When does proactivity become a thorn in the side?

MediaCom UK Intern Francesco Granati explains how he is learning to choose wisely...

You are a child and you are in the car with your parents. And you have the most important, pressing question you have ever thought of stuck in your mind. It is almost numbing. It's an obsession on the brink of taking you over.

"Are we there yet?"

Then you get that same old look from your parents, the one you will probably give your own children at some point in your life. And their answer always stays the same:
"We're almost there."

It's almost mind blowing when you realise that having the answer doesn't change how you feel. You just want to ask again. You just want to be a little bit of a nag. In five minutes you know you'll ask again. And by then your dad will probably scream out 'Serenity now! Serenity now!' like Frank Costanza in Seinfeld.

As an intern, one of the first things I'm quickly trying to learn is the right balance between being proactive and being a nag. I'm constantly asking myself, what is the point of my question? Am I coming off as a restless thorn in the side? And, if I don't ask any questions, does it look like I'm not using my initiative?

When I talked about this with my dad, his reaction was bemusing. "If I had an intern today," he said, "I wouldn't know what tasks to give him." Basically, he said he would have to put some serious effort into finding a worthwhile task for an intern, increasing his own workload in the process. It would be have to be something interesting - not too boring and dumb - but also something with no real responsibilities. He also said, however, that he would go crazy if the intern kept prodding him every few minutes for something new to do.

This isn't to say that at MediaCom no one knows what to do with an intern, of course. But nonetheless, these bits and pieces of fatherly wisdom are accompanying me during my period here. One thing's for sure: it's not a walk in the park. I know how busy everyone is, and I don't want to be a thorn in the side, but I also want to be proactive and take the initiative. Knowing how much work there is to do makes me really appreciate how patient people
have been with me, and how often people have been ready to take the time to clarify things with me. I won't identify anyone specifically - the list would be too long! - but I'd like to thank everyone for doing this.

Arnold Schwarzenegger once said that one of his rules for success is to 'Give something back' and be thankful for what you have received. I hope that in the near future I will be able to give something back to everyone who has put the time in for me.

The truth of the week is that finding the balance between being proactive and being annoying is a mission even Ethan Hunt would have to think twice about before accepting. However, the quest for this balance is accompanied by people who are willing to help, and by the gratitude that follows.