

THE MAKING OF AN ACORN RESEARCHER

NOTE: What is expressed here on the Making of an Acorn Researcher is solely our viewpoint. These views are intended to dispel any misconceptions about becoming a marketing researcher.

a) Why must I be a marketing researcher?

It is a choice only you can make. You are now being trained by us to be one. During the first few months you have to think seriously about whether you want to be a marketing researcher. But once you decide to stay, whether you like it or not, we are going to try to make you a researcher of substance.

b) How long does it take to be a researcher?

If you have a basic degree, if you can think, you can write (especially English) and handle more than basic instructions, it will take you approximately two years to manage projects under the supervision of a Research Director.

To be a full-fledged researcher who we can allow to handle clients independently without endangering himself / herself, the client and the company, it takes minimally three years and a show of competency.

To be an excellent researcher whom other researchers talk about, the process takes forever because when you stop learning you stop being excellent.

c) Why does it take so much to become a marketing researcher?

No one is born a marketing researcher - we take this view for granted. You are going to be paid while you learn. You are not here to earn your salary as a trainee. Most of the time - until and unless you start learning to write proposals, do projects, analyse findings and make presentations - you are more a pain than a help.

While we are training and teaching you, your "work" is mainly useless. Four draft proposals and draft reports generally cause us a lot of frustration and stress and we have to spend more time turning them into meaningful documents before they can go to clients. Actually, we sometimes feel that we ought to charge trainee executives tuition fees for making professionals out of you at great cost to our mental and physical health.

Really, it takes more out of us to train you than it takes you to become a researcher.

d) So why do we take in trainees?

Unlike other agencies, we prefer to train our own researchers than recruit from our competitors (we also do not believe that we can find anybody to meet our standards otherwise). When we hire executives, we hire them with the view of them becoming one of our country managers one day. We take our profession seriously, so competence and integrity are important to us even if it is unfashionable to claim that these days. If you are not interested to go through some painful learning to be the best you can be, then you are not of much use to us - or, seriously, to anybody else.

e) What kind of training do I get?

You will be thrown into the deep end from the start. You learn very quickly to do real work, attend meetings, presentations and focus groups. You will be assigned a mentor (usually a Research Director or Manager) and work in a team with more senior research executives.

When you attend meetings and presentations, it is not for your personal pleasure. You take notes, listen to how questions are asked, what answers are given and you learn.

We use the 'Thinking Man' as our logo for a reason. THINK! It is amazing how many people expect to get through their training without thinking.

Work closely with your team, and show your draft proposals and reports to your mentor so that he / she can check and correct your work. How else can he be impressed with your thinking capability, diligence and time management? If you are set a deadline - meet it - if you cannot - tell your mentor why and how much time you need. Deadlines always seem unreasonable but when you push yourself you will be surprised how easily you can meet them.

f) Why do I always get more work to do than others?

Have you heard of the phrase: we are the victims of our own success? You get more work because of your ability to complete it quickly and properly. When people are impressed with your reliability and ability, they come back to you. Do you go back to a restaurant that serves lousy food? Do you ask the plumber to fix your pipes in the bathroom when he flooded your kitchen? Be thankful when everybody asks to work with you. That is a show of confidence - otherwise you may not make it past the first three months of your probation.

g) If I made a mistake will it be held against me?

If you are a trainee, the mentor will be wise not to let you make mistakes against your will. Bad things happen to researchers who make mistakes. Whilst mistakes are generally not held against you in the early days of your training, remember that confidence is a strange thing. Once lost it is hard to be regained. Bad incidents linger in the memory and you have to work a lot harder to remove them.

In marketing research we dread Murphy. His law has long arms in product tests, attribute ratings in questionnaires, and preparation of test materials. Believe us, anything that can go wrong will go wrong. Always meticulously check and recheck things. Even then, Murphy pursues you relentlessly.

h) Who do I go to if I have a problem?

Go first to your mentor. If he / she is the problem go to another Research Director or Director.

If you have a problem because of too much work refer to (f) If "too much work" arises because you do not know how to do it, then ask for help from a senior researcher. Do not pass the work to someone else - it would be wiser for you to learn how to do it. Word always comes back that you passed the work to someone else.

i) Isn't this a very stressful place to work?

Depending on who you ask, the answer could be "yes" or "no."

We are very demanding on ourselves and on the people who work with us. You are either going to be very good at what you do or you are not. We do not believe in mediocrity. If you just want to cruise and get by, this is not the place for you.

After all being the best requires a little more effort - and you will beat the mass. Stress is a frame of mind. We suggest you change stress into passion by:

- Thinking about what a great job you are doing instead of how hard you are working.
- Believing how much you are learning instead of how much work you are doing.
- Discussing new ideas with positive-minded colleagues instead of commiserating with losers about how difficult a project is.
- Developing the "I can" attitude instead of the "How can I?" self doubt.

Just DO IT! Decide to be a top notch researcher - it is easier to compete with a few at the top than the mass of mediocrity below.

j) Do I have to come to work at 9:00 am since I worked late the night before?

Yes you do. Your clients expect to be able to reach you when they call. They do not know you had worked late or had conducted a focus group the previous night.

If you know you are going to be late, call the receptionist to inform clients that you are in an early morning meeting and will return calls as soon as you can.

k) I always seem to be busy. How do I manage my time better?

Some people are just bad time managers. You need order and discipline.

- Prioritise what is urgent - must do; what is important - but can wait a while; and what is not urgent - can be done when you have time.
- Keep blocks of time to write proposals, reports. Do not allow e-mails and phone calls to continuously interrupt your thinking.
- Set specific times to open your e-mails, reply and send messages: morning before you start on a serious piece of work, after lunch to work off the heavy load and evening before you end your day.
- Unless you are very free, do not entertain 'time-stealers' who walk to your workspace, chat about nonsensical things for 10 minutes and break-up your work time. Send them away with a polite, "Talk to you later. I have to finish this proposal / report."

l) Do I have to bother about the office and the property of the company?

You spend 10-12 hours a day in the office - more than the time you spend in your own home. You want to feel the space belongs to you so make it comfortable, clean, and put things back where they belong.

Treat the things in the office like you would your own belongings (you never know, one day it might be given to you).

Convey a sense of pride that this is your office, your company. Clients and visitors notice how the staff feel for their company very quickly.

m) Why is the company so security conscious – it feels like the Gestapo HQ?

Next to quality, the most important thing in our business is security. You must not take these things lightly:

- Never throw any parts of a report, proposal or documents on projects in the dustbin. They must all be shredded. The penalty is a thorough tongue-lashing.
- Never leave concept boards, test materials, topic guides, questionnaires, show cards or written messages on white boards in the conference rooms or viewing rooms. Once confiscated you have to beg to get them back.
- All correspondence documents, and test products on other projects must be kept out of view if a client visits the office / your office. If they see things which are not meant for their eyes, even if these are not from their competitors, you are compromising the confidentiality of the project you are working on.
- If clients attending focus groups, presentations or meetings need to make phone calls, always direct them to the phone at the reception area. Never take them to somebody else's office or a secretary's area. In an emergency – first check the phone area for messages, notes, documents lying on the table, or test materials before directing a client to an internal office phone – and stay discreetly around to guide them back to the conference or viewing room.
- Do not reuse templates of old presentations. Do you know that the project details stay with the old templates? Do yourself a big favour by training yourself to make new charts every time.
- Do not discuss clients, projects, questionnaires or carry on briefings in lifts, toilets, corridors, restaurants, airplanes and other public places. You don't know who is sitting next to you! Remind interviewers about discussing briefings and questionnaires in the lifts and public places as well.
- Do not read documents, or write reports in planes, trains and other public places unless you are sitting in a secluded area.
- Remember e-mails are not secure. If you have confidential documents to attach use a password which only the recipient knows.
- Check that recipient names on emails are correct before you press send. Believe me you will not like the consequences of sending important information to the wrong people.

- Lock highly confidential documents and projects you are working on in your lockers before you leave for the night. You are given lockers right? They are for documents not your snacks.
- Do not discuss details of projects you are working on with friends – no matter how close. They do not need to know since it does not concern them.
- Do not copy, remove, keep for your own use or give away reports, questionnaires, documents on client projects. They are confidential – you are warned!
Be vigilant. Security consciousness should be second nature to us. We must instinctively protect our client's properties and projects at all time.

n) What other types of training do I get aside from on the job?

After a couple of months in the company, we arrange for trainee executives to write their first report and make presentations to all the executives in the company. The intention is to:

- Build your confidence in facing an audience and articulating your thoughts.
- Let you have an idea of what you will experience if you do a bad job or a good job.
- We will be frank about what we think of your presentation style, your ability to conceptualise and the amount of effort you have put in the presentation. We do not say things to make you feel small or inadequate. We will give constructive analyses which are also intended to help the other trainee executives.

Periodically we will ask you to do "Book Reviews" which are not necessarily related to marketing research. The whole idea is to assess your ability to conceptualise and synthesize information and re-articulate it in a coherent manner. Do yourself a favour by enjoying what you read and pick up the pearls of wisdom along the way. Spare us a dull regurgitation of the contents - we will know when you have enjoyed the book or when you have read the book just to get the "Book Review" exercise over with.

o) Can I delegate work to other newer trainee executives?

Think before you even ask this question. Would you give away a prized treasure to someone else? Who do you think will learn and progress faster than you in the company?

p) Can I pass my time here doing as little as possible since I only want a job?

You are in the wrong company. You probably can fool some people some of the time by appearing to be busy and working hard. But you can hardly fool the Directors - they have seen this dysfunctional personality type before and you are quickly shown the door.

Our advice: change your attitude fast, you don't know what a danger you are to yourself!

q) When do I know I am going to make it as a top notch researcher?

When you feel coming to work is exciting. When you are captivated and absorbed by the projects you work on. When the clients you work with call you personally to take briefs, provide more information or just to help them get something. When you find a well-written proposal or report so

beautiful and elegant you wish your name was on it. When you want to do more than 110% for your clients because they always appreciate what you do for them. When you can go without sleep for a night and still feel ready to face a new day of challenges.

If you feel lukewarm about all the things above - it's time to call it a day and look for another job.

r) Will I make a lot of money as a researcher?

You have probably heard this many times. For us, marketing research is a passion. We just want to do a great job, enjoy what we are working on and experience the intellectual growth. We know ultimately the recognition, fulfillment and money will be there.

You will be sought after and you will be paid top dollars. But first – if you don't enjoy what you do, no amount of money will make you happy.