

Saving lives his inspiration

'See something, say something' was adman's response to 9/11

After he became a hero, vendor Lance Orton advised his fellow New Yorkers to follow the principle that prompted him to alert police to the car bomb in Times Square.

"If you see something, say something," he said.

And, nobody was happier to see those words so ingrained in the hero vendor than the adman who coined the phrase nearly a decade ago, on the day after the attack on the World Trade Center.

"That's really what my goal was," Allen Kay said yesterday.

Kay is the CEO and chairman of Corey Kay & Partners advertising agency — a sort of modern-day version of "Mad Men." Like so many of us in the immediate

aftermath of 9/11, he was desperate to answer pure evil with whatever good he could summon in himself.

"I was trying to think what I could do," Kay recalled yesterday. "One thing I know how to do is advertising."

On 9/12, Kay was in his Manhattan office, asking himself the same question he and his colleagues did at the start of a big Honda campaign or when con-

ceiving a Xerox commercial for the Super Bowl.

"What kind of message would be best?"

He felt sure that other ad people would be doing "patriotic, waving the flag" campaigns.

"I was thinking what was really needed was an ounce of prevention," he said. "I thought what can I do in some way keeping a disaster like this from happening in the future?"

He recalled a famous phrase from World War II.

"'Loose lips sink ships' spread across the country," he said. "If I could come up with a 21st century version of that . . ."

He again considered what would be the best message in this new war.

"What really do I want to say?" he asked himself. "I want to say, 'People, be alert.'"

As always, the idea just popped into his head. He wrote it down on one of the 3X5 cards he keeps

handy for when inspiration strikes.

"IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING."

He had no doubts, no other tries, no alternatives.

"I knew it was right," he recalled.

His agency had done business with the MTA, and he figured this would be a perfect way to spread the message. He picked up the phone.

"Very shortly thereafter it was in the subway and buses and trains," he said.

The phrase kept spreading over the years, generating 159 million mentions on Google, imprinting itself on the psyches of even more individuals.

Those individuals included Orton, who was selling T-shirts on W. 45th St. Saturday evening when he saw something in the form of a suspiciously parked SUV emitting acrid smoke. He immediately said something to

the mounted cop he saw nearby, Police Officer Wayne Rhatigan.

Pure evil had returned to us in the person of somebody who would drive a car bomb into Times Square when it was packed with innocents — many of them children — enjoying a beautiful spring evening.

The materials with which he hoped to kill as many as he could are available everywhere, as available as the ingredients the would-be subway bombers used last fall.

Any would-be murderer can obtain them, whether he has international connections or not, is part of an organization or a lone psycho.

That means we need to remain vigilant. To help keep us watchful we have that phrase jotted on a 3X5 card on 9/12, when an urge to do good became a flash of inspiration.

"That's how ideas happen," Kaysaid.

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