

Quotations of David Ogilvy



Ogilvy75

Published by Ogilvy

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PREFACE

On the occasion of our agency's 75th anniversary, we proudly reissue this collection of David Ogilvy's quotations – a timeless treasure trove of wit, insight, and audacious candor.

Curated from his masterpieces like *Confessions of an Advertising Man* and *Ogilvy on Advertising*, as well as iconic writings like *How to Create Advertising That Sells*, *Principles of Management*, some early Creative Council reports, and more, these quotes are a testament to the enduring relevance of David's wisdom and pragmatic brilliance.

During an era when the advertising industry was primarily male dominated, David's choice of words in his writings naturally echoed the prevailing norms of the time.

Today, it would undoubtedly bring him immense joy to witness two women steering the very agency he established, particularly considering the remarkable collaboration he had with his incredible wife, Herta.

As you delve into this renewed edition, you'll find a concise and powerful guide to Ogilvy's principles – a source of perpetual inspiration and a reflection of David's indelible impact on the world of advertising and beyond.

*Devika Bulchandani,
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Ideas

Unless your advertising is
built on a big idea it will pass
like a ship in the night.

How to Create Advertising That Sells

Encourage innovation. Change is our
lifeblood, stagnation our death knell.

Principles of Management

Big ideas are usually simple ideas.

How to Create Advertising That Sells

Senior men have no monopoly on great ideas. Nor do creative people. Some of the best ideas come from account executives, researchers, and others. Encourage this; you need all the ideas you can get.

Principles of Management

The Power of Advertising

We sell, or else.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

I once found myself conspiring with a president of the Board of Trade as to how we might persuade H.M. Treasury to cough up more money for the British Travel advertising in America. Said Sir David Eccles, “Why does any American in his senses spend his holidays in the cold damp of an English summer when he could equally well bask under Italian skies? I can only suppose that your advertising is the answer.” Quite so.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

What you show is more
important than what you say.

How to Create Advertising That Sells

Scores of great advertisements
have been discarded before
they have begun to pay off.

How to Create Advertising That Sells

It pays to boil down your strategy to one simple promise and go the whole hog in delivering that promise.

How to Create Advertising That Sells

Brand Image & Positioning

Every advertisement must contribute to the complex symbol which is the brand image.

How to Create Advertising That Sells

Most manufacturers are reluctant to accept any limitation on the image of their brand. They want it to be all things to all people. They want their brand to be a male brand and a female brand. An upper -class brand and a plebeian brand. They generally end up with a brand which has no personality of any kind, a wishy-washy neuter. No capon ever rules the roost.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

It takes uncommon guts to stick to one style in the face of all the pressures to “come up with something new” every six months. It is tragically easy to be stampeded into change. But golden rewards await the advertiser who has the brains to create a coherent image, and the stability to stick with it over a long period.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

The personality of a product is an amalgam of many things – its name, its packaging, its price, the style of its advertising, and, above all, the nature of the product itself.

Ogilvy on Advertising

The most important decision is
how to position your product.

How to Create Advertising That Sells

A lot of successful advertising was created before POSITIONING was invented. And a lot of today's campaigns are based on optimum positioning but are totally ineffective – because they are dull, or badly constructed, or ineptly written. If nobody reads your advertisement or looks at your commercial, it doesn't do you much good to have the right positioning.

Creative Council Reports

Leadership

Do not summon people to your office – it frightens them. Instead, go to see them in their offices. This makes you visible throughout the agency. A chairman who never wanders about his agency becomes a hermit, out of touch with his staff.

Principles of Management

Our offices must always be headed by the kind of men who command respect. Not phonies, zeros or bastards.

Principles of Management

It is important to admit your mistakes, and to do so before you are charged with them.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

To keep your ship moving through the water at maximum efficiency, you have to keep scraping the barnacles off its bottom. It is rare for a department head to recommend the abolition of a job, or even the elimination of a man; the pressure from below is always for adding. If the initiative for barnacle-scraping does not come from management, barnacles will never be scraped.

Principles of Management

It is the inescapable duty
of management to fire
incompetent people.

Principles of Management

Excellence

We have a divine discontent
with our performance. It is
an antidote to smugness.

The Corporate Culture of Ogilvy & Mather

The pursuit of excellence is less profitable than the pursuit of bigness, but it can be more satisfying.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Many of the greatest creations of man have been inspired by the desire to make money. When George Frederick Handel was on his beam ends, he shut himself up for twenty-one days and emerged with the complete score of *Messiah* – and hit the jackpot. Few of the themes of *Messiah* were original; Handel dredged them up from his unconscious, where they had been stored since he heard them in other composers' work, or since he had composed them for his own forgotten operas.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Work Ethic

I figure that my staff will be less reluctant to work overtime if I work longer hours than they do.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

I believe in the Scottish proverb: “Hard work never killed a man.” Men die of boredom, psychological conflict, and disease. They do not die of hard work.

Principles of Management

In the best establishments, promises are always kept, whatever it may cost in agony and overtime.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Professional Discipline

I frequently hear the Magic Lanterns described as rules. They are not rules. They are reports. Reports on how consumers react to different stimuli. If it were possible to create great advertising merely by studying the Lanterns, any damn fool could do it. More is required: innovative genius. The Lanterns only light the way for genius, indicating the most fruitful path to explore.

Creative Council Reports

Shakespeare wrote his sonnets with a strict discipline, fourteen lines of iambic pentameter, rhyming in three quatrains and a couplet. Were his sonnets dull? Mozart wrote sonatas within an equally rigid discipline – exposition, development, and recapitulation. Were they dull?

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Suppose you've got an acute appendicitis. You've got to be operated on tonight. Would you like to have a surgeon who's read some books of anatomy and knows how to do that operation – or would you prefer to have a surgeon who refused to read all books about anatomy and relied on his own instinct? Why should a manufacturer bet his money – perhaps the future of his company – on your instinct?

Viewpoint

I had a friend who was the king's surgeon in England. One day I asked him what makes a great surgeon. He replied, "What distinguishes a great surgeon is his knowledge. He knows more than other surgeons. During an operation he finds something which he wasn't expecting, recognizes it and knows what to do about it."

It's the same thing with advertising people. The good ones know more. How do you get to know more? By reading books about advertising.

By picking the brains of people
who know more than you do.
From the Magic Lanterns.
And from experience.

I can't stand callow amateurs
who aren't sufficiently interested
in the craft of advertising to
assume the posture of students.

Creative Council Reports

Talent

In recruitment and promotion,
we are fanatical in our hatred
for all forms of prejudice.

The Unpublished David Ogilvy

Our business needs massive transfusions of talent. And talent, I believe, is most likely to be found among nonconformists, dissenters, and rebels.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

If each of us hires people who are bigger than we are, we shall become a company of giants.

Ogilvy on Advertising

Tolerate genius.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Get rid of sad dogs
who spread gloom.

Principles of Management

I admire people with gentle manners who treat other people as human beings. I abhor quarrelsome people. I abhor people who wage paper warfare.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

If you ever find a man who is better than you are – hire him. If necessary, pay him more than you pay yourself.

Principles of Management

I despise toadies who suck up to their bosses; they are generally the same people who bully their subordinates.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Creative People

Do not compete with your agency
in the creative area. Why keep
a dog and bark yourself?

Ogilvy on Advertising

Few of the great creators have bland personalities. They are cantankerous egotists, the kind of men who are unwelcome in the modern corporation.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Account Executives

I don't believe in this specialization.
Who said that there's one breed of
cat which is an account executive,
and then there are the creative people
– and they are quite different?
This has been perpetuated by
both sides for years. It's nonsense.

Viewpoint

Madison Avenue is full of masochists who unconsciously provoke rejection by their clients. I know brilliant men who have lost every account they have handled.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

One of the most brilliant colleagues I ever had was blackballed by three clients in one year; the experience hurt him so badly that he left the agency business forever. If you are too thin-skinned to survive this hazard, you should not become an account executive in an advertising agency.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

In most agencies, account executives outnumber the copywriters two to one. If you were a dairy farmer, would you employ twice as many milkers as you had cows?

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Clients

I always use my clients' products. This is not toadyism but elementary good manners.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

If you resign accounts every time you feel like doing so, you will empty your portfolio every year.

Principles of Management

The best way to get new accounts is to create for our present clients the kind of advertising that will attract prospective clients. We do not have new business departments in our offices. No first-class man will take the job; no second-class man can do it effectively.

Principles of Management

Don't expect your agency
to pay for all the dry holes
they drill on your behalf.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Committees

A lot of advertisements and television commercials look like minutes of a committee meeting, and that is what they are. Advertising seems to sell most when it is written by a solitary individual. He must study the product, the research, and the precedents. Then he must shut the door of his office and write the advertisements.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Nowadays it is the fashion to pretend that no single individual is ever responsible for a successful advertising campaign. This emphasis on “teamwork” is bunkum – a conspiracy of the mediocre majority.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Consumers

You cannot bore people into
buying your product; you can
only interest them in buying it.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

You aren't advertising to a standing army; you are advertising to a moving parade. Three million consumers get married every year. The advertisement which sold a refrigerator to those who got married last year will probably be just as successful with those who'll get married next year. An advertisement is just like a radar sweep, constantly hunting new prospects as they come into the market. Get a good radar and keep it sweeping.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

The consumer isn't a moron; she is your wife. You insult her intelligence if you assume that a mere slogan and a few vapid adjectives will persuade her to buy anything. She wants all the information you can give her.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

While you are responsible to your clients for sales results, you are also responsible to consumers for the kind of advertising you bring into their homes. I abhor advertising that is blatant, dull, or dishonest. Agencies which transgress this principle are not widely respected.

Principles of Management

Never write an advertisement which you wouldn't want your own family to read. You wouldn't tell lies to your own wife. Don't tell them to mine.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

If you tell lies about your product you will be found out – either by the government, which will prosecute you, or by the consumer, who will punish you by not buying your product a second time.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Training

Ogilvy & Mather does two things:
We look after clients, and we
teach young advertising people.

The Unpublished David Ogilvy

Training should not be confined to trainees. It should be a continuous progress, and should include the entire professional staff of the agency. The more our people learn, the more useful they can be to our clients.

Principles of Management

Research

The most important word in the vocabulary of advertising is TEST. Test your premise. Test your media. Test your headlines and your illustrations. Test the size of your advertisements. Test your frequency. Test your level of expenditure. Test your commercials. Never stop testing, and your advertising will never stop improving.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

We prefer the discipline of knowledge to the anarchy of ignorance. We pursue knowledge the way a pig pursues truffles.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Layouts

Once upon a time I was riding on the top of a First Avenue bus when I heard a mythical housewife say to another, “Molly, my dear, I would have bought that new brand of toilet soap if only they hadn’t set the body copy in ten-point Garamond.” Don’t you believe it. What really decides consumers to buy or not buy is the content of your advertising, not its form.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Most of the art schools which train unsuspecting students for careers in advertising still subscribe to the mystique of the Bauhaus. They hold that the success of an advertisement depends on such things as “balance,” “movement,” and “design,” but can they prove it? My research suggests that these aesthetic intangibles do not increase sales, and I cannot conceal my hostility to the old school of art directors who take such preachments seriously.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

“Making the logo twice the size” is often a good thing to do, because most advertisements are deficient in brand identification. “Showing the clients’ faces” is also a better stratagem than it may sound, because the public is more interested in personalities than in the corporations. Some clients can be projected as human symbols of their own products.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

H. L. Mencken once said that nobody ever went broke underestimating the taste of the American public. That is not true. I have come to believe that it pays to make all your layouts project a feeling of good taste, provided that you do it unobtrusively. An ugly layout suggests an ugly product. There are very few products which do not benefit from being given a first-class ticket through life.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Most headlines are set too big to be legible in the magazines or newspapers. Never approve a layout until you have seen it pasted into the magazine or newspaper for which it is destined. If you pin up the layouts on a bulletin board and appraise them from fifteen feet, you will produce posters.

Creative Council Reports

Today, almost all our layouts look “addy.” Too bad. How do you sell editorial layouts to clients? Try saying, “Would you like the editors of half a dozen magazines to devote a whole page to your product?” The client will reply, “Yes, of course. But it is impossible.” You say, “It is possible. You buy the space and I will put an editorial in it. Look, here is your editorial. Better than any advertisement, isn’t it?”

Creative Council Reports

Most readers look at the photograph first. If you put it in the middle of the page, the reader will start by looking in the middle. Then her eye must go up to read the headline; this doesn't work, because people have a habit of scanning downwards. However, suppose a few readers do read the headline after seeing the photograph below it. After that, you require them to jump down past the photograph which they have already seen. Not bloody likely.

Creative Council Reports

It has been found that the less an advertisement looks like an advertisement, and the more it looks like an editorial, the more readers stop, look, and read. Therefore, study the graphics used by editors and imitate them. Study the graphics used in advertisements and avoid them.

Creative Council Reports

All too often the bottoms of advertisements are littered with miscellaneous crap, gadgets, etc. Get rid of them; they contribute to an appearance of untidiness which reduces “impact” and readership.

Creative Council Reports

Writing

It is a mistake to use highfalutin language when you advertise to uneducated people. I once used the word OBSOLETE in a headline, only to discover that 33% of housewives had no idea of what it meant. In another headline, I used the word INEFFABLE, only to discover that I didn't know what it meant myself.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Our business is infested with idiots who try to impress by using pretentious jargon. They say that the commercials for food products must include “an affirmative eating experience.” The latest horror is SUBOPTIMIZE.

Creative Council Reports

Jingles

Candor compels me to admit that I have no conclusive research to support my view that jingles are less persuasive than the spoken word. It is based on the difficulty I always experience in hearing the words in jingles, and on my experience as a door-to-door salesman; I never sang to my prospects. The advertisers who believe in the selling power of jingles have never had to sell anything.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Next time you decide to have the sales pitch sung in a television or radio commercial, play the song to half a dozen people who know nothing about the product. Then ask them what it said.

Creative Council Reports

Television Commercials

I have found that it is easier to double the selling power of a commercial than to double the audience of a program. This may come as news to Hollywood hidalgos who produce programs and look down their noses at us obscure copywriters who write the commercials.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

The purpose of a commercial is not to entertain the viewer but to sell him. Horace Schwerin reports that there is no correlation between people liking commercials and being sold by them. But this does not mean that your commercials should be deliberately bad-mannered. On the contrary, there is reason to believe that it pays to make them human and friendly, if you can do so without being unctuous.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Dr. Gallup reports that if you say something which you don't also illustrate, the viewer immediately forgets it. I conclude that if you don't show it there is no point in saying it. Try running your commercial with the sound turned off; if it doesn't tell without sound, it is useless.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Research has shown that commercials which open with a dramatic visual hold their audience better than commercials which don't. If you are advertising a fire extinguisher, open with the fire.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

People buy products, not
television commercials.

How to Make Successful Television Commercials

Awards

It is the professional duty of the advertising agent to conceal his artifice. When Aeschines spoke, they said, "How well he speaks." But when Demosthenes spoke, they said, "Let us march against Philip." I'm in for Demosthenes.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

Resist the temptation to write the kind of copy which wins awards. I am always gratified when I win an award, but most of the campaigns which produce results never win awards because they don't draw attention to themselves.

Confessions of an Advertising Man

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