

AUGUST 2012

JACKSONVILLE MAGAZINE'S

904

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MANAGEMENT

Does creative leadership
lead to bottom line success?

HIGHER EDUCATION

You're never too old to
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GAME ON

Not all sports leagues
are created equal



Mary Fisher and her creative team

CREATIVE TYPES

Success in advertising, marketing and design requires hard work, diligence and attention to detail. And, maybe a break for recess.

In many ways, running a creative agency is just like running any other business; owners worry about the bottom line and they manage expenses tightly. Like any other business, they aim to recruit the best talent, except that the talent really has to have... well, talent. Mary Harvey runs Agency à la Carte, a staffing and recruiting firm for creative and marketing professionals. It's her job to know talent when she sees it and to find the right match for an agency, whether it's for an interim or permanent position.

Identifying creative talent is an art form, and hard to describe, she says; you just know it when you see it. But she also judges talent by how easy someone is to work with. If he has the reputation of being difficult, it's just not worth it, no matter how great his work may be. Despite their reputation, Harvey

says that creative people are not more challenging to manage. "That's a myth, and unfair to the great people I know in the industry," she says. They're not difficult, she says, but their task is—to put out great work on demand.

Mike Guiry is the creative director at the Robin Shepherd Group, a Riverside firm founded by fine artist Robin Shepherd. Guiry agrees that a creative staff can't wait around for inspiration to hit it; for Guiry, leadership is about getting his staff to deliver fresh ideas consistently. "You may not be inspired by the product or the client, but you have to do great work anyway. So you look for creative wins in every piece: an unexpected graphic or image, or a great headline with catchy word play. That's how you keep your head in the game."

The Robin Shepherd Group

allows, and even encourages, staff to do projects on their own that keep the creative juices flowing. Their employees blog, design, perform improvisational comedy and play in a rock band. "Play" is the operative word; it's part of what keeps creative workers' ideas fresh.

That's one of the big differences between creative agencies and other companies; play is a big part of the corporate culture. Walk through these agencies' spaces, and you'll find stimulation for all the senses. Fine art or cartoons on the walls, musical instruments standing in the corner, finger puppets and sock monkeys on the desks. It's not uncommon for staff members to shoot some hoops out back to clear their minds. Good leaders understand how important play is, and how important rest is. A *Psychology Today* article on "The Creative Mind" says:

"When necessary, [creative people] can focus like a laser beam; when not, creative types immediately recharge their batteries. They consider the rhythm of activity followed by idleness or reflection very important for the success of their work."

Tim Kinney is vice president and principal at Brunet-Garcia, which was founded by husband and wife team Jorge and Diane Brunet-Garcia in 2003. Brunet-Garcia has 20 employees and is rapidly outgrowing its San Marco storefront. Kinney says that finding and keeping great creative talent requires a unique mindset. "Creative people value different things," he says. "They need time and space to think, to clear their minds and reconnect with their ideas, and to play. That's how you motivate them."

Mary Fisher, who founded Mary Fisher Design in 1989, firmly believes in the power of play. Her firm recently acquired a battery-operated flying fish that keeps things lively between meetings. Fisher does believe that managing creative people takes more skill. She finds them to be more easily distracted; their keen observation skills and response to sensory input means that you have to help them manage deadlines more carefully. Fisher accomplishes that by paying only for billable hours, and she allows her staff to follow their instincts and put in hours when they feel most creative. That may be at 11 PM, and that's fine with her. Work when you're ready and feeling most creative, she says—as long as deadlines are met.

John Fricks is all about results. He moved to Jacksonville in February of this year from Atlanta, where he owned a firm that he sold in 2005. He's the new kid in town, and was recruited to take over the leadership of the Scott McCrae Group, the oldest firm in the city that was established in 1968.

He brings the advantage of a new perspective to the agency and the experience to back it up. His agency took 13 Fortune

200 companies to the top of their class in growth. You'd recognize the names: Papa John's Pizza, ValuJet Airlines, The Home Shopping Network and the Disney Channel are among them. There's no doubt in his mind that good creative leadership is about getting results for the client. Results are easy to agree upon, he says: more sales, more clicks, more mentions for your client. It's how you get the results that makes the work interesting.

Like many creative agency owners, Jennifer Holland has a small core staff, but has access to a large network of creative specialists across the country. She runs Holland Creative, a brand strategy firm that was established in 1997. She's part of a network of 20 firms that are run by certified branding strategists that share talent, allowing them to find the best person for any job.

Sharing talent is another way in which creative firms are different from other kinds of companies. Creative workers are not neces-

sarily motivated by security. They have always embraced the idea of freelancing, coming together for projects, then moving on to work with other companies on new projects. It's one of the ways they stay fresh and interested, and a way for companies to find specialists in certain industries or skills. The agreement allows the two parties to part ways after a project with no hard feelings, an arrangement that could work in other industries with a bit of flexibility.

Creative people talk about their work differently than other professionals, but Holland wishes it weren't that way. "Every industry would benefit from the things we value," she says. "Every company—no matter what they do—should talk about concepts like passion, inspiration and play; just think how it might transform their workplace." ■

Candace Moody is VP Communications at First Coast Workforce Development, which serves six counties in Northeast Florida.

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

It doesn't come with a red carpet laden with celebrities, but the ADDY Awards bring something far more concrete to the table than any glammed-up Hollywood extravaganza.

Much more than a simple award contest for excellence in the advertising and design community, the ADDY awards operate in conjunction with the American Advertising Federation on local, district and national levels. As the world's largest advertising competition, the nomination process is rigorous and thorough.

"It's kind of a three-tiered process," says Aerien Kloske, senior art director and studio manager for Brunet-Garcia Advertising, and chair of the 2012 regional ADDY Awards ceremony that took place on February 11. "Different agencies, students and freelancers make their submissions, and then three judges fly out from different parts of the country to judge the top 20 percent from each district. From there, they narrow it down and move on to nationals."

While winning an ADDY certainly looks good from a face-value standpoint, it also helps generate excitement and interest in a particular firm or individual, helping lead to increased business. This year, Jorge Brunet-Garcia's agency collected three national gold ADDY awards and one silver ADDY, and he's convinced that the time devoted to compiling entries was well spent. St. John & Partners, another local creative agency, claimed two national silver ADDY awards for posters created for the Wounded Warrior Project.

"Entering and winning award shows encourages everyone at the agency—not only creatives—to do their best work. It emboldens our clients to abandon their insecurities and constraints and demand more from us."

It also brings welcomed attention to our agency and, as a byproduct, helps us increase sales and expand our client base," Brunet-Garcia says. "Bottom line, awards are good for business, but more than anything, beating the competition and winning feels great." ■ *words by Mike Hall*



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