

OP-ED

On the battlefield of creative thinking, fear is defeating PR

If today's creative thinking were to be a hospital patient, our doctor would certainly be Jack Kevorkian.

The PR sector has been hit hard by a deadly creativity-killing disease – fear. For proof, you can go to any of our award shows and look at all the entries lined up like intensive care patients suffocating in sameness, gasping for a hit of oxygenized originality. Fear is killing us.

For a while, fear in corporate America was largely held in check by economic prosperity. But today, marketers are so obsessed with the bottom line that inventive concepts that actually land on the CMO's desk are simply put out of their misery. This is despite IBM's 2010 annual global survey of CEOs who cited "creativity" as the most vital leadership quality in the new economic environment.

Fear is the crack cocaine of today's communicators, with companies robotically requesting "big ideas," and "game-changing concepts," but too hooked on fear to implement them. While we may look with disdain at these corporate fear addicts, we're also to blame; we are enablers. Rather

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than push clients toward fresh, original ideas, we strip the creative life out of concepts until they meet the addicts' needs – providing them a main-line

injection of the safe and sound.

What remains are lifeless ideas that ultimately die when introduced to the consumer. "Executing" a plan has never been truer.

We've waited decades to shed our reputation as the red-headed stepchildren of the communications industry and snag a seat at the adult marketing table. But many firms remain in desperate need of the very things that can get them there – a spine, guts, brass ones, cojones – the antidotes to fear.

If we only give our clients what they want – what they're used to – why do they need us? "We're fine," you say. "Our clients love everything we develop." Then you're not pushing hard enough. (And the same goes for your staff; if they don't have the freedom to soar and possibly fall, they'll remain grounded in bland thinking.)

Leading requires that we take risks. Get shot at now and then. That's what it will take to win new ground in the battle for communications turf. We man-up, or we take a good long hit of fear, stretch out on a gurney, and wait to die. Create on. ●

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