

Sorry Employers, There Are No 25-Year-Olds with 20 Years' Experience.

Published on August 2, 2018



Paul Suggett

Freelance CD/Copywriter. Idea Machine. Workaholic.

“Well duh,” is the collective responsive from anyone with any kind of common sense. Even the kid at the back of the class that eats chalk would know that one doesn’t compute.

However, although spelling it out seems somewhat futile, it apparently needs to happen. After months of hearing stories from other freelance creatives, recruiters, full-time employees, and job hunters, one thing has become abundantly clear; talented, experienced professionals in advertising and marketing are getting the shaft.

While experience appears to be highly-prized in other industries (imagine a doctor being turned away because he or she was asking too much money for an esteemed career in the operating room), it seems as though us “veterans” have to apologize for asking for a salary barely equivalent to our experience.

In fact, I’ve even heard myself hesitate to say what my hourly rate was because I knew the response on the other end of the phone would be “oh...I see.” And after a short silence that’s followed up with “yeah, that’s WAY out of our range.”

“But your ad asked for a writer with significant experience writing for TV and social,” I’ll say. “Well, we’re looking more in the 3-5 year range, and at least half your hourly rate.”

Why am I fearful of charging a rate I have earned? I’m not asking \$500/hr, which apparently is the going rate for a half-decent lawyer these days. I’m not even in the same universe as that. And let’s not forget, it’s not just my money on the line here. It’s the client’s money. Wouldn’t you, as someone in charge of assembling the team, want the best people for the job? Spend a little more, get a much better return on your investment.

I just don’t understand the mentality of cutting costs with creative talent. You really do get what you pay for, but it seems that agencies everywhere are happy enough to settle for the cheaper cuts of meat.

With Age Comes Wisdom, and the Experience to Implement it.

You have probably heard a story like this on more than one occasion. However, that is not going to stop me from telling it again, because who knows...maybe it escaped you. Maybe you're a young twenty-something who didn't hear it because it simply hasn't reached you yet.

The story goes (and this is no doubt one of many variations on it) that a major ocean liner just would not start. The engine was dead. The owners were perplexed and called upon some of the brightest young engineering minds to come and fix the problem.

One after another, they failed to breathe life into it. In desperation, the owners approached an old man with a small boat repair shop who was apparently good with engines. "What the hell," they thought, "it can't hurt to ask him."

The old man came with his worn and dented toolbox, and spent a little time looking over the engine. He pressed his ear to it. He examined the housing. He looked at some of the gauges. In all, he spent around 15 minutes looking over the problem. Then, he reached into his toolbox, pulled out a hammer, and spent 10 seconds tapping a few parts.

He then asked the crew to try it again, and the engine chugged and whirred and started running as it always had. Thunderous rounds of applause met the man.

The old fella said his goodbyes and said he would send an invoice. When the owners received it, they went into shock. "\$5,000 for 15 minutes work?! That's crazy!" They demanded the old man send an itemized bill. He did.

Time spent tapping the hammer - \$5.00

Knowing where to tap - \$4,995.00

Now, you know this in other forms. Maybe it's an aging plumber and an old boiler. A seasoned mechanic and a vintage car. A retired detective and an unsolved murder case.

And there's the story of [Picasso](#) sketching a lady in just 1 second and charging \$5,000. When she said it only took him 1 second, he replied, "madam, it took me my entire life."

This is what age and experience brings.

When you hire me, or someone with my level of experience, you don't just get a creative with more miles on the clock. You get someone who's worked with a massive variety of different clients, and has a history of knowing what will work for each of them. You get someone who has won untold pitches, and knows just why the agency lost others. You get someone who's been in client meetings until 3am. You get a creative who has suffered failures and grown stronger because of it. And you get someone who can crack any brief, have the client throw it on the fire, and come back and crack it again.

So...How Do We Get This Message Across To the People Doing the Hiring?

It's a tough one and no mistake.

Do recruiters bear the blame? Honestly, I don't think so. After all, they're given a price range to work within, and want the best talent they can get for that rate. Usually, experienced creatives will have no choice but to turn it down, because once you say yes to a rate that's way less than you deserve, you set a precedent.

I've been on calls recently with awesome recruiters who really want to get me a rate equal to 22 years of experience. But what I get told is "we don't see many of those opportunities come through I'm afraid." The agencies are setting the rates, and the recruiters have to abide by them.

In a perfect world (for agencies anyway), they will give the recruiter a rate of \$25/hr, and in turn they'll get senior creative professionals with decades of experience, a trophy case filled with awards, and even better, they live only a short walk from the agency.

That scenario happens zero times.

What will actually happen is they'll either have to bump up the asking rate (unlikely) or lower their expectations. Usually, it's the latter. Instead of a senior creative they get a junior, or someone with 4-5 years' experience. And sure, these creatives have some nice stuff in their book.

What they don't have, though, is a long history to draw upon that will help them solve the problem quickly, effectively, and in a way that the client will be excited to implement. In many cases for less experienced people, it's hit and hope. They may just slam that ball out of the park. They may also swing and miss.

Ironically, the accountants running the advertising agencies, including in-house shops, want it both ways. They think they should charge their own clients what the work is truly worth (or even more), and often complain about the shrinking budgets and tiny pitch fees. But on the other hand, they're quite happy to squeeze freelancers and take advantage of the market.

In a time when CEOs and CMOs are earning [204 times](#) more than their average worker, it feels like we're only going to see things get worse. Whoever holds the money holds the power, and more and more of that money is rising to the top.

Eventually, fingers crossed, agencies will realize that cheap labor is a false economy. It costs time, and it costs even more money when you have to bring in a seasoned professional to clean up the mess.

Let's hope there's an awakening soon.

Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/sorry-employers-25-year-olds-20-years-experience-paul-suggett/>