

# BRANDWEEK

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## Top of Mind

### Help Wanted: Actual Talent, Not Fancy Resumes

-David Bernstein

**3 million jobs** were lost in the recession. According to my friends in the business, 2.9 million of them were in advertising.

So maybe it's not surprising that my agency gets a lot of resumes. A lot of people need work. What is surprising, at least to me, is the number of killer resumes I've seen.

Many of the recently unemployed were mercenaries when it came to their careers. They crisscrossed the country in order to work at the best agencies possible, to build the best credentials possible. I guess I always thought those people were recession-proof.

Granted, this has been a depression-like recession. When the axe fell, it cut the talented and untalented alike.

For a while, no one was hiring. But lately, I've been hearing about more and more job openings. So why are these people still unemployed? They know everyone. They've held staff positions everywhere. Why aren't they being hired?

I re-read those blue-chip resumes and noticed something. They were at the famous shops, but they didn't actually invent the famous work. They just worked on it *after* it had been invented.

Which reminded me of a lesson I was taught a long time ago.

When I was a young copywriter, everyone I knew had the same career goals. We all wanted to work at a famous agency, on an award-winning account.

For me, that agency was Ammirati & Puris and the account was BMW. Not that it was easy. Far from it. It took me years to get a copywriting job there.

Most of my idols had worked at that agency. So, after I produced about a dozen

**“Careers aren't based on where you've worked, but what you've done.”**

BMW ads, I found the courage to ask Ralph Ammirati if there was one creative person that he missed the most.

I fully expected him to name one of the previous writers or art directors on “my” account. But he didn't. He named a guy who had worked on some of the agency's other business.

When I asked why, Ralph said it was because this writer created new campaigns. From scratch. The other folks, for all their One Show pencils, had only produced pool-outs of an idea Ralph and his partner, Martin Puris, had created.

I'd spent the early part of my career trying to get hired by Ammirati & Puris, so I could write BMW ads and follow in the footsteps of my advertising idols, only to learn a bitter truth: You can't find your own voice by copying someone else's.

Don't get me wrong. You can learn a lot about the craft of advertising by doing pool-outs. You can also win awards, get flattering

press and have a lot of fun doing it. But eventually, you need to have your own ideas.

It doesn't matter if you work in account management, account planning, media or the creative department. You need to create something that's yours.

I can't promise you'll get a recession-proof resume. But it will make more agencies interested in you, when and if that time comes. Or, to put it in other words, successful careers aren't based on where you've worked, but what you've done.

Don't take it from me. Take it from Ralph. He had a Hall of Fame career.

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