

# The advertising game is a strange one

By  Robyn Oettlé

18 Dec 2015

Essentially what you're selling is creativity, which means that any creative team--copywriters, art directors, editors, animators and designers--is an agency's most important asset.

When it comes to managing them, however, typical staff management principles don't necessarily apply. The term 'herding cats' seems to be an industry go-to when asked what it's like to manage a creative team, because that's just what it is: the coordination of many groups and many personalities, each completely different and each predisposed with something completely arb. Cats.

Yes, any team is made up of different personalities, but creatives are not only different--they're completely different to everyone else. And that means managing them in a way that is both good for business as well as good for their own creativity.

According to research published in NeuroImage in 2014, numerous detailed scans revealed that the artistic groups had significantly more grey matter in an area of the brain called the precuneus in the parietal lobe. This region is involved in a range of functions but potentially in things that could be linked to creativity, like visual imagery--being able to manipulate visual images in your brain, combine them and deconstruct them.



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The structure of the brain is able to adapt and change due to training and practice, proving that creativity can be learnt or mastered, as well as genetically inherited. It is therefore important for creatives to \*practice\* and develop the brain muscle just as any professional sportsman would. This can be done in many different ways: recreationally, socially or the most common nowadays, through technology.

That said, when it comes to time management and managing deadlines around creatives most people in a managerial position tend to struggle. Creative people are a particular type of personality; they operate differently, and have their own timeframes. Often, creative people are given a lot more time and or freedom to allow them to be creative.

As managers it is important to understand the importance of allowing them this luxury: time to look and scour the internet for inspiration, do research and explore new and current trends in the industry and beyond. This exercise is often misunderstood and seen as procrastination (and in some instances it is), however there is a fine line between ensuring productivity and stomping out creative freedom and the way to manage this is in the detail.

The truth is that creatives are also easily distracted, and once they get on a path it is often hard for them to stop and realign their thinking. By simply structuring their creative downtime (through exercises like brainstorming sessions) one can ensure that they don't get too carried away, but still have the freedom to flex their creative muscle.

One of the most important aspects to understand is the need for a creative climate. As Leif Denti of the University of Gothenburg explains it: "A climate can be seen as various aspects of the psychological atmosphere in a team and the surrounding organisational environment. The climate often conveys expectations about which behaviours and attitudes that are acceptable." In the creativity research field there have been many attempts to conceptualise the idea of a creative climate (i.e. such a climate that facilitates outcomes that are creative).



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The six main themes evident in research are: challenge, intellectual debate, flexibility and risk taking, top management support, positive superior relations and positive interpersonal exchange. What's interesting is that there is a direct link between maintaining a creative climate and research detailing key creative traits and the fact that they enjoy being challenged within their creative climate.

When it comes to herding these cats we call creatives, we need to understand them and then manage them around their key traits and characteristics. In a feature for the *Elite Daily*, columnist Paul Hudson describes five traits that 'creatives have that other people don't understand'--traits that managers should always be aware of.' They are, in no particular order:

that creatives see the world differently, that they're often introverted, that they don't judge their abilities the way others do, that they're emotional and that they tend to be dreamers.

Simply being cognisant of this means that half the battle is already won.

Because they're such emotional creatures you have to let them know that you've taken the time to understand them and provide them with the top management support that they're looking for. Always allow them the space to think and dream, but, in the same breath, monitor them to ensure they're being productive.

Who knows--if you're able to find a good balance between the two you might just find yourself herding from afar.

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