

O'Toole of the Trade.

John O'Toole. Ex-Marine; copywriter trained by the legendary Fairfax Cone; inspirational creative director. And, since 1969, president of Foote, Cone & Belding. A quiet, reflective man dedicated to the trade and craft of good writing. Here, from a recent interview are a few jewels from Mr. O'Toole.

On beginning in the business:

"I suppose I started as a writer at 15—that's when my first poem was published. Great encouragement for a youngster who loved words. After journalism school, I had a job waiting with a Chicago newspaper. But the Marines had a job waiting for me, too. Following the Korean War, I decided I'd like to write for all media, not just one—and that led me to advertising. I took off for New York to look for a job. But my money ran out, and I returned to Chicago where I started in the business. A year later, I made up my mind to work for either Fax Cone or Leo Burnett. I interviewed at Foote, Cone & Belding first—and I've been here since."

On life with Fax Cone:

"A magnificent teacher. His prime lesson: write to a single individual, not the hypothetical masses. Fax would never let writers get tangled up in a web of creative conceit; you quickly learned that no matter how hard you'd worked on an ad, you could make it better. Fax believed writers had to have the ability to step back from their work, and look at it through the eyes of a consumer. He was as tough on himself as he was on the writers who worked for him."

On today's consumers:

"If I want to write to individual consumers, then I must know how they think, and live, and buy. So I believe it's essential to go beyond the statistics of public opinion, to look at what's happening in the real world. For example, you might see today as a time of reassuring quiet after the turbulence of the sixties. But that's only the surface. There's a new spirit of individualism; people seeking to satisfy their own goals, serve their ambitions, feed their individual appetites, find life styles to suit their needs. Small wonder there's such distrust of advertising that treats people as a homogeneous mass. Today's great advertising speaks to individual needs—to the strong drive to be yourself."

On visibility:

"There's an enormous amount of advertising and communication fighting for attention. So visibility is difficult to achieve. Yet, you must gain the eyes of the people you want to reach, or you haven't a chance of winning their minds. But making an ad visible means running risks. If an ad is provocative, interesting, intriguing, it's apt to create some adverse comments. Consider the alternative: advertising so bland there's no bite."

On long copy:

"Persuasion by essay. A powerful technique that lets you speak to the consumer as a friend. You tell your story leisurely, but without wasted words. You put forth logic and facts that lead to persuasion. Good copy is read—be it long or short. But provided your premise is accurate, long copy increases the power of persuasion, and without decreasing readership."

On print:

"Print may well be the strongest medium of all, if you have the energy and skill to deal with the discipline of the printed page. It tests the skills of the writer, for the persuasion of the copy is critical to success. It tests the abilities of the art director for the clarity of design is critical to readership. Finally, print is the most controllable of all media."

with the ultimate product clearly reflecting the skills of just two or three people. If it's strong, and memorable, and persuasive, it's *your* achievement—not that of platoons of specialists who can make a weak idea look good."

On advertising and geography:

"There's good advertising being produced in every part of the country. And no matter where you practice your craft, the creative professional has advantages—and disadvantages. The New York writer benefits from the stimulation of a magnificent, vibrant, exciting city. But you must remember that New York isn't America; that the pace of life and the values and the attitudes are different here. I started in Chicago, went on to Los Angeles, and finally came to New York. This background has helped me understand the differences that make America the most demanding market in the world of advertising."

On information:

"Information sells. Perhaps some products can't be sold with information; but they're few in number—you have to work and dig and think to find why they're different. Today's consumers are hungry for information. They want to know as much as possible about your product, your service, your company. Advertising writers today are blessed with thousands of gifted products about which to write. Our problem, very simply, is to make sure we're as gifted as the products we're assigned."

On The Wall Street Journal:

"No more exciting challenge exists than writing an ad for The Wall Street Journal. The page size, the editorial environment, the day-in-and-day-out topicality; these are unmatched advantages. You can use all the tools of your trade, and if you use them right, the results will make you a hero. Journal writers provide enormous stimulation; their first-rate prose spurs you to write first-rate copy. And the intensity with which people read The Journal is significant—I think it's a major reason Journal campaigns so often produce superlative results. Speaking as a Journal reader, I appreciate the fact that I can read The Journal everywhere I go—and know that I'm informed. You know, I receive 120 different publications. I can skip most of them, and never feel the loss. But if I miss an issue of The Journal, I feel I've let the rest of the world gain a few steps on me!"

**The Wall Street Journal.
It works.**

