



Yes!

By Tim Dietz – SSA VP, Communications & Government Relations

SSA Globe Advertising Director Tom Comi notes that Yes-Man is a relatively average Jim Carrey movie with a tired storyline. The official definition of a yes-man is: *a person who, regardless of actual attitude, always expresses agreement with his or her supervisor, superior, etc.; sycophant.*

For example, at NBC both *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* and the *Tonight Show with Jay Leno* had been beating all of the competition for years. The network brass wanted to keep both stars and to do so they had to keep both stars happy. So, they created a prime-time slot for Leno and moved O'Brien into the *Tonight Show*. They were being yes-men to their talent and in turn, their subordinates were probably yes-men to the brass telling them what a great idea it was. According to the first few weeks, it has been a disaster. Conan's ratings aren't close to what Leno enjoyed and most of Leno's new show is unwatchable.

The yes-man is usually more of a reflection of the insecurities and/or over-confidence of a "know-it-all" boss. Leadership guru Jack Welch characterizes the know-it-all boss in typical blunt fashion: *"Sometimes these blowhards get their swagger from a few positive experiences. But usually they're just victims of their own bad personalities. And you and your company are victims, too."*

A few years ago, I had a boss who, regardless of the request from upper management, would automatically just say yes. He could be told to paste himself all over with honey and climb into a tent full of bees—and he'd ask "bumbees or killer bees?"

That particular job was within a lobbying group. One time that boss wanted the yes-man to deliver a letter to a Congressional committee chairman that actually called him and his bill "absurd and ridiculous" and threatened to stop contributing to his campaigns. He delivered it and we lost the battle, I believe somewhat based on the ill-conceived, ego-driven, emotional response from the executive. You don't tell powerful elected officials that they are absurd and ridiculous, nor do you even mention campaign funding in the official course of advocacy.

That doesn't mean you have to be a yes-man to them either. If you truly disagree, which we all did in this case, a good supervisor (and, in this case, legislator) will respect you for disagreeing in a reasonable, measured approach. The most successful companies are those where the executives and workers disagree in a healthy way and debate ideas, sometimes to the point of frustration. Nobody's ideas are always right and sometimes the answer should simply be: no. ❖