

Tips from the top

In the summer of 2013 Otherboard conducted a series of interviews with the leaders of creative agencies; here's just a little of the wisdom they shared with us...

1. Do the obvious

Ask agency leaders to rank the challenges of the job and they'll nearly always come up with the same top three: financial management, finding and retaining talent and business strategy. It's almost too obvious to be true, but if you focus on getting strong support in each of these areas the job of leadership becomes that much easier.

2. Get your truth unvarnished

The Queen, it is said, thinks the whole world smells of paint. It would seem business leaders get the same special treatment; your colleagues would rather put a gloss on things than let you see the bare truth. All leaders are wise to this, only a few do anything about it.

3. Don't get your education from the University of Whoops

Most leaders expect to do their learning in the job, one mistake at a time. Yet those same agency heads know all about the return on investment that comes from staff training and development. Save some training budget for yourself.

4. There's no such job as Chief Best Mate

Creative agencies are fun places to work where popularity is currency. Of course it's tempting to become everyone's friend, but you don't have that option. You need to make tough decisions about the people around you. You're the leader.

5. Be prepared to be unprepared

Running a team with its own P&L is good experience, but in that role there's always a boss above you or peers alongside you to share the burden. Running a business is a far more solitary role – it's like nothing you've ever known.

The leader stands alone: it goes with the job, but it creates human issues every growing business needs to solve. There are different ways to do it. You could network with peers in other agencies or you might consider getting a traditional non-exec.

Or you could find a supportive, objective outsider. This is the service we offer at Otherboard. We help senior people deal with the sort of decisions they face everyday.

Our work is built around a relationship with you as an individual. It's a bit like having your own personal non-exec – not someone you have to answer to, but someone you can find answers with. Your advisor is there to provide a sounding board, a wise best friend in business, someone to turn to, talk to and work with, someone to take the loneliness out of leadership.

If you'd like to find out more about our research or our services, contact Louisa Pau: louisa@otherboard.co.uk