

BONUS CHAPTER

CREATIVE EXECUTIVE PROFILES

NORM SHEARER



Norm Shearer, creative Director and partner of Cactus in Denver embraces his employees' outside endeavors. But this support has not always been for the benefit of the agency. Shearer points out that people can be very entrepreneurial if they are given the opportunity. Shearer believes this is part of what makes his job enjoyable. "Honestly, it kind of makes it more fun,"

he adds. "It's not about drinking the Cactus Kool-Aid, it's about [how] we want people to have lives outside of Cactus." Though employees work hard, Shearer believes that you do not have to sacrifice your outside life for the sake of creativity. "It's not about getting people, burning them out, lighting a fire underneath them, milking every ounce of creativity that they have in two years and then they move on to a different job."

The support system at Cactus has naturally led to employee satisfaction within the company, "We really like the family atmosphere we have." This familial environment has caused the agency to ac-

cept that people, when their entrepreneurial talents are encouraged, might leave. Regardless of how wonderful an employee, Shearer says, “That’s kind of fun too, to see people go off and do their own thing.”

For all of the agencies open-mindedness, Shearer is adamant about one ideal: The agency does not intentionally motivate people. “I would say we just give people a good environment, a helpful environment where they feel like they’re supported and nurtured,” he says. “We give them a challenge that’s sort of fun to figure out and then get out of their way.” He also says this theory would fail if the agency did not hire the right people.

Shearer believes the agency is always trying to hire the most intriguing people, and those individuals do not have to be advertising gurus. “We’ve hired a lot of people from different types of backgrounds, different types of industries.” According to Shearer, doing so helps to ensure that Cactus’s employees are inspired by their own lives, not just their agency life. “You don’t come here to get inspired, I would say, you come here to inspire us

with your thoughts, with your previous life experience,” he says.

Regardless of the creative energy Cactus embodies, failures do sometimes happen. Aside from the regular agency failures of poorly received pitches and unsuccessful campaigns, Shearer believes there are other types of failure to embrace and learn from. Sometimes, regardless of success, Cactus employees are just not happy with what they produce. “There’s a lot of times we solve our clients’ problems but maybe we’re not happy with the end results of the work for whatever reason,” he says. Shearer states that work sometimes does not come out the way it was envisioned, but it is important to move forward.

At the end of the day, it is the clients who drive the creative ideas. Shearer understands that clients expect unexpected ideas. “I think it’s about getting people who’ve worked in different industries or have sort of interesting backgrounds.” He believes this diversity of ideas is an important factor for success.

ALEX BOGUSKY



Alex Bogusky believes that creativity is an essential element of humanity. He thinks that we are all creative, but creativity does not come easy. “It’s very common in an

agency for certain people you know in other departments to say ‘Well, I’m not creative.’... and it

has always bothered me.” Bogusky believes that those who claim to lack creativity are hiding behind a facade of excuses developed by barriers within the industry. These have sectioned people into different positions, and “creative” has become just another department.” Even in our industry we have a department called ‘creative’... that’s probably a mistake. I’ve been trying to figure out how to undo that one for a long time without taking the name off,” he says.

Titles aside, all creative personalities differ from one another. Collaboration has become an essential element in the creative process, where everyone works together to move forward bit by bit. According to Alex, the real trick is to find the right mix of people. “In advertising we work in teams,” he says. “Teams have a very specific chemistry I believe. And it’s not that easy to pinpoint, but I think you need one thinker and you need one engine.”

These ‘thinkers’ and ‘engines’ on creative teams come from very diverse backgrounds, and that fact has led to Bogusky’s theory of how culture defines your behavior. To test this idea in the office, Bogusky will try different hairstyles and hair lengths, some of which may be viewed as counter-culture. According to his observations, others see the changes in his hair as a signal to discrepancies about his political beliefs. “People sometimes believe that they are living outside of the rules of culture,” he notes.

Despite unique backgrounds and cultural differences, Bogusky has noticed one commonality in his creatives. “[They are] people who tended to feel isolated and that also were analyzing cultures from afar. That seems to be something that at least in advertising is a real asset,” he says. Additionally

these people who work in the traditional creative department are aware they are creative, “And once you’re comfortable with that idea, that’s about all we can do for them individually,” Bogusky says.

The team nature of advertising lends itself well to a concept Bogusky calls “Delusional Positivity.” Because creative work is highly scrutinized, it is important to maintain an upbeat atmosphere. “Delusional positivity is really about supporting each other,” he says, “We have lot’s of good things that happen around the office and lots of good things win and we celebrate those, constantly.”

The ideas surrounding creativity are constantly changing and Bogusky believes he has an idea what the future will bring. “What’s coming is really a world where everyone is flexing their creativity all the time. I don’t know what that looks like because it commoditizes creativity, which is scary for a guy who has been making his living off selling ideas,” he says. For someone who lacks Bogusky’s positive attitude, this idea of the future might be somewhat daunting but he’s fine with it. “I’m not so worried about that, because I really am excited about living in a world where creativity is a commodity,” he notes. “That feels like a cool world.”