

## Spirituality in Advertising?

Recently I was a guest speaker at a local college, imparting breezy facts about careers in advertising & marketing. As an aside, I mentioned the need for staying centered spiritually in what might be perceived as a “soul-zapping” field. Later, during the Q & A period, a young lady raised her hand and questioned me about that comment. “What did I mean exactly?” she wanted to know.

Stunned by her naivete, I was momentarily speechless. Was it possible that her generation was unaware of the perceived deceit, the manipulative power, the questionable ethical practices that seemed to pervade the field? Had she never been exposed to writings of Vance Packard, Faith Popcorn or the vast number of sociologists who have studied and exposed the stealthy, underhanded methodology of professional persuaders like me?

That seemingly benign experience began a personal quest to better understand my own role in advertising and in the world of entrepreneurship as a whole. Even as a youngster I felt confident in my talents as a creative thinker. Because I have a knack for synthesizing complex and esoteric material and devising a convincing buzz around it, advertising & marketing was a natural for me. Now I wondered: was doing something well reason enough to build my life and most of my days around it? And what happened to my youthful dreams of elevating the human condition through writing or art or theater or just plain ole meaningful existence? I’d never been one of those who believed deep down in the prosperity rule telling me that God really *wants* me to own a Mercedes or a house at Seaside or a \$50K wardrobe. In fact, I had been a big scoffer, even a snob, about conspicuous consumerism. So how did I find my way into, of all things, advertising, ...and, darn it (!), where is the love?

My search for God in advertising is ongoing, and it’s getting easier. I now begin the day by thinking of myself, my clients, my co-workers, and even my competitors as reflections of a perfect, non-erring God; perfect “ideas” of God. Traditionally, I’m no Pollyanna, but I really try to incorporate a deep sense of joy into everyday tasks, taking a cue from the Buddhist monks who, while sweeping the monastery floor, are deeply appreciative and keenly aware of the action of every broom straw in the broom. I have always enjoyed working with others, but now I consider these relationships genuine privileges. This energized views easily leads to a new approach to my work as a creative thinker. If creativity is spiritual, then my ideas are limitless and complete and full of good potential that will serve my clients well. The same grand principle works for our competitors, too. And setbacks? I resolve to process them as set-ups for learning. Has any bad or negative incident ever failed to result in something better in the long run? Never. Not once.

I was impressed by the recent “60 Minutes” profile of the young founders of the behemoth search engine Google, who, from the start, made a conscious decision not to do “bad (unethical) things” to get ahead. Which brings me back to the idea of advertising and spirituality. I’ve concluded that no matter what field we find ourselves in, we can

make a conscious decision to operate and conduct our lives on a spiritual level, and that level will inevitably reflect the best, the brightest, the most ethical laws at work in the universe.