

Chez Pierre, a restaurant a short walk from the offices of Trade Magazine. The editor of Trade Magazine is having lunch with the advertising manager of Large Engineering Business. They are in a private room. This is a regular annual event. The advertising manager arrived mid-morning with two assistants. The assistants have been taken to lunch at another restaurant by two members of staff from the advertising department of Trade Magazine, with instructions to be sociable but not discuss business. There has been a meeting of all six people and a few others this morning and this afternoon the contract for another year of advertising is due to be signed. The two men get on well and chat is usually just social over lunch, and has been today, until now.

The advertising manager says something that seems a bit strange, he speaks slowly, almost apologetically.

“Up until a few days ago I was dreading coming to this meeting, but it’s alright now, it’s all worked out.”

The editor is quite surprised by this, but says nothing and tries not to show surprise. It is quite reasonable that he is surprised. These lunches at a quite expensive restaurant have always been an event to which he has looked forward.

The advertising manager continues, in the same almost apologetic manner.

“There was a board meeting about a month ago and the Chairman, he used to be the Managing Director but he is essentially retired now, he’s well past normal retirement age but he comes in several days a week for a few hours and often has lunch with the present Managing Director and keeps up to date: he has no real power now but he is genuinely widely respected because of the way that he always looked after people if they had problems. Anyway, he attends board meetings and has his say, though usually it has no great significance but he does influence things, often to improve things for the staff.”

The editor is wondering where this is leading, but says nothing but listens attentively because he wonders what is coming.

“Well, at that board meeting the matter of renewing the advertising contract with Trade Magazine came up. Normally it goes through without much discussion but this time the Chairman proposed that the contract not be renewed.”

The editor is startled at this and is very concerned.

“It appears that he reads every issue. However, he has become more and more annoyed because he says that every time you report on a new idea then unless it comes from a big established company there is always knocking copy in the last paragraph. Apparently he reads the articles about new ideas with enthusiasm only to feel disgruntled when he reads the last paragraph. Well there was some discussion and as you know we regard the business we get from advertising in Trade Magazine as substantial. We do monitoring exercises by only advertising some particular new product in Trade Magazine and recording how many enquiries and orders we get and we are very satisfied.”

The editor is feeling slightly relieved, but is still very concerned.

“So after a while the Managing Director said that there was a lot on the agenda for the meeting and suggested that we defer a decision until after lunch and when all the other business had been completed. That was what happened and in the end a vote was avoided and it was decided to renew the contract this year but that I was to inform you of the feeling about this, not only by the Chairman it seems but by some of the other directors too, though they were not prepared to go as far as cancelling the contract due to the potential loss of business.”

The editor is feeling less concerned because it seems that at least the contract is going to be renewed this time.

“But as I said it’s alright now, it’s all worked out. Apparently the Chairman had lunch the other day with the Managing Director and was very upbeat and enthusiastic about Trade Magazine. It appears that there was an article about some new idea and it ended with very positive upbeat enthusiastic comments. Well the Chairman said that reading that and thinking about it and trying to imagine how the new ideas could be applied had made him feel young again. It appears that he started with the company when he was in his twenties and worked on electronics and computer technology as a design engineer actually developing electronic circuitry, then after some years he was asked to become a manager and his direct involvement with actually designing electronic circuitry got less and less until eventually there was none of it in his day. Then he got promoted again and gradually moved up, though he always remembered those days actually designing circuitry and thinking up new ideas with fondness. I was called in by the Managing Director later the same day and was told what I am telling you now. However he added - the Managing Director that is - he added that I was nevertheless to make you aware of the situation so that hopefully there will not be the same discussion when the contract come up for renewal next year.”

The editor is taking this in.

“I was told the name of the author of the article. Edward Stanley, that’s it, Edward Stanley. The Chairman said he is looking out for future articles by the same man. Anyway I was told to inform you and that is what I have done, I hope you are not offended and I know editors don’t like any hint of advertisers trying to influence content but since we last had lunch together we went on holiday to Tuscany, my wife is very much into art. Her parents apparently took her to Florence when she was a little girl and she has vague recollections but did not take it all in at that age and wanted to go. I ended up carrying one of those large thin portfolio cases around she had one too and she was buying various prints and putting them in the portfolio cases to keep them flat rather than have them rolled and put in a tube. In fact she had about half a dozen of the cases and we took two out with us every day. There was one little hilltop town and what happened there was quite strange, well it seemed strange at the time, but there was an explanation, though a bit of a strange explanation.”

“Oh.”

“Yes, we were sat at a table outside in this piazza when she suddenly said, ‘I’m going to sing wait there.’ and she went over to this ancient well with a few steps around it and she walked up the steps and then started singing. I wondered what was going on, but a

small crowd gathered, just people who had been walking by in the evening, mostly other tourists I think, and listened. When she finished they applauded and she took a bow. Then she came back to the table and sat down looking radiantly happy. I of course wondered what was going on, then she explained. Apparently part of her interest in art is about when people have written books and paid to have them published. Very often such books do not sell many copies, if any, but if it makes people happy, ... anyway she is in the habit of searching the Internet and having a look at what is available and sometimes she buys one of them if she likes the synopsis. Well there was this book that she bought, a novel, fiction, not a biography of what really happened, and in this story the heroine if one can call her that had done the singing thing in that very spot in that very town and had received a round of applause. So when she got there she decided to repeat the event herself, though of course she wasn't repeating it, it was all just part of a story, a made up event, not real. Anyway she was happy and that's what matters."

The editor nods politely and smiles as best he can as he has been thinking about what he had been told earlier.

"She told me the name of the author of the book. What was it, ... Jane ... Jane Hove, that's it, Jane Hove. I have never heard the name apart from when my wife told me.

The editor feels somewhat disconcerted but tries not to show it. Two people whom he has sussed mentioned during one meal.

"Well I suppose that we had better be getting back so that I can sign the contract."

'At least he hasn't asked to meet Edward, and there is no reason why he should connect Jane with Trade Magazine.' thinks the editor.

The editor rings for the waiter and the owner of the restaurant enters.

"Can I have the bill please." asks the editor.

"Certainly sir. I hope you both enjoyed your meal."

"Yes, very good." replies the editor.

"Very good." says the advertising manager.

The editor pays the bill using a debit card and they leave.

Later that afternoon the contract is signed. The visitors then leave.

The editor is thinking, thinking that a change of policy over articles needs to happen. A change of culture. But important though this account is, it is not the only account and if every article is upbeat at the end, some other advertisers might not like that. A lot to think about, but clearly there has got to be some change of direction.