men, while his sergeant, Carwood Lipton desperately urges him to advance. His lack of a clear plan cost the lives of many in his company. Another lieutenant stepped in and took them forward.

The town was captured. Dike had fallen to the sniper.

Sergeant Lipton summed it up: "He wasn't a bad leader because he made bad decisions. He was a bad leader because he made no decisions."

Creative leadership

I was reminded of this scene when reading an article by Robin Ham, in which he looks at leadership lessons to be learned from *Band of Brothers* - and in particular, Episode 7.

Arguably, it's something that new creative directors need to understand. Their teams need guidance and a clear way forward. Ham points out that you can at least learn from a wrong decision, and then make a good one.

I was once told that the key to creative leadership is simply giving clear direction and a definite time by which it must be executed.

I believe clients can learn from this, too. The most successful clients always make a call. Often, this is based on a gut feel and an intuition for what is right for their brand. Sometimes, it is based on experience - and probably a few bad decisions.

But there is always a clear call.

Marketing sometimes appears to be satisfying internal issues and management expectations rather than connecting to the actual market.

With a strong and intuitive client, you always know exactly where you stand. If they love the work you make it, if they don't, they tell you not to present crap like it again. These clients usually have one strong leader and don't rely on PowerPoint slides filled with product triangles and brand rockets and spider diagrams. They just know and aren't afraid to get it wrong.

Because the risk of getting it right, is getting it really right...

Adidas made the call to go with their amazing piece of work, *Original Is Never Finished*. It turned out to be the right call. As was the call to trust the right people to do it. Pepsi made a wrong call with their Kendall Jenner piece. They probably won't make it again and I expect them to come back with something big and right. Either way, we noticed the work.

We've all seen these lines in briefs. "It's a rugged off-road car, but it's for on-road too". "We are talking to an older market, but don't ignore the youth". "We're serious, but fun". It's like going left and right.

When decisions are not clear or have no direction at all, you hover around what is safe and what a committee is comfortable with. You get middle-of-the-road communication that doesn't offend or inspire anyone, but leaves people with *okay* and barely a blip on their emotional radar.

The lesson here is not to hesitate or stand still. I've made many bad decisions, but more often than not they've led to something more interesting. And I've learned more making bad decisions than when I've done nothing at all.

As hard as it is sometimes... just make a call!

M&C Saatchi Abel

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