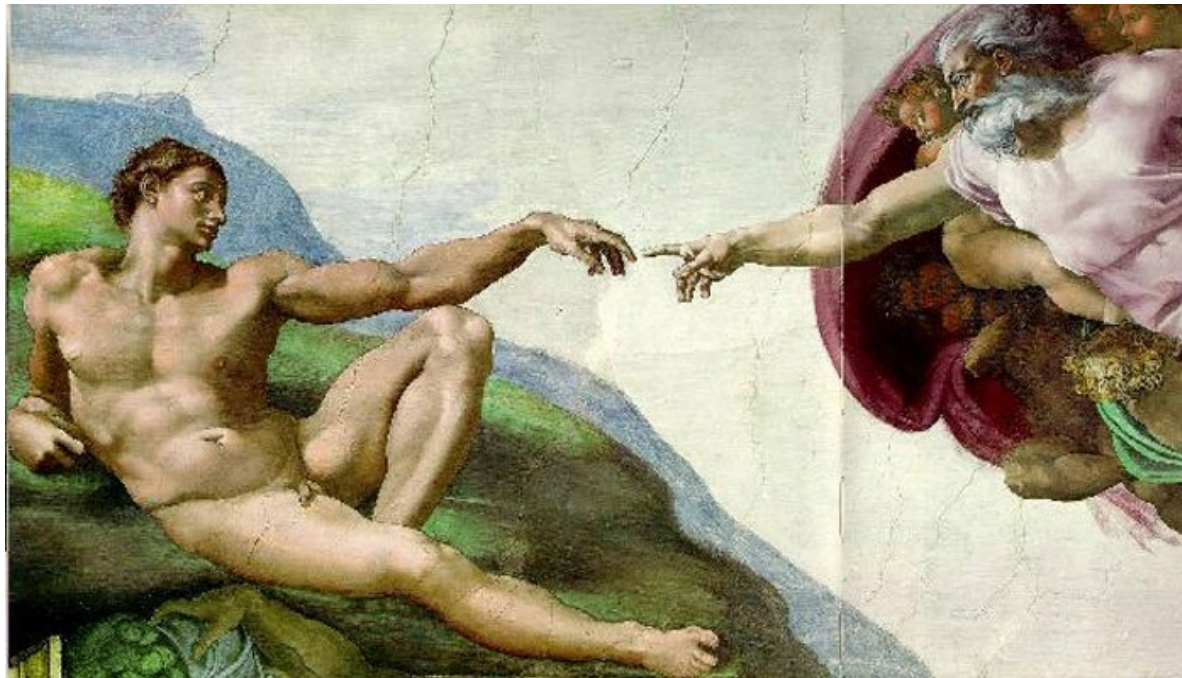


The Brief for the Sistine Chapel

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The Brief for the Sistine Chapel

When you have a proposition you should try to express it in a way that will propel your creative team towards a solution.

Here is a story to help illustrate what this means.

The Brief for the Sistine Chapel

Everyone knows the frescoes that were painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel by Michelangelo. They are among the greatest works of art of all time.

You can imagine the briefs he might have been given for this work by his client, Pope Julius II, or the Pope's account man, Cardinal Alidosi:

The Brief for the Sistine Chapel

Brief #1

Please paint the ceiling.

There is no doubt that this is what Michelangelo was being asked to do, but this brief gives him no hints as to what the solution to the request might be. It leaves all the decisions and thinking to the artist before he can put paint to plaster.

The Brief for the Sistine Chapel

Brief #2

Please paint the ceiling using red, green and yellow paint.

This brief is worse. Not only does it not tell him what to paint it gives him a number of restrictions without justification; restrictions which will inevitably prove irksome and which will distract him from his main task.

The Brief for the Sistine Chapel

Brief #3

We've got terrible problems with cracks in the ceiling. Can you cover it up for us?

This is much worse. It still does not tell him what to do and it gives him irrelevant and depressing information that implies no one is interested in what he paints because it won't be long before the ceiling falls in anyway. How much effort is he likely to put into it?

The Brief for the Sistine Chapel

Brief #4

Please paint biblical scenes on the ceiling incorporating some or all of the following: God, Adam, angels, cupids, devils and saints.

Better: now they are beginning to give Michelangelo some direction. They have not given him the full picture yet (pardon the pun) but at least he knows the important elements. This is the sort of brief that most of us would have given. It contains everything the creative needs to know, but it does not go that one step beyond, towards an idea and a solution.

The Brief for the Sistine Chapel

Here is the brief that Michelangelo was actually given:

Please paint our ceiling for the greater glory of God and as an inspiration and lesson to his people.

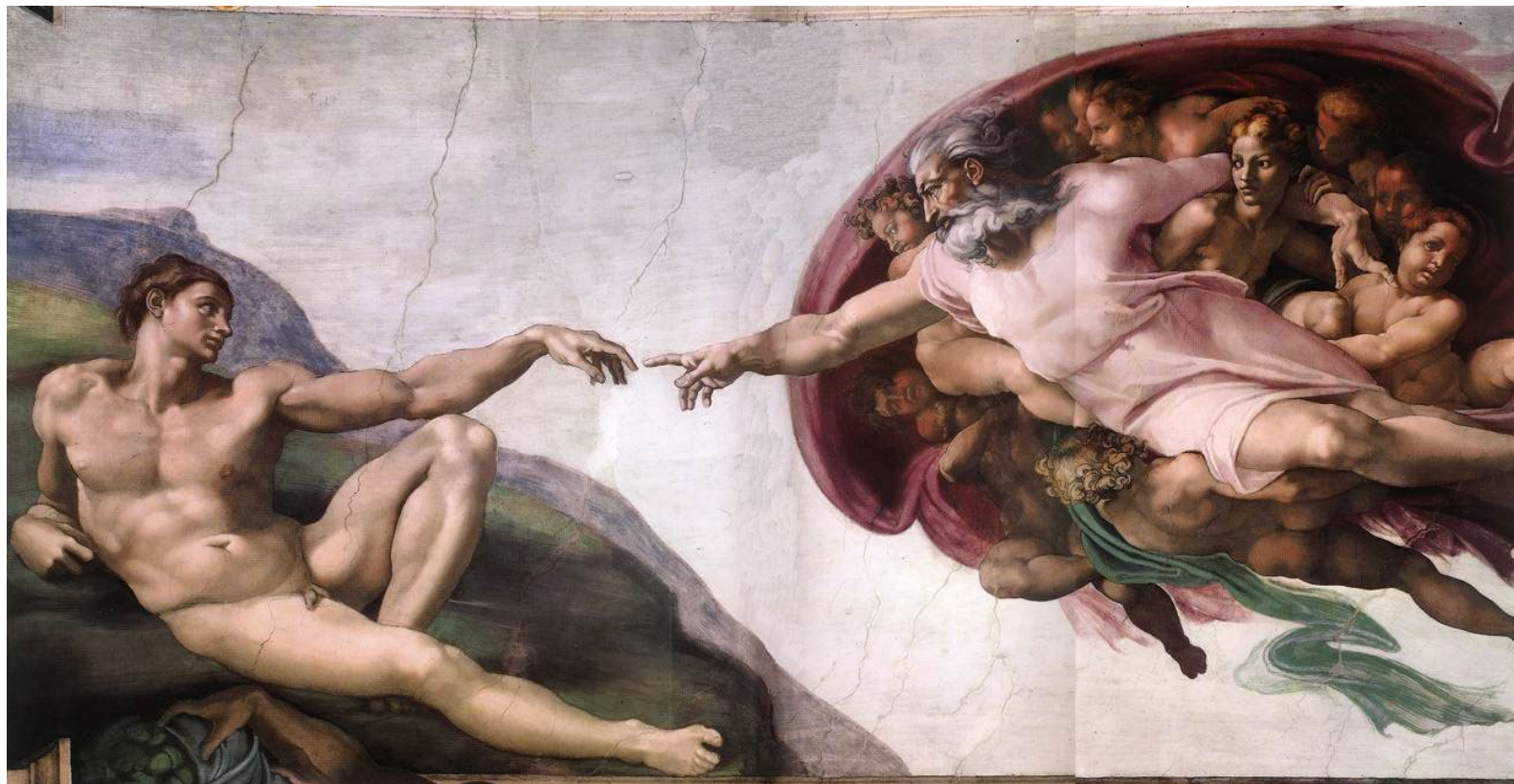
Michelangelo took this brief and painted frescoes which depicted the creation of the world, the fall, mankind's degradation by sin, the divine wrath of the deluge and the preservation of Noah and his family. He knew what to do—and was inspired by the importance of the project. With direction like this he was free to devote his attention to executing the details of the brief in the best way he knew how.

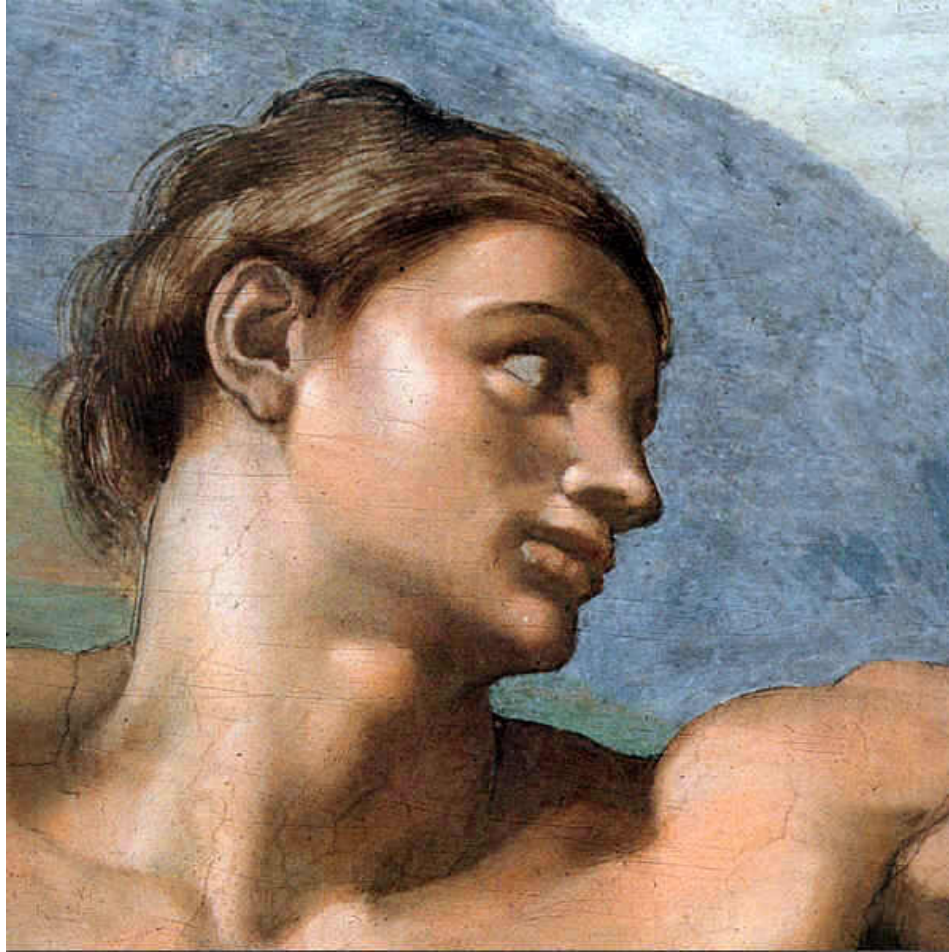












Words are little bombs: the right ones can explode inside us, demanding an original and exciting solution instead of a mediocre, pedestrian one.



Always work very, very hard to find the right proposition and then even harder to find the words which express it in the least ambiguous and most exciting way.



Extracted from How to Plan Advertising - the Blue Book, published by the APG, 1987, as it appeared on www.accountplanning.net.

I have taken the liberty of tweaking a few words and adding some pictures, but the original ideas and text belong solely to Damian O'Malley, whose permission to republish this has been kindly granted.

I would also like to thank John Griffiths of accountplanning.net for posting the original and putting me in touch with Damian.

Steven Stark
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