

Talent is never a single malt

 By [Damon Stapleton](#)

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Talent. It's one of those words. Like the word, creativity. Everybody nods and agrees that you need it. These days, everybody, says they need talent desperately. What is also perhaps true, is that the changing structure of our business, from consultants to in-house agencies and everything in between means all sorts of people are perhaps figuring out what this word actually means for the first time.



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The question is, what is it?

Part of the problem is the word. It is all encompassing and generic. Talent may be an ability an individual has. However, it is also a Lego block you can connect to other Lego blocks, to build something far bigger.

The trick is how you put the blocks together. And having an idea of what needs to be built

So what's the problem? Well, lately I have seen a few car crashes. Certain companies hiring people that are plain wrong,

simply because they have the word 'creative' in their CV. These companies have done this over and over for the last couple of years. And judging by the turnover of staff, it must have cost them plenty.



What do you want creativity to do?

Damon Stapleton 22 Aug 2018



The question is, what is it they don't understand?

The answer is pretty simple. They don't understand what they need. They also don't understand that creatives are not all the same. They have different skills which have to be managed and blended together. It doesn't just work all by itself. Especially, if there is no culture of creativity in the company.

“Creatives are like the game Tetris. They fit together in a multitude of ways. And when they do, they unlock far higher levels. They are capable of incredible leaps and doing the impossible. When they are just seen as manpower or resource they unlock far less. And to extend the metaphor, that is how you reach game over.”

Bill Bernbach understood the value of connecting creatives over 50 years ago. He was the first to put an art director and a copywriter together. He understood you would get far better work if you got this combination right.

He wasn't looking at individuals, but puzzle pieces that fit together. This idea over the last couple of years was often said to be old-fashioned. However, if you go and look at where ideas come from in almost any organisation, you will find a couple of people in a room with laptops, or Post-Its or pads trying to come up with ideas. They might have different titles 50 years on, but what they do is not that different.

Bernbach realised that finding a single individual that could have a range of different, brilliant ideas every day, then potentially sell those ideas with exuberance, and then make all those different ideas equally well, is very rare.

The power of bounce

More than that, he really understood the power of combinations and what they can unlock. He understood what I call the power of bounce. You see this strange power in improv theatre. The golden rule for actors is no matter what the other actor says, you have to say: 'Yes and...' You have to build on the idea.



Do you speak creativity?

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Actually, it's not a strange power. We have seen it for years. Lennon and McCartney. Keith Richards and Mick Jagger. Elton John and Bernie Taupin. Or, modern comedy writing versions. Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant. Tina Fey and Amy Poehler. Or closer to home, Flight of the Conchords.

Together, these duos create what one of them cannot. They fuel each other and support each other's ideas. Having ideas can be a lonely business. Another person that gets you and is willing to go on a crazy journey with you is beyond value.

Finding those combinations though takes time and needs to be nurtured. Many right now are not taking the time. They are just hiring the right amount of people for the desks in a room. Even if they are great, they may not be the answer.

“ *Imagine the football team Barcelona made up entirely of Lionel Messi clones. He is arguably the greatest player that has ever lived. How many matches would that team win? My guess is not many if he is the goalkeeper.* ”

Raymond Chandler once said there are no bad whiskeys. There are only some whiskeys that aren't as good as others.

And in our business, which has always been a team sport, the greatest whiskey of all is talent. And that talent may begin as a single malt, but if it is to truly succeed, it should always become a blend.

“Everybody has talent, it's just a matter of moving around until you have discovered what it is.” - George Lucas

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 Clio, 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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