

Thursday, October 23, 2008

Earning a good living without focus groups: It can be done.

Â Â In the summer of 1971, at the age of eight, I learned two indispensable things. First, I learned about Mad Magazine, which I read and subscribed to religiously for many years, and whose offices I got a tour of three years later, mesmerized as Associate Editor Jerry DeFucio led me downÂ hallways filled with amazing art, drawers filled with such priceless gems as the originalÂ Godfather cover artwork, and Bill Gaines's office with a papier-mÂchÂ© King Kong ready to burst in through the window; andÂ as Sergio Aragones inked original drawings for me on the inside covers of his books. Second, I learned how to fold my eyelids inside out, which I can still do today. Â How does this connect with the practice of law? First, theÂ most effective and fearless fight -- be it in or out of the courtroom -- is accomplished by maintaining the wonder and fearlessness and never-ending joyful self-discoveryÂ of a child. Second, people will be more riveted to your courtroom presentation if you remain real without constantly dwelling on your law office's financial bottom-line, just as Mad under the late William Gaines never bothered surveying its reader demographics but still earned a bundle in the process, while doing things as outrageous as bringing the staff to Haiti to visit the magazine's sole subscriber to convince him to renew his subscription. Third, you can be successful without being co-opted by people and issues you do not want to be co-opted by, just as the William Gaines gang refused advertising, lest that water down Mad's satirical sharpness (today, post-Gaines,Â Mad is riddled with advertising and its previous sharp pen is much less sharp). Â Now is the time, before you turn in for the evening, to summon the fearless and wondrous child within you. Go ahead. Throw water balloons out your window (just not in anybody's direction); make milk come out of your friend's nose; goÂ on a roadtrip until sunrise. How did that feel?Â Â Jon Katz

Posted by Jon Katz in Persuasion at 00:00