

\$24.95 US



The Advertising On-Ramp

getting your first advertising job

BELLE FRANK

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The Advertising On-Ramp provides strategies readers can use to make their job prospecting more effective. It also serves as a source of emotional support for job seekers, which is increasingly needed in these complicated economic times.

This book is a must-read for college seniors and new graduates in communications, marketing, and advertising, or those in liberal arts who want to move into those fields. Belle Frank is responsible for hiring, so it addresses issues that many marketing professionals have encountered when interviewing and hiring.

The Advertising On-Ramp is also important for professionals in the marketing business who are responsible for attracting and developing new talent as well as those who are advising graduates about career choices.

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The standard
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The Y&R Way

All advertising agencies say they're committed to hiring the **best talent** out there. But often the standard recruiting and hiring process confuses talent with experience. People who look best on paper when they are just starting out may have spent too much time looking good on paper and may not really possess the talent we need. **At Y&R we are committed to hiring better talent, so we have to be committed to better hiring practices.** We aren't publishing this book to be nice. We want better candidates to want to come to us so we can do better work for our clients than our competitors can. With that as our objective, **we try to be smarter about finding and reaching out to new candidates** to make them part of the Y&R family.

In recent years, the advertising industry in the United States has been criticized for its lack of diversity, for not being able to ensure that minority talent is adequately represented in its management ranks. But in today's world, **a diverse workplace isn't just about multicultural talent.** We need many different kinds of talent if we are to continue to **innovate.**

Media and advertising change every day and it takes creative thinkers to shape the future. At Y&R we take our commitment to diversity very seriously. One of our senior account leaders tells me he always asks candidates what they would do with a brick besides build a house. He says that **he likes to see if they can think on their feet, if they can respond to a curve ball, if they can recover**. He isn't trying to be ornery, he is trying to get beneath **people's rehearsed answers** to try to predict their potential. He doesn't want to know what kind of animal or what kind of car they would be. He is looking for **creative problem solvers** and this question has been effective for him.

For more than 30 years, **Dorothy Giannone** has been responsible for finding our entry-level talent at Y&R. She has an uncanny ability to identify people that can, as my dad used to say, "punch beyond their weight class." Some years ago, Dot forged a relationship with CCNY, New York's premier public university, and its marketing and advertising program. As a result, we have relationships that ensure that **high caliber diverse candidates come to us**.

I asked Dot to explain **how she talks to new people** in order **to see beyond their inexperience and get them to reveal their potential**. Think about her words when you interview. Everyone at Y&R had to connect with Dot when we were hired. I can't say other agencies are as skilled at picking out the best talent even though I know they try.

Here is what Dot had to say:

I'm a **people person**, and what I do is try to understand the person sitting in my office. Entry-level people sometimes don't think they have a lot to say so I ask a lot of questions. I guess I am looking for a diamond in the rough. I want to see passion. **I want an answer to why they want to be in our business** and I don't want to hear that they were born to it, their mother was in it and it's in their blood. I do ask, obviously, about advertising they like and you would be amazed how many young people haven't thought about any. It seems obvious to me but I guess not to everyone. I expect them to know about our company—do the research.

I also look for something about their **presence**. Our business is about marketing and the way we say things matters. I don't want to see cockiness or arrogant confidence.

I look for **unique passions** and I listen to how they tell stories. And I try to understand how they will work under pressure to help me uncover how they will fit. I tell them the job entails collaborating with groups and multi-tasking and get them to describe something they have done that involves those sorts of skills.

One question I ask is for them to **tell me about the best and worst thing that has ever happened to them personally or while they were working**. This gives me an indication of how **open** they are and how willing

they are to be **honest**. It can be anything, that their house burned down or that they flunked a class. I am trying to understand **if they can learn from mistakes, if they can take feedback and direction**. And I want to see confidence, even as they describe their worst experiences. It is easier to get **honest answers** from a story about something that really happened than it is when you ask people to talk about their **strengths and weaknesses**. You are looking for the same things but concrete stories are a better way to ask. I don't ask people about what kind of flower or animal they would be. I want to know about **what kind of people they are**.

I interviewed a woman who told me she wanted to learn to speak Japanese when she was six because she thought the calligraphy was beautiful, but her parents made her study piano instead. And she laughed when she told me that she studied piano but finally, after years of practicing music, she convinced her family they should let her study Japanese too. It was **an honest story, her unique story, and spoke volumes** about her passion and persistence.

Some people are worried because they come out of school and don't have three internships on their resumes. I would rather know that someone had to dig ditches to pay for college. That shows me a backbone and really tells me a lot. A person who has had to work while studying is clearly industrious and won't object to

hard work. Think about it, a great GPA but no internship because you're paying your way through school by working in a bookstore. It really says something. **The star in college doesn't always turn into the star at work**, so if you've already shown me both, that's a great combination. People sometimes ask me if they should bring things they have written or projects they have prepared. Sure, but only as a basis for a conversation. **Practice talking about the project.** Describe it as a group effort. Use it to illustrate your negotiating skills as well as your creativity. **I want a whole person**, one who can work with us, not a lone wolf who needs a lot of space.

And of course there are a few things NOT to say. I've loved ads since I was 2? Nobody has. I once had a candidate say, "I don't like to work in teams; I'm better when I work alone." That's a real red flag. And **you've got to ask questions.** Of me when you interview, and of your boss when you work, so never be afraid to do so. **Ask questions that show you have thought about what you are asking.** Not things like what am I looking for, or how did I get started. Only ask those if I open the door to it. I want you to talk and I want to understand what kind of thinker you are. **When you leave, you should feel like I've gotten to know you.** Like you've told me what you are all about.

And once you leave **I do appreciate a thank-you note.**

One with substance, based on our conversation and not a form letter. Hand written or email is fine, but **it better not be a generic form letter**. I once received an email that was addressed to a competitor colleague. Proofread, even when you cut and paste. I sent it back to the candidate and warned him about the evils of technology and the need to proofread.

It's tricky really. There are no rules and lots of missteps you can make. But you have a lot of control. Tell me about yourself without bragging, convince me to buy but don't be too salesy. I trust my instincts and so should you. Sometimes it just comes down to how you tell the story. If that isn't advertising, what is?

As you can see, Dot asks much **more about people than skills**. Much more about personality than leadership. When we hire for a company, **we are looking to hire people we'd like on our team**. Those who can think independently but who want to work with us and will be willing to compromise. One thing this business has taught me is that two pieces of data are more helpful than a single piece. Two people thinking about a problem will bring a more creative solution than one person alone. **Nobody is really smart enough or talented enough in our complicated business to do everything alone**. So when you are interviewing, try to **show me why I want to work with you** and I will be much more inclined to do so.

At Y&R we always want to meet new and different people

in every department even if we have no openings. We try to make interviewing part of our fabric because it helps us stay on top of what talent is looking for. We try to accommodate a candidate's request for an informational interview. We offer shadow opportunities with surprising frequency so young people can become more comfortable with how work gets done in an agency. We are rather like the sports scouts who spend time in the field even when it isn't recruiting season— **we just want to keep current about who is trying to get hired and what they care about.**

Because we are so committed to hiring the best talent we have a number of ongoing initiatives in place to support our goals.

1. Our approach to internships

We love our interns. **They help us do real work.** In winter and summer Y&R hosts a large number of students who work on real projects. Some interns are paid, some receive course credit, but we take pride in the fact that all are productive. **We use interns in every department.** It helps us really get the measure of the students we host, and the professionals who agree to supervise interns take their roles seriously. Agreeing to mentor an intern is a commitment but it is one we believe adds value to the work we do for clients.

Our summer internship program is difficult to get into. It requires applications and essays. The program has been **designed to help students get real-world experience**

beyond what they could get as part of a workshop class in the university setting. Unlike some agency programs, we expose our interns to real client problems or pitches as team members. That way **we benefit from their contributions and they learn real-world skills.** We are also able to assess their talents “in the field,” which gives us a better ability to make job offers to individuals who truly contribute.

2. Our ongoing alliances

We work very closely with CCNY and New York’s Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) to attract talented interns. These students are supervised at Y&R during the school year, and both programs require students to share what they’ve learned with their classes. This allows others beyond those who work at Y&R to benefit from the internship lessons.

As an active member of the Advertising Educational Foundation, Y&R sends many professionals out into the academic world to teach classes and meet with students. Additionally, we host professors at our office from all sorts of universities, which helps us help them make their curricula more practical. This type of alliance helps us in two ways. First, **it gives us a great way to keep an eye on emerging talent as well as on industry issues.** Presenting at schools gives us exposure to quality students. And second **when professors come to the agency, our employees benefit from exposure to the latest academic thinking** which can help us improve the quality of the work we do for clients.

In the last several years, thanks to Dot Giannone, we have hosted “Winterners” from Tufts University. One of the most selective liberal arts schools in the country, Tufts does not offer a marketing or advertising degree. What they have is a minor program supplemental to their high-quality liberal arts program in Communications & Media Studies. The students compete to be allowed to **spend one week shadowing some of our employees**. They also come prepared to present a point of view [POV] on something they care passionately about. The winternship allows the students to learn something about our business and gives us a peek at some of the country’s bright folks who might not otherwise find their way to advertising.

3. How we find the right folks

One thing we always do is ask our candidates to meet many people at the agency from many different departments. If you are a beginner in Account Management, in addition to your potential boss we might have you meet our Strategist or Creative Director. As I have said, **our business is about collaboration and we want to hire people who can work with people who may not always speak the same language, either literally, as we are a global organization, or figuratively**, as not everyone you work with will have identical training or even use the same jargon, depending on their experience.

The advertising business is in flux. **Media has changed and continues to change, and the worst thing we can do is**

Hiring PLU
is NOT a
future-
focused
decision.

hire only for today. Whenever I ask one of our most experienced Creative Directors to meet with a Strategy candidate, we have a laugh about how our business requires “different horses for different courses.” He says **our clients are all different types of people, so we at the agency need different types of talent.**

Many hiring managers make what I call **the PLU mistake—People Like Us.** I guess it is natural. As a professional, you see the world your way and so it isn’t surprising that you would gravitate toward people who seem “like you” when you look at candidates. But that is shortsighted thinking. Hiring is a future-focused decision. Of course you want someone who can do the job you have open, but you really want to try to ensure that **the person can grow with the job** both vertically (get promoted) and horizontally (innovate as business changes).

We ask the right questions—and they’re not necessarily all about the job we’re looking to fill. Chapter 4 tells the story of Anna and her job at Bloomingdale’s. **The experience she gained selling clothes made her right for advertising** even if it might not have seemed so on the surface. If we had interviewed her and only asked about her ad experience, there would have been nothing to discover about her and we would have missed a chance to get someone who is industrious, motivated, and collaborative.

We ask direct and indirect questions. We listen well and sometimes ask applicants **all sorts of seemingly random questions to better learn who they are.** We ask them to

talk about themselves, to describe something they have seen that has shaped them, anything to help us learn more. Our experience in consumer insights sometimes means that we have them role-play a little as part of our drive to find out what makes them interesting and different. Management consultants have been known to use techniques like this and I've been told they find it to be very effective.

We want to hire diverse talent. We are building an agency, a collection of people with different skills who can work together. We don't assume a candidate's point of difference is a business skill, and we hire people with and without experience. **Great talent, especially unique talent, can be hidden behind what may look like an average skill set, especially in a domain like advertising.** When we try to understand what differentiates candidates from one another, we're really looking for the **passions, hobbies, interests, and qualities** that make them great people who can become greatly skilled professionals. **We can always train someone on skills**, and we do. But **we can't create a true passion that doesn't already exist** within the young person. We can't create a love for a hobby that inspires creative thinking. We can't create a commitment to a cause that invokes a sense of partnership. We can teach people to write and present well but we try to hire individuals who can work together, each with particular talents and strengths, to build a better company and do better work for our clients.

Debbie Kamioner, Associate Director of Recruiting at Y&R, looks for very specific characteristics in the people she interviews for entry-level positions. She sees people looking for work in every department—creative, account, and strategy. She has some **very specific qualities she is looking for** and uses all her questions to identify them. Debbie describes the qualities as follows:

1. Work attitude
2. Work ethic
3. Native intelligence

She defines work attitude as being about what it will be like to work with you.

You need to try to demonstrate that **you are going to do whatever we ask you to do, with a smile**. There are several ways you can communicate that, in your overall demeanor and openness, as well as by finding a way to tell me a story about a time when you did something tedious with a smile. Debbie really wants to think that **beginners have a realistic sense about the job**. She told me the story of a woman who convinced her she had the right attitude about doing repetitive tasks because she had been on her college swim team and had practiced boring flip turns over and over again. The young woman understood that if she made a mistake in her turn during a race she wouldn't win. She convinced us she knew what hard work was about.

Work ethic means that when a client calls and asks for something at the end of the day, a beginner isn't going to say that she can't work on it because she has a basketball game.

It also, of course, means **showing up on time and taking your job seriously even if others around you aren't** doing so. Debbie points out that sometimes when you are hired as an Assistant Account Executive, you might be working with some Account Executives who are tired of doing the work you have been hired to do. They may feel that they've paid their dues and are waiting for reward or recognition. As the "new guy," **you've got to work hard to keep focused on your own path.** As the newest member of the team who has something to prove, you've got to get past their grumbling. **When you interview for your first job, you need to seem like you can be the one with the greatest commitment.** Someone who is not looking for the easy way out. Again, telling a story to demonstrate work ethic is great. Describe jobs you have had with pride and illustrate the characteristics they tested in you. **Seem like you would be both thrilled and grateful to work with us.**

Native intelligence is less about “book learning or grades” and more about instinct, although we do expect you to be able to write clearly, present a cogent argument, and do so with a little flair.

That is what marketing is about. In this case, be sure to watch for **typos**, don't cut and paste a cover note from another letter and forget to change the company name. Be **careful** and **detail oriented**. Also demonstrate **curiosity** about our business. Cite sources you have read, talk about what you have learned about our company. What **industry publications** have you consulted? We aren't hiring you for “what” you know but for what kind of **value** you can add to our firm. Our clients need to know that we hire accomplished young people who are passionate and committed to hard work. But also **that these people can contribute to their strategic issues and are intelligent enough to signal problems when they run across them**. It goes without saying you need a cogent “elevator” pitch about yourself. I want to see that you are realistic about what you are all about and that you have tried to learn about the job.

Debbie says she does ask about **“interests”** outside of work and agrees that if something is on your resume, it is fair game for questions. She had an interesting observation about **too much focus on fraternity and sorority activities**. She feels that these could suggest greater interest in social pursuits

than in intellectual or more productive activities. Again, it isn't a hard and fast rule, but be careful when you talk about your college experience and its relationship to work. She loves seeing work experience. People who work their way through school are industrious and capable. And they appreciate the value of work. She says that the way you talk about these jobs is important, but that candidates who have "flipped hamburgers" are often more impressive than those with internships based on family connections.

Additionally, Debbie had some suggestions about the final moments of an interview when she usually asks candidates if they have any questions for her. Don't ask, "Do you promote from within?" **Don't make us feel that you have a timetable or fixed expectations about your next job.** We want to know that you are committed to work, to the firm and its growth. A question that makes you sound too self-focused can undo some hard work you did during an interview. To me this sounds like Debbie is advising less focus on the "path" and more on your "voice." **Show us that you can deliver beyond company expectations and you will find your way.**

We try to do right by our people

Listen to **Chris Cutone**, HR Director at Y&R NY, who joined Y&R because she believed in our vision for our talent:

We understand that **once we hire great new talent we need to protect it.** And we know that it takes **training and support.**

Our talent practices are designed to:

1. **Provide opportunities** for learning and growing. This includes formal and informal training as well as conference attendance and exposure to industry events.
2. **Deliver the appropriate balance between supervision and autonomy** to give people the experience they want. We try to make sure they have opportunities to socialize with coworkers and that we rotate their assignments so they get new experiences. Additionally, we are careful to help them feel supported in their personal lives as well as in their careers.
3. **Compensate fairly and competitively** and, when we have lean times and can't do so, we work hard to explain ourselves so our employees have reasonable expectations. When #3 becomes challenging, as it can when we face a business slowdown, a focus on #1 and #2 can go a long way to helping us retain our talent.

This book was written for young people trying to find the on-ramp to advertising. Written for them and to them. But it can be of value for people with a few years in the business who are growing beyond their first jobs.

We also believe this book can serve as **a reminder for anyone involved in talent management in our industry.** For all the managers out there, please note that I believe the next generation of talent will be even more committed to finding their path AND their voice. And so for the future of our business, we must be committed to helping them do both.



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950 Danby Road, Suite 136
Ithaca, NY 14850
www.paramountbooks.com
Voice: 607-275-8100; 888-787-8100 Fax: 607-275-8101

Publisher: James Madden
Editorial Director: Doris Walsh

Copyright © 2013 Young & Rubicam, Inc.
First published USA 2013
Printed in USA

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Cataloging in Publication Data available

ISBN-10: 0-9851795-1-1

ISBN-13: 978-0-9851795-1-9



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oversees the development of communications strategies for key Y&R global clients. She co-leads a department of 15 brand strategists and is one of the developers of Y&R's BrandAsset® Valuator brand equity model. Belle is a member of the Board of Directors of the Advertising Research Foundation and received an Advertising Women of New York, Trailblazing Working Mother of the Year award in 2007. She teaches in the City College of New York Branding and Integrated Communications program and is on the Board of Directors of the Tufts University Communications and Media Studies program.

ADVERTISING

ISBN 978-0-9851795-1-9

Agencies are made great by their people. I've worked with Belle for many years now, and I know that she is part of what makes our agency great. She's challenged and inspired me. And she is an unwaveringly committed champion for new talent. Belle Frank's *The Advertising On-Ramp* offers **a road map to getting hired and succeeding** in our business. We will all be better for it.

Matt Anthony

CEO, Y&R North America

Filled with pithy advice that's practical in today's competitive job market and infused with plenty of clear insight and good humor, Belle Frank's *The Advertising On-Ramp* is bound to become the one "must have" book for people hoping to break into the world of Madison Ave. **Clear and readable, Frank's book offers cogent suggestions on everything from resumes to informational interviews and advises on how to stand out from the crowd.** Most importantly, she shows people trying to get a job in advertising how to find their own voice. I'm going to recommend this book to all the students I advise who are about to enter the job market, not just the ones interested in advertising and marketing.

Julie Dobrow

*Director, Communications & Media Studies Program
Tufts University*

Belle Frank's *The Advertising On-Ramp* is a must-read for anyone who aspires to a career in advertising (or any profession, for that matter). She gives the essentials for budding professionals to craft a dynamite resume that really sets them apart from the competition as well as how to interview to close the deal. **With wisdom, humor, and straight talk, Belle offers a clear road map to success.** In an age when competition for jobs is at an all-time high, this book offers dead-on practical advice that will help anyone be a stronger job candidate.

Lynn Appelbaum

*Professor and Director, Advertising/PR Program
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