

Learning the ropes... again.

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DAMON RICHARDS - PLANNER/BUYER 11 SEP 2019

Walking around Edinburgh in the early autumn sunshine, my husband asked me - not for the first time - what it actually is that a trainee media planner/buyer does. After a year in the role, I was finally able to confidently explain the complex and nuanced process of delivering a media campaign that delivers the objectives of the client in the most dynamic and impactful way, whilst simultaneously meeting their budget requirements and inspiring customers to engage with their brand.

Instead of the sage nod of comprehension I was expecting, his blank expression once again reminded me that it is nearly impossible to explain the world of media to someone who doesn't work in the industry. Fortunately a number 22 bus passed by at that moment with one of our Subway ads gleaming on the side – I buy those, I said, pointing.

“I thought so,” he replied.

Last year, after over two decades in retail followed by a career break in the USA, I decided to start again in a new industry. I always expected that it would be challenging, but I still wasn't prepared for the reality of starting from scratch in your forties. Everything was new, everything had to be learned, painstakingly explained to me by my colleagues, often more than once. Never more than three times. Four max...I would frequently find myself annoyed, even angry, after a day at work, walking home with my head whirring and – if I am being very frank – considering whether I had done the right thing by starting over. It took me far too long to realise that the biggest challenge I was having to face, was me. I had gone from being the person invited to meetings to share my industry knowledge, to someone who didn't know the basics and not even knowing the difference between CTR and CPR.

And I was acutely aware of my age. Starting out is great in your twenties, but I felt like a failure doing it at 42 and that was something I hadn't expected to feel and couldn't articulate to anyone else.

Frustration has been a constant companion in the last twelve months, luckily for me though I have had an incredible team around me. They have been both patient and encouraging; giving me a hand when I needed it but also letting me flounder a little in those moments where I just had to work things out on my own. My successes have driven me forwards, but my mistakes have been my greatest learning tools – which is fortunate as I have learned a lot!

Letting go of your own baggage is the hardest thing to do, but stepping away from that burden is liberating when it happens. The last year has been incredible, with way more highs than lows, but even when there have been lows, I have never been alone in them. My team

have guided me through, my husband has kept me balanced and, occasionally, I have just had to have a damn good talk with myself.

On my LinkedIn profile I boldly claim “Two decades of retail experience now being translated into the world of media and marketing” and I finally feel like I can truly stand by that. My transferable skills that I had expected would see me hit the ground running are finally re-emerging and I feel more like the old me. I’m still learning about the world of media, I expect that will never stop and, for the most part, I have taken the pressure off of myself to know everything now.

As for my age? Thankfully I am still getting older and I am now a 43 year-old trainee planner buyer which just means I have additional responsibilities – like teaching my younger colleagues that Phil Collins didn’t write True Colours.

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