THINK LIKE AN M/F/X ADMAN DON'T **ACT LIKE** ONE

DAVID SNELLENBERG

TO ADVERTISE IS TO ENTICE

Subconsciously, we're all advertising all day long. For ourselves, our jobs or our dreams. Our neighbourhood, city or country. We defend our convictions, come up with new products and services and convince others that we're right. I wrote this book for all of us. In a nutshell, this book will teach you to take a clear position and transform it into a good story that will convince people, motivate them and inspire them to change their behaviour. Ad people do this all day long. But after reading this book of tricks, insights and the odd personal opinion, you might not even need their help!

My 75 lessons are inspired by what I have learned from those around me over the years. The people I work with and for day in, day out. I feel privileged to work with these extremely talented and passionate people. I have tried to make these insights accessible to a large, new audience, so that more people can make their dreams come true and grow what matters to them.

David Snellenberg.



© 2022 Text: David Snellenberg Concept: Aernoud Bourdrez and Peter Heykamp Image Editor: Frank Schallmaier Production: buro van Ons www.thinklikeapro.org

Photo cover: Reza Harek

ISBN 97890 6369 635 1 1st print 2022

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ADVERTISING IS MORE THAN A SPOT ON TELLY

Pope Franciscus being gifted a Pinocchio figurine.

It's everything you do to persuade people to behave differently. Or see things differently. Or change their opinion. You're advertising all day long. For yourself, your company or brand, your NGO, your political party, your school, neighbourhood, city, country... In every way possible. By telling stories. Or twisting them. By making some things seem more beautiful. And others uglier. By outlining an alternative. Or getting people to see your point of view. The nice thing about advertising is that everyone does it. But very few are any good at it (just look around you). This little book is for anyone who wants to learn how to advertise. Without becoming an adperson.



IT BEGINS WITH A POSTER

An ad poster featuring pop star Justin Bieber in Athens, Greece.

There's a lot that a poster doesn't have. It has no sound, no music and no voice. It only has language, colour and (sometimes) a picture. What's more, the viewer has very little time to understand your message. Simply because they're driving past it very quickly. Or cycling. Or if you're lucky, walking. Which means you have to communicate the essence. The litmus test of any good campaign is the poster.



PUT YOUR MISSION FIRST

Young women on their way to New York Fashion Week.

A good branding idea is much like a skewer. It's a clearly-formulated vision that holds together everything a company promises, says and does. What an ad will look like. Or packaging. Or the website. How people answer the phone. What the company sponsors. And what they avoid. Companies have to be consistent. A one-off ad, no matter how good, will fail if it is not backed up by unparalleled products, excellent service, innovations and the brand's overall behaviour. When you set about creating a big campaign, try to find a few things the brand excels at. Look for the common thread. And highlight it. Align all the brand's other activities with it. The mission is what holds everything together.



WORK FROM YOUR HEART

A Palestinian fruit vendor shows off.

Most people despise advertising. Rightly so. Me too. Still, I've been working as an adman for 25 years now. And I've noticed that hating something is a pretty good motivator. At least you know what you don't want. No screaming. No making ugly things. No wasting people's time. Never working for brands, products, services or things you don't agree with. No selling bullshit. That's a pretty good start. And it gives you a bit of space. So what is OK? I have a very simple principle: You. Must. Really. Believe. In. It. Because if you believe in it, if you 'get' it, then other people will too. And then it's up to you to build the creative bridge between those few people. And the masses. And here's another principle: work with and for people you think are nice, smart and good. It'll save you a lot of time.



ΟΝΟΟΆΑ ΤΙ ΝΆυτ

A visitor in Fritz Schall's Upside down house in Guatavita, Colombia.

Last week, I was having trouble sleeping. When my girlfriend asked me what was wrong, I told her that I owed the neighbour \notin 1000, but that I just didn't have the money. My girlfriend got out of bed, opened the window and yelled: "Hey neighbour, you'll get your \notin 1000 from David, but he doesn't have it right now!" Back in bed, she cuddled up to me and said: "Right. It's his problem now. Good night."

Turning things around often works a treat. Just think of John F. Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." Patek Philippe, a luxury watch brand, has been campaigning with the same message for decades: "You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation." It's a very powerful line. And all it takes to turn what was an expensive gift to yourself at first into a valuable heirloom for your kids.





FOLLOW OR LEAD?

Passerby Peggy VanSickle met a laughing donkey, Custer State Park, USA.

Imagine going to your favourite bar. The waiter sees you coming and already knows what you want to drink. As you walk up to the bar, he places it before you, welcoming you by name. What a great experience. You feel welcome, seen, appreciated. But suppose you pass by the same bar on your way to someplace else. And that same bartender runs out with your favourite drink. And keeps following you, proffering the drink. He even rings your doorbell long after you've got back home and just want to be left alone. Everyone has examples of brands that not only know them, but follow them relentlessly. That's why it's so important that brands don't just know and follow consumers, but let it work the other way around. Ensure those people know you. And know where to find you when they need you.



CONTROL IS GOOD TRUST IS BETTER

An American household showing their guns, The Ameriguns, Gabriele Galimberti.

Some people look to have maximum control when creating a campaign. Leading to long and extensive briefings. Sessions involving far too many people (each with an opinion). Research agencies who give their input, departments that may have their say. The upshot? You're no longer concerned with originality or impact, but process management. Because god forbid you skip a step. Someone once called it 'playing tennis with your eyes fixed on the scoreboard'. The chance of something really cool emerging out of such a process is zero. And any professional creative will tell you as much. Throughout the gruelling (and expensive) process, you've managed to tick all the boxes at interim meetings. And the end result is always mediocre. It's like solving a 5-star cryptogram: nice to do, but not something you'd hang on the wall. So if you find yourself in this situation, immediately intervene. Keep things sweet and simple. I'm pretty sure everyone will thank you for it.



FIND A UNIVERSAL TRUTH

Belgian marksman Piotr van Montagu learned how to shoot a bow with his legs.

"If you have a body, you're an athlete." This is a quote from Bill Bowerman, one of the founders of Nike. That single sentence guides everything Nike does, says and makes. We don't just focus on elite athletes, but on everyone who wants to exercise. So how does Nike do it? With a second insight: "Before there's sport, there's play." To get lots of people to play sports and exercise, you need to make it fun. The first thing children do is play. Then they start to move around. And then there's sports and exercise. And only later does competition come into it. Armed with these two insights, you know what kind of advertising you need to make: focus on the person behind the athlete. And make it playful. Finding a universal truth is harder than you might think. But once you've found it, you've struck gold.



STOP FILLING PIPES

A 3D video billboard in Shinjuku, Tokyo.

Many brands think they need to be everywhere all the time. On all socials. On TV and radio. Outdoor advertising. Usually they're persuaded this is necessary by their agency, because that means lots of work for them. 9 times out of 10, it leads to an accumulation of lukewarm messages, spread over 1001 mini-contact moments. Handy for mega-large advertisers because you can't ignore it, but not my style. Come up with a blindingly good idea. And develop it into the shape and format that suits it best. Grabbing people by the lapels with a good idea is way more powerful than endlessly following them around. Stop filling the pipes. You won't be remembered for it.



SELL A DESIRE

Onlookers spectating a national bodybuilding competition in Tel Aviv, Israel.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote *The Little Prince*. A children's book adored by millions of adults. He knew a thing or two about storytelling, and had a wonderful metaphor for it: "If you want to build a ship, don't ask people to gather wood or assign them tasks. Instead, teach them to long for the limitless immensity of the sea." When you have a solution, look into why anyone might long for that solution. Steve Jobs really understood this. In 2007, he stood on the stage at an Apple event and said, "Today we are launching three revolutionary products. The first changes the way we connect ourselves to the world and each other. The second is an interface that will shape the future of gaming. And the third is a computer that gives us access to all available knowledge, information and technology." It was the iPhone. The answer to desires that didn't even exist yet.



THE DADA OF DATA

Diagram of British aircraft that managed to return in WWII.

Dadaism was an art movement at the beginning of the last century. It let the viewer see art in a completely different light. You should treat data the same way. Thanks to data, you know what you know; but especially what you don't know. Bit cryptic? I'll give you an example. During World War II, British fighter planes returned from their missions with bullet holes. And in the places where those holes were found (in other words, the data) the aircraft were reinforced with extra steel. Seemed logical at first, but Abraham Wald, a mathematician, thought otherwise. Perhaps the places where there were no holes were the vulnerable places. Because the planes that were hit there simply didn't return. They'd been shot down. Thanks to this insight, the aircraft were reinforced in the places where there were no bullet holes. And it worked. So the story behind the data is more important than the data itself. To put it another way, the data we don't have can be more important than the data we do have.



EVERYTHING BEATS IN TIME EXCEPT YOUR HEART

70,000 rubber ducks being dumped into the Chicago River to raise money for charity.

Sometimes ideas are so rational that they leave you cold. Everything is coloured neatly within the lines, but it's no work of art. You've met all the requirements, filled out the entire sudoku, answered every question in the briefing. Everyone gets it, but nobody feels it. In which case, it's time to give it another go. To get angry, bin everything and start again.



REPEAT YOURSELF

An elephant camp in Bangkok celebrating the birth of a panda cub.

Jon Favreau was Barack Obama's speechwriter. He saw speeches as songs. And no one remembers all the lyrics in a song. But if you repeat one bit, like a chorus, it becomes memorable. But no one wants to be repeating themselves all the time. So there's a trick to get round the problem: repeat yourself with different words. That's why Barack told a group of young scientists: "Keep exploring. Keep dreaming. Keep asking why." Followed by: "Don't settle for what you already know. Never stop believing in the power of your ideas, your imagination, your hard work to change the world." He repeats himself but keeps using different words. So it sticks. Next time you have something to say, say it three times.



DO THE T-SHIRT TEST

A Trump supporter at an election rally in Latrobe, USA.

A good idea is simple. And to test it, there's the poster test (see #2). But an even better idea is one you want to associate yourself with. An idea that fits on a T-shirt. And if there are people who actually want to wear that T-shirt, you're on to a winner. During your campaign, always try to develop an idea for a T-shirt. If you've got that, and the poster, then the basis for your campaign is basically there. That 3-minute film will now more or less write itself.



EVERYONE LOVES A PAT ON THE BACK

A juror judging a leek at the Harrogate Autumn Flower Show, England.

We're all insecure. It's part of being human. And we all need a pat on the back. Confirmation. So if you want to encourage someone to do or change their mind about something, you'll have to give them a little affirmation first. Tell them they're on the right track. It's no coincidence that L'Oréal's "Because you're worth it" has been hugely successful. But a good politician will also always say, "I hear you!" And not; "You're wrong". If you learn to understand people, read them and get to know how they see the world, you can join their ranks. Standing side by side, looking in the same direction. Show people the common good. Clean air for you and your children. Delicious, healthy food. Once you've got them hooked, you can ask them to make a big, disruptive decision.



A BIG IDEA IS ALL YOU NEED

Employees in Tokyo dressed up as Twitter birds for Halloween.

Every good idea has a basis. You call that basis 'the big idea'. It's what every manifestation, every action, every product, every service refers back to. A big idea should be as short and concise as possible. *Patagonia? Business Unusual. Apple? Think different. Disney? Making people happy.* Guiding sentences on which you can hang a whole story. But more than anything, they determine what you do, and what you don't do. Create one for your company, political party, NGO, brand or client. It's harder than you think. But it will help you enormously.



DON'T BE TONE DEAF

Stranded Syrian refugees waiting on Westbahnhof in Vienna.

More often than not, advertising is the unwelcome clown showing up at just the wrong moment. Not long ago, I was watching a documentary about refugees in the Mediterranean. It was interrupted by an ad for dog food. With a vet who told you which vitamins and minerals your dog needs to perform best. Like most people, I'm extremely moved by families who have to risk their lives by making a horrific sea crossing. I also have a dog, and wish the very best for her. But seeing these two topics in quick succession, life suddenly seems so unfair. And suddenly I feel extremely guilty: I leave those families to fend for themselves, but will willingly splash out cash to perfect my dog's diet. If the advert's intention was to make me feel guilty and donate money for those refugees, it was a clever trick. But it wasn't, which makes it totally inappropriate.



ADVERTISING IS NOT SCIENCE

A wall painting of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny being removed.

There are more than a few charlatans operating in the advertising world. People who say they're 'absolutely certain' about something. They have a model that WORKS FOR EVERYTHING. And examples to hand (usually Nike campaigns) that exactly fit their unique, self-developed and patented model. Nothing could be further from the truth. The essence of advertising is intuitive. Feeling. Emotion. The best marketeers and advertisers feel. And only then do they think. And research. There are countless methods and models you can work with. You have data and research. Use them, but don't forget: ignore them if you spot a genuinely good idea. No model can bottle emotion.



MAKE IT SIMPLE NOT SILLY

A shop selling plant-based meat substitutes in London, England.

Think like an academic. Write like a toddler. Behave like an artist. Coming up with an idea isn't easy. But the true artistry isn't coming up with an idea, but the next step: formulating it so simply that everyone understands it. From new-born scream to life-support machine. Because most ideas run aground on the sands of complexity. And only really take off through simplicity. A good idea is easy to communicate. The Vegetarian Butcher. That doesn't sound like a sub-atomic scientist talking to you. It's simple. Yet the thinking that went into it was certainly anything but simple. And once you have that simple idea, you can set out in any direction you want when it comes to implementation. Because the simple idea will survive.



SAY SOMETHING NEW ABOUT SOMETHING OLD

Artist Lucy Sparrow with her felt pharmacy in London.

Odds are you're not a mathematician or physicist. If you were, you probably wouldn't be reading this book. In hard science, people search for the truth. Most people, on the other hand, aren't really concerned with truth at all. They see reality through tinted glasses. Their tint. Or your tint, of course. All realities are perceptions. Or interpretations. Or viewpoints. So if you want to convince people of a different, new reality, here's a simple trick: don't say something familiar about something familiar. Because people won't take any notice. And don't tell them something new about something new. That's asking too much of people. Instead, tell them something new about something old. Start with what people recognise and tell them something new about it.



HI IMPERFECTION!

A replica of an Kurdish tank by artist Zaq Landsberg.

Some things are just too great to ever see the light of day. They're too beautiful, too perfect, or too polished. They're so divine that they engender distrust. Because the world isn't perfect. Disney knows how to walk this fine line. Donald Duck is a hothead. He's jealous. His plans are (usually) doomed to fail. But he's blessed with a heart of gold. And that's why children all over the world love this wacky uncle and his three nephews. To err is human, after all. Bob Ross, the famously soft-spoken TV artist, was as well known for his art as for his *happy accidents*. Mistakes that paved the way for a whole new forest or mountain top. There's a lesson here. Don't try to erase your mistakes, and mistakes there will be. Instead, admit when you were wrong and make amends. An unfortunate tweet? A clunky online conversation with a customer? Bad PR? If you own up to your mistakes, you'll end up strengthening the bond with your audience, rather than losing them altogether.



THE NEW RELIGION

A three word mantra: Faith, Hope & Love.

Many companies have lengthy mission statements. Stories where they sketch an ideal world. Leaving nothing out. And putting themselves at the heart of major changes. Every department in the company more or less agrees with it, nobody's really against it. So the 150-word Mission Statement is signed off. And immediately deep-filed in a drawer somewhere. Or on a long-forgotten page of the corporate website. Guy Kawasaki taught me not to write a mission statement (which no one can remember), but a mantra. A mantra of 2, or no more than 3 words. TEDx has "Ideas Worth Spreading". Fedex has "Peace of mind". Disney? "Making People Happy". Simple mantras steer people better, have sticking power and are remembered. With the right mantra, you can test everything you do against it. It provides direction and guidance. If religions can become successful with them, why can't your company?



KNOW WHO YOU'RE WORKING FOR

Music producer Rick Rubin.

Most people think discipline and creativity don't mix. Nothing could be further from the truth. Just look at someone like Rick Rubin. One of the finest and most versatile music producers of our time. He produced Johnny Cash and Kanye West. ZZ Top and James Blake. Metallica and the Wu-Tang Clan. It doesn't get more diverse. And you can only do that if you really immerse yourself in the artists. Where they're currently at. Who they are. Where they want to go. It calls for an intense interest in the person who you're working with and for. There simply are no standard solutions. I've never been able to sell a campaign that one client rejected to someone else. Everything is always tailor-made, for that one client. Or one project.



STOP POSITIONING JUST TAKE POSITION

Pavers put back in a different pattern in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Today's biggest brands don't need to position themselves relative to others. They take a natural position. Which was already theirs. And is theirs. And will stay theirs. Because you'll make sure it does.



EXECUTION IS EVERYTHING

A Turkish driver eats his breakfast at the port of Dover.

Strange but true: a modern person gets to see more photos every day in 12 hours than someone did in their entire life a century ago. And that's not including videos, headlines, tweets, etc, etc. We're living in the age of information overload. Good luck getting people to notice your brilliant idea! To stand a chance, try spending 20% of your time on the idea and 80% on execution. That's where you can really make a difference. No matter how new, fresh, different, quirky or moving your idea may be, how are you going to execute it? Will it be difficult? Complex? Expensive? Scary? Exciting? That's also a good sign. Just think of the Eiffel Tower. The first and at the time tallest tower ever made of steel (a new material back then). People had never seen anything like it. And then the execution. I fear, and hope, that many people couldn't sleep at night thinking about it. The rest is history.



THE POWER OF SCENT

The Belgian sniffer dog Sammy being trained to detect Coronavirus.

When asked what she wore to bed in 1952, blonde bombshell Marilyn Monroe famously responded: "I only wear Chanel N°5." A smell is a memory. If you smell incense, it may make you think of your yoga school. A certain detergent? Your grandmother. Freshly-baked apple pie? That smells safe and cosy. The scent of Johnson's shampoo is a good example. People immediately think of babies, preferably their own baby. And yet the scent was developed in a lab somewhere. So claiming a fragrance can be a very strong anchor, especially if you have a physical product or place. By inventing or claiming a scent, people will subconsciously feel right at home.



FASHION COMES AND GOES

A model showing Germanier's winter collection at Paris Fashion Week.

"Fashion comes and goes, style goes on forever." Coco Chanel said this in 1921. And it rings true to this day. You have a voice of your own. So use it. Don't get too distracted by what's hip-and-happening right now. Don't steal the latest trends from Instagram and stick them on your brand. It can work for a while, but wears off quickly. What's more, your audience sees through it. Ultimately, it'll only make you weaker. Strong brands need strong creators: people and brands that stand firm. Have your own voice. And dare to use it.



THE POWER OF CLICHÉS

A tab of XTC featuring the logo of beer brand Heineken.

Giorgio Moroder, the king of disco, has produced a lot of music in his life and was especially good at working with musical clichés. Or as he put it himself, "It's simple: you play a little guitar at parties and the girls get interested." So you don't have to be original to stand out or captivate. People like to be enchanted by recognisable symbols, sounds and stories. People don't want to hear something new about something new. It doesn't touch them; they don't understand it. Nor do they want to see something familiar about something familiar. That's boring. People want to feel something new about something familiar. That's where the magic lies. So next time you come up with something, look at which cliché you're going to reuse, in a completely different form.



FIND YOURSELF AN ICON

#48

Designers group Gorilla used icon Mickey Mouse.

One of the most potent tools you can build for a brand is its very own icon. And it can be absolutely anything. A sports brand enlisting an A-list celebrity. A sock puppet for a zoo. Legendary packaging for a soft drink. A stack of tyres come to life. People bond with these icons. They build relationships with them. Supermarkets have even cast entire families as their brand icons. It's a bit like Friends in the 90s. You get to know the characters and even start to love them. And every new ad will start to feel like a new episode. Blendtec makes very powerful blenders. As part of a recurring series of videos called 'Will it blend?' dry-witted engineer Tom Dickson tried to blend a new object every week. From iPads to diamonds. A hilarious series that didn't just prove the quality of the blenders. But also managed to rack up 100 million views.



MAKE SOMETHING USEFULL

A traditional Omani daggerin Muscat, Oman.

Being followed all day by salespeople. People constantly seeking your attention, talking at you. What a nightmare that must be. Or are we already living it? Really big, autonomous brands don't go in for this. Selling is a gift few have. And it starts with 'stop selling.' Come up with something that really benefits people at the moment that they need it. Make yourself known. Wait patiently.



MAKE STUFF PEOPLE WANT

A shared bike-graveyard in Shenyang, China.

Before you start, ask yourself: am I pushing these products or services? Are there people who actually want them? Or can I think of something that people do want? You guessed it. Yet most advertisers repeatedly make the same mistake by falling into the first trap. Go for the second. Always.



BECOME YOUR CLIENT'S BIGGEST FAN

American firemen posing in front of a building during an exercise.

Immerse yourself in your project. Challenge your client's brief. Dig deeper. Become your client's client. Find out where they excel. And where there's work to be done. Call their call centre. Buy the product. Or service. Find something that will make you fall in love. Something to solve a problem. Or satisfy a need. Find something that gets you going. Turning you into your project's biggest fan.



BAD PRESS IS ALSO PRESS

Designers group Gorilla came up with an appropriate Volkswagen logo.

Volkswagen's Dieselgate dominated the news for quite some time. The brand had tampered with software to make their cars seem much more environmentally friendly than they actually were. Large-scale fraud by the company at the expense of buyers, legislators and the environment. Volkswagen did absolutely everything wrong. They got caught. Denied it. Management appeared to be aware of this. Bad speeches and shabby apologies from the CEO. The result: for months they were continuously in the news in a very negative light. A PR disaster. A year later, sales were better than ever. Of course, Volkswagen put this down to their own good efforts. But the media analysts knew better. Volkswagen had been in the news a lot, but people had forgotten why. Volkswagen was simply top-of-mind.



BEING RIGHT VS BEING SEEN TO BE RIGHT

Climate activist Greta Thunberg in an interview with the BBC.

Somehow people who have the truth on their side don't always get their way. I think that's because when you've found the solution to a major problem, you tend to shout it from the rooftops, thrust your views upon others, preach. And people have a natural aversion to smartarses. We don't like to be corrected. So, suppose you're right about something. How do you get people to agree? By climbing down from your pulpit and standing alongside them. Offering them an alternative view, but then letting them come to their own conclusions: This m/f/x is right! And I feel valuable because I've discovered it for myself.



GET IT?

A sheep shorn to resemble a prize-winning poodle by artists Lernert & Sander.

The common denominator can help you. When I talk about a Barbet, few people know what I'm on about. But water dog aficionados know. But if you don't know that water dogs are a type of hunting dog, you're still none the wiser. Hunting dogs come in many shapes and sizes. But in the end, they're all dogs. And dogs are pets. Everyone knows that. But when you talk to Barbet owners, of course, you never refer to their 'pet'. That would be to belittle them. And vice versa. You'd overestimate and lose a large part of your audience by talking about Barbets. So consider carefully how familiar your audience is with your subject. And when in doubt, always take a step up the pyramid: Barbet, water dog, hunting dog, dog, pet.



EVERYTHING STARTS WITH AN IDEA

French Michelin employees performing their mandatory daily warm-up routine.

A good idea steers everything. Everything? Everything! Not just what you promise, but also what you deliver. A great brand idea resonates in how you pick up the phone. How to speak to people on your social channels. How you name your products. Which services you'll develop, and which you'll drop. Which people you hire, and which customers you serve. A great brand idea is therefore not the end of a process. But the beginning.



EVERYBODY HAS A SUPERPOWER

Andorran David Aguilar with a home-made prosthetic arm made of LEGO.

Many brands you know have bought their presence. Simply by being extremely large, they can dominate all media space and shout loudly. There's a very good chance you work for a brand that doesn't have any of that. If you're not big, you have to be smart. If you can't get famous people working for you, you have to be honest. If you can't put on a show, you have to be vulnerable. If you can't be everyone's friend, choose a superpower that really is right for you. That's why a progressive investment fund had a proud young girl butt heads with the Wall Street Bull on Women's Day 2017. News of *Fearless Girl* swept the globe. You can't lose if you make a genuine choice.

This collection of anecdotes, tips and observations is part of the series Think Like a Pro Don't Act Like One, which reveals the world as seen through professional eyes. From engineer to admaker.

THINK LIKE AN ADMAN DON'T ACT LIKE ONE

offers 75 tips to entice people to change their behaviour. Or their views. Or their mind. This book is for anyone who wants to tell stories, or twist them. To enthuse or discourage. To embellish some things and point out the flaws in others. The nice thing about advertising is that everyone does it. After reading this book, you'll realise why it's not only the remit of ad people.

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"For David, advertising is not a spray of perfume, but a touch of essence."

Roland van der Vorst -Head of Innovation, Rabobank



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