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SPOT THE STRIPES! TRAIN YOUR CREATIVE BRAIN TO FIND INSPIRATION IN ANYTHING, ANYWHERE.

"You're lucky," they say, "you're creative".

"So are you," we reply, "we all are".

And it's true. The problem is, we've created this problem ourselves – a world divided into two groups; "creative people" and "non creative people". We do it with businesses too – even entire sectors – "the creative industries" implies that other industries are not creative, which is of course, nonsense.

At Brands at Work, we pride ourselves on the fact that we don't have a siloed creative department. There isn't one, because it's all of us. We're all responsible for our collective creativity. We have a company mascot, George the Zebra. With his striking stripes, he (and we) like to stand out from the crowd; to be bold and imaginative. But there are, in fact, hidden zebras everywhere – you just have to look for their patterns that are neatly encoded in our everyday existence. They're literally everywhere.

Brain science basics

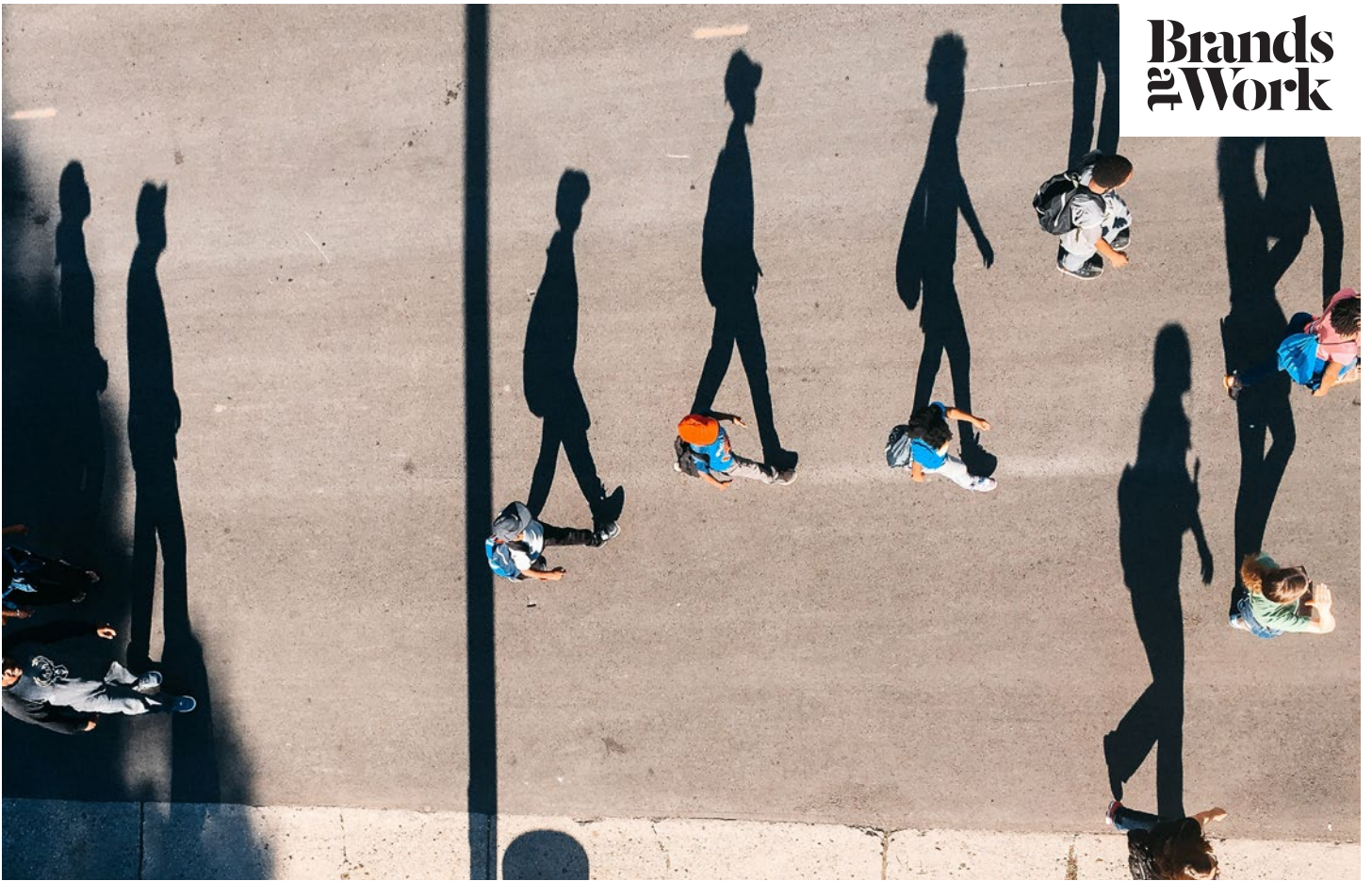
First, welcome to the brain science basics class. There are three core creative networks in your brain; network one helps you to focus your attention on relatively complex creative tasks (e.g. listening). Network two is for recalling memories and thinking about future possibilities (your imagination). And network three helps you to switch between one and two and monitor what's going on around you. To get into the right mindset for creative thinking, you've got to tell network one to pipe down and encourage network two to speak up. In other words, to allow inspiration in, you've got to let your imagination open up.

Preparation is everything

Contrary to popular opinion, the sudden surge of a single idea – that seemingly comes out of nowhere – is a rare breed. The epiphany. The lightbulb. The "Eureka!" moment. After all, we assume that Archimedes had many other baths before 'the one' where he discovered the law of buoyancy. You can't just switch creativity on, the secret is to prepare. How? Do something (anything) that you're passionate about (cooking, walking, cycling, drawing, listening to music) and network one (complex creative tasks) will slow down and network two (imagination) will speed up. So, next time you have a tricky problem to solve, or before your next team brainstorm, go for a walk, listen to some music, do some knitting – whatever floats your boat. Let your brain wander off and the ideas will wander in.

Bring your creative bubble to the boil

Once you're prepared, it's time to mull, noodle, chew, ponder, or our personal favourite; percolate. That is, allow yourself time to let your thoughts and ideas bubble up until they're ready to be poured. Your subconscious brain is great at working hard in the background, but sometimes it needs time to process before making connections. Think of the classic brainstorm meeting: "Hello everyone, we all have to be creative – NOW!". As you'll know, this often results in a slow start, or worse, nothing productive at all. Sending out the brief or the meeting objectives a day or so beforehand and setting pre-work (or pre-thinking), are all good practice in training your brain to percolate.



Collide, connect and combine

There's a shedload of science behind the fact that no idea is original. That's because a new idea comes when two or more existing ideas connect and collide. That's why creative hotbeds tend to be in cities or concentrated places – think of fashion in Paris, movies in LA and technology in Silicon Valley. What this means is, you can't do it alone. You have to collide, connect and combine your ideas with someone else's. And yes, the more the merrier. By having the right people in the room, who've done the right preparation (and percolation) you'll be in the best possible place to create.

Do different

Why do we do events in external venues? Why are conferences and away days even a 'thing'? Because, more often than not, a different environment (and interacting with different people) encourages inspiration. Ok, so lockdown has made this a little trickier, but even with the restrictions placed on our everyday lives, inspiration is still all around us. In fact, the phrase "necessity is the mother of invention" has perhaps never been truer. We've been doing socially distanced 'walk and talk' meetings, learning new skills, discovering different TV shows and podcasts and taking inspiration from the reams of reimagined art, theatre and music on social media. The simple act of 'doing different' helps your imagination to open up and allows those ideas to flow.

Bounce back from hitting the wall

Writer's block, brain freeze, hitting the creative wall – it happens to us all. When the creative juices stop flowing, it's time to take action. Maybe you need more percolation time. Maybe you need to look at things from a different angle. Start in the opposite place to where you started the first time. Think about the behaviour change you want to see when the event is over. Ask yourself what problem you're trying to solve again (and again). Sometimes the simplest possible way to solve something is to think of the simplest possible thing you could do. Don't force creativity and it will happen.

Collaboration breeds creativity

Maybe as you've been reading, you've been thinking this article a little counterintuitive. A creative agency telling everyone "hey, you can do this creativity thing too, you know!" is a little weird, right? Wrong. This article doesn't devalue our creativity, in fact, we hope quite the opposite. We're sharing it because we want to encourage everyone around us to unleash their creativity – for two reasons: First, because although everyone is creative they don't always know how to be (and of course, we hope this article will help with that). And second, because if the people around us become more creative, we'll become even more creative ourselves.