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CLYDE BEDELL

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CLYDE BEDELL

Fortunate is a man who sometime in his career finds a mentor whose influence never wanes, whose words and deeds continue to give inspiration and make life richer.

I found such a person early in my teaching career. He was Clyde Bedell. I found him through his textbook—the first and only text I have used in more than 30 years of teaching advertising copy.

In reading *How To Write Advertising That Sells*, I sensed more in the author than just another advertising man. I was struck by his statement that he preferred to help one person become a better ad person and citizen than to help three become better ad persons. I was impressed by the breadth of his knowledge and his ability to communicate it—as though we were chatting across a desk, which it has been my good fortune to do on many occasions through the years.

We corresponded before we met in person, but nothing prepared me for the impact of meeting Bedell in person. The vigor of his mind and body, the warmth of his personality, his interest in his fellow man made him immediately the most unforgettable character I have ever known. I have not changed my mind after more than three decades of a treasured friendship.

What Bedell gave me I have passed on to hundreds of students of advertising, not nearly so well as he could have done it—for Bedell is a *master teacher*. He has taught advertising to practitioners around the

globe. Through lectures and clinics and seminars, he has shared his knowledge with the advertising and sales personnel of retail stores and newspapers and some of the nation's largest businesses. As a consultant and teacher, he has served clients throughout the world.

Clyde had an unfailing interest in advertising education and often interrupted a business trip to appear on a college campus. He lectured in college classrooms across the country, never talking down to undergraduates, always urging them to conduct themselves as professionals. To a whole generation of advertising students, *How To Write Advertising That Sells* was the official guide to good copywriting—a blueprint they took with them into their business careers. It was the one textbook that few second-hand book sellers ever got their hands on.

Few authors of books on creative advertising can fail to acknowledge a debt to Bedell for his ideas and principles that often appear today in truncated form. Sid Bernstein, chairman of the executive committee of Crain Publications says: "Clyde deserves a high place among those 'practical teachers' of advertising who have made very considerable contributions to the art . . . he has had a great deal more influence on American advertising, and particularly retail advertising, than many people currently better known in advertising circles."

Men and women who have reached the top in the advertising business are quick to acknowledge Clyde's influence. Robert Marker, former chairman of McCann-Erickson, once told me that when his creative juices failed to flow, he often turned to Bedell for inspiration and reread chapters in *How To Write Advertising That Sells* which was always near his typewriter.

Like so many of us, William Bernbach met Clyde through his book. "But it was a momentous meeting for me," Bernbach says. "It stimulated my thinking on advertising, which then led me to new thoughts on the whole communications process. More than anything else I learned the arithmetic of advertising from Bedell, the tangible things that should be included in ads, that basic knowledge about a product that the consumer looks for and without which he is not persuaded . . . I got from him the understanding that the most brilliant scintillating work not soundly based would be a terrible waste of creative talent. And that the soundest work in the world boringly presented would never reach its target."

How To Write Advertising That Sells came about nearly 40 years ago when Clyde was teaching copywriting to a night class at Northwestern University. He could find no book that presented a systematic, integrated procedure for the creation of selling copy;

none based on the organized siftings of systematic research instead of assorted intuitions and fragments of experience.

So he wrote his own textbook which McGraw-Hill published first in 1940, followed by a second revised edition in 1952. It became that best seller on copy among advertising teachers and practitioners who liked its informal narration and copious examples, who found in its academic approach and personal style a book that was no ordinary text—but rather the intimate experience of one human communicating with another.

When Dr. Charles Sandage first read Bedell's book, he predicted it would go far to help students and practitioners understand not only the ingredients that should be included in advertising copy, but also the manner in which they should be mixed or combined for maximum results. It did.

An academician at heart, Clyde was of the opinion that the only way businessmen could solve their toughest problems most economically and effectively was through an academic approach—through the professional technique of analysis, hypothesis, experiment, prediction, control.

He emphasized this in all of his writings: *The Seven Keys To Retail Profits*, which broke all records for a business book when published by McGraw-Hill in the 1930's and 40's; *Let's Talk Retailing and Your Advertising, Force or Farce*, projects for ANPA and NAEA respectively. It was at the core of his *Total Selling Service*, prepared for the furniture industry, and in his column that appeared regularly in *Advertising Age* for nearly ten years.

After he became an independent consultant in 1939, he continued to analyze the results of his craftsmanship, distilling the principles and practices that produced results for him and the thousands he taught, developing "stratagems" and "touchstones" that have been associated with his name for more than four decades.

Those who believe Bedell, through his systematic approach to copywriting, was encouraging a host of mechanics, are naive, indeed. He was the first to say "the art is not made by the rules—nor does one become master of the art upon possession of the tools." Clyde says, "The art is in the internal, elusive, personal qualities which determine the worker's own, always unique, style."

Yet Victor O. Schwab, who later wrote his own book on copywriting, said of Bedell's touchstones of ad writing: "They condensed into very few words years of distilled experience. Taken to heart, to mind and to memory, they can transform a writer who merely fills white space with words into one whose words will fill stores with customers."

Clyde believes that wherever things are done well in the world, disciplined minds have made great contributions. His own accomplishments in a long and successful career have come about through discipline and energy, coupled with talent and intellect that a renowned psychologist characterized as "one of the true geniuses I've ever run across."

Clyde was born in Des Moines, Iowa, on April 25, 1898. His high school classmates recognized his perseverance and leadership when they wrote beneath his picture in the school annual: "A boy in whose dictionary the word 'can't' does not appear." He proved he could on the basketball squad and track team, in the boys' glee club, as debate captain and as editor of the yearbook. One can just imagine the college record he would have made had he not been forced to leave Coe College after one year to earn his livelihood!

Always a worker, Clyde in his youth trucked freight ten hours a day for six months. He dug ditches and laid gas pipe. He was a helper on a moving van. He got up at 4 a.m. to fry doughnuts over a huge vat of boiling grease for six hours, only to clean up and sell clothing for the remainder of the day. Clyde considered work as a teacher. It was his passport to better things, an opportunity for growing.

Several years ago he withdrew from active participation in Bedell Advertising Selling Improvement Corporation in Santa Barbara, California, leaving it in the capable hands of his oldest son, Barrie. His younger son, Jeffrey, is a communications specialist with Lockheed in Saudi Arabia.

Clyde is very much alive and well in Laguna Hills, California, where he lives with Florence, his devoted mate for 52 years.

Clyde has never done anything in a perfunctory way. Whether reading a book, delivering a speech, corresponding with friends, or pursuing a philosophy of life, he moves with thoughtful determination and buoyant enthusiasm. He is constantly engaged in a project that challenges his intellect and his spirit.

And Clyde never deviates from his principles. He believes that morality should not be one thing for Sunday and another for Monday, nor should it be one thing in one human activity and another in business. He believes that ethics in connection with urging is the same as ethics in connection with all human relationships. As long as you employ honest means for ends which are not harmful or destructive to others, you are selling legitimately—ethically.

"Above all, shines the Bedell honesty. He is integrity personified," says Budd Gore, former advertising director of Marshall Field & Company and a national advertising consultant. "Bedell's copy bursts with believability. All trust Clyde and what he is selling."

JOURNAL OF ADVERTISING

With reason. He never would agree to promote a shabby piece of merchandise or a questionable service. An incredible man; always an inspiration; always a teacher-challenger."

Clyde was the first person named to the National Retail Advertising Conference's Hall of Fame. When 2000 retail advertising and promotion executives were polled to determine what individual had done most for retail advertising in America, Clyde received 65 percent of all votes cast—although there were six nominees.

Some years ago, the nearly 60 college chapters of Alpha Delta Sigma, national professional advertising fraternity, honored Clyde with the Nichols Cup, its tribute to the person having made the greatest contribution to advertising education. The National Retail Merchants Association also named him one of the "all-time greats" for his contribution to the bank of knowledge in retail sales promotion.

One is never in doubt about where Bedell stands or what he believes. He has never wavered in his advocacy of the free enterprise system and advertising's role in maintaining a healthy economy. But he regrets that a high standard of living is not assurance of a high standard of life. "I wish all citizens were ardent in their belief that the main purpose of civilization is to improve man—not his gadgets or standard of living," he says. "The profit motive can cause free enterprise to self-destruct unless it is modified by the service motive," Clyde warns.

Clyde liked the independence he had as a creative selling consultant that took him four times around the world. It was not just the travel he enjoyed, but the fact that he could be his own man. He once said that if you can risk job and income, you can stand by your principles. That, he was always willing to do. He stood up to store presidents and agency chairman if principles were at stake. Early in his career, he told an employer, "I owe you my loyalty or my resignation. Since I can't be loyal in the light of managerial mistakes that jeopardize my principles, I must resign."

In serving clients around the world, he had the unique policy of guaranteeing satisfaction or accounts could pare his fee to whatever they wished. He never had a fee cut.

A perfectionist with a sense of humor, Clyde is tactful to all but fools and liars. He is a patient teacher to those who want to learn, a constructive critic to those who should know better, a zealous patriot who can articulate national and world problems with forthright and thoughtful rhetoric, stemming from study and genuine concern. At 80, he still reads widely—everything from philosophical treatises and economic theories to modern cookbooks. He is concerned deeply about the human race and the future of man-

kind, and he is devoting almost full time to the study of the *URANTIA* Book and the compilation of a *CONCORDEX* to accompany it.

Had he lived in another age, he would have been called a Renaissance Man. His interest in art and music and poetry is stamped on his surroundings. Wherever he is, he is surrounded by books. His collection of rare volumes spans his office from floor to ceiling, and he relaxes to classical music on the stereo at his elbow.

Clyde is the kind of man who thunders against prejudice and oppression, and silently stands in awe of a waning sunset.

He will talk long into the night about things closest to his heart. That resonant voice with its infinite nuances still is cause for admiration and a little envy. He still puts into practice—so effortlessly—the "Magic of words" he wrote so eloquently about in his textbook. And in the morning, he is the first one out of bed, ready to whip up a batch of his famous blueberry pancakes for appreciative guests.

He abhors tedium and never allows himself to become bored. He thinks anyone who finds life monotonous or uninteresting has "brain calluses—spots in his mental machinery worn over-hard through thinking in narrow paths or not thinking at all." So typical of Clyde is a statement he made some years ago:

"On a clear night when the moon is small and the stars are bright, I regret I cannot have one life to live as an astronomer. When I see weary people, distressed, hopeless, knowing not what way to turn, I regret that I have not years enough in which to reform—and become a non-sectarian minister. When I am among my books or the more valuable collections of others, I regret that when my course has been run I will not be able to start all over again and devote a life to what now can be only one of several avocations."

Clyde Bedell: researcher, teacher, advertising man. But above all else, a man.

By Richard Joel
University of Tennessee

For information on the range of printed and custom advertising services based on Clyde Bedell's proven principles, including advertising analysis, consultation, promotion planning and seminars, contact:

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