



Bill Bernbach said...

We felt that the only way to share some of Bill's ideas with you would be to let him speak for himself.

"Rules are what the artist breaks; the memorable never emerged from a formula."

"You can say the right thing about a product and nobody will listen. You've got to say it in such a way that people will feel it in their gut. Because if they don't feel it, nothing will happen."

"Properly practiced creativity Must result in greater sales more economically achieved. Properly practiced creativity can lift your claims out of the swamp of sameness and make them accepted, believed, persuasive, urgent."

"If your advertising goes unnoticed, everything else is academic."

"Is creativity some obscure, esoteric art form? Not on your life. It's the most practical thing a businessman can employ."

"There is no such thing as a good or bad ad in isolation. What is good at one moment is bad at another. Research can trap you into the past."

"You can turn a page and, before you really comprehend it, there's a feeling. There's a vibration. If it's the wrong vibration for what you want to convey, what follows is going to fight it-an uphill battle against the original impression you made."

"The magic is in the product."

"It's not just what you say that stirs people. It's the way that you say it."

"Merely to let your imagination run riot, to dream unrelated dreams, to indulge in graphic acrobatics and verbal gymnastics in NOT being creative. The creative person had harnessed his imagination. He has disciplined it so that every thought, every idea, every word he puts down, every line he draws, every light and shadow in every photograph he takes, makes more vivid, more believable, more persuasive the original theme or product advantage he has decided he must convey."



“Surely it is better to state our proposition with the kind of talent that will touch and move the reader and viewer than to bore them to death with the ordinary.”

“Nobody counts the number of ads you run; they just remember the impression you make.”

“You can get attention and really make people resent you if you do it with an unrelated gimmick. They won’t like you for that.”

“You can have everybody coming in on time, everybody leaving on time, all work finished on the due date, and still have a lousy ad, and fail.”

“I can put down on a page a picture of a man crying, and it’s just a picture of a man crying. Or I can put him down in such a way as to make you want to cry. The difference is artistry—the intangible thing that business distrusts.”

“It is one thing to have a selling proposition and quite another to sell it.”

“Properly practiced creativity can make one ad do the work of ten.”

“It’s that creative spark that I’m so jealous of for our agency and that I’m so desperately fearful of losing. I don’t want academicians. I don’t want people who do the right things. I want people who do inspiring things.”

“Technique for its own sake can be disastrous. Because, after a while, you’re so anxious to do things differently, and do them better and funnier and more brilliantly than the next guy, that becomes the goal of the ad, instead of the selling of the merchandise.”

“Imitation can be commercial suicide.”

“Just because your ad looks good is no insurance that it will get looked at. How many people do you know who are impeccably groomed ... but dull?”

“We are so busy measuring public opinion that we forget we can mold it. We are so busy listening to statistics we forget we can create them.”

“Today’s smartest advertising style is tomorrow’s corn.”

“Be provocative. But be sure your provocativeness stems from your product. You are NOT right if in your ad you stand a man on his head JUST to get attention. You ARE right if you have him on his head to show how your product keeps things from falling out of his pockets.”



“We don’t do just snob ads, we don’t do just short copy ads, or just long copy ads, or any particular style. If you want to know what makes DDB ads, it is a fresh and original idea that conveys the advantage of the product memorably. We have no formula.”

“I warn you against believing that advertising is a science.”

“I wouldn’t hesitate for a second to choose the plain looking ad that is alive and vital and meaningful, over the ad that is beautiful but dumb.”

“Our job is to sell our clients’ merchandise ... not ourselves. Our job is to kill the cleverness that makes us shine instead of the product. Our job is to simplify, to tear away the unrelated, to pluck out the weeds that are smothering the product message.”

“Know your product inside and out before you start working. And relate that knowledge to the consumer’s needs.”

“No matter how skillful you are, you can’t invent a product advantage that doesn’t exist. And if you do, and it’s just a gimmick, it’s going to fall apart anyway.”

“There will be a time when no headline is proper; there will be a time when a headline is proper. There will be a time when a logo is good and there will be a time when using a logo is the worst thing in the world you can do.”

“Our job is to bring the dead facts to life.”

“A great ad campaign will make a bad product fail faster. It will get more people to know it’s bad.”

“The truth isn’t the truth until people believe you, and they can’t believe you if they don’t know what you’re saying, and they can’t know what you’re saying if they don’t listen to you, and they won’t listen to you if you’re not interesting, and you won’t be interesting unless you say things imaginatively, originally, freshly.”

“Forget words like ‘hard sell’ and ‘soft sell.’ That will only confuse you. Just be sure your advertising is saying something with substance, something that will inform and serve the consumer, and be sure you’re saying it like it’s never been said before.”

“Adapt your techniques to an idea, not an idea to your techniques.”

“Playing it safe can be the most dangerous thing in the world, because you’re presenting people with an idea they’ve seen before, and you won’t have impact.”



“Advertising doesn’t create a product advantage. It can only convey it.”

“The difference between the forget-table and the enduring is artistry.”

“You’ve got to live with your product. You’ve got to get steeped in it. You’ve got to get saturated with it. You must get to the heart of it. Indeed, if you have not crystallized into a single purpose, a single theme, what you want to tell the reader, you CANNOT be creative.”

“There are two attitudes you can wear: that of cold arithmetic or that of warm, human persuasion. I will urge the latter on you. For there is evidence that in the field of communications the more intellectual you grow, the more you lose the great intuitive skills that make for the greater persuasion-the things that really touch and move people.”

“Execution becomes content in a work of genius.”

“Can you really judge an idea from a storyboard? How do you storyboard a smile?”

“A dull truth will not be looked at. An exciting lie will. That is what good, sincere people must understand. They must make their truth exciting and new, or their good works will be born dead.”

“Don’t confuse good taste with the absence of taste.”

“At the heart of an effective creative philosophy is the belief that nothing is so powerful as an insight into human nature, what compulsions drive a man, what instincts dominate his action, even though his language so often camouflages what really motivates him.”

“There is practically nothing that is not capable of boring us.”

“In communications, familiarity breeds apathy.”

“It is insight into human nature that is the key to the communicator’s skill. For whereas the writer is concerned with what he puts into his writings, the communicator is concerned with what the reader gets out of it. He therefore becomes a student of how people read or listen.”

“There are few things more destructive than an unsound idea persuasively expressed.”

“To succeed an ad (or a person or product for that matter) must establish its own unique personality, or it will never be noticed.”



“To keep your ads fresh you’ve got to keep yourself fresh. Live in the current idiom and you will create in it. If you follow and enjoy and are excited by the new trails in art, in writing, in industry, in personal relationships ... whatever you do will naturally be of today.”

“It took millions of years for man’s instincts to develop. It will take millions more for them to even vary. It is fashionable to talk about *changing* man. A communicator must be concerned with *unchanging* man, with his obsessive drive to survive, to be admired, to succeed, to love, to take care of his own.”

“Word of mouth is the best medium of all.”

“Find new symbols, even though in time those symbols will grow old and die. The most freshly sculptured phrase will eventually become a cliché.”

“With our industry being watched so carefully by governmental agencies, with the FTC ready to pounce on every claim we make, what we CAN say in our ads is forever narrowing and the sharpest tool left for us is HOW we say it.”

“Finding out what to say is the beginning of the communication process. How you say it makes people look and listen and believe. And if you are not successful at that you have wasted all the work and intelligence and skill that went into discovering what you should say.”

“Dullness won’t sell your product, but neither will irrelevant brilliance.”

“An idea can turn to dust or magic depending on the talent that rubs against it.”

“You’ve got to believe in your product ... you’ve got to believe in your work. Only a deep belief will generate the vitality and energy that give life to your work.”

“You cannot sell a man who isn’t listening.”

“Getting a product known isn’t the answer. Getting it WANTED is the answer. Some of the best known product names have failed.”

“Maybe we’re getting bogged down in too much detail. Maybe our advertising ideas are being ground up in that multi-level American efficiency machine.”

“It’s not how short you make it; it’s how you make it short.”

“The great mistakes are made when we feel we are beyond questioning.”



“Today, everybody is talking ‘Creativity,’ and frankly, that’s got me worried. I fear lest we keep the good taste and lose the sell. I fear all the sins we may commit in the name of ‘Creativity.’ I fear that we may be entering an age of phonies.”

“Logic and overanalysis can immobilize and sterilize an idea. It’s like love-the more you analyze it the faster it disappears.”

“A unique selling proposition is no longer enough. Without a unique selling talent it may die.”

“Because an appeal makes logical sense is no guarantee that it will work.”

“Working from a method or a formula is guaranteed to do the same thing to the effectiveness of an idea that time does to a loaf of bread. Ideas must be hot out of the oven if they are to arouse the appetite. That is why, in communications, imitation is commercial suicide.”

“The fragile structure of logic fades and disappears against the emotional onslaught of hushed tone, a dramatic pause, and the soaring excitement of a verbal crescendo.”

“Knowledge is ultimately available to everyone. Only true intuition, jumping from knowledge to an idea, is yours and yours alone.”

“An important idea not communicated persuasively is like having no idea at all.”

“It is ironic that the very thing that is most suspect by business, that intangible thing called artistry, turns out to be the most practical tool available to it. For it is only an original talent that can vie with all the shocking news events and violence in the world for the attention of the consumer.”

“The men who are going to be in business tomorrow are the men who understand that the future, as always, belongs to the brave.”

“In this very real world, good doesn’t drive out evil. Evil doesn’t drive out good. But the energetic displaces the passive.”

“We don’t ask research to do what it was never meant to do, and that is to get an idea.”

“Most readers come away from their reading not with a clear, precise, detailed registration of its contents on their minds, but rather with a vague, misty idea which was formed as much by the pace, the proportions, the music of the writings as by the literal words themselves.”



“All of us who professionally use the mass media are the shapers of society. We can vulgarize that society. We can brutalize it. Or we can help lift it onto a higher level.”

“However much we would like advertising to be a science-because life would be simpler that way-the fact is that it is not. It is a subtle, ever-changing art, defying formularization, flowering on freshness and withering on imitation; where what was effective one day, for that very reason, will not be effective the next, because it has lost the maximum impact of originality.”

“More and more I have come to the conclusion that a principle isn’t a principle until it costs you money.”

“The real giants have always been poets, men who jumped from facts into the realm of imagination and ideas.”

“If you stand for something, you will always find some people for you and some against you. If you stand for nothing, you will find nobody against you, and nobody for you.”

“When we started our agency, we had in mind precisely the kind of people we wanted with us. There were two requirements: You had to be talented and you had to be nice. If you were nice but without talent, we were very sorry, but you just wouldn’t do. We had to ‘make it.’ And only great talent would help us do that. If you were a great talent, but not a nice person, we had no hesitation in saying ‘No.’ Life is too short to sacrifice so much of it, to living with a bastard.”

“A great talent, sailing in the wrong direction will, like the lost pilot breaking the speed record, reach the wrong destination all the more quickly.”

“The purpose of advertising is to sell. That is what the client is paying for and if that goal does not permeate every idea you get, every word you write, every picture you take, you are a phony and you ought to get out of the business.”