

# Account people need to be the second-best expert at everything

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Last week, I attended a Marketing Society event where Nicola Thomson (current Global Marketing Capability Lead at Edrington, and all-round marketing superstar) presented. Nicola was an incredible speaker, and I left the talk feeling bolstered and inspired to tackle the year ahead.

On a very windy and rather grey January afternoon, Nicola's outlook on how to navigate a career in the advertising industry was a well-timed antidote to the gloomy mood that can so easily take over in January.

Nicola's advice was peppered with stories from her enviable career, and my favourite

nugget of wisdom that she shared is that “*account people need to be the second-best expert at everything*”. As an account manager only four and a half years into their career, I found this a beautiful way to summarise a job which is so often hard to describe, and in a strange way, it gives me focus into what I need to work on developing next.

Owning your story was another key piece of advice that Nicola shared. Applying your own filter to judge how your life is going is a good reminder that we need to live on our own terms and not by someone else’s rules (for example milestone tick-boxes). Figuring out what works for you takes time and anything you try that you don’t like can usually be reversed. Also, remembering it’s not the end of the world if things don’t go to plan is another gentle reminder to keep going, and that failure leads to growth and learning.

The talk discussed how people view everything on a spectrum, and this is a useful way to think about some of life’s more challenging decisions. Remembering it’s not one rule fits all situations was helpful advice, and knowing where things rank along each spectrum is a skill that we hone over time.

#### Acceptance (responsibility) □ ➔ Fight Back

Sometimes there is a good time to fight your corner, and other times it’s better to accept responsibility and blame. Nicola spoke about there being great value in recognising when we aren’t good at something – it’s the fastest route to learning how to do it better.

#### Safety □ ➔ Adventure

When deciding what you want next, it’s important to define what it actually means to you (e.g. if you want safety in your next role, what do you actually mean by this? What will make you feel safe?) Understand what your “guard rails” are for your own wellbeing and strive to include these in your plans. This could mean not changing *everything* at once, or just knowing the things you need to bring with you into the next step.

#### Serving Yourself □ ➔ Serving Others

Nicola discussed the importance of cancelling out the noise; the benefits of doing this both professionally and personally to reach your goals. It's healthy to learn to do this yourself (and not just by purchasing noise-cancelling headphones). Taking time to do something for yourself (Nicola's example is her running) frees your mind and although this time may not solve any issues, it does help us *resolve* them.

I can't attempt to make Nicola's advice as enchanting as she did, but for me, it was a perfectly timed talk to get the inspiration for the year ahead flowing.

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