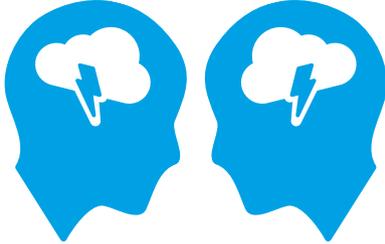


ADVICE FOR CREATIVES NAVIGATING THE WORKPLACE



I have some great ideas around the consumer experience that I think would be particularly appropriate to the online side of the business, but there seems to be a big gulf between the brick-and-mortar creative and online creative. Any suggestions on ways to find a common, more productive ground?

– *Yearning for Collaboration*

Judy: I'm willing to bet that the online creatives have plenty of ideas for brick and mortar, too. How can you open up an idea exchange to both sides? First, identify

one or more online creatives as partners and brainstorm a variety of ways to develop and share ideas. List the top two or three strategies and schedule time with the directors of your departments to present your ideas. Here is one strategy to get you started:

Creative Collaboration Challenge

Who: Ask for volunteers to participate on teams that combine one online expert and one in-store expert.

What: Blue Sky Idea Generation.

Where: Coffee shop brainstorm sessions for each team of two.

How: Each expert offers his/her ideas for the other expert's category. Collaborate and fine-tune the ideas. Produce mock-ups of the team's favorite online and in-store ideas. Present the ideas in a joint online and in-store staff meeting. Department directors decide which ideas move forward to be tested. What's next? Continue this process quarterly or semi-annually. Even if this is a one-time test, the door will be cracked open to future idea-sharing and collaboration across online and in-store teams.



JUDY BELL
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While it would be great to live in New York, San Francisco or Miami, such is not the case. I work in an organization, I have a boss, and it's all about the numbers and the deadlines. I am trying to find ways to get him/her to appreciate the "finer things," sometimes pointing him or her to websites/magazines. Any thoughts on how to light the creative fires of my spreadsheet colleague?

– *Searching for Creative Kerosene*

Judy: Early in my career, I worked as a visual merchandiser for a chain of specialty stores. We purchased props to create displays in our windows, but we didn't go to market. We didn't even know there were markets. We'd order our props from factory reps like Charlie and Rosie. A charming older married couple, they would fly in to Minneapolis from New York and lay out a wide variety of silk flowers on their bed in their hotel room. As we looked on, they held up the hand-crafted flowers one by one and presented each

to us with pride. We loved it when they visited us—they felt like family. Earl Dann of Dann Dee Display would come in from Chicago. He'd flip open his briefcase (I can still hear the "snap, snap" of the brass closures) as we sat side-by-side on a bench in the food court at Southdale Mall. He introduced his store fixtures to us as if they were sparkling and diamond-studded. But most exciting was Ken Albright of Seven Continents, who flew in from Toronto and entered our office, his arms filled with vibrantly colored parasols from northern Thailand and other global treasures.

A few years later, my boss left the company and I was named visual merchandising director. The sales reps who came in began telling me about retail design markets in San Francisco and New York. They raved about what they called "the show." Intrigued with their enthusiasm, I talked with my boss about the markets and, in time, I was given approval to book my ticket to San Francisco for WAVM, the Western Association of Visual Merchandising. Once you've been to Oz—you know the rest. However, budgets were tight and the trips were seldom funded.

Down the road, I interviewed at a major retailer



and said that I wouldn't consider the visual merchandising position unless there was a budget to go to market. They agreed, I took the job and off I went to New York for the December show. A director in another department of the company got wind of it and didn't think it was a good use of funds. He told me, "We get our ideas here," as he pointed to his head. I said, "I do, too, but New York is a powerful idea generator."

Time passed, and lo and behold, he joined me on a trip to New York. The two of us were standing in Times Square together, surrounded by the energy and lights and billboards, including a steaming cup of noodles on a 25-story-high skyscraper. He looked

around and said, “Now I get it. I understand why you come here for ideas and inspiration.”

After that we both lived happily ever after, collaborating and speaking a common language. You may not be able to motivate your boss to travel to New York, but how about a competitive shopping trip for a couple of hours at a nearby mall? Do some prep work. Walk the mall on your own and identify five to 10 innovations. Examples might include unique fixtures, signing with unusual messages or a new way to display product. Think about how you could combine some of the ideas, or give them a new twist to fit your company brand. Invite your boss to walk the mall with you and point out your findings. Offer a few ideas that you would like to test and track sales. If you are given the green light, grab the opportunity and do whatever it takes to make the strategy

a success. There is no better way to get someone’s attention and support than an increase in sales. Once that happens, thank your boss for collaborating with you on the project. Now you have a path to raise the stakes and talk about a trip to GlobalShop. Use the same process. Pre-walk the show on your own and identify a few innovative ideas. Then spend a half-day with your boss on the show floor to discuss collaborating on a new series of sales-driving tests. Think BIG—next destination, New York City! 

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. SEND YOUR QUESTIONS FOR “ASK JUDY” TO JESSIE.DOWD@EMERALDEXPO.COM.



What do you think about the concept of working from home (WFH)?

– *Future Remote Employee*

Judy: I have traveled around the block a few times with working from home, always eager to stretch my toes and boundaries. When I was working full time in a corporation, I experimented with WFH in three ways: Tuesdays and Fridays WFH, Fridays only WFH, and full time in the office with an occasional afternoon WFH. I can vouch for working from home; it increased my focus and productivity. And I wasn’t just imagining it. Whartons’ blog in January 2016 introduced a book: “Deep Work, Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World.” An excerpt from the book examined how Adam Grant, the highest-rated and youngest tenured professor at Wharton, made his achievements “by leveraging the following law of productivity: High-Quality Work Produced = (Time Spent) x (Intensity of Focus).”

First I tried working from home two days a week and found that too many of my projects required in-person collaboration. So I tried working from home just one day a week. I chose Fridays, because they were designated “no

meeting” days at the office. I found that Fridays at home were a great way to catch up on emails or wrap up projects that required writing and quiet time. But after a while, I missed the relaxed nature and fun of Fridays in the office and abandoned my home office experiment. Some of the most productive meetings in my career took place in office elevators, hallways and lobbies, and I wanted to be present to take advantage of spontaneous opportunities and synchronicities. So I settled on an occasional home office session for projects that required hours of uninterrupted focus.

If you are contemplating working from home, here are four important considerations:

- 1) Capacity for self-motivation:** Can you rise each morning committed and enthusiastic?
- 2) Work style:** Do you prefer to collaborate or work alone?
- 3) Work assignment:** What do your projects generally require? Quiet blocks of time or collaboration?
- 4) Networking opportunities:** Are you content with your current position and projects or would you like to explore other opportunities in your corporation?

Those who prefer little social interaction may find that working from home is the most productive for them. In any case, I believe it’s beneficial to work inside the corporate office at least a few days a week. There is no substitute for in-person interaction with your colleagues.