

Open your heart to **EVERYONE**

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SUE UNERMAN, CSO AT MEDIACOM 05 DEC 2016

Yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.

This is how Mary Shelley describes Frankenstein's monster. He gets a friendly makeover in Apple's new Christmas ad. Of course the creature was a composite of parts of other people, and in Shelley's vision, as it is shunned by humans the story doesn't end well. However there may be an advantage to putting together a composite of lots of people in business.

If you're one of many who is looking for a role model then the Frankenstein creature

approach may be the best one for you.

In the talks that co-author Kathryn Jacob and I are giving for The Glass Wall the question of role models comes up frequently. At a talk at one city firm the question “who is your role model?” was best answered by one top partner who replied “don’t look for the perfect role model, build your own composite model”.

This approach works for 4 reasons

1. A composite role model creature won’t let you down in the way that investing in a single person might when you need some advice or attention from them. Whoever you find in the real world will, you can guarantee it, have off days, have days when you need something from them but they’re under pressure that they can barely cope with, so they might be abrupt or even churlish with you. If you invest in a composite creature instead this doesn’t happen. If one person disappoints you’ll always have a back-up.

2. Very few individuals are skilled at everything. There aren’t many people who are equally exceptional at strategy and tactics, logic and gut feel, warmth and dispassion. If you fix on just one individual you compromise on some aspects of excellence unnecessarily.

3. Great performers tend to have a great entourage or team around them. Those who have one dominant influence can fall into an unhealthy Svengali like relationship with them. Svengali is a fictional character in George du Maurier’s 1895 novel Trilby. Svengali seduces, dominates and exploits Trilby, a young English girl, and makes her a famous singer, but she is a pawn in his game. Think of Elvis and Colonel Tom Parker, of Brian Wilson and Eugene Landy.

4. If you pick one person it will be someone you admire, who you want to borrow traits from of course. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with this but it might limit you to someone who thinks like you already. With whom you have stuff in common. This won’t stretch you in as many directions as a composite would. Better to have a collection of people who are different. Very different. From you. From each other. That way you can use them in

different situations. If you've got to deal with a delicate negotiation ask Jane what to do. If you need to cut through to the heart of the matter at high speed pick John instead to ask for advice.

Don't aim for one role model to put on a pedestal. Chances are they will either fall off, or climb down. Go for an Apple-friendly Frankenstein approach instead.

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