

The Martin Agency

Among the many agencies I routinely visited along the eastern corridor one was The Martin Agency in Richmond. It was a relatively small shop, but it handled a major piece of business for us: Dow Chemical. Or, at least it should have been a good piece of business. It wasn't. I'd tried everything. But the Media Director routinely was rude to me. Once she let me sit for over an hour only to appear and tell me she didn't have time for our appointment. But for my other calls along Amtrak's Metroliner service corridor, it would have been a trip wasted.

One of my buddies took me aside and gave me the bad news: "Diane hates you; absolutely can't stand you." I didn't ask why. My ego was fragile enough. But I did *do* something: I asked a young salesman we'd just hired to assume the account. He did; he got the business for us too. The lesson I learned was this: Most people who are unhappy with you for some reason won't confront you, but will simply pull away. In business situations when this happens, you won't have time for reconciliation. So the best course is substitution. Also I learned that in spite of all we do, there are people who are wired differently and for some reason just don't like us. That was the case with Diane. I held no animosity, but sought to understand -- and do something about it.

February 20, 2008