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WITH A SUCCESSFUL and storied career for various big-name players in the industry and several books under her belt, Judy Bell knows retail design. She also knows how to run a meeting, train an employee, build an effective team and have a conversation with the CEO. In this bi-issue column, we ask our readers to bring her their toughest challenges in navigating the workplace in a creativity-driven environment. Have a question? Simply “Ask Judy” by sending your anonymous inquiries to jessie.dowd@emeraldexpo.com.



My team is filled with half great talent, and half “B” players. What’s your recommendation for pushing the “B” players up or helping them find jobs that are more suitable?

– The A-Team in New York

Judy: Strip away the “A” and “B” designation for a minute. Every individual has unique skills and talents. When collaborating on a project, a variety of skills can complement each other and produce better results. Can you take a look at your team through a fresh lens and rediscover their strengths? Try the following exercise, designed to rest and reset busy minds, and then open the door to a broader awareness of every individual’s star qualities.

***Part 1:** Take a 20-minute time-out with your team to practice the Japanese art of *Shinrin-Yoku*, also known as “forest bathing.” Go for a walk on a nature trail, ripe with sensory sights, sounds and

scents. Do not speak—listen to the sounds of nature. If any outside thoughts come into your mind, tune in again to nature.

***Part 2:** Now go inside to a space where your team can spread out and work privately. Ask them to make a list of their favorite skills and talents. What makes them come alive? When are they most confident? Encourage them to write freely and creatively. Work alongside them to create your own list. Here are a few examples:

Hunter/Gatherer: Researches media like news, magazines, books, etc. to determine what potential shoppers are thinking about.

Storyteller: Engages groups with humor and fun while communicating trends and ideas.

Inventor: Pulls together disparate ideas to create something unusual and engaging.

***Part 3:** Get the group back together to share their lists. Begin a discussion on how they can elevate their best skills to an expert level, through headquarters training programs or by identifying a mentor. Then look at a few current projects and talk about how each member of the team can contribute by using their unique talents.

By focusing on strengths and engaging your team on equal footing, you will be laying the groundwork for a collaborative environment that can raise your entire team to a whole new level.



When do you tell a client to take a hike when they keep changing the project scope, but won’t change the design fee?

– Increasingly Frustrated Designer

Judy: Design projects are always somewhat fluid by nature. Remaining open to the shifts that occur along the way can unlock the door to an unexpected creative eloquence.

Rigidly following a proposal to the letter automatically limits an inspired spirit on either side: design firm or client. Why not build in a “blue sky” clause to all design proposals to cover and even encourage changes and expansion of projects? Make the idea of change part of the process and embrace it, with the promise of a real departure from the ordinary, to something that will engage retail shoppers in a new way.

In your case, it sounds like you are attempting to follow a set proposal, and I’m assuming that you’ve already spoken to the client about the affect of their changes on your time and budget—to no avail, from the frustrated tone of your



I have been at the same company for a long time and have hit what I believe is the top spot for me. I want to ensure that I have a bright future—should I move on?

—Ready For More

Judy: Kudos to you for making it to the “top of your game” in your company! Something tells me that you have everything in place to take the next step toward the bright future you desire. But, before you step outside the door, have you taken advantage of the benefits of being settled

into a position? Knowing how to do a job backwards and forwards can open up space in your schedule to participate in opportunities in the retail design community.

Turn your attention to networking at events (like the design:retail Forum), where leaders gather once a year in various cities to hear inspiring presentations on the latest trends and pressing topics, explore shopping hotspots and dine at foodie feasts. Or what about volunteering your time to PAVE by joining committees for events like the PAVE Gala? Once you begin to volunteer, you’ll be working alongside industry leaders and other volunteer opportunities will open up. By making your mark there, you may be invited to serve on design boards that reach across the industry. All of this networking will serve you well as you explore your next career move. And who knows—your most significant career opportunity may emerge naturally from taking time to give back! (P.S. If your company doesn’t cover the cost of retail design industry conferences and events, take a few vacation days, pick up the tab and invest in your own future by “building” your personal brand in a larger arena.)

question. If I’m following your predicament correctly, then you might want to consider:

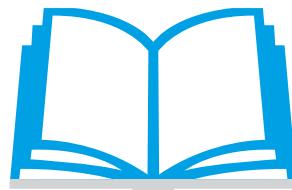
• **The integrity and reputation of your firm.**

Follow through and complete the project. Take responsibility for not factoring in extra time and budget for the natural flow of the design process and resulting shift in project scope.

• **The potential for future work with the client.**

Evaluate outlying opportunities and then, if you’d like to try another round, build in that “blue sky” clause to your proposal. Have a careful discussion with your client about your previous project, how the creative design process works, and ask them to sign off on this new provision that will benefit them by leading to more innovative solutions.

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I think I am burning out. What are some ways to refresh and revitalize my creative spirit?

—Midwest Burnout

Judy: “Burnout” was coined by a psychologist named Herbert Freudenberger in his 1974 paper, “Staff Burn-Out,” and later in his 1980 book, “Burnout: The High Cost of High Achievement.” It is defined as “a loss of drive, motivation or incentive, resulting from the demands of a particular job that have taken an emotional or spiritual toll on a person” in “Words that Make a Difference” by Robert Greenman.

There are a multitude of books on the subject that might help you to diagnose what is behind your thinking. Or you can begin by asking yourself a few questions: Is it the work that no longer motivates me? Is it my boss? Is it my colleagues? Is

it the company culture? Is it job location? Answers to questions like these will have a direct impact on your plan to refresh and revive.

Julia Cameron has written multiple books on creativity. Ten years ago, I began working with a small group of people from a variety of professions to study her books, beginning with “The Artist’s Way.” We continue to meet today. My personal favorite is “The Artist’s Way Workbook,” which serves as an effective shortcut for someone with a busy schedule by offering highlights from “The Artist’s Way” book. It is filled with questions and exercises to help you explore your personal creative practices. Without too much reading, you can dive right into the “good stuff.” I dated my entries, and then some years later, I went back through the book entering new information. In this way, I was able to track my progress in my professional and personal growth. The practices I developed there have been a continual source of inspiration.

JUDY BELL IS THE FOUNDER OF ENERGETIC RETAIL (ENERGETIC-RETAIL.COM) AND AUTHOR OF “SILENT SELLING.” SHE HELD AN INSPIRATIONAL ROLE FOR 22 YEARS AT TARGET CORP. AND NOW SHARES HER INSIGHTS ON NAVIGATING THE CREATIVE WORKPLACE WITH DESIGN:RETAIL IN THIS BI-ISSUE COLUMN.