



Agony and Ecstasy of the International Perfume Company

(from the Perfumer's Point of View)

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Twenty-seven years ago the American writer, Irving Stone, wrote a biography of the most famous of the great Florentine artists of the Renaissance. It was about Michelangelo, his adversities and his triumphs. Despite his insistence that he was a sculptor, not a painter, Michelangelo's most heralded work is the series of frescos he painted in the Sistine chapel.

Stone titled his book, *The Agony and the Ecstasy*.

I can't think of two more accurate and compelling words to describe the life of human beings—as individuals, in relationship with others, and in the organizations and societies in which we serve and live.

The Bible tells us that God created the universe and everything in it in only six days. History tells us that it took Michelangelo four and one-half years to depict that creation on the Sistine chapel ceiling.

I am not going to contend that the agonies and ecstasies we face in the world's perfumery business are of the nobility or magnitude of creation or the work of art the depicts it. Nevertheless, those words—Agony and Ecstasy—appeal greatly to me because they do characterize, from the perfumer's point-of-view, what it's like to be a part of this industry.

"Genesis," Chapter Two, tells us that on the seventh day, God rested. Presumably, after he finally got down from the scaffolding in the Sistine chapel, Michelangelo rested, too. For those of us in corporations there is no rest, at least not in the sense that there is an end to our work.

Definition of Agony and Ecstasy

In the perfumery business, our agonies and ecstasies, while not on the esthetic scale of a Michelangelo, may carry even more human weight because they are a continuum. Our worries never go away; they just differ—and change. Our transitions are not always from one success to another, but sometimes from success to failure—failure that may be marked by the progressive decline of reputation—or by regressing financial achievements. American businessmen call this a shrinking of the bottom line.

For perfumers, agony can mean many things:

- Hindrances and constraints in the exercise of our art
- The gradual erosion of our participation in the company's choices and decisions
- Inaccurate evaluations of our creativity

Agony, almost always, is a tangible state, one in which it is easy to identify and point to the circumstances that cause it.

Ecstasy, on the other hand, is less specific, more general, more abstract, more contemplative. Its generalities are feelings, such as the pride of achievement, such as enthusiasm, conviction and satisfaction. Ecstasy, for all of us no matter what our company or what it manufactures, is clearly subjective.

And yet, in the real world of commerce, ecstasy—and the sensitivity of those who either feel it or are denied it—most often depends upon

the concept of measurable success, that is, the reputation, productivity and profitability of the enterprise for whom one works.

Even Michelangelo, in painting the Sistine chapel, worked for an employer, Pope Julius, and endeavored to meet the needs of that sponsor.

Agony and Ecstasy Within the Company

Material success is the only guarantee that a company will endure, persist and grow in the world's competitive marketplaces.

From perfumers' points of view—and the corporations'—success must include corporate objectives as well as perfumers' aspirations. But they are not so different.

Consider the origin of the word, corporate. It comes from the Latin word *corporare*: "to make into a body"—a unified body of individuals.

The only way I know to truly unify a body of individuals is to combine the best that each has to offer, for the good of each and for the body as a whole.

Don't we as perfumers do this every day? Let's look at ourselves as perfumers, given that we can have perfect conditions. We know that without our creativity and sensitivity, our businesses could not exist. We would insist on working autonomously, committed to our conceptions of the right way to do things. Corporate acquiescence to these traits and demands could only mean the ecstasy of ideal employment. Again, in an American idiom, this is described as being allowed to do "one's own thing."

However, our companies could say, "Yes, there are constraints, but we have a lot to offer, too. We are giving you, our perfumers, the opportunity to:

- capitalize on the resources put at your disposal
- integrate harmoniously into a team of peers
- compare your ideas with those of other creative professionals
- take advantage of the working tools of other departments such as applications or technical support to enhance your art
- profit from support such as market studies and development techniques
- use sales networks to distribute your creations worldwide
- travel and visit clients, widening your knowledge and horizons
- participate in new fields of activities that continually multiply through the means and impact of our companies."

The key thought, I believe, which differentiates those of us who work in an institutional environment is that Latin word "*corporare*"—to make into

a body, a unified body of individuals.

This unification cannot be accomplished by encouraging creative people to work entirely on their own: by inhibiting them from working within teams, with their colleagues; by preventing them from participating in other divisions' projects and plans; by letting them forget that creativity—the source of products to be sold—must remain a principal function of the company.

This last point is crucial. Creativity is a principal contributor to the successful company and this is the focal issue on which perfumers and companies must agree. Every company's policy must spring from that source, and articulate itself around it because the products to be marketed are the key to the development, progress and success of every company.

Too often it seems that questions of organization and standardization are becoming more important priorities of large international companies. This may upset perfumers, giving them feelings of isolation, that they are unimportant, a tiny cog in the wheel of commerce.

How do we deal with these issues?

The answer, as it is in so many complex relationships, is communication. A basic condition for success is to recognize the importance of liaison between different departments—to communicate. Good communication is the real link between knowledge and experience, between technical, scientific, logistics, sales and marketing disciplines.

We must not forget that the perfumer deals with other professionals in those business disciplines with which we interact. Nor should we forget that perfumer has to make these experts understand the art so that they can enhance, instead of hinder it. In a perfume company, the best manufacturing, marketing, and promotional decisions can only be made if other professionals understand the product, and the agonies and ecstasies that give that product birth.

Now, let's consider another element of "corporate"—bringing individuals together into a unified, productive body. That element is management. It goes without saying that the art of business is to maintain balance and keep performers of various disciplines working together hand in hand. It is a difficult task but absolutely essential. Only management can provide the atmosphere of confidence.

The principal objective of management is maintaining a productive balance between all elements of a company. Management must recognize and utilize all the skills of perfumers, as well as the skills of other members of the corporate team, for the benefit of the company—not

only in product creation but also in product acceptance.

Every perfumer has a unique talent and a natural disposition. In an international perfume company, all perfumers are creators, but each has different aptitudes. Their particular aptitudes, and skills, will make them successful in one area or another—in creating unprecedented accords or substitutes of natural products or specializing in perfumes for cosmetics, soaps or detergents. Some may even have skills that are suited to administration, or public or customer relations.

A good management will promote perfumers according to their possibilities. A good management will stimulate individual qualities, and improve and develop potentials.

The External Influences

As all of us well know and understand not all of the agonies and ecstasies in a corporation are caused internally. There are external influences as well. I am talking about:

—the deadlines imposed by demand for the creation of a product

—the ecological requirements imposed on perfumers by various national and international institutions

—the availability—and acceptability—of chemicals and raw materials, the fundamental resources of our business

—and the price limits, determined by our customers, within which our products can be successfully marketed

Let me address each of these important factors.

Deadlines

All of us are concerned with the problem of deadlines. The time to answer briefs grows shorter and shorter. Too often, in order to submit offers within those deadlines, we are forced to opt for the easiest and quickest solutions, to the detriment of the creative resource.

Although, in any well-organized company, the perfumers are creating ahead of time to meet future demands, basing their work on market studies and intuition, their creations are rarely immediately adopted. In most cases, these creations require further modification, sometimes to

the neglect of the most elementary technical considerations.

The deadlines granted (without even asking for the perfumer's opinions) are often limited to a few days, if not to a few hours! One forgets the time required to find the acceptance of the modification, its adaptability to the existing perfume, the time needed for the blending of the new formula's different substances and the time needed for maceration and testing. And what if the perfume's creator is working in another country, a hemisphere away?

Even with an outstanding organization and a superb team of performers, this conception of unrealistically rapid modification of existing fragrances is either a certain lack of respect towards the artistic work or of knowledge of the profession. To use another, more mundane analogy, those who are the most eager to achieve instant modifications of a perfume are often the very same people who don't accept whiskey that's less than twenty years old!

Ecology

Now consider ecology, specifically those dermatological and toxicological rules of safety imposed on perfumers by national and international regulations.

Respecting their rules, one could think that perfumers would be completely safeguarded from the attacks of ecology circles. Unfortunately, complete safety is a utopia which, in the view of continuing new environmental studies, we cannot achieve in our lifetimes. However, we must be forever attentive—and sensitive—to the considerations of ecology.

In addition to dermatological and toxicological safety rules, we must also consider the myriad environmental rules and regulations for the manufacture of chemical products. As a consequence, manufacturing processes are and will continue to be more costly.

Availability

The full observance of the dermatological and toxicological rules, as well as of those governing the integrity of environmental safety affects our art and impoverishes little by little the perfumers' collection. A parallel could be drawn with painters to whom more and more colors or nuances are refused to express their art or with a piano-player who sees more and more keys taken away from the keyboard. Moreover, the availability of certain chemicals or natural raw materials is becoming a problem as it is closely linked to questions of production, economy and politics. Depending on the brief submitted, the perfumer

must take into account this availability problem which might also diminish the number of keys on his keyboard. He would, then, be forced to play a variation of the given theme, hoping that his interpretation will meet the auditor's expectations, that is to say, respond to his company's and the customers' marketing requirements.

Prices

Another agony we face in this business consists of the price limits determined by customers for our products. Prices are becoming lower and lower. Yet the cost of launching a new perfume, or perfumed product, is increasing at an almost inverse ratio.

First, there is the initial and considerable investment in product development. Then, there is the growing cost of evaluating the perfume, testing it and conducting panel surveys to determine its likely reception in the marketplace. And, last but certainly not least, a huge expense is devoted to selection, packaging, advertising and distribution.

It goes without saying that these investments have an impact on the price allowed for each particular compound. It is becoming increasingly difficult to use in fine fragrances natural products such as rose, jasmin, orris, tuberose, orange flowers, jonquil, etc. Yet, ironically, those who are most drawn to these fragrances—who advertise these essences most frequently—are often the same people who ignore their cost.

We, as perfumers, know that the use of expensive natural raw materials is not the key to the originality and creativity but is indispensable to the beauty and the elegance of a perfume.

Another cost factor we must confront is that as the methods of perfume analysis have improved, more and more clients tend to evaluate perfume prices on the basis of the cost of their raw materials. The cost of creation is being more and more ignored. The same is true for research investments, applications development costs, tests and panel evaluations.

Perfumers must get together with their companies to communicate and explain their indispensability to the creation of perfumes. They must jointly tell the world that a perfume is not simply a mixture of raw materials, but a work of harmony, an accord, a means of expression.

I believe, as I am certain you all do, that no one would ever consider buying a statue at the cost of a ton of marble, a painting at the cost of paint and frame, or a designer dress at the cost of its material. Somehow the originality, quality and beauty of whatever we buy must be paid for because without these elements the product could



not possibly exist.

We must continue to educate our markets, to alert them to the real danger low prices present to the creative process and to the future of our profession.

In summary, amongst all four grounds of agony outside the company, the most alarming is without doubt the problem of prices.

Time constraints, while a severe hindrance, are a problem over which we can have some immediate control, through better planning in the processing of projects by both customers and suppliers. We can also improve our organizational support of projects; and even, if necessary, increase the staffs of our creative and marketing teams.

As to the ecological restrictions, the dermatological and toxicological safety rules, perfumers may respond to these with new ingredients, either to be used as substitutes for the old, or as more interesting and better performing new accords.

The problem of availability of raw materials can also be solved with a range of new ingredients or new substitutes, in other words, by intensifying research and development of new substances and improving manufacturing processes.

However, all of these remedies mean additional costs and investments which will be more and more difficult to recover if our selling prices continue their erosion.

If we judge a company's success by its financial profitability and worldwide renown, the definition of ecstasy can be understood as the company's ability to conform to the market evolutions, its capability of developing existing markets and finding new outlets.

The future ecstasies depend on the ability to finance the investments necessary to adapt to the constant evolution of the market and the determination to develop other concepts, other fields of fragrance utilization. However, what will happen to these developments, to the profitability of our industry if the declining trend of selling prices continues?

Conclusions

Most importantly, we perfumers must share our credo with those who buy, sell and use our creations. We need to stress the utility and positive role of perfumes in everyday life.

We have to convey the historical truth that perfumes have always been a part of our pleasure, our relaxation, our idealism, our environment. In a world assaulted by agonies of which a Michelangelo barely dreamed, perfumes are becoming, more and more, the conveyance of

dreams, of refuge, of escape. Millions of people, of every creed, persuasion, ethnic origin and conviction have traveled from all parts of the world to visit the Sistine chapel and to gain inspiration from its scenes depicting life from the creation to the flood. All of those viewers have been able to share the ecstasy, forever preserved, on the frescos of that Vatican ceiling.

I believe that, in its own unique way, our industry has an ecstasy that is worth its own preservation.

I am convinced that a mutual understanding among ourselves, our companies and our customers is of utmost importance for the benefit of all. Together, we will seek the ideal balance that permits the perfumery industry to forget its fears of agony—and to continue to grow and to progress toward ecstasy.

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