

# Do you speak creativity?

 By [Damon Stapleton](#)

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"Doing stand-up in Poland." This is a phrase that we used to say at an agency I use to work at many years ago. It referred to a bad meeting with a client that involved a creative presentation.



Screengrab from the Jordan Peterson 'difficulties of creative people' interview.

It would feel like you were in the middle of Warsaw in a comedy club, trying to do your routine. The only problem was, nobody understood what you were saying because nobody in the audience spoke English.

I had always wondered about these meetings. It was like I had done exactly the wrong thing by presenting ideas that had pushed the boat out. Yet, there it was on the brief: **Give the client big, bold out-of-the-box ideas.**



## In defence of the often maligned creative

Damon Stapleton 19 Oct 2016



In these meetings, the general response was like: 'Why are you showing us this stuff. It could create a lot of trouble for us.'

While I was thinking about all this, I stumbled on this interview with Jordan Peterson.

## Entrepreneurial types

Now, I know he polarises opinion, but for the moment I would ask you to focus on what he says in this interview. For me, it makes a lot of sense when I think of the experiences I have had in my career.

*“ He speaks with real clarity about the problem with creativity inside corporations. Essentially, his point is that creative types are difficult to manage, don't like routine and hate working inside a system, so they are normally weeded out fairly quickly. They don't conform, so they don't rise up the ranks. ”*

He then makes a second very important point: Creatives, or if you prefer, 'entrepreneurial types', are desperately needed at the top of businesses, because although they are high risk they are also high reward. They are the ones that makes growth happen. Yet, they are often not there.

So, it would seem there is a real disconnect when it comes to creativity and business. On the one hand, you hear how important it is for growth. You hear it is how a business moves forward. Insert Steve Job's lesson or snappy slogan here.

On the other hand, it would seem it is very hard for a creative person to make it to the top in many businesses.

## Ideas that scare them

From a personal perspective, you will never see this more clearly than when you pitch on a piece of business. The brief will say 'the business wants radical transformation, real out-of-the-box thinking'. You will be told they want ideas that scare them.

And sometimes, that is all true. You will have an amazing client who wants creativity. They are open to new ideas. They are trying to go somewhere. They have a vision and are excited by new thinking. They want to go on a journey with you.

And sometimes, it isn't true. You see pure fear as you begin to present. The client looks at you like you are real trouble. You are speaking a foreign language. You have given them a big headache. Invariably this leads to work that is average.

I write about this because although there is a lot of talk about technology and data and how advertising is changing, what hasn't changed is a ritual that happens every day across the world:

“ People that smell of Red Bull and spray glue, stare with fixed smiles to hide a lack of sleep, at other people across a boardroom table to win their business. ”

It's the one thing that has changed very little in our business and depends on one human being understanding the ideas of another.

A pitch is such a simple process, but it really is amazing how different each one can be.

There are many reasons for this. Politics, personalities, an agency getting it wrong and the brief not being clear are just a few that I can mention. However, what Professor Peterson says makes a lot of sense and has to be one of the main variables.

The truth is, there are many companies where there are not any people across the table who speak creativity. And by definition, don't actually want any creativity. I get the fact that it may be hard to sell internally. Or, the company won't buy out there work.

## Risk and reward

The problem is there is still a need for new ideas. You cannot have lateral thinking while being perpendicular. There is always going to be some risk to get any reward.

This is going to become a bigger problem moving forward. Think of how the job landscape will change in the future. Jobs that can be replicated by an algorithm or A.I will disappear. Creativity is a vocabulary many more people and companies are going to have to learn to understand. And perhaps, more importantly, value.

Yes, creativity may mean risk to many. However, if you speak the language you can create and shape the world you want. Or, you can choose not to understand, stand still and wait for the world to shape you.

I think we all know how that one ends...

*"I never made one of my discoveries through the process of rational thinking."* Albert Einstein

## ABOUT DAMON STAPLETON

Damon is regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia. Before that, ECD at Saatchi and Saatchi Australia, before that, group ECD of TBWA Hunt Lascaris and global ECD of Standard Bank. He has won over 500 awards internationally, including a D&AD Black Pencil, Cannes Grand Prix, Grand Olios, ADC Black Cube and most effective ad in the world by Warc 100. Damon is now regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia...

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