

# Art & Commerce

## Rite of Passage

When it hits the fan—and it will—think of it as fresh air

On a generic Monday night in New York—a night any rummy blues band can get a gig—I'm having dinner down in the Village with my boss. Given our normal take and give, which typically has all the warmth of two vampires facing down sunrise with only one coffin between them, the conversation takes on a life of its own, as predestined as a matador raising his *espada* for the kill.

Eighteen months earlier—or a lifetime, if you're measuring in misery—I joined the storied Scali, McCabe, Sloves as part of "the next generation that would assume leadership" once Marvin Sloves and Sam Scali followed Ed McCabe out. But first I was to run their flagship Hertz business, and soon I was making commercials with Jamie Lee and O.J. (Curtis and Simpson—a killer babe and a babe killer, but that's another story).

It was Keith Green—whose resignation a few years later would be greeted with "euphoria" by the Scali staff, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, and who "left the industry with the nickname 'the Darth Vader of advertising,'" according to *Adweek*—who had charmed me into leaving J. Walter Thompson and coming to work for him. Now, at dinner with him, I'm reminded that none of this was a good idea.

Too late. Before I can drain my first drink, he fires me. At that point, I could hardly know it would be a great career move.

"What's new?" I say, as we sit down.

"Not much," he offers, which turns out to be a gross understatement. "But near as I can tell,



**TIM ARNOLD** is managing partner at The Ad Store in New York. He can be reached at [arnold@adstore.com](mailto:arnold@adstore.com).

you don't really want to be me these days."

Shit, I never did. Not then, not anytime.

"So when's the bomb going to drop?" I flirted. I always did have a death wish.

"How 'bout right now?"

At one time, Scali was a shining beacon of creativity and innovation, driven by another egocentric dervish. What Ed McCabe left behind was a great deal of creative arrogance and much less talent, and no one at the wheel.

This should have been a match made in heaven. It was a marriage from hell. This was an agency on the precipice, and it was about to jump off: In the next year, they would be investigated by the Texas attorney general over the monster-truck incident, become the subject of several exposé trade articles and ultimately suffer the humiliation of having to resign the prestigious Volvo business. They would lose half their billings, see many of their key people leave before they could fire them, fail to win a single new account and slip further and further away from their dream of buying themselves back from Martin Sorrell's WPP.

They've long since disappeared up the orifice of agency acquisitions and mergers. But this isn't about them.

"Tim, you've got to go."

Just like that. After 16 years in the fast lane, I get canned by a guy so controversial I can't even use him as a reference—and he *wants* me to. "Ten out of ten times, I'd hire you again," he's telling me. And somehow I like this guy. Like a moth to a flame.

"Happens to everybody."

Yeah, but this is me.

"Nothing to do with ability or performance."

Really? Now I feel much better.

"Look at it as an opportunity, a chance to re-examine your priorities and decide what you really want to do with your life."

OK, I'll foreclose on my apartment, sell everything we own and join the Peace Corps.

"You got caught in a squeeze. It's just politics. After all, we did lose Hertz 'on your watch.'"

Indeed, we did.

And it occurs to me that bosses are often in a position to have somebody else take the fall. In an instant, instead of feeling like some kind of big-time ad guy pulling down six digits, I feel ...

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### LETTERS

#### Greenberg piece left out talent transformation

Bob Greenberg's column on transformations ["Real Change Agents," A&C, June 20] neglected to mention one vital aspect of becoming change agents—talent transformation. Those of us who have the vision to see the future have not stood around waiting for agencies or clients to transform themselves—because, as he mentions, most haven't. We have built our own credentials in a way that ensures transforming brand ideas are developed and delivered 24/7.

Believe it or not, 99 percent of leading agency executives—not to mention the HR professionals who work with them—still don't understand the unique idea value that real multidisciplinary expertise brings to agencies and, in turn, their clients—expertise that is gained by working within, not just "around," related disciplines.

If I'm leading that big multinational business at an agency, how can I possibly come up with viable, strategic, discipline-neutral ideas if I haven't had the hands-on experience of working within a practice area the idea might impact ... and seen how an audience relates to it?

The future is individuals—not committees—who can advise clients and lead/mentor teams on navigating ideas for their brand, no matter the touch point—individuals who don't say, "That's a PR problem, let's get the PR agency," but rather, "That's a PR problem, here's an idea."

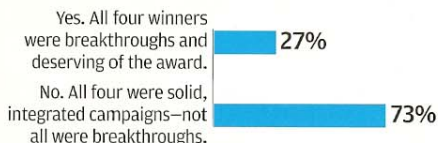
I keep waiting for the market to catch up. Bob's article has given me hope.

RUSS PARKEL  
*New York*

E-mail letters to Tim Nudd at [tnudd@adweek.com](mailto:tnudd@adweek.com); fax (646) 654-5365; or mail them to *Adweek*, 770 Broadway, New York, NY 10003. Please include your name, title, company and location. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. Op-ed pitches or completed pieces can be sent to the same e-mail, fax and postal address.

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