

Realtor's man-on-the-lamb is hard to forget



A visitor was so upset by the ad that he called Mr. Lamb to complain, **VIRGINIA GALT** writes

Some might think "you have to be a bit of a jackass" to plaster your face on billboards, park benches and garbage receptacles all over town, says Toronto real estate broker Brad Lamb.

But it gets you noticed.

This Lamb Sells Condos — a billboard advertisement featuring an image of the broker's head atop a lamb's body — so disturbed a visiting advertising executive from Seattle that he later called Mr. Lamb to complain that he had never seen such a bad, degrading, embarrassing display.

The point is, Offended from Seattle — who had never before called a real estate broker to rant about an ad — is unlikely to forget that a man named Lamb sells condominiums in Toronto.

You have to put yourself out there, said Mr. Lamb, so you might as well have fun with it.

Most of us do not have to be as blatantly self-promotional as real estate people to get ahead — there are only so many billboards, after all.

But, in any field, people who are "more proactive" in managing their careers experience greater job satisfaction and success, Jamie Gruman, a psychologist who studies organizational behaviour, said in an interview this week.

The trick is to discern the difference between "proactive" and pushy (or downright obnoxious) — and this is very much a matter of organizational culture, said Dr. Gruman, an assistant professor in the division of management at the University of Toronto's Scarborough campus.

In real estate, for example, you would stand out if you didn't hustle. "Real estate agents who are high in proactivity sell more," he said.

Mr. Lamb, the founder of Brad J. Lamb Realty Inc., agreed that the most effective agents "don't sit back and wait for the world to come to them, they go out and make things happen."

In an interview this week, Mr. Lamb said he would far rather work with his small, motivated staff of 15 than employ "200 idiots who sit around the coffee machine complaining about bad markets."



Toronto real estate broker Brad Lamb says his 'This Lamb Sells Condos' billboard ads bring in the customers and his 'small group of very good people' takes it from there.

From his windowless, concrete-walled office — "we call it the bat cave" — Dr. Gruman is conducting research on what career strategies work, especially for new employees.

Hopefully, you have some idea of what you are getting into before being installed in the new cubicle, he said.

"If you are someone who likes freedom and autonomy and free thinking and you end up working in an organization that is very rigid and bureaucratic, you are not going to fit very well and you are probably not going to last very long and it will certainly have an effect on your job satisfaction."

Assuming you have made a good career choice, the next step is to quickly learn the lay of the land, Dr. Gruman said.

"Learn to actively observe and watch other people. Watch what they are rewarded for, watch what they are punished for. Learn the boundaries that are acceptable and

then learn to work within those boundaries," he said.

Observation is "not only an effective technique, it's basic survival," he added.

"When you start at a new company, in a new group, in a new position, you want to take some time to learn 'what are the norms here?' For instance, are people open about discussing problems or mistakes or do they keep mistakes to themselves?"

This might sound like common sense, but sometimes people are so eager to make their mark that they risk annoying the very people who are crucial to their success.

That said, it doesn't hurt to ask questions, seek feedback, build relationships and make suggestions — in moderation, Dr. Gruman advised.

He listed four measures that determine whether a person is more "proactive" than the "reactive" person at the next desk, who is more inclined to go with the flow:

■ **Innovation:** the degree to which somebody actually makes changes.

■ **Initiative:** the extent to which somebody learns about career prospects and possibilities and takes charge of his or her own career.

■ **Political savvy:** the level of knowledge about who has power in the organization and who doesn't.

■ **Voice:** the degree to which people call attention to problems.

"But here's a caution: you can't just arbitrarily go ahead and start showing the world on day one just how gung-ho you are and how proactive you are going to be and make all these changes, because you will just annoy people. They don't want to hear it, they are busy," Dr. Gruman said.

Managers and co-workers don't want to be inundated with problems; they want to hear about solutions. Even then, a person should establish a bit of credibility before voicing off.

Eventually, a good organization

will want to hear their useful ideas.

There are, he conceded, many organizations that are perfectly content with the status quo.

"The extent to which people will be proactive is pretty dependent on the costs associated," he said.

Organizations that routinely stifle innovative ideas will lose in the long run — their employees will stop trying, adopt an attitude of "learned helplessness," or move on to more engaging opportunities.

Mr. Lamb said he strives to create a positive environment for his "small group of very good people." As the face on the billboards and garbage receptacles, Mr. Lamb brings in the business. His team takes it from there.

When Mr. Lamb, a professional engineer, started his real estate career in 1988, he sat in an office making hundreds of phone calls a day. "I picked up the phone and I called every single person I could think of."

He scoured the real estate listings

for ads that said "for sale by owner" and contacted those people, trying to convince them that he could get them a better deal. "I harassed them — in a nice way," he said.

For every 100 calls Mr. Lamb placed in a day, he usually came up with one solid lead. "That's six or seven leads a week. I did very well in my first year."

Today, the customers call him, his firm sells an average of 2,000 properties a year and Mr. Lamb's employees have the luxury of specializing. Some work the waterfront condominium market; others sell lofts in some of the newer developments where factories have been converted into condos.

"My agents don't have to do what I did all day, sitting on the phone, getting abused by people."

Today, in the real estate industry, innovation takes different forms, he said, "but it still takes a special kind of person."

vgalt@globeandmail.ca

LOUIE PALU/THE GLOBE AND MAIL