



LIGHTS! CAMERA!  
ACTION! FUN!

## Make a Commercial. Win Scholarship Money. Get Famous.

As early as grade school, kids feel pressure to drink. Sometimes, the courage to say no can come from an older kid. That's what Courageous Persuaders is all about. High school students create television commercials targeted at middle school students, to warn them about the dangers of alcohol use. Students compete for scholarship money and Courage Trophies. The grand prize-winning commercial airs as a PSA on Michigan television stations. And, all of the participants get an invitation to a Hollywood-style awards banquet, some valuable experience, and most importantly, a chance to save lives.



### The Problem is Huge

As many as one-third of all high school students binge drink. And it is killing them! The three leading causes of death for 15- to 24-year-olds are auto crashes, homicides and suicides. Alcohol is a key factor in all three. Underage drinking costs Americans \$53 billion annually. Each year, more than 10,000 people ages 16 to 25 die as a result of alcohol-impaired driving.

### Peer Pressure is Peer Power

Teens are bombarded with negative imagery. They are the largest group of frequent moviegoers and they devour TV and commercial music. Dramatizations of teenage drinking by aspirational celebrities define their culture and influence their decisions. Straight talk alone is not enough.



The teenage years are transitional years. Many psychologists believe young adults are programmed to rebel in order to develop and find their own way. Approaches that rely solely on shock value and telling it like it is have had little impact.

Peer pressure is peer power. The most powerful influence on teenagers is peer pressure. While often encouraging risky behavior, peer pressure holds potential for positive influence if harnessed and directed.

Courageous Persuaders sets up an environment where positive peer pressure can effectively discourage underage drinking.

### Right for These Times

Courageous Persuaders runs on the creative power of youth and a minimum amount of money. Visit [CourageFirst.com](http://CourageFirst.com) and see how the program uses the Internet to communicate with students and process entries. A one-person part-time staff and volunteers from McCann Erickson Detroit help make it feel big.

The competition is launched each year with a poster mailed to Michigan Schools and a wire service press release. The program relies heavily on free publicity and buzz to get the word out.

### History

It all started with an idea at McCann Erickson Detroit, the Michigan office of the world's largest ad agency. McCann teamed up with District Judge Michael A. Martone and they held the first Courageous Persuaders competition in Troy, Michigan. In three short years Courageous Persuaders expanded to become statewide, attracting diverse entries from every corner of Michigan. In 2003, over 2,000 students participated, and the program continues to grow.



The Michigan Department of Education's Office of School Improvement has supported the program for the past several years by promoting it on its website and e-media, and by presenting awards at the awards banquet.

## Program Objectives

Raise awareness and change attitudes about the dangers of underage drinking among high school students. A secondary objective was to expose middle school students to positive role models – high school students taking a stand on this deadly issue.



Success was measured based on the level of participation and the depth of involvement from the participants, and by one-on-one interviews conducted with high school students that assessed the impact of the program on them.

Questionnaires were also administered to middle school students to gauge the effectiveness of the commercials produced by the high schoolers. Ratings on these questionnaires determined the winners.

## Key Insights

While the challenge to the high school students was to target middle school kids, the program itself was targeted at high school kids. The hypothesis was that by getting the high schoolers involved in the dynamics of the creative process – analyzing, researching, strategizing etc. – they would learn more about this serious issue and accept what they learn.

Key insights about our conceptual target were revealed in a McCann-Erickson proprietary study:

They are social on their own terms.

- Want to fit in, but crave their own identities.
- They are self-conscious, but aspire to be cool.

They see value in maturity, but at a price.

- Long for freedom of adulthood, but not responsibilities.
- They are young, but aspire to be older.
- They want to have fun, but be taken seriously.

They long to be empowered.

- Reject weakness, but aspire to be strong.
- They are dependent, but want control.
- Long to show the world they can handle the really tough issues.



## Sponsors

Sponsorship of Courageous Persuaders has been limited to small cash contributions for the scholarships and office expenses, and media leverage. The media loves Courageous Persuaders:

- *USA Today* is the largest supporter, running a 4-color ad congratulating the previous years' winners and promoting new entries, offering a special USA Today Courageous Leader Award for a teacher, and by funding one of the scholarships.
- *The Detroit News* has publicized the program in editorial and run the winner's ad.
- *US News* and *Sports Illustrated* have also run the winners ad.
- Viacom Outdoor donated outdoor board space and Metro Media produced the outdoor materials based on McCann's design.
- The Detroit Fox affiliate has been an ardent supporter, airing promos for the program, running the grand prize-winner PSA, and providing their popular news anchor, Huel Perkins (at right), to host the gala awards banquet, which is aired on public access TV across the state.



- McCann Erickson volunteers provide the underpinnings of the competition, producing all of the communications materials, designing and managing the website, creating the evaluation methodology, tabulating the entries and producing the Awards Show.
- The New York Life Insurance Company sponsored the awards banquet in 2003
- Other than a small grant from the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning and the U.S. Department of Transportation, there is been virtually no financial support of the competition.

## National & International Recognition

Courageous Persuaders was recognized in 2004 by several major international professional organizations, garnering a Gold Medal at The New York Festivals, a Silver Medal at the AME (Advertising Marketing Effectiveness) Awards and two "Outstanding Creativity" Awards at The Mobius Awards in Los Angeles. These awards recognized the high schools, the students, one of the sponsors (The Adcraft Club of Detroit), a Detroit Photographer, Yessian Music, McCann Erickson Detroit and Judge Michael Martone, as well as the program itself.



### 2004 Courageous Persuaders Awards Summary

Award	Award	Won Award For...	Credits
<b>MOBIUS (International)</b>	"Outstanding Creativity" Integrated Communications	"Binge Thinking" Campaign	McCann Erickson Detroit Courageous Persuaders James Haefner Photography
<b>MOBIUS (International)</b>	"Outstanding Creativity" Specialty Advertising	"The Effects of Alcohol" Student TV Commercial	McCann Erickson Detroit Courageous Persuaders Adcraft Club of Detroit Yessian Music Dearborn High School (Elaine Strutz)
<b>AME (International)</b>	Silver Marketing Effectiveness Public Service	"Binge Thinking" Campaign	McCann Erickson Detroit Courage First Foundation
<b>New York Festivals (International)</b>	Gold "Special Recognition"	"Courageous Persuaders" Concept	McCann Erickson Detroit Courage First Foundation Troy High School Emily Badhorn James Berg Robin Geggie Sandra Matty

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