

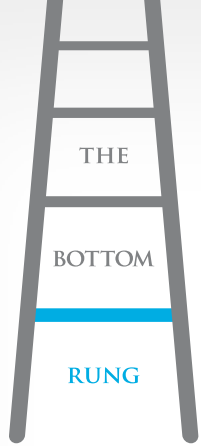
Chapter 1. *Take pride in the little things.*

When you're first hired, you will be handed a mountain of small projects – numerous inconsequential projects that are likely just a nuisance to the people dolling them out – and as a bonus, you'll have basically no time to complete them. History shows, there are two approaches to take with these types of assignments:

- A Finish them & move on.
- B Give them the attention they deserve and start spinning that ordinary straw into gold.

Now, there are benefits to choosing option A. You'll save time just crossing those projects off your to-do list, rather than spinning your wheels trying to make an award-winning coupon ad. Your traffic manager will love you for finishing projects so quickly, and you will be less likely to have a heart attack due to the reduced level of stress. (It is stressful trying to make something out of nothing!)

But here's the problem: if you happily accept these jobs, do them quickly to get them out the door, (while only complaining under your breath about the *quality* of the jobs) you may very well find yourself doing the exact same thing ten years down the road.

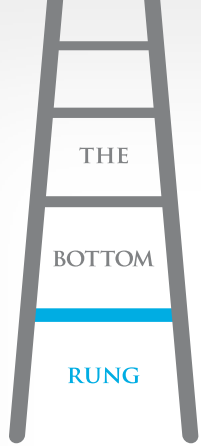


I submit that option B is the way to go, especially if you don't want to be designing fast food tray-liners well into retirement.

Although trying to make those small jobs into something respectable is sometimes frustrating and difficult, it's the road to more responsibility. Your boss will notice your efforts, especially if you still get your projects done on time. And, in the event that you do make some dull project into something spectacular, they'll soon want to see what you can do with assignments that have more potential.

And your boss won't be the only one that takes notice. You'll quickly find that you'll be able to 'get away' with better work because compared with what your client is used to seeing, your even moderate efforts are going to look like the frickin' Mona Lisa. She's going to be impressed. And that is how you begin to build a trusting creative relationship with any client. Over time, you'll be more likely to personally present your work and be introduced to more and more clients on these small terms.

Some of my favorite work came from projects that could just have easily been mailed in, or were in the process of *being* mailed in, and were saved through nothing more than a little thought, a bit of effort and some elbow grease. So the next time you get a job jacket describing a project of little consequence, recognize its inherent potential to make you a rock star. Take it home. Give it some attention. Stay up all night thinking

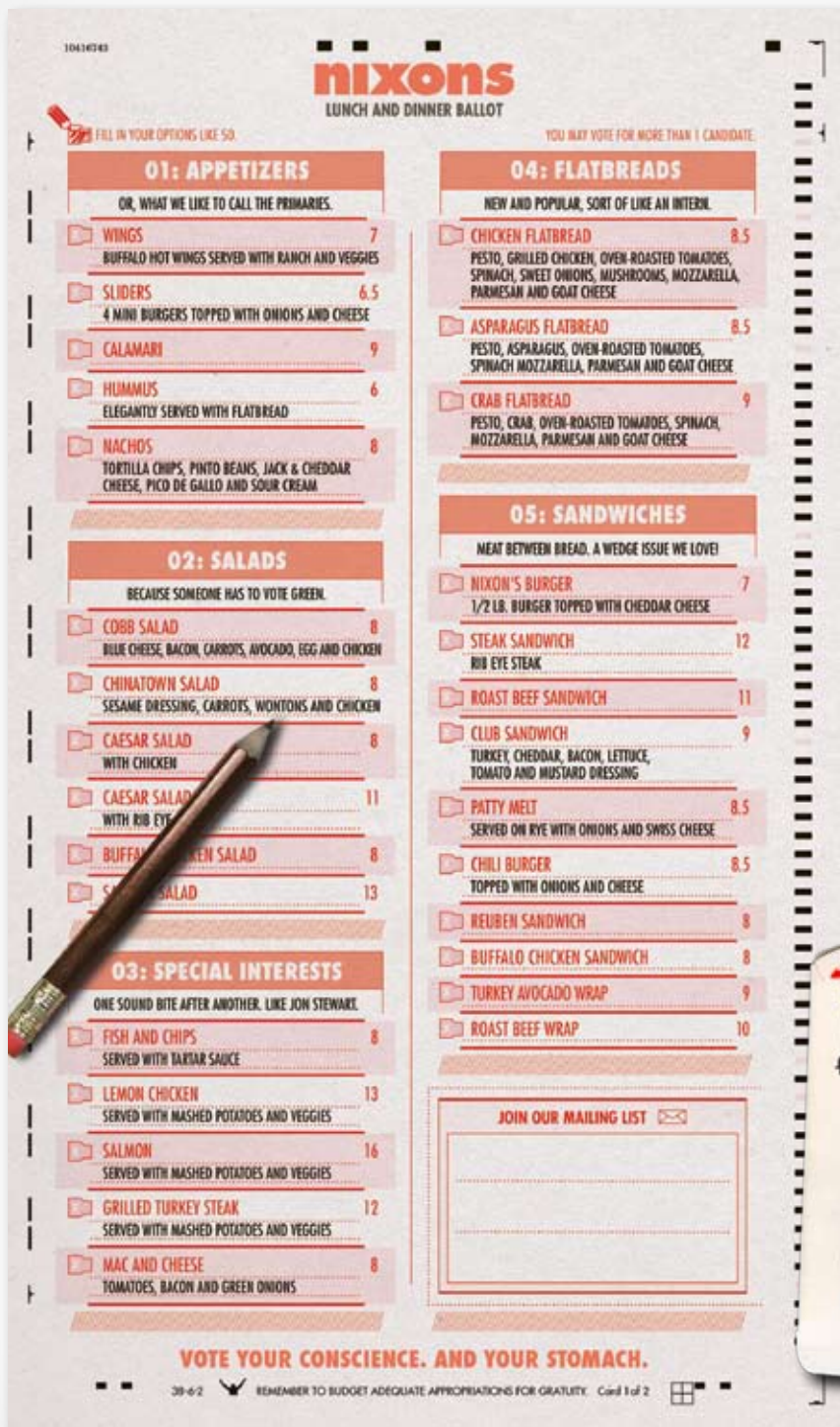


about it. Cover a wall with concepts addressing its main purpose. And as long as you stay realistic with your ideas, you'll eventually do something that will make it into your portfolio and show your boss that you:

- 1 Take your job seriously.
- 2 Have pride in the work that you produce.
- 3 Have an ego that doesn't prevent you from gladly toiling on the small stuff.
- 4 Are different from the other newbies who only complain about the quality of the jobs they're assigned and wonder why nothing ever changes.

Just one thing to keep in mind while you are traveling down this road: you're working on some of the toughest assignments that exist and you'll need to be very patient. You may strike out often and *waste* a lot of time. But the only way to discover which job has potential is to work at it and find out.

The following pages have a few examples of small jobs that were turned into something bigger, by some lowly creative out there who had the gumption to try. Me. (I promise to use more famous examples to prove a point in the future.)



◀◀ **Nixons Menu:** This job came in as a quick update for a typical, laminated (and ugly) menu for a politically-themed restaurant. A production artist and I took the time to give it an idea, design it appropriately, mock it up and present it. Of course the real credit goes to the client who had the courage to not only try something different, but to pay for it. It is currently in its second printing.

▼ **Rubios Holiday Gift Card:** Here's an assignment where the client (and maybe even our boss) would have been perfectly happy with a gift card updated to match their current look. However, a writer and I took the initiative to concept until we had something a little bit bigger, and then convinced Paul Howalt, an awesome illustrator to work for far less than what he was worth on the project. It ended up being a little bit cooler than it otherwise might have been - sales of this gift card were 30% higher than the previous year's version.

* The card slid out from the back of the van like a real surfboard would.





▲ **Arizona Office of Tourism Calendar of Events:** You really need to see the previous version of this to appreciate the improvement on what is supposed to be a simple listing of events. The piece below required the client to spend slightly more money than was budgeted, but the result was something they could be proud to take to tradeshows and exhibits. They didn't ask for such an elaborately designed brochure, but the extra effort showed that the agency was thoughtful in even the little jobs that came through for this tourism client.

▼ **The Garage, Self-Promotion CD Cover:** When I was the partner at a design studio / ad agency in Pittsburgh, we were busy doing a million things, but always tried to pay attention to the details. This insignificant CD cover always got a lot of attention. The chuckle it gave The Loafers Bread Company helped us win our very first full-time client. Good thing it didn't just say, 'Interactive Portfolio.'

▶▶ **Shutters On The Beach *Do Not Distrub* Sign:** This job came in as a rush, but a co-worker and I tried to tap into the feeling of this posh, seaside boutique. We came up with reasons why someone would need privacy at such a place (instead of just asking for it,) giving the guest a way to interact with the piece. Some of the choices were: Shhhhh, I am becoming one with my mini bar; If you can read this, then you are much too close; I am still in my jammies; and Come in, but only if you party like a rock star. This piece appealed to the celebrity guests of Shutters, and the celebrity-wannabes alike.

