

Demand growing for management training in the advertising industry

Advertising people are creative, spontaneous and free-thinking - all of which makes them great advertising agency staff, but lousy managers, according to one training company. "More and more advertising companies are seeing the value in training their staff in the art of managing," says Ernst Kuhlmann from organisational and development training specialists, Network Dynamics.

In advertising agencies a hot-shot creative person tends to make a mark for themselves through their passion and creative talent. Almost by default these people then end up heading the creative department and they often have no, or very few, management skills, details Network Dynamics.

The powers that be often presume that an outgoing 'people's person', and most of the time a subject matter expert in one field, will naturally be a great manager but, as they soon find out to their detriment, this is seldom the case, Kuhlmann says.

"One of the most frequent problems is that these managers are simply young. They have risen to the top because of their creative talent but, due to their age, they don't have the life experience as well as exposure to management skills, to manage people effectively.

"Managers in advertising departments are often required to lead a team of staff who are much older than themselves. These staff end up resenting the creative hot-shot who is now 'the boss'. Managers need to learn how best to deal with this kind of undercurrent - if left unchecked it can lead to resentful, unproductive staff," he says.

He says another problem is the very nature of the beast. Creative types instinctively hate rules and restrictions. Their biggest fear is turning into a "stereotypical 9 to 5, pin-stripe suited banker". Because of this, they tend to shy away from imposing rules on their staff.

"Unfortunately no department can work efficiently if staff come and go as they please. Of course advertising departments are not banks and it is common for staff to be required to work all through the night or weekend when working on a big pitch. The challenge facing managers is to make allowances for these types of situations while still maintaining some sort of structure within the department.

"The good news is that management skills can be learned. Training within advertising companies traditionally focused on hard skills such as teaching people the intricacies of the latest graphic software package. However we have noticed a growing demand from advertising agencies for softer skills training such as management development and our advice to advertising agencies looking for training is to shop around. You need to find a training company that understands the advertising industry and its idiosyncrasies. Off-the-shelf training programmes designed for the corporate market will just not work. Training staff need to understand what makes creative types tick and talk their language - this is the only way to ensure a successful training experience."

Training has to be backed up with coaching and mentoring for greater impact and internalisation for the participant, says Kuhlmann. The training also has to be connected to the participant's work realities and the end results have to be measurable. "Most of all the team leader has to be empowered after each course to better manage their team members, thanks to the skills they have learnt during their training," concludes Kuhlmann.

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