



YOU'RE NOT  
PERFECT

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**Okay, so it's not the most encouraging chapter title, but that's because we're getting right to the point:**

Some of your biggest problems are created by assuming you already have the answers. We've all been there, whether we realize it completely or not. You walk into a job or project and really feel like you've got this one. You say you are interested in others' opinions or feedback, but if you were honest, you're really not. Sometimes you are stubborn, you want to do this all by yourself, or you really believe you know all you can about the job ahead, or you may just not like your coworker offering suggestions.

At my first job out of college, even while I was working on my very first

assignment there, I already thought I was the typography master and was ready to present my brilliant ad campaigns to wow our biggest clients. After months of hounding my creative director for an opportunity to showcase my brilliance, I finally got my chance. I was given the opportunity to put a direction into our pitch if—and only if—it made it through the internal critique. Man, I must have done hundreds of sketches (or at least it felt like it) until I finally came up with a couple of ideas that I knew were spot-on. I worked for days on the ad. And I reworked it. Then I started over and went back to my original ideas and reworked those.

Finally, the day of the internal critique came, and I was ready. I knew I had

developed a couple of really great directions and concepts, and I proudly walked up to the presentation board with Napoleon-like confidence to pontificate my genius to my coworkers.

When I finished my presentation, there was an uncomfortable silence that lasted for what seemed like 10 minutes. Finally, someone spoke up and pointed out that the concept was solid, but the typography was brutal—and they killed the ad. Killed it. Dead. My heart sank. I had a brief vision of kicking the commenter where the sun doesn't shine, but quickly realized that might limit my chances for advancement . . . or for doing another ad, for that matter. Instead, I listened . . . sort of. I heard words and managed to mutter the occasional “uh-huh” or “yeah, makes sense” retort.

After the meeting I went back to my desk still feeling pretty devastated. Didn't my ad reflect the countless hours and endless application of brain matter? The brilliance was right there on the page! While I stared at the ad in disbelief, one of my art directors walked up and scribbled some font adjustments on the ad for me to consider.

I said thanks, thinking there was no way that was all that needed to happen. But I begrudgingly started refining the headline and organizing the relationship of the headline with the imagery, and suddenly something magical happened. I saw it. I saw what was missing, because those simple refinements brought the ad into a peaceful composition. At the next critique, my ad was selected for presentation and eventually even made it to publication.

Luckily, I learned early in my career that I wasn't as good as I thought I was. When you start thinking you have it all figured out, you let pride blind you to the obvious, and you may stop asking for input or counsel from others. The good news is, the problem goes away the minute you can admit you're not perfect and don't have all the answers.

Do you see yourself in this example? Do you ever ask for help? If you do, do you actually listen? Do you give credit to those who have helped you? The discipline of asking for, receiving, and then giving thanks for advice pays great dividends to those who embrace it.

No one is perfect. Embrace the mind-set that should be obvious: You don't know everything. We can learn from anyone, even a small child; we simply need to be willing to hear. Are you listening?

For your next project or meeting, make sure you get someone else's perspective, especially if that's something you don't typically do. How? By simply asking for it and setting aside your ego so you can receive it.

Responding to and agreeing or disagreeing with input is another key element in this scenario. Are you a person who encourages those who give input, or do you come off as guarded and resistant? If you don't know, ask a coworker or anyone you think will be honest with you.

