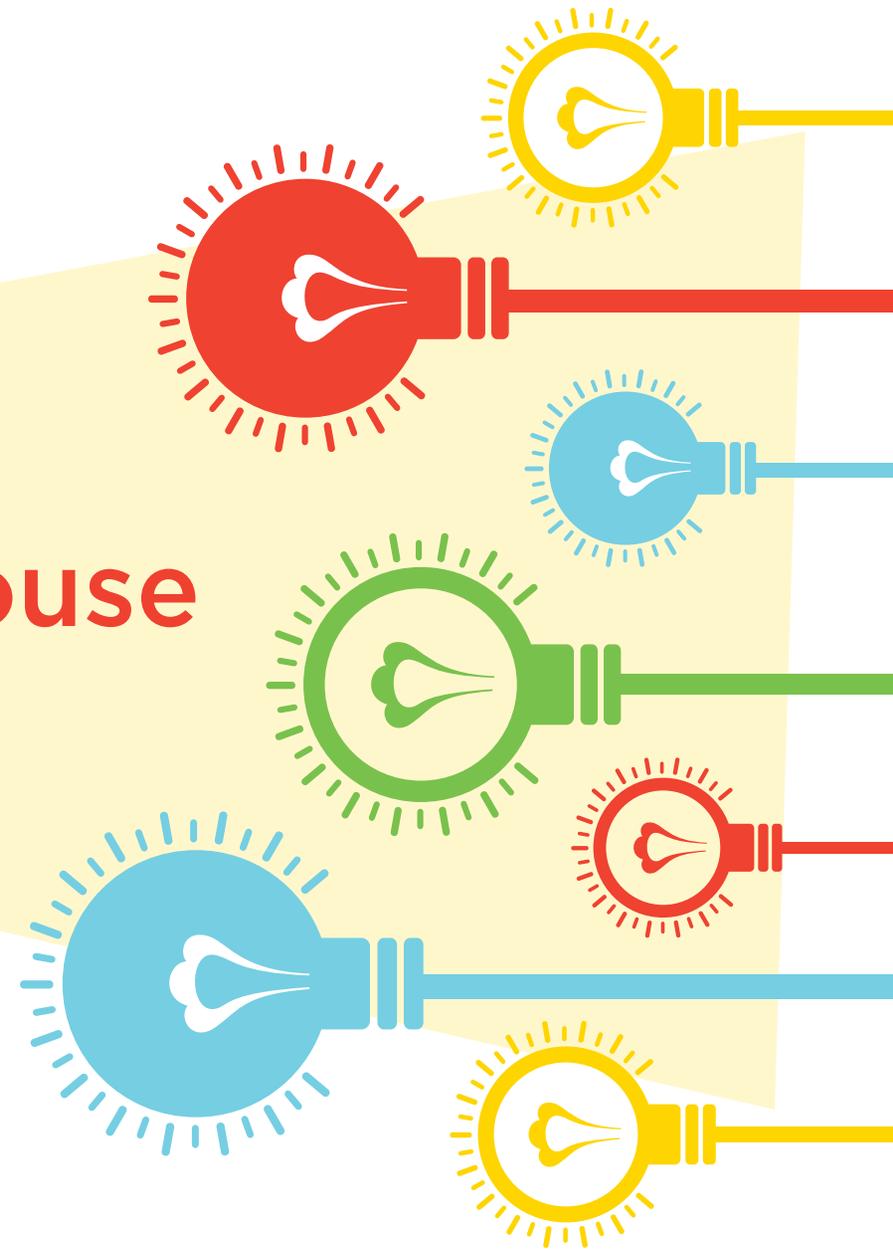


CREATIVE TEAM
OF THE **FUTURE**

INNOVATION IN THE HOUSE

Creativity Lessons From **Five Top In-House** Creative Teams



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Introduction: Inventing the Future



Although businesses can learn a lot from looking back at past successes and failures, those that look forward often make the greatest strides. To help you focus on the future, The Creative Group (TCG), a leading creative staffing agency, has once again partnered with AIGA, the professional association for design, to continue **The Creative Team of the Future** program.

For this year's research, we spoke with and surveyed more than 750 creative practitioners across the country to find out where the industry is heading. Our research confirmed that creativity is the lifeblood of the most successful – and satisfied – people and teams. The freedom to innovate is what allows designers, writers and other creative professionals to avoid career stagnation and invent the future, both for themselves and their companies.

At the same time, keeping a creative edge poses a challenge for many teams. More than one-quarter (26 percent) of the in-house professionals we surveyed said their team “plays it much too safe” when it comes to creative risk-taking. Another 45 percent said they do some risk-taking but not enough. And when asked how empowered they feel by their manager to take creative risks, less than a quarter (23 percent) of respondents said they feel very empowered. Clearly, there is room to grow.

To help you harness this power, we interviewed members of the advisory committee of **INitiative**, a joint program with AIGA to support in-house designers. The INitiative advisory committee members also happen to be creative leaders at five innovative organizations: Disney's Yellow Shoes Creative Group, McKesson, National Parks Conservation Association, Square and Target. These leaders gave us an inside look at how they're inventing the future – and how you can, too. We also explored other trends shaping the industry, many of which tie back to something truly basic but often forgotten in today's digital world: building authentic human connections.

You can find additional information about The Creative Team of the Future, including our latest survey data and expert interviews, on the **TCG Blog**. Or contact the TCG office nearest you by calling **1.888.846.1668** or visiting creativegroup.com.

“There's really no secret about our approach. We keep moving forward – opening up new doors and doing new things – because we're curious. And curiosity keeps leading us down new paths. We're always exploring and experimenting.”

– Walt Disney

12 Insider Creativity Tips



1. Be open to failure - from yourself and teammates.

It's often a critical step on the path to a big breakthrough. "We try to make it an environment where it's OK to fail," says Will Gay, creative director at Disney's Yellow Shoes Creative Group. "Walt Disney failed many times before he got it right with Mickey Mouse and was super successful. You have to fail in order to get to the good stuff."

2. Show your work - and not just to other designers.

Hizam Haron, senior manager, visual identity at McKesson, a healthcare services company, often hangs draft images or layouts on the wall. "When people walk past they're always very curious," he says. "They say, 'Oh what is this?'" Haron briefly explains the in-progress work and then asks for input. "Having that open, porous environment really helps because people [throughout the organization] like to see what you're working on. You don't have to follow everything they say." Instead, it's a great way to test new ideas, push past feeling stuck or simply broaden your perspective.

3. Give clients what they should have requested.

Did your client ask for something you think is a bad idea? Or not the best solution? "I'll give them what they're asking for, and then I'll give them what they should be doing," says Allan Peters, associate creative director at Target. "And I'll keep giving them the second option every time to push the idea forward."

CREATIVITY CASE STORY

Target: Going to Work in the Garage

Creative teams of the future will actively invent new things. When James Dyson, inventor of the famous Dyson vacuum cleaner, came to speak at Target, someone asked him, "How do you innovate?" He replied, "That's easy. Find something that pisses you off and fix the problem." It's the philosophy behind Target's Garage program. Staff members identify something that bothers or irritates them about the company and then come up with ideas to fix it. The group picks out the best ideas and forms teams around them.

12 Insider Creativity Tips



4. Don't wait for a creative brief.

If you want to innovate, don't wait for the juicy projects to hit your desk. "You're not always going to get the brief you wanted," says Peters. "Identify the problem, and try and fix it. You have to put it on yourself to rock out some good ideas." Then sell those big ideas to your boss or team.

5. Always create multiple solutions to the problem.

True creativity means exploring more than one option to any design problem. "The more you push yourself to do three or four different versions, the more you're going to have to get creative," says Scott Kirkwood, editor in chief at *National Parks* magazine and senior director of publications at the National Parks Conservation Association.

6. Distill your message or story down to its essence.

Creative teams of the future will cut through the noise with concise communication. "Every story can be boiled down," says Kirkwood. "You can tell a story in one sentence or 10 sentences or 100 pages, but the more succinct you are, the more likely you are to get someone's attention."

CREATIVITY CASE STORY

***National Parks Magazine:* Telling Better Stories**

Creative teams of the future will tell exceptional stories. "Every challenge we have must be told through a story," says Scott Kirkwood, editor in chief at *National Parks* magazine and senior director of publications at the National Parks Conservation Association. "We're not going to produce a boring fact sheet in the magazine. We always have to come up with a story and a person and a human angle." Good stories feature an element of surprise, a person to root for and the challenges that person faces. It also helps to add layers by including the perspective from the other side.

12 Insider Creativity Tips



7. Look for creative ways to bring the tactile into digital.

Creative teams of the future will humanize digital experiences. “Digital concepts and designs are the future,” Gay says. “But when we tie them into a real-world touch and feel, that’s how the emotional connections are made.” That might mean creating a hand-drawn map for a website or bringing old-school 2D animation into a banner ad.

8. Make every project better than the last one.

Moving into the future means always pushing your work. “If you can make it just a little bit better, you’re going to be happier and everyone else is going to be happier,” Peters says. “Depending on the brand you’re working on, that might not be a huge shift, but it’s the little wins you should celebrate.”

9. Make it a point to truly listen to your customers.

Creative teams of the future will ask what their customers think. At Square, Chris Heimbuch, director of creative operations, brand, says the in-house team ran a “Let’s Talk” program that involved a multi-city tour. They rented venues and brought small business customers up on stage to talk about their entrepreneurial efforts and how their Square credit card readers factored into those risks and dreams. It reminded the creative team how much Square affects people’s lives.

CREATIVITY CASE STORY

McKesson: Thinking B-to-P (Business to People)

Creative teams of the future will focus more on people and less on the distinctions between B-to-C or B-to-B. “People are people,” says Hizam Haron, senior manager for visual identity at McKesson, a major healthcare services company. “People like to see beautiful things. People appreciate creativity. You don’t have to dumb it down because it’s B-to-B. The design still has to be smart and solve the challenge.” Whatever company you’re selling to, the audience is still ultimately the person who’s actually hiring you or buying the product. Focus on appealing to the target audience’s needs on a humanistic level.

12 Insider Creativity Tips



10. Don't spend your whole life at work.

Creative teams of the future know that more hours don't always mean better results. Before coming to Target, Peters worked 60 to 65 hours a week at agencies. Now he logs around 40 to 45. "I create more work," he says. "And I make better work, really the best work of my career, since coming to Target, and a lot of that is just having time away from the office and being inspired by life."

11. Take a class about something other than design.

A little cross-pollination can kick-start your creativity. "I always encourage people to take classes," says Heimbuch "If you're a photographer, that doesn't mean you take another level of photography. Think creative writing or painting. Break out from the familiar."

12. Meet as many people as you possibly can.

There's nothing better for your career and creative perspective than authentic networking. "I see creators running into issues when they operate a little bit too much in a vacuum," says Heimbuch. "Develop a healthy network around you so you don't end up being too isolated."

CREATIVITY CASE STORY

Square: Stepping Outside Your Discipline

Creative teams of the future will actively solve business problems. Once a quarter at Square, the entire company holds "Hack Week," where people are free to examine different parts of the business and take a hack at challenges outside their department. "It's really pretty liberating," says Chris Heimbuch, director of creative operations, brand at Square. "It gets people out of their comfort zones. We tend to mix up teams that don't normally work with one another and foster a different way of looking at things."



Conclusion

In the end, creativity and innovation are all about pushing yourself forward. You need to be open to new ideas, relationships, working methods and feedback. It's not enough to keep doing what you've always done. Instead, you'll need to actively invent the future as you focus on building real relationships with real people – whether it's a colleague or someone in your target audience. The power of connection is a truth that applies across mediums, disciplines and industries.

To see the latest research from The Creative Team of the Future, visit the [TCG Blog](#).

EXPERT CONTRIBUTORS

Thanks to the following INitiative advisory committee members who contributed to this project:

- Will Gay, Creative Director, Disney's Yellow Shoes Creative Group
- Hizam Haron, Senior Manager, Visual Identity, McKesson
- Chris Heimbuch, Director of Creative Operations, Brand, Square
- Scott Kirkwood, Editor in Chief, *National Parks* magazine, and Senior Director of Publications, National Parks Conservation Association
- Allan Peters, Associate Creative Director, Target

CREATIVITY CASE STORY

Disney: Making Magic with a Cereal Bar

Creative teams of the future will be in touch with their inner child. When Will Gay, creative director at Disney's Yellow Shoes Creative Group, visited the company's Animation Studios in Burbank, Calif., he came around a corner and found himself face to face with an employee eating cereal at a breakfast cereal bar. He thought it was such a smart idea that he had one built outside his office in Orlando, Fla., and had it stocked with all kinds of milk and favorite childhood cereals, like Cap'n Crunch's Crunch Berries and Chocolate Lucky Charms. "It's just one more thing that keeps the creative team young," he says. "It's a little thing, but it goes a long way."

Perks like free food have even been shown to enhance employee retention.



Conclusion

ABOUT THE CREATIVE TEAM OF THE FUTURE

Developed together by TCG and AIGA, with a media partnership provided by *Graphic Design USA*, The Creative Team of the Future is a research project that explores trends affecting the role of the design team and the creative professional. Our project shares insights from leaders in the creative industry on a range of topics, including challenges creative teams face and how to overcome them. Look for the latest research at creativegroup.com/ctf.

ABOUT AIGA

AIGA, the professional association for design, advances design as a professional craft, strategic advantage and vital cultural force. As the largest community of design advocates, we bring together practitioners, enthusiasts and patrons to amplify the voice of design and create the vision for a collective future. We define global standards and ethical practices, guide design education, inspire designers and the public, enhance professional development, and make powerful tools and resources accessible to all. Learn more at aiga.org.

ABOUT THE CREATIVE GROUP

The Creative Group (TCG) is a leader among creative and marketing staffing agencies. We specialize in connecting talented, creative professionals with companies looking to hire interactive, design, marketing, advertising and public relations talent. As the creative and design staffing division of **Robert Half**, we offer flexible solutions to meet companies' freelance and full-time employment needs. For more information or help addressing your staffing needs, please call **1.888.846.1668** or visit creativegroup.com.

ABOUT GRAPHIC DESIGN USA

Since 1963, *Graphic Design USA* has been the news magazine for graphic designers and other creative professionals. It provides information on graphic design news, trends, people, ideas and products from the design community. The magazine covers nearly every part of the professional design community, including graphic design firms, corporate and publishing in-house departments, advertising agencies, institutions and nonprofits, and other creative businesses and organizations. The magazine is free to creative professionals within the United States. Learn more at gdusa.com.



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