

Mastering Freelancer Management



Expert Strategies for Effectively
Managing a Remote Talent Network

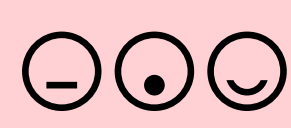


IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH LEADERS FROM

Bloomberg

StanleyBlack&Decker


COMCAST


JACK MORTON

 **insomnia**
cookies

Table of contents

Introduction

Becca Breslin

Director of Creative + Strategy, Global Campaigns
Stanley Black & Decker, Inc.

Lauri Accardi

Chief Program Officer, **CataPoint Consulting**
Former Director of Program Management, **Comcast**

Dinesh Kapoor

Global Creative Director, **Bloomberg Media**
Former Group Creative Director, **Ogilvy**

Mandy Johnson

Production Services Director, **Jack Morton**

Justin Rentzel

Creative Director, **Red Tettemer O’Connell + Partners**
Former Head of Creative, **Insomnia Cookies**

Kellie Jeswald

Global Lead, Project Management and Studio Operations,
Bloomberg

Closing thoughts

2

4

13

22

30

39

49

57

Mastering Freelancer Management

Expert Strategies for Effectively Managing a Remote Talent Network

Welcome to Mastering Freelancer Management. In this comprehensive guide, we peel back the curtain on the strategies and actionable tips that Fortune 500 companies — such as Bloomberg, Comcast, Stanley Black & Decker, and IPG — employ to effectively manage their expansive networks of external talent.

The goal? Get the best work done, without the stressful administrative work and wasted costs.

Resource managers, program managers, and operations leaders: You are the conductors orchestrating a symphony of creative and innovative work. Yet, even maestros need guidance in a technological landscape that rapidly evolves. Let's navigate the future of work together.

In these in-depth interviews, you will learn practical wisdom honed by industry leaders who have triumphed through the industry challenges you face daily. Expect an authentic narrative rich with real-life insights, stories, and unique perspectives on freelancer management today.

You're hearing it straight from the experts' mouths.

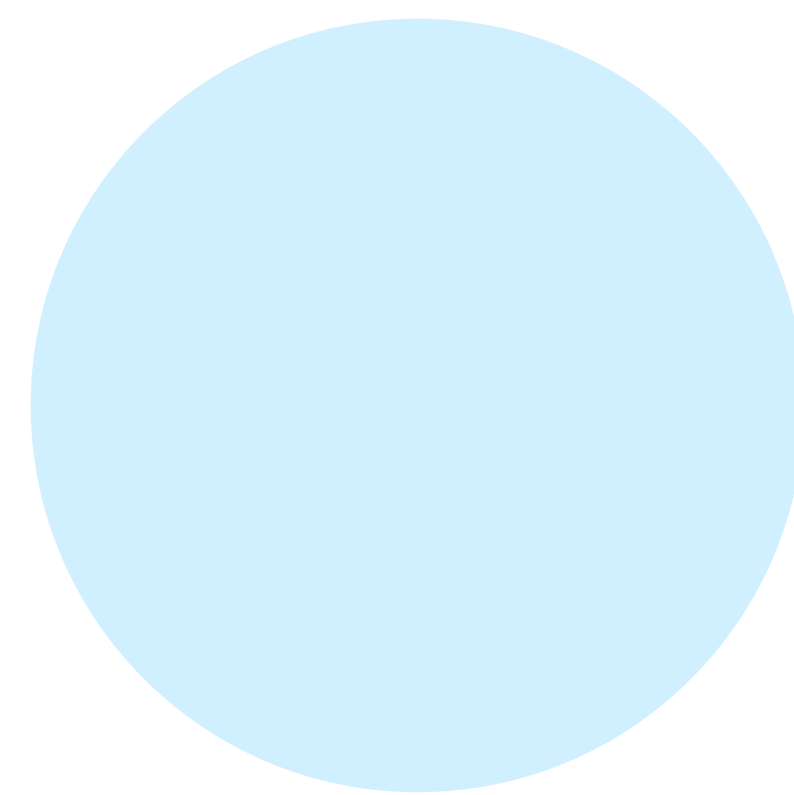
How to juggle timezone differences for contractors in different countries? Behind

the scenes on the making of a Super Bowl spot with vendors and celebrity talent? How to measure DEI goals among your external workforce? What's the most important advice for managing freelancers, and how does it differ from leading an internal team? How to "cast" the right talent to the right projects and guide the highest quality output?

This guide covers it all.

Plus, you can [watch the video version](#) of the interviews while you read along.

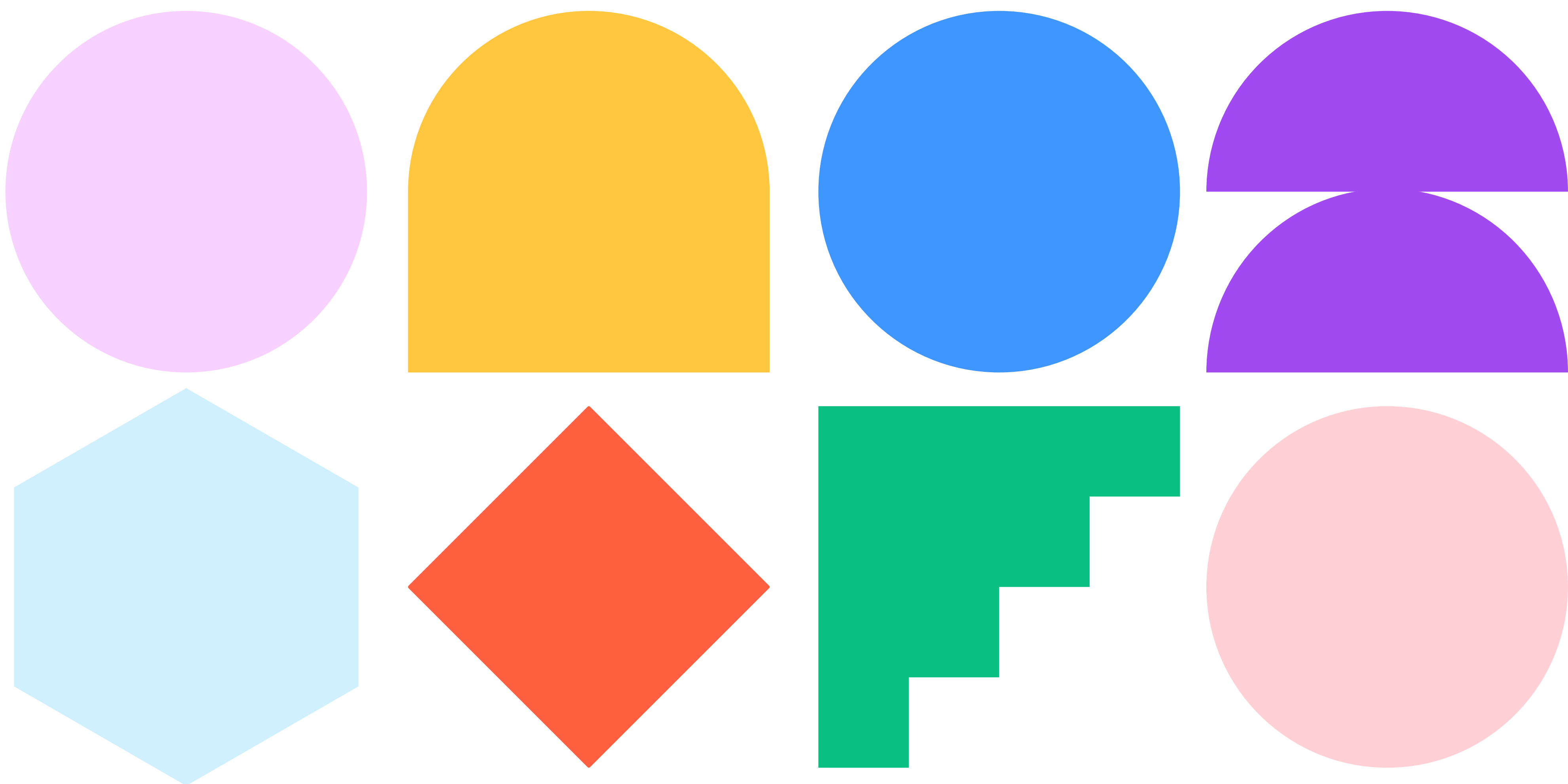
Mastering Freelancer Management is more than just a guide; it's a compendium of actionable knowledge from experts who have done it before — managing thousands of contractors at scale — so you can unlock the most potential from your talent network.



About Worksuite

Worksuite is the premier SaaS and Payments platform focused on the global freelancer, contingent and influencer workforces with 350,000 users worldwide including Disney, Marriott, Vox Media, WebMD, and Microsoft. Our centralized platform helps seamlessly onboard, manage, and pay your contractors in 190 countries, compliantly.

© 2024 Worksuite Inc.



“ Make freelancers not feel like freelancers. Again, we keep describing it as this ‘extension of our team.’ It’s not a dirty word for us.

”

Becca Breslin

Director of Creative + Strategy, Global Campaigns, Stanley Black & Decker, Inc.



Becca Breslin is currently the Director of Creative and Strategy at Stanley Black & Decker, Inc. She is responsible for empowering teams to produce work that is rooted in strategy, brought to life by unabashed big thinking, and spectacularly executed. A designer by trade, somewhere along the way she fell in love with user research and developing briefs that inspire teams and make them want to run and get started...not run away and scream because they have a hundred clarifying questions.

She’s proud to have built award-winning campaigns, global teams from the ground up, and workflows that keep both clients and creatives sane so they can concentrate on producing the best work possible.

The greatest title she’s held to date is “Mom” which she was promoted to in the summer of 2022 with the birth of her son, George. Originally from outside Philadelphia, she and her husband, Jeff, now live between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. In her free time, Becca enjoys pretending she’s going to make it onto the LPGA tour one day, channeling her creativity in the kitchen, and trying to keep her cool every time the Philadelphia Phillies or Eagles take the field.

What do you love about your job when it comes to managing external resources?

I love the fact that there's so much unique talent out there and that every brief might have its own very particular strategies and needs. You need to build that team to accomplish that, and it feels like compiling your ideal roster every time you get a project brief and saying, okay, what are all the pieces I need to accomplish this?

And sometimes that's really fun to put completely wildly different people together too, and that's where sometimes it's really hard at the same time to find all of those unicorns and put them together and say, how is this going to accomplish what we need out of the brief?

How do you match those 'unicorns' to the right projects?

I'm always a big fan of briefs because that's going to be your measurement for success. So I think if you can start out and say, okay, what is our end goal, and then work backwards from there. And start to say, what are all the steps in the process that get us there? And sometimes that means you might need a different team for each step of the process too, right?

It might mean, okay, there's some really big thinking that needs to happen here at the front. So therefore I'm going to. But this group of people together, and then when it gets time to like, how do I really tangibly start to bring those big ideas to life visually, tonally, that might be a different group of people, or it might be the same.

But I think it involves identifying what your end goal is and then what are all the steps along the way to get there. And that's how you, you bring in those different people.



In your experience creating scalable processes in-house for brands, what does that brief look like? Do you have a template or framework in your head for briefing great work?

Yeah. So I've worked with similar processes, I think, in every place I've been, whether it's a smaller nonprofit or a larger company like Stanley Black and Decker.

But I'll speak to just right now. The way our process works is we do have a brief "template" especially when we're thinking about what we call our tier-one campaigns. And it's a brief that very clearly identifies,

- What is the objective we're trying to achieve?
- How do we know what success looks like?

- Who is the audience we're talking to?
- All of your standards. But then there are some non-standards like,
- What does the audience currently think and perceive?
- What do we want them to think and perceive?

So it's got all of these checklist items to accomplish for a successful project. And that's what grounds every step of our process here. We start first with making that brief. So it's usually myself as a creative director, and our director of account management with our client, our internal clients, our brand marketers, and our product team. So we build that brief with them and then we go through a creative strategy phase, and then we go through creative development and then eventually creative production.

So you can see even in, I mean, as you know from your world, those are all three very different steps in the process. Right? And those just require different groups of thought and how people strategize and contribute. So it's often for us, three different groups of people in our in-house creative agency that contribute to that.

Very true. And what are some other challenges you run into with managing external creative talent?

I think one challenge is always just creating the clarity. What are we trying to accomplish first? But then once you get past that and you get to what you're talking about — the people part — I think some things that are challenging are...

Our world is just different now. And I know every generation of creatives and people probably say that, right? But every brief I feel like I've gotten, I'm like, woof, I've never done this before!

And I'm not fresh and new. Mind you, I'm by no means 40 years into my career, but I've seen a lot of projects and I've been in a lot of kickoffs. And sometimes you get a kickoff and you think to yourself, 'I've never done this before.' And sometimes, no one in the room has done that before. And that's a challenge in that, how do I get all of the right people to help us tackle this?

And on the flip side, sometimes everyone in the room has done it before. And that's where it's also a challenge: how do I make sure I've got the right people in the room to bring fresh ideas and to make sure that this isn't rinse and repeat?

And sometimes that's where supplementing and bringing in people to complement your regular roster is really helpful too. Like we talk about it here as, Hey, we've got our roster of key people and we kind of organize our creatives into pods, if you will. Each pod is working on particular clients, but every once in a while, you've got to pull someone from the bench, just like you would in baseball like, hey, I've got a DH for a certain team that I play or a certain pitcher who's there, right. Like you've got to pull in those key players. So it's both: when it's like



something you haven't done before, and something you have done before, you need to really think about your talent network. If that makes sense.

And is there a difference in how you move that work forward, how you check-in and manage that creative talent, depending on whether they're in house or somebody that you're outsourcing to?

Yeah, I think there definitely is. I mean, I think one thing we've noticed with our internal teams, and I'd imagine other companies can speak to this, when you own multiple brands, right?

For us, we own a lot of the market share in terms of tools and outdoor. Sometimes people don't even realize we own everything from, yes, Black & Decker and Stanley on our nameplate, but we also own DeWalt, and we own Craftsman, and we own Cub Cadet and Hustler. Some of these can be somewhat cannibalistic if you're not careful, right?

For example, I could be working on something for Stanley, but the same audience could theoretically also be shopping for Craftsman, but we own both of those brands. So how do we make sure that we're separating our creative?

And when we have our internal talent, we spend a lot of time when we onboard people, educating them on the "swim lanes" as we like to call them — of those brands and how we make sure we're setting both Stanley up for success and Craftsman up for success.

We give them each, you know, differentiating things in the marketplace. That gets hard when you're pulling in freelance talent who doesn't have all of that background. So I think for us, there is that period of building a freelance bench that feels like an extension of our team. We can spend the time and energy and make sure that they have that education of all the brands that we own.

And even if you're just working on Craftsman, you really have to be aware of everything else, not just our competitors. But also the brands that we also own, so there is a difference in that we have the luxury of our internal folks that I feel like they kind of know and breathe that every day.

And then the external folks, we just have to make sure we're doing our due diligence of making sure that they still have that same background and awareness of our portfolio that internal teammates do.

“ And then the external folks, we just have to make sure we're doing our due diligence of making sure that they still have that same background and awareness of our portfolio that internal teammates do. ”

What would that dream onboarding process look like to ensure external talent gets onboarded with the same education as internal team members?

It's a combination of, I guess I'll say different learning styles. For example, we've spent a lot of time and effort, probably a solid two years when I first joined building really, really great brand standards and making all of our brand standards follow the same format. To the point where if you pull up the appendix or the menu of one brand standard, it's going to look like the order of the sections, everything is the same so that someone can really easily go back and forth and reference those two.

So we have the educational pieces that you need to get smart on our brands. So that is a dream part of the onboarding process is just having really great tools and resources for your people, whether they're internal or external. But then I think too, part of that ideal onboarding process is facilitating opportunities for them to experience it firsthand.

Because it's one thing, to just read it and say, okay, I've seen a couple of creative examples. But it's another thing to immerse for the next two weeks you know, every time there's a DeWalt status meeting, our account team is going to be able to pull you in for a 30-minute Zoom here and there. Seeing it, hearing the conversation, right?

Copywriters are one of the most difficult examples for us. With designers, it's a little easier in that, visually you can say okay, cool. I get the difference. I see the font family. I see the textures. I see the colorway. I can understand that. Copywriters, it's tricky to understand, tonally, how do I really immerse myself in this?

How do I understand there's a whole set of adjectives that we give to one brand exclusively, and we actually don't allow this other brand to use because we want to create that differentiation? And that's really hard to get from a brand standard, until you're in a creative review and hear someone talking about it, and that doesn't always happen.

So just the onboarding process of, 'Hey, let's do a deep dive on each of our brands for the next two weeks. It's going to be a 30-minute Zoom here and there.'

Switching gears just a little bit in terms of creative direction of all these brands and specifically around budgets. How do you avoid things going down the wrong path, dragging out the scope and budget?

Honestly I have to give good credit to our account management team who wears dual hats of both playing our resource managers and our project managers. And they're frankly just incredibly experienced and smart at assessing, for example, 'Okay I know if I have this level creative and they've worked with this creative before, I can really grasp how long this is truly going to take.'

“

They're really good at scoping. I think that's super important. But I think the other important part is just being really strong communicators

”

They're really good at scoping. I think that's super important. But I think the other important part is just being really strong communicators and sometimes being strong communicators also comes from developing that type of relationship with that freelance partner. And it's got to be a mutual respect and understanding of, 'Hey, we have to check in and let me know how you're doing on hours.'

As simple as having that conversation. Yes. Having a tool to track it is one thing, but I think going beyond having the tool as your foundation, but then also being able to build that relationship and have a conversation about realistic hours and what's going on with the project.

Can you say more about the relationship aspects with your freelancers?

Yeah, I think as much as you can make freelancers not feel like freelancers, is that a thing, right? Again, we keep describing it as this "extension of our team" and we like to say here, it's not a dirty word for us.

It's not like there's an in-house versus out-of-house. It's, these are a team. Just really

great, unique talents and levers that we get to pull as needed and building that relationship. Like any relationship, whether you're onboarding somebody new to the company, it just takes time and effort, and you have to put in that time and effort upfront.

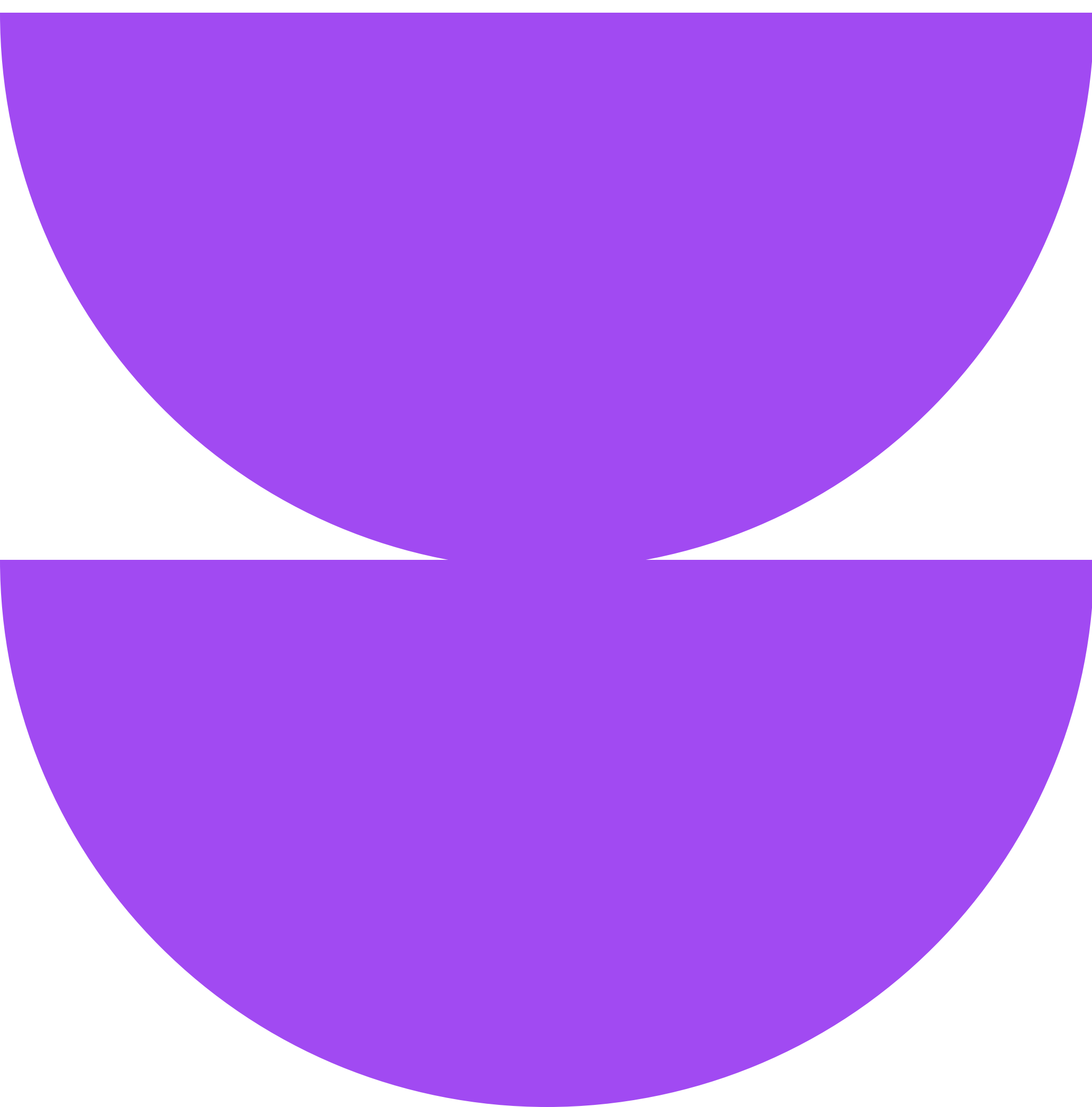
So, you know, as you're doing that resourcing planning for hours, such as making sure that you're planning for, 'Hey, I want this person in a part of the kickoffs. I want them in all of these reviews. I want them pitching work.' We let our freelancers pitch work. It's not just that they do the work. And then we take it away internally and pitch it.

We're really transparent to our clients in-house. 'Hey, I have a great connection that I previously worked with and we want to bring them into this project.' To the point now where they've asked us, 'Hey, this is different. Do you have anyone in mind who's done something like this before?'

And I think they appreciate that we're being really thoughtful about doing what's best for the project and the company and making sure that we're rounding out our team accordingly.

Yeah, I love that. Not to put you on the spot, but what's your number one piece of advice around managing a large creative workforce or setting up for scale in terms of your creative output?

My number 1 piece of advice is to just be really aware of what capabilities and talents you do have and what you don't. And that's okay. And being really curious about finding the pieces that you don't currently do well and owning up to that and admitting it. It's so rare. That you have every single role that you need perfectly staffed with the level of talent that you need, right?



That is an anomaly. It's especially in-house, right? And it's, we've even seen it and experienced it at agencies, right? It's why you're constantly staffing up and down according to clients. So I think if you can do a good job of holding yourself accountable to constant check-ins to say, Hey, what do what am I working with? What do I need?

And always being prepared to quickly supplement things in to round it out according to the project need. That kind of awareness and agility will really be helpful.

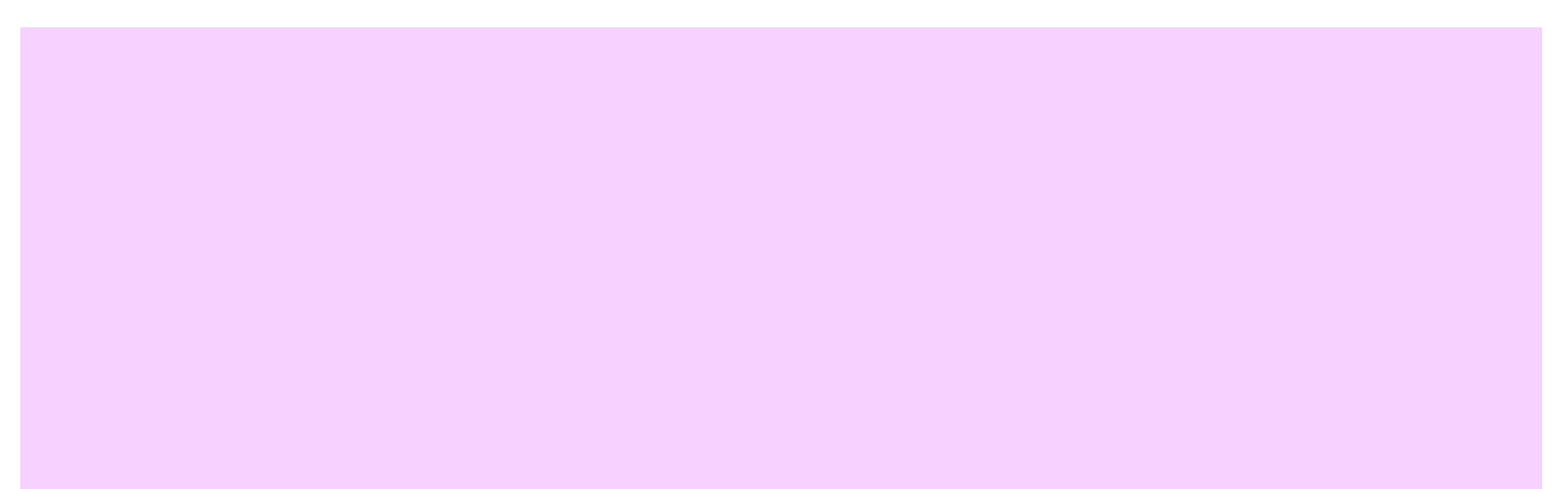
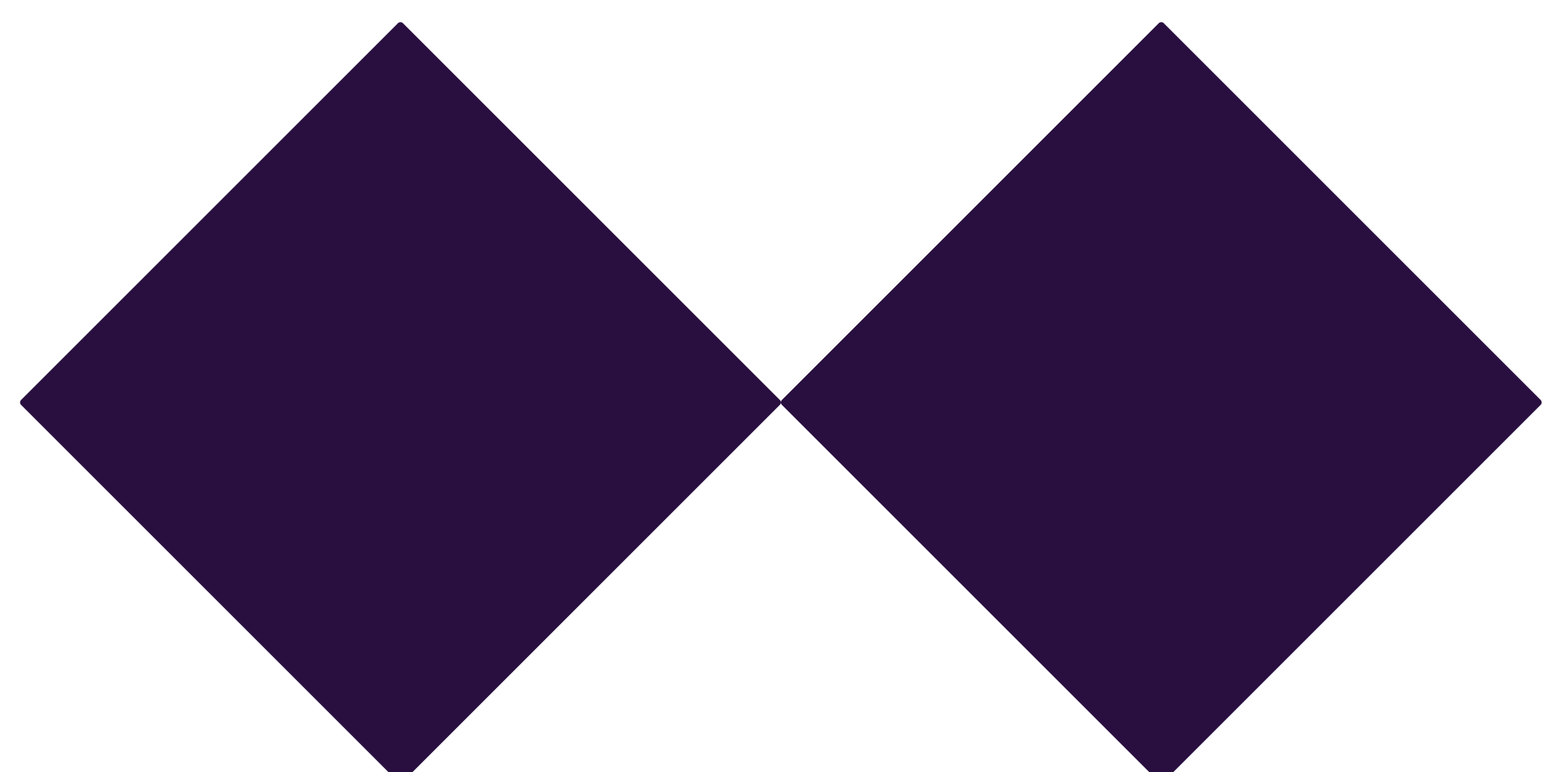
I'll give another example with copywriting. And I think it's evident with design too.

For example, if you have a really cool idea that comes to life and it's an illustration style. And you realize, we don't have an illustrator in-house, right? That seems like a really quick 'get' to see, 'Okay, I need to supplement with this type of illustration.' But it happens with our copy teams all the time too.

And I think we're trying to always educate both our teams and our people, our creatives, that it's okay if you don't write humor and lyrical rhymes for headlines, right?

We just had a scenario where we just released a huge campaign for Craftsman and we partnered with a really great agency, Colle McVoy, and we wondered to ourselves, 'Who did they have in-house writing these jingles!?'

Yeah, our copywriters aren't jingle writers, right? Because that is a craft and a skill that someone has honed over time. And we just had to be really honest with ourselves as we transitioned some of that work, and we're doing it in-house to say what do we need to do to, to either upskill or be transparent that this is an area in which we need help — especially when it's a niche skill.



You need to realize that this isn't going to happen across all of our brands. It's not going to fill 80 percent of someone's time. How do we supplement with somebody to really help us do this? I've done a lot of things, but I've never done this.

One last question. What does the future of work mean to you? What are you seeing that you feel is going to be really important in the workforce?

Wow, that's a big question, Zack. That makes sense as an ending one.

I think that there's always a lot of focus on innovation and moving forward and thinking about what's groundbreaking and what's next.

And I don't disagree. I think innovation is super important. However, I think what we sometimes tend to lose sight of is the healthy balance with learnings that we already have, right? How do I take past learnings, whether they've gone well or not so well, and combine that with forward thinking and innovation?

And I think that's kind of a sweet spot that sometimes we innovate for the sake of innovating, without even having a purpose for it yet. How do we constantly balance where we've been and how we build on it with being forward-thinking?

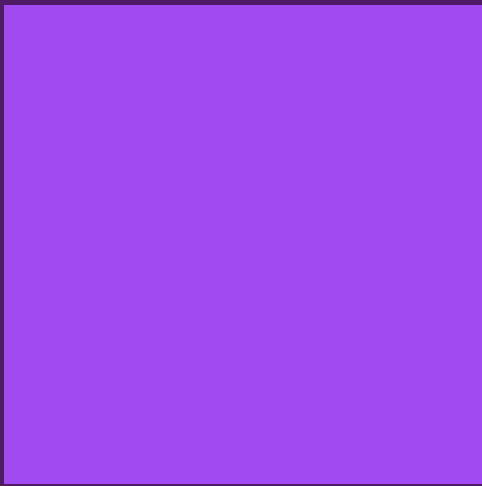
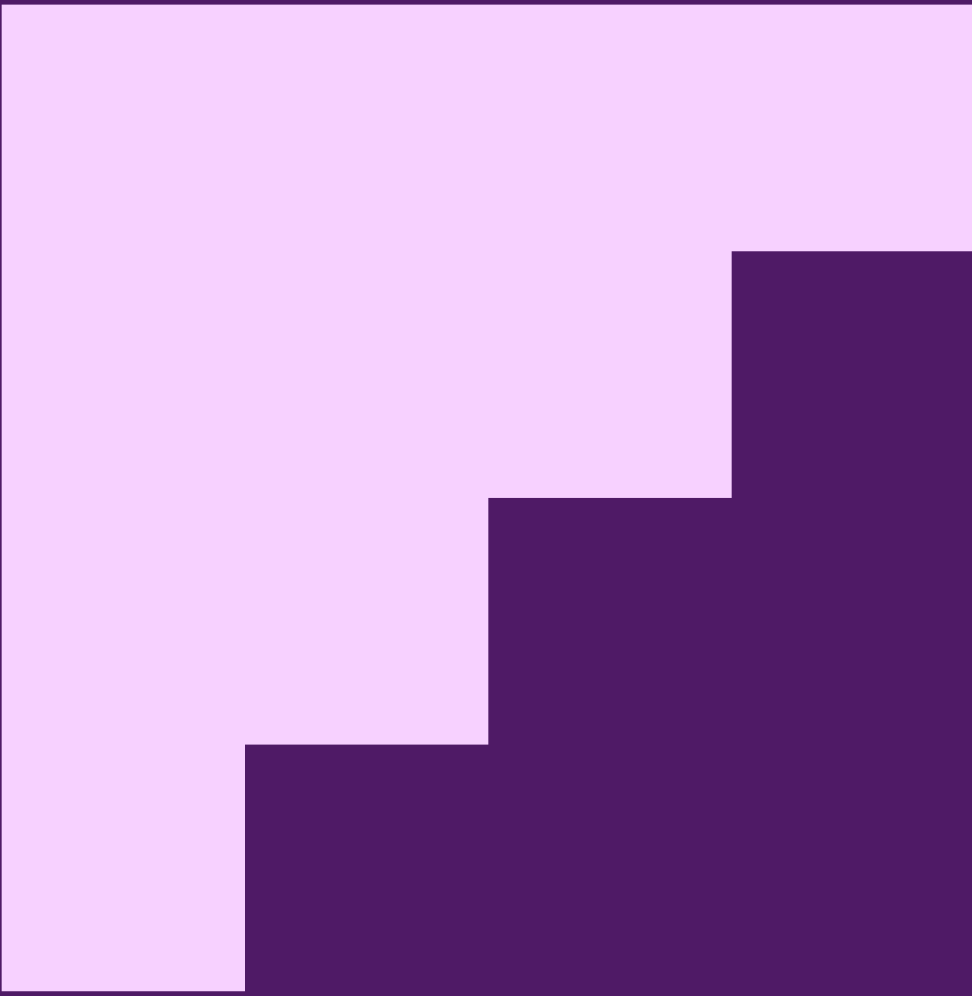
I think it's really hard to take action on this when our world is moving so fast, but I think one way is to have postmortems. For example, after a campaign has launched or after you've done an event or anything to really carve out the time to look at,

- What were we measuring against?
- Did we hit it?

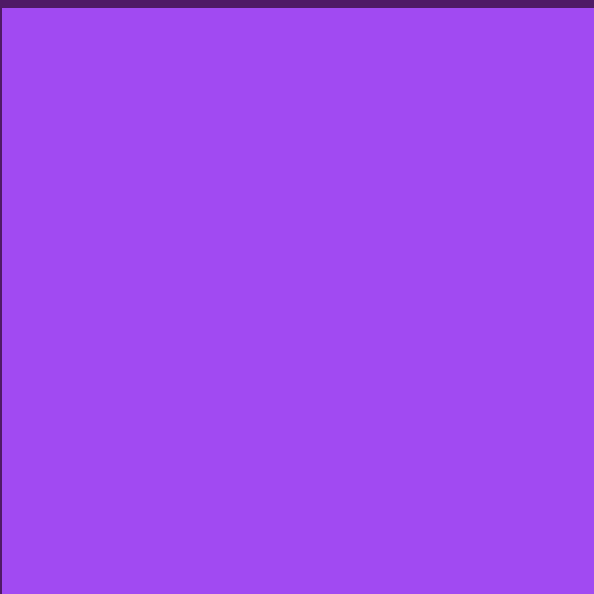
- Why do we think we didn't hit it?
- Or even how was the process of actually working on that project?
- Did it go well?
- Did we accomplish it?
- Was everyone crazy by the end of it?

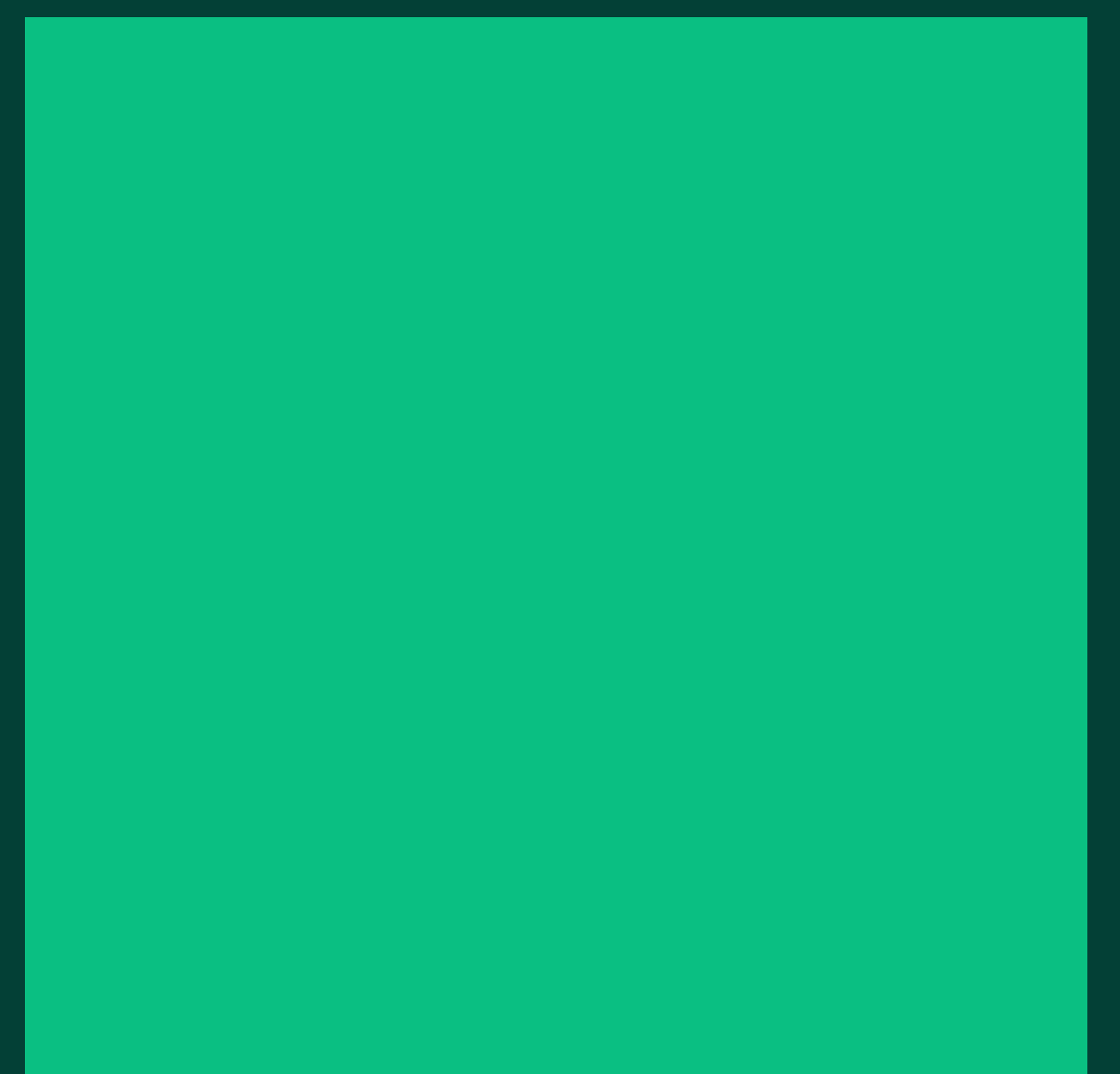
It can be learnings about the work itself, or it can be learnings about the process.

But I think one actionable way to be both innovative and forward-thinking while not overlooking learnings is to carve out that time to reflect and look back. Let's not just put our heads down and move on to the next thing. I think we need to take time to both celebrate the wins, yes, but also learn from how the heck we actually got there.



Key Takeaways

- Share brand standards and “swim lanes” when onboarding talent, especially if working across multiple brands who may compete with each other
 - Make sure the right people are in the room: Not just the right talent who HAS done this thing before, but also, fresh perspectives so creative doesn’t get stale
 - Onboarding: have great tools & resources for your talent
 - Get good at scoping!
 - Be a strong communicator.
 - Develop a relationship of mutual respect with your freelancers. Check-ins go both ways. e.g. “let me know how you’re doing on hours”. Have realistic conversations.
 - Make freelancers NOT feel like freelancers. Think of your external talent network as an extension of your team.
 - Be self-aware of what capabilities you do (and don’t) have. And stay curious about finding the missing pieces to supplement your talent network according to project needs.
 - Do postmortems after a campaign, to measure what worked, what didn’t, and why
 - Avoid innovating for innovation’s sake. Use past learnings combined with innovative thinking.
- 
- 



Lauri Accardi

*Chief Program Officer, **CataPoint Consulting***

*Former Director of Program Management, **Comcast***

Lauri Accardi, founder of CataPoint Consulting, LLC, brings over 20 years of Fortune 50 corporate experience to transform leadership and Scaled Agile understanding. As a dual Master's degree candidate, she's earning her MBA and a Master's in Strategic Management and Executive Leadership. Lauri actively contributes to the community through PMINJ, serves on the Penn State World Campus Student Advisory Board, and chairs the Academic Affairs Committee. A dedicated wife and mother of four, she balances family life with hobbies like exercising, cooking, and fine dining. Embodying continuous learning and agility, Lauri's journey is a testament to her heart, spirit, and dedication.

“ **Resource management is critical in every single aspect of my role. And I absolutely love working with a variety of people with different skills from around the world.** ”

What do you love about your job when it comes to managing external resources?

In program management, resources are everything. We have to ensure that we have all the right people in all the right places to deliver everything on schedule and on time.

Resource management is critical in every single aspect of my role. And I absolutely love working with a variety of people. That's part of the beauty of working on various programs – you get to better understand the different roles, responsibilities, skill sets, and personalities. I love being able to figure out what is the best fit for the project and for the resources assigned to each task. I always keep in mind the individual goals for the resources and the goals of the project or program to ensure they remain balanced and in sync.

Specifically, as it pertains to international resources – vendors, freelancers, studios – you mentioned that you love to work with a variety of people. What are the pros and cons of hiring and managing global contractors?

The challenge usually happens when there are conflicting time zones. That's really the only thing that I recognize as a significant challenge. As long as a project or program is flexible in terms of not needing people to be in the same location, which I have my personal thoughts on...

It is best to see what works for the team and what works for the people, as opposed to having a specific mandate regarding location. I'm always flexible to include different time zones and people of all cultures. You'll get more value in a project outcome when you have people on the team who come from diverse backgrounds.

I always look at the silver lining of things.

With COVID, we had this beautiful opportunity to open up our pool of candidates. We could look not only across the U.S. but also to international partners on projects. Sometimes, the time difference has been beneficial. For instance, I'm an early riser. If I'm working with someone in the UK, it's really easy for me because I'm up early, so I can finish my day early but still input the same hours. There is definitely a benefit there.

On the other hand, if I have someone in California and they're working with someone in the UK, they totally miss each other. That doesn't work out easily. Understanding the team makeup and what might work best for them is essential. I always remain open to having people from all backgrounds, no matter where they are.

“

I'm always flexible to include different time zones and people of all cultures. You'll get more value in a project outcome when you have people on the team who come from diverse backgrounds.

”

Could you share more about how you facilitate that connection and collaboration across time zones?

I always ensure a dedicated time is established at the beginning of working together. It's crucial to figure out with the time zones what that mutually agreeable day and time is so everyone knows when and where we will regularly connect synchronously as a standing meeting. We can evaluate before each meeting; if we don't need to hold it, we can cancel. We all have that sacred time for our standing meeting, and don't double-book. I know that even when working with people in Korea or Tokyo, for example, I keep in mind that there is a 13-hour time difference for the East Coast. That's a pretty big gap. But you can always find that sweet spot at 8am on the East Coast, which is 9pm there, so we can make that work. There are different ways that you can find how to make it work for everybody. It's just about figuring out who likes to wake up early, who does not want to, and how you can find spots that make sense for everybody.

I like it. Finding the sweet spot for overlap and direct comms. What are some other challenges that you've run into when managing remote contractors?

Especially when people are off-site, getting engagement has been challenging. I don't

like to make a mandate that everybody invariably needs to have their cameras on. I personally feel very strongly about connection. It can be challenging to connect with someone when it's just a voice, and you're looking at a picture of them. Whenever possible, I encourage people to be present to come on camera if they feel comfortable so that we can all stay actively engaged. In meetings, I have many open questions to maintain the engagement.

Also, retrospectives have been phenomenal in getting people to feel more comfortable and engaged, especially with a dispersed group or one that includes different contractors. In those cases, people might need to know everyone's background and skills, which can lead to competition.

Retrospectives have been phenomenal for getting people to be open and honest. I make them anonymous, and no one has to say, 'Hey, I did this.' Rather, I open up the opportunity for people to talk more openly about what they're experiencing, what they're feeling, and how we can improve things collectively.

It helps to align everyone as an ultimate team, as opposed to one contractor working on one thing over here, who might feel like a small part of a massive project rather than an invested team member.

Do you have a framework for running an effective retrospective?

Yes, I do. I'll usually set up a retrospective board and send it out so everybody can add to it before the meeting. I encourage people to reply to different comments or add reactions to keep it fun and engaging. Everything remains anonymous, and everybody can get their thoughts in — in advance. It also helps the facilitator

“

I personally feel very strongly about connection.

”

because you can get a preview of what you will be discussing with the group.

But I love to ask:

What shout-outs do you have?

What's been going well?

What hasn't gone so well?

What would we like to try next?

What puzzles us?

This helps us celebrate our wins and discuss our outstanding accomplishments, ensuring that is the highlight and starting point. People tend to focus on the negative, but when you have 'What's gone well?' and it's empty, people think, 'Oh, well, we have

done some good things.' It encourages people to share and celebrate wins, which is a great way to start.

Next, it's essential to recognize that there's always room for improvement. So, what are the things that we can improve upon? As a facilitator for those conversations, it's vital to focus on the fact that this is about trying to improve collectively. It's not about complaining. My approach is to say, 'We see that this is something that people haven't responded well to, so how can we collectively work to find a solution to improve this moving forward?'

A lot of dialogue usually comes up with, 'What do we want to try next?' People have some great ideas you can discuss as a group and decide if you want to implement moving forward.

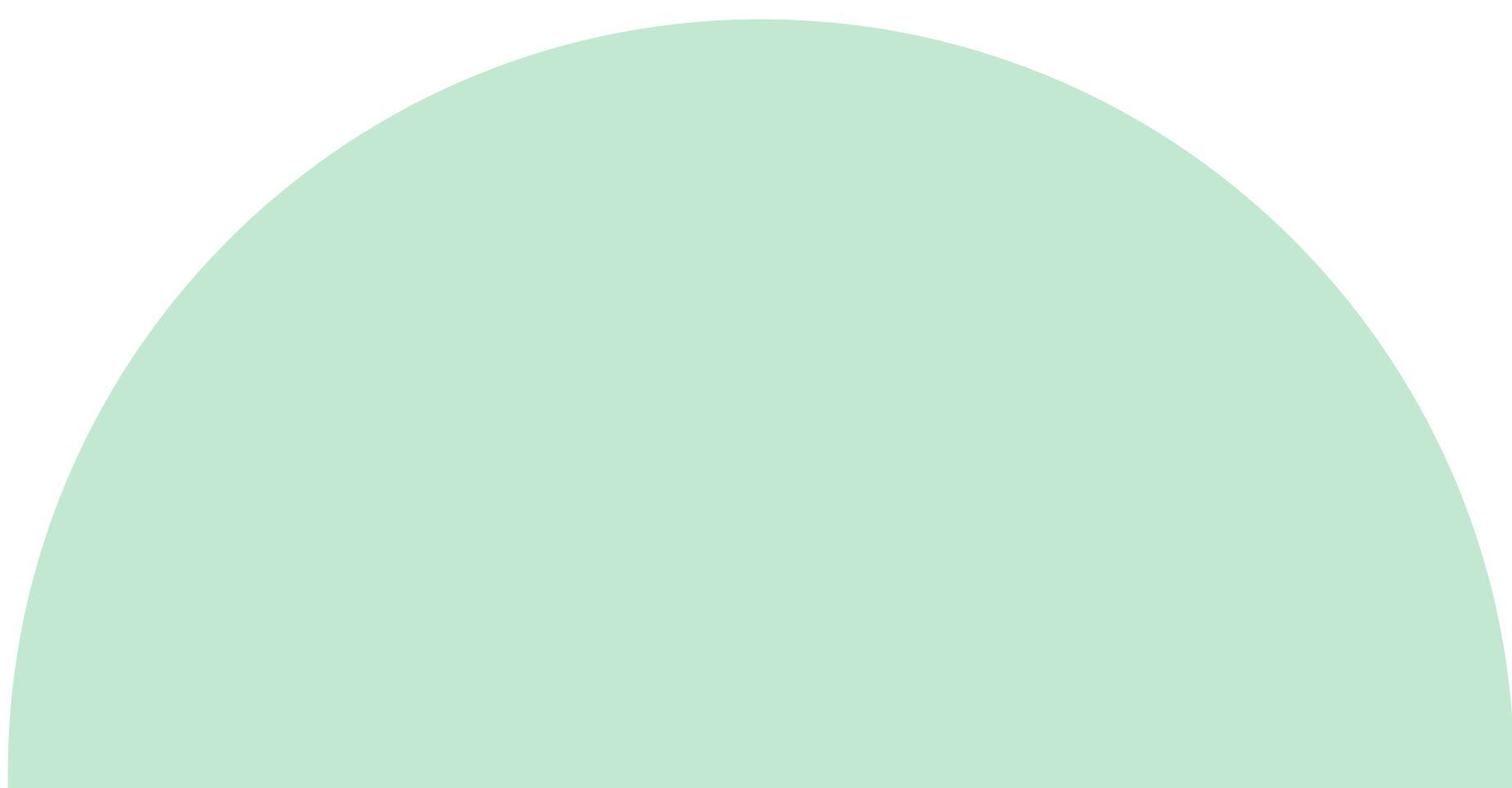
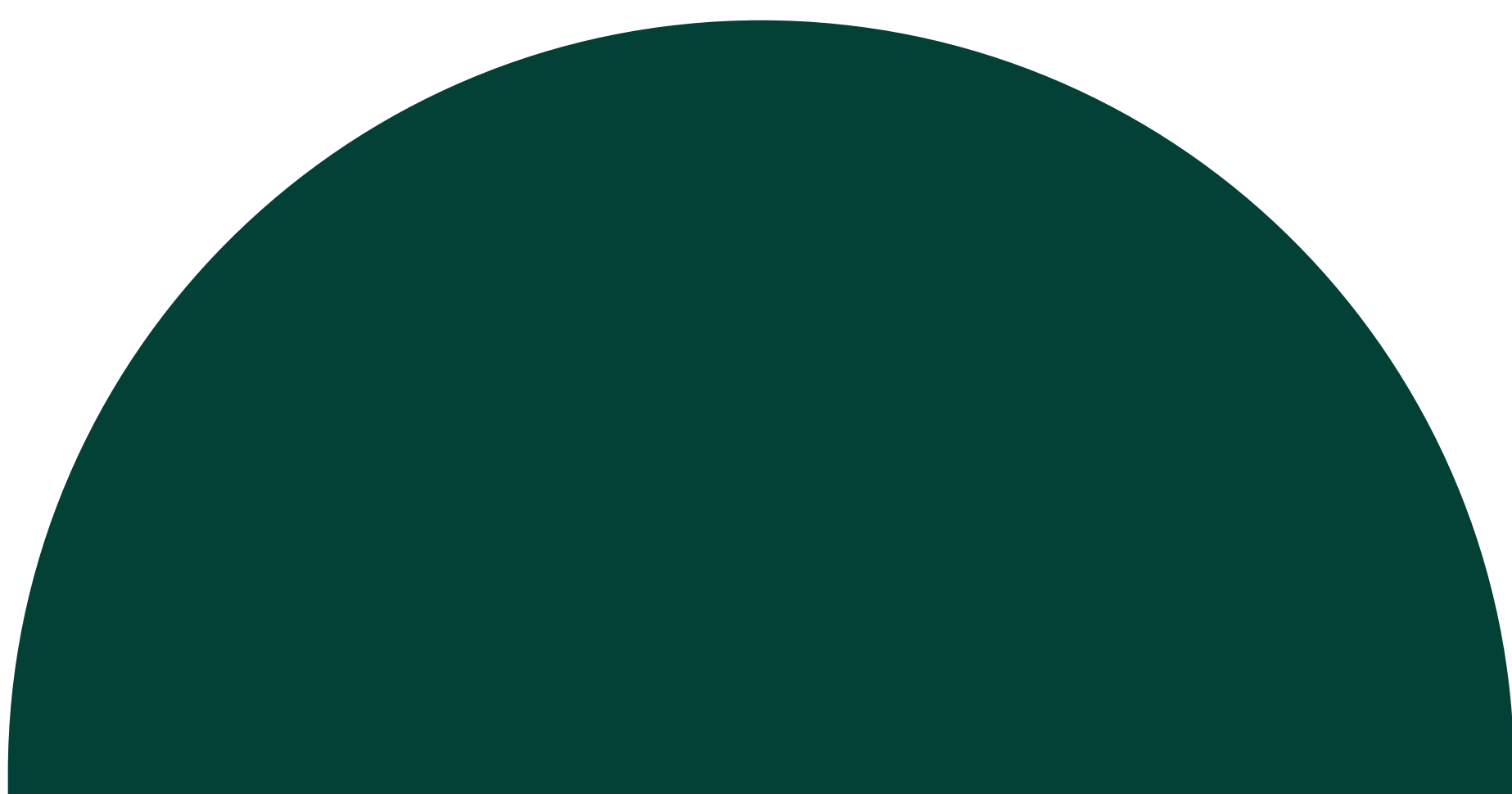
'What puzzles us?' allows everyone to discuss their questions.

From these five prompts, I usually get significant engagement.

Do you ever run into cultural communication differences when you have talent from all different places in those retrospectives?

Yeah, you can absolutely get a huge gamut. Think about it from a personality perspective; you can get certain people who are really zealous and want to talk and others who are quieter, more reserved and don't want to say anything. Usually, when you get a topic that strikes a nerve for people, they're more willing to speak up.

I like to allow people the flexibility during the retrospective to continue to comment anonymously. If there's a question that I might have on an item that's on the retro board, if someone doesn't feel like speaking



up because they happen to be shy — or there could be a language issue — or they feel less comfortable communicating on their feet — they can write an anonymous comment to add context. Everyone can see the comment live to help clarify without needing to speak directly to everyone. People feel more comfortable and safe when they are not having to be put on the spot.

Excellent. Switching gears a little bit... You mentioned earlier that one of the core tenets of program management is matching the right Skills and Resources to the Project. What's your thought process there? How do you match the right talent to the right task?

Honestly, every program manager will approach it very differently, so I can only speak to my approach.

Every individual on the team is essential to me. When someone new is onboarded, I'm not just looking to know how many years of experience they have since I can find that in their resume. It doesn't tell me what interests them or about their personal preferences. Someone might have a background that could be in one field but have acquired various skills that are also appropriate for multiple roles.

I want to find out the specific goals and desires of each individual. What are the things that they feel comfortable and confident with? What are the things they would like to do more of? What are their strengths, and what are their weaknesses? With that information, I can appropriately map their skills to the proper role in the project. I take a more holistic approach to understanding people as people, not people as the typical 'resource.'

I always partner with the functional lead to ensure they feel comfortable and confident

in my decision. I always have a rationale for 'why' I make the recommendations I do. It allows the functional lead and the resource to feel more comfortable moving forward.

I like that. People as people. This brings me to my next question...

What is the difference between *managing* external talent vs. *leading* a team? Or is there a difference?

I don't personally feel there should be a difference between 'managing' and 'leading.' That is a particular choice that I have made. Even though I don't have specific authority over freelancers as their people leader, I want to inspire them to do their best work. I want to encourage them to meet these achievable deadlines and continue to excel in their role.

I don't inspire them; what's in it for them? Their work becomes just a paycheck. We all tend to spend more time at work than at home with our families, so I want people to feel invested in — as individuals. It helps them develop an investment in wanting to see the project's ultimate success and see it through to launch. That investment ultimately adds value to the result and the individual's return.

Wanting to be a 'leader' rather than a 'manager' is also why I feel retrospectives are critical. I like the team to know 'I'm listening to you,' 'We're all here together,' and 'We all want to achieve this goal together.'

My choice of 'leading' is the most authentic for me since I'm not the person who can say, for example, 'You need to do this because I said so.' That, I will never say. I have four kids; they can tell you I have never said that or used it as an excuse. That is what I think of as 'management,' not 'leading.'

I think about leading and guiding them to help them achieve a goal so that we can all feel the strength from achieving it together.

I love that. What would you say is your number one piece of advice on leading a team that encompasses external talent?

Try to be as consistent as possible with everybody and treat everyone equally. In certain companies, contractors will be looked at and treated differently from full-time employees. I have seen them treated as a disposable resource, which saddens me. They are individuals with skills and no different from an FTE. I treat everyone with kindness and appreciation.

I also suggest giving feedback. Honesty and transparency are essential and are reasons I genuinely appreciate retrospectives. So, if you recognize good things, provide that feedback. Feedback doesn't have to be negative.

People often think that feedback is only for when things go wrong. That's not true – you can tell them when things went great, too. It helps motivate and keep people excited and engaged. Keep the feedback loop open so people know what they're doing well. It helps if you understand their goals to say, 'All right, well, I see that there's this opportunity here for you. If you're looking to grow in this one area, let's see if there is a smaller subset of this project that you can

work on to try to achieve your goals.'

Everything in managing resources is really about understanding who people are as individuals and how I can support their growth to facilitate it in the best way possible – regardless of their employment status.

You say you turn organizational chaos into clarity – which I love, by the way – what's an example where you had to do this?

About 8 million stories just came to mind all at once. I mean, that's the nature of being in project and program management. Everything is chaotic, and it's really about understanding patterns and consistent trends.

I always evaluate what I do to support a program in the long term by understanding what the strategic future vision is. From there, I think about how we back that into the tactical projects and what I can do to facilitate and align. I always focus on getting a smooth flow and more visibility.

I love finding a standard for how we work as a team based on an understanding of what has worked and what has not worked. Again, this is where the retrospectives are helpful because you can see how we evolved as a team based on our needs. Quarterly planning is one of the best examples of chaos because everyone

“Honesty and transparency are essential and are reasons I genuinely appreciate retrospectives. So, if you recognize good things, provide that feedback. Feedback doesn't have to be negative.”

approaches it from their specific role and perspective. Everyone wants their work prioritized over everyone else's. Still, no one has requirements, so it can be everywhere. I like to help get everyone together, consolidating that list and showing, okay, well, this is what it's actually going to look like if we do everything. We need the resources that can line up against it. Let's move things around to who can work on what, and then I suggest a roadmap. That way, people have a better understanding and visibility of the roadmap on an ongoing basis. When things need to adjust, it's essential to communicate it immediately. I think holistically about how I can have a program, a continuous way of showing progress and ensuring transparent, open, and consistent communication.



What does the “future of work” mean to you?

From everything I have invested in from a continuing education perspective, Scaled Agile will differentiate companies and help them deliver quality and speed in the technology space.

Scaled Agile is a framework that aligns cross-functional teams around maximizing business and customer value and being able to plan more effectively. Every stakeholder in the cross-functional team is regularly in the PI planning session to

ensure all decision-makers are part of the planning. Scaled Agile is the only way for companies to remain competitive and to do so at speed and at scale.

Forming culturally diverse teams will be incredibly important. Engaging talent from other countries and seeking a diverse talent pool will ultimately benefit the work in the long run. This approach will allow us to remain hybrid, proving more valuable to a positive work-life balance. It also allows companies to get exceptional talent and subject matter expertise from unique perspectives.

Implementing a Scaled Agile Framework and hiring culturally diverse candidates will be the main differentiators for the innovators, the entrepreneurs, and the future business powerhouses.

What's your top “tip to grow on” for scaling companies?

We are absolutely in sync, because again this comes back to Scaled Agile. It's a framework that can go from an organizational level to an enterprise level, and it is centered on alignment for maximizing business and customer value at speed. It removes the individual ownership, moving towards team collective ownership, and it removes the corporate ego. That is a sticking point for many companies, so many companies will not go towards that model.

Executives frequently want to say they are the ones who made something happen or they made a product, but they did not – the team did. The saying, “There is no I in team,” is true in Scaled Agile. Ultimately, products will suffer because the egocentric focus will only slow down work. It creates silos and makes people less invested in the end result. The focus should always be on making something together, making it the

best it can be, and celebrating everyone who is a part of the success.

People will show up differently to work when personally invested and feel valued and appreciated. They will work harder, move faster, want to achieve greatness, and do all that together. Ego-driven leaders deter that drive, and they disconnect people from their work.

What's your most significant piece of advice for enterprises that manage a large contingent workforce?

My most significant piece of advice is in the candidate selection process, looking at the collective skills rather than just titles. Many hiring managers want to see a certain number of years with a specific job title. They don't realize that many people acquire skills in various roles.

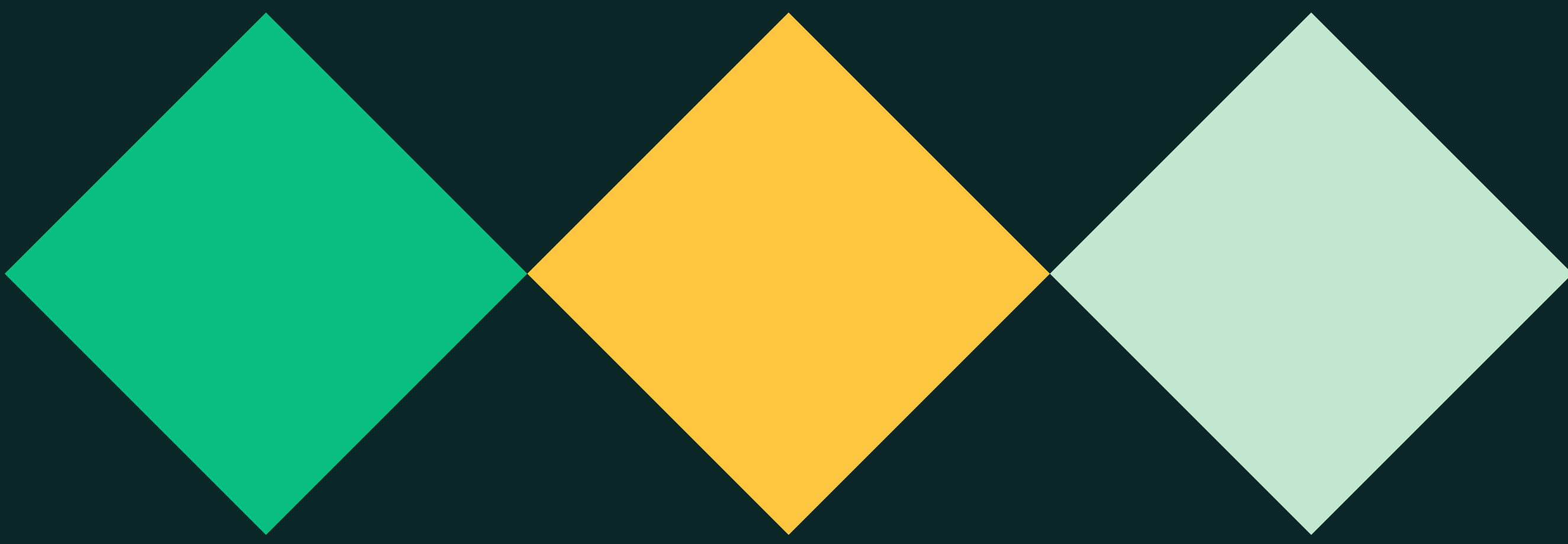
Looking at skills and proficiencies and any volunteer positions can give you a more well-rounded candidate with a different approach to the work. Use AI to scan resumes if you're looking for specific titles. You're not going to get the talent pool that you could get if you look more at their skills, recognizing how that diversity can also add value.

Take my career path as an example. I can't say that there is a linear line that makes

sense, but when I explain how I moved from A to B to C to D, it does make sense. They all led to one another, and I built the skills I needed to acquire to show to my current position. I am incredibly skilled at what I do. Still, again, it was not a direct line. Therefore, I continuously seek additional education and learning opportunities to continue growing those skill sets. Titles can be helpful, but they are only some of it. Skills, life experience, education, and volunteering should be the focus in selecting unique talent and fascinating perspectives.



“
My most significant piece of advice is in the candidate selection process, looking at the collective skills rather than just titles.
”



Key Takeaways

- Run retrospectives to encourage engagement
- Bring in diverse perspectives with global talent
- Collect and give feedback on a consistent cadence, to make everyone feel heard and stay engaged
- Use a Scaled Agile Framework
- As a leader, treat internal and external talent with the same honesty
- Look for skill sets and experiences, not just titles and resume buzzwords



Dinesh Kapoor

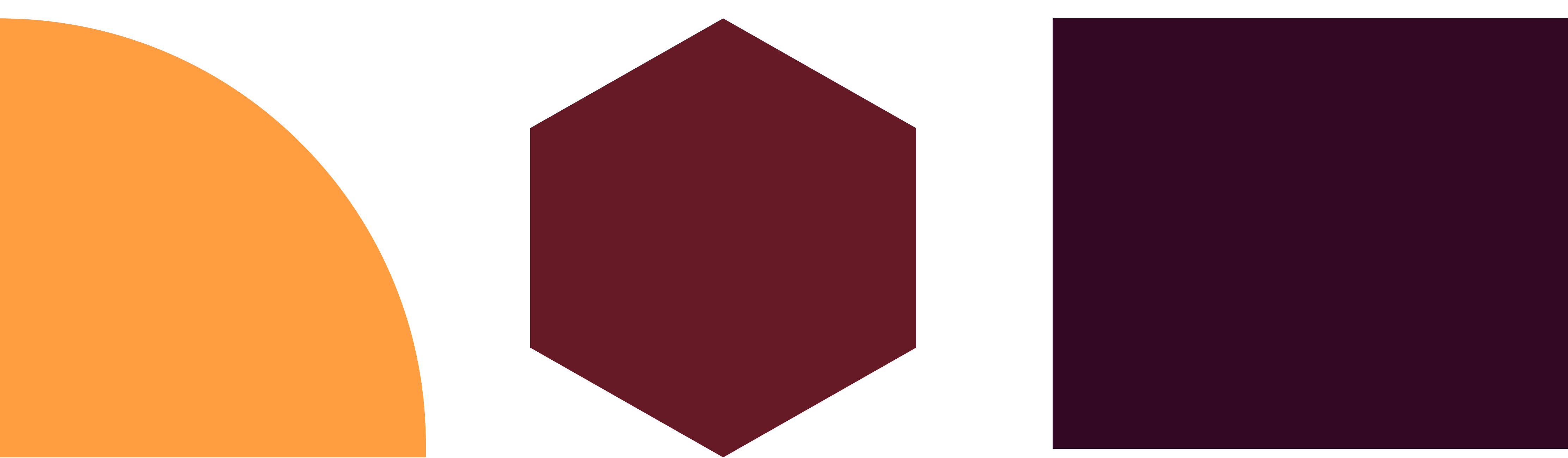
*Global Creative Director,
Consumer Brand & Live Experiences,
Bloomberg Media*

Dinesh Kapoor is currently the Global Creative Director, Consumer Brand & Live Experiences at Bloomberg Media and defines his role as “amplifying the work of over 2,700 journalists and analysts in 120 global bureaus, across 70+ countries.”

Previously, Dinesh was the Group Creative Director at Ogilvy, working on IBM’s Cloud/Watson/Cybersecurity business, and IBM Consulting. He was also Creative Director at J. Walter Thompson Worldwide, working across client brands including HSBC, Ford, Royal Caribbean, Smirnoff, Macys, Welch’s, Merrill Lynch, Rolex, JetBlue, and Microsoft.

“ the fundamental difference that we’ve seen over the last 10 years is that the tools have become so democratic that it has facilitated very efficient remote work.

”



Let's start with the easy stuff – about you. What do you love about your job when it comes to managing a creative workforce?

One major challenge for most creatives is that we first got into the business because we like to create. And the cost we pay here – as we grow and rise up through the ranks – is that we actually do less of that ourselves, and instead, become more of an agent to guide others.

For me personally, I've always had at least some "skin in the game" when it comes to doing the work. It's very important to me. And quite honestly, I feel like if I have to energize a team or paint a picture or a vision, I need to be using my muscles physically – not just talk about things. That's where sometimes that gap begins to exist.

In my opinion, collaborating and getting involved like this is a tool for building empathy. For example, if I'm sweating about the problem and using my muscles and feeling tired from the work, I have a better ability to understand that perhaps the workload is too much for my team, and we need extra resources.

Everybody does things differently. For me, having that one foot in the work helps me to speak about it more and be a

cheerleader and evangelist for the creative vision.

At the same time, I know a lot of strong creative leaders who are very comfortable solely managing and leading people. However, I just always keep going back to the actual work itself.

That's interesting. Obviously with your background in creative direction at some of the biggest agency names in the world, and now one of the biggest media brands in the world – have you seen any difference in how the contingent workforce is managed?

My role at Bloomberg is, in many ways, an extension of what I've always done in my advertising career. A lot of what I do is essentially simplifying and crystallizing the message – and then amplifying it.

And I would argue that's exactly what I've done for brands I've worked with in the past. The way we manage the actual creative work is definitely changing, though. I think the fundamental difference that we've seen over the last 10 years is that the tools have become so democratic that it has facilitated very efficient remote work.

Don't get me wrong – we've always wanted flexibility. And I think especially creative

teams have always wanted the space to step aside and have a chance to really focus, “away” from a lot of the strategic thinking or day-to-day business.

But there was always guilt involved in stepping away to focus. We always felt that, yes we’re doing the work, but is that being acknowledged? Is it being perceived that way? And I think now, we are experiencing a moment in time where you have both the tools to create and the tools to manage – remotely – which didn’t exist before.

Obviously COVID and the remote work boom that happened during those three years became a proof of concept. Even with some of the remote tools already available, what needed to happen was more of a cultural acknowledgment.

Yes, technology keeps improving, and there are better tools than ever before. But I think the big shift of cultural acknowledgment makes it possible to manage remote work more effectively. If I had to hypothetically design a startup product, I would feel very comfortable having a distributed global team and still be able to do something pretty great – which I couldn’t have achieved even five years ago.

I’ll give you an interesting example. Right before I came to Bloomberg, for a year I was involved with a makerspace, and we were doing a lot of interesting creative projects and consulting with startups.

For context, this was when GenAI tools like Midjourney and DALL-E just started coming along. And I was really excited about what those tools empower you to do in terms of initial brainstorming. A lot of that has been proven in the last two years.

However if you rewind two years ago, we had an idea that we wanted to produce using a specific animation technique. Now if you’ve ever worked on animated projects even five years ago, you understand they were generally the most time-consuming and costly things to do. You had to storyboard. And then you had to render. All of this would sometimes take up to six or seven months.

Instead, what we decided to do is design storyboards in Midjourney and DALL-E, and then we created this piece of work using Unreal Engine 5. Now the cool thing about this project? The people who did the Midjourney designs were based out of Serbia, and the people who were doing the Unreal Engine work were based out of India – and we were all collaborating around the clock from a basement in New York.

The democratic tools coupled with the geographic flexibility made it possible for a really small outfit to create something that I thought was pretty impressive for the time. This wouldn’t have been possible even six months prior.

It comes down to where you are. For example with Bloomberg, we are a very “in-person” workplace culture, and I truly do believe that some of the best conversations you can have are when you are in the hallway, actually talking to people. At the same time, I understand that it can be done in many other ways, too.



You mentioned earlier, giving creative people the space to create. What are some ways that you free up your contingent talent to focus on what they do best?

When you really think about the personalities of creative people, we tend to be more introverted and atypical.

There are days in the week when I know I'll be more productive in a specific location. Having that flexibility is always a great thing. There are days when I would argue it's way more productive for me to be in a physical office or studio space.

On the flipside, I also remember 18 years ago, when I was at J. Walter Thompson, when I would crave a creative escape, my art director partner and I used to go walk up to MoMA, primarily because we liked the quiet of those massive galleries. It was a very inspirational space. The agency had an office in Midtown Manhattan, but that little bit of physical separation by going to the museum helped us be more productive.

If there is trust built over time with your talent and teams – and through systems and clear communication – then having the flexibility to carve out your own space

can hugely benefit creative teams.

I think a lot of it comes back to the kind of work we do and the “casting” of the people who do that work. Creatives tend to perform better when we have a little more space – physically and mentally.

Can you share more about “casting”? How do you match the right creative talent to the right projects?

Yes, I use that word a lot, and I have to credit it to an interview I heard with Ethan Coen.

In the interview, the Coen brothers were asked about how they go about thinking of ideas for films, and how much latitude they give the actors to improvise. Coen said that they invest most of the energy in casting for the story or the role. Then, once you are confident that you have the right cast in place, you can give them the freedom to improvise and take the work to another level. I totally subscribe to this idea. Whenever I've been in a situation where I've felt a lack of control, or things are slightly off, this is generally when the casting is not right.

“

Invest most of the energy in casting for the story or the role. Then, once you are confident that you have the right cast in place, you can give them the freedom to improvise and take the work to another level

”

You can control the casting on your side of the team, too. Sometimes you have no control about the casting at all – who your client is, for example. But it does make a difference when you can have some insight and visibility into all the people who put together the work. I’m a huge believer in casting.

I love that. When it comes to leadership and guiding that creative work forward, is there a difference between managing internal and external talent?

To me, there is no difference.

I seek clarity. I want to make sure everything that’s being asked for, serves the quality of the work. And finally, I want to ensure that the person overseeing the project has my best interests in mind.

Let’s say I’m an illustrator or a photographer, and I simply want integrity and transparency in the way that work will be used. Those principles don’t change. Transparency, trust, and clarity – these are such old-fashioned values that

apply universally to creative workforce management.

Whether I work digitally with a completely remote team, or a physical in-person team – those things don’t change, in my opinion.

What would you say is the most important aspect of managing creative talent?

I really do think it’s important to have a clear vision. You want to have your leader draw the margins of where you can go. And the bigger and the broader that vision is, it requires a certain level of confidence.

You want whoever is driving the creative direction to have that ability. One of the biggest blockers to doing great work is when there’s fear involved, or when you feel like your stakeholders will not have the ability to sell it through.

This leads me to another important aspect: Empathy. You want a manager to truly understand your challenges. And in fact, empathy informs clarity, because then I will understand the pain points to make sure that I’m accessible, and that I’m giving you all the information that you need. And then that coincides with the trust aspect.

To sum it up:

- Confidence in your vision
- Ability to “draw the margins” for your talent to play in
- Empathy
- Clarity
- Trust

Those are the important things because there’s so much complexity in the kinds of



projects we do. And I'm very aware that there are individuals in my team who are more skilled than me in a certain domain or category.

I think the best thing that I can do is to make sure that I'm giving them the freedom to do what they do best. I am going to be clear – so we don't waste time or resources. And then they can trust me. I think those principles triangulate and work in conjunction with each other.

Love it. Thank you. I have one more question. What does the future of work mean to you? What are you seeing that's going to be really important for the future workforce?

We are clearly now at a point where we can cast a wider net. And we can bring in resources in many cases where the barriers are gone. In contrast, previously 15–20 years ago, if you wanted to work with someone globally, you needed the weight and the infrastructure of an agency network or a big holding company.

Whereas today, you can sit in your basement from anywhere in the world and create some infrastructure that inspires trust and credibility. This could be from your social media presence, your portfolio, or your channel of choice. And you can easily reach out to an international contractor and say, "I need you to animate something" or "I need you to write code for this project."

And you can actually make that happen globally, from the comfort of home. I think there's going to be more of that. I believe that this democracy of tools and skills is going to enable nimble creative work that happens faster. At the same time, its going to get very noisy. Everyone can do this now.

From my point of view, I think the future of

“

I believe that this democracy of tools and skills is going to enable nimble creative work that happens faster.

”

work is going to be more decentralized. But also incredibly competitive.

Well said. Any last words to grow on for people managing a large creative workforce?

The one thing that we might not have in the future is a large creative workforce. I think that this whole idea of "how many people we need" to do the things that we want to do is fundamentally changing. That's the big difference.

To answer your earlier question, "what has changed?" I feel like my teams are much, much smaller. But I'm very invested in what makes up those teams, for the same reason. This goes back to the casting idea. One of the key things that I'm encouraging the smaller teams to do is to familiarize themselves with more of these democratized tools.

What we may not have anymore in the luxury of large headcounts, we can make up for with technology. I want to make sure that the people who are there, can do amazing

work with the additional tools that they have.

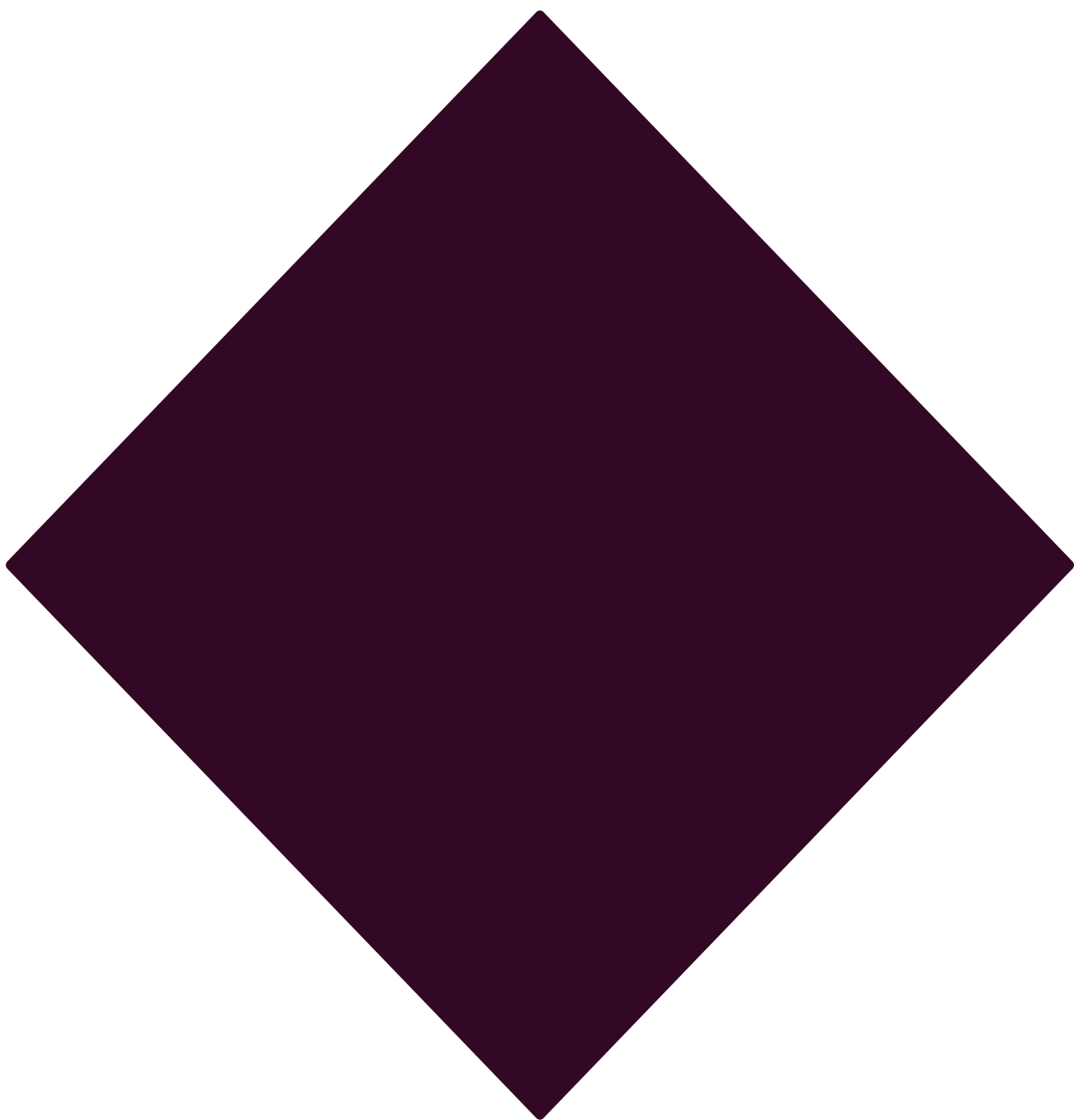
I think that is a large part of the ‘future of work’ conversation. I’ve worked in organizations where it was very normal to have 20-30 people working on a large piece of business. I think those days are long gone.

As we move forward, there’s a lot of change happening. I won’t say the cliches of AI and all of that. But there is no doubt that we are going to be working with smaller teams.

Arguably, I think this should put pressure on leaders and managers to take really good care of those people, because it’s possible to then keep that door open – and see how we can use the tools to do the work better.

So more of a “quality over quantity”.

Absolutely. Really treat that talent well so you can keep them engaged.





Key Takeaways

- Casting is critical: How you match the right talent with the right projects can make all the difference
- Give creative people space (both physical and mental) for improved productivity. Don't micro-manage the work!
- Clarity: Set clear expectations and parameters, and make sure everything you ask for serves to improve the quality of the work
- Have your talent's best interests in mind
- Embody a clear vision to drive the direction of the work and sell it through
- Have empathy with your creative talent, which informs clarity and trust
- Take really good care of your talent to re-engage on future projects
- Leverage democratized tools to collaborate, create, and amplify the work from anywhere in the world

“ We need to make sure that we establish a cadence of communication and checking in, because we’re not all sitting in the same office. We can’t just say, “Hey, let’s circle up and go into a meeting room and hammer this out.”

”

Mandy Johnson

Production Services Director, Jack Morton

Mandy Johnson is the Production Services Director of Jack Morton. Her team manages the supplier and freelancer onboarding and engagement process for most of the Jack Morton US offices, and helps connect the right teams with the right talent in order to create exceptional brand experiences for Jack Morton’s clients. If you’re ready to Be Extraordinary, get in touch!



Thank you so much, Mandy, for joining us. I'm excited to learn about Jack Morton's experience with managing such a fantastic freelance workforce. Let's start with the easy stuff – about you. What is it you love about your job when it comes to freelancer management?

I've been with Jack Morton since March of 2022, and I came from a little more of the corporate world. I worked with IPG, our parent company, for 10 years. I love the freedom, creativity, and agility that comes with doing the client-facing work and production world.

I feel like I get to work with hundreds of different people on any given day, and I travel all over the world and especially all over the U.S. meeting with these folks and making sure that our offices are feeling supported. I know that there are a lot of difficult challenges with managing any remote workforce, but it also gives us a lot of opportunities to work with folks that we might not have otherwise been able to engage with. So, there are definitely silver linings involved with all of this.

What sort of challenges do you run into when it comes to managing such a large remote workforce?

Our freelancers make up a diverse and widespread workforce, so making sure we can recruit the right talent and engage in a meaningful way in an era of remote working has been a challenge to be sure!

We strive to create a culture built on Jack Morton's key values: Passion, Agility, and Respect. We outline these values to everyone we work with, employees and external contractors alike, and make sure that everyone is in alignment with putting these values at the heart of all our client work. If they don't, the relationship won't

stick, but fortunately for the most part, the people we engage with are on board to create extraordinary brand experiences for our partners.

Beyond that, the challenges are similar to what I'd imagine any corporation is dealing with right now when people are as widespread as they are: We need to make sure that we establish a cadence of communication and checking in, because we're not all sitting in the same office. We can't just say, "Hey, let's quick circle up and go into a meeting room and hammer this out."

Instead, we need to be more intentional about how and when we're able to connect with each other. And then, of course, if you are somebody who is working remotely, just make yourself available – for anybody that needs that support.

As long as we are establishing really clear boundaries and expectations at the outset of our engagement with anybody – with both freelancer and employee alike – just establishing the expectations and the cadence of communication gets through a lot of those challenges right away.

And how do you approach that at scale? I understand that your organization has effectively grown your talent pool by thousands. How do you manage all of that – from chasing down details and emailing people and keeping that communication cadence?

Well, having an excellent onboarding partner like Worksuite really helps. Truly, all cheese aside, because we have the Worksuite platform, we are able to engage, onboard, sign deal memos, review insurance, get the information over to our third-party payroll system, if they are going through that – all in one place.

So the fact that we have built a custom

workflow that works for our onboarding and management system, and does all of that automatically – collects their tax information, gets their banking details, if they’re going to be paid through our system – we are able to put together the deal memo with all of the details involved in the engagement and request.

We’re able to review that internally by sending it to the appropriate reviewers. We’re able to get the counter signatures done by our head-level people who need to sign off. As well as reviewing, tracking and storing our insurance documents, which is another important part of our business.

All of that happens right in Worksuite. It is a one-stop shop and it has made it so easy to manage this at scale because we can do all of this in one place.

Wow. Thank you for the kind of words about Worksuite.

I mean, honestly, that’s the only reason we’ve been able to do it at scale as successfully as we have so far.

Before Worksuite, what did ‘the old way’ look like for trying to do all of those things?

A lot of different documents. A lot of different file folders. I mean, we had programs and platforms that were being utilized separately in certain offices. We would use Google Sheets in one office, and then in another we would use monday.com. And so we were leveraging the different platforms that our offices separately were comfortable with. Having to do all of those things, in addition to tracking down the Word documents of the deal memos and then making sure that we’re getting the PDFs saved in one spot and then managing the insurance documents separately...

It was a very manual and piecemeal process. So being able to move all of those together into one platform has been kind of a game changer.

“

As long as we are establishing really clear boundaries, expectations, and a cadence of communication at the outset of our engagement with anybody, this gets through a lot of those challenges right away.

”

That’s amazing what you all have done with the platform. For folks in your position who are managing global talent and dealing with different offices, what do people commonly misunderstand when it comes to outsourcing to contractors?

I think when I originally took over this position, I thought that our freelancer work was a one-and-done sort of situation, and that is not the case at all. So it’s not, it’s not the same as onboarding a supplier that we know we’re only going to be using for this one engagement.

It’s hardly ever a “one-and-done” deal – we’re not just building a product or an event for our clients, we’re building relationships. It’s the foundation of what we create for our

partners, so of course it becomes the basis of our work with our vendors, our internal teams and our freelancers.

And then we probably won't work with them anymore because we don't know if we'll be back in that location. No, with freelancers, we are building relationships and especially with the ability to work with people across the country and across the world. If we like your work, we're going to work with you again, because it's easy to do.

So it's not just that we are using Worksuite to onboard the one-and-done folks and say, "all right here, we'll do your deal memo. We'll pay you and then send you on your way." No, no, no. This is building a cadence, building a relationship.

And then we can look back and say, "That's right. We use this freelancer for this job. I think it would work for them to do, to help us out with this future job for either a similar client or the same client and having that history. And you know, a bunch of the features that Worksuite has for us as well to remember exactly the work that we did, the rates that we paid before, all of the information is right there on file, easy to reference.

And outsourcing isn't just reaching outside of our core team to find more womanpower – we're intentionally seeking out specialists and industry leaders with a wealth of experience. Contracting is a great way to gain these insights while allowing the freelancers the freedom to engage with

other partners alongside the great work they do with Jack Morton.

This system is truly our little black book, and it's a chance for us to build ongoing relationships with people – and not just a one-and-done tool.

What are some of your top tips for building those fruitful, long-term freelancer relationships?

- **Set clear expectations**

Agreeing on the dates of the engagement, the detailed responsibilities, and the understanding of the freelancer's impact on the client experience Jack Morton is building.

- **Keep open lines of communication**

Outlining from the beginning who are the points of contact for any questions or issues that arise, and the understanding that asking now is better than apologizing later!

- **Maintain regularly scheduled checkpoints**

Establishing a cadence for providing updates on the great work they're doing, as well as being kept in the loop about any changes to the overall game plan.

As long as everyone is on the same page from the start, we're well-equipped to navigate the many twists and turns that come with creating great brand experiences!

In your opinion, what's the difference between managing freelancers and leading an internal team? Or is there a difference?

When it's being done well, it feels like there's no difference at all! Our freelancers are an important part of our team, so making sure that they are connected and included is essential to producing great and meaningful work.

That said, we recognize that freelancers are only with us as long as they want to be – it's important to make their experience a great one, so that they want to work with us again on any future projects for which they would be a good fit.

We are fortunate to work with many freelancers across our five U.S. offices. Between our freelance management partners Worksuite and Atrium, we have created a seamless engagement, onboarding, and invoicing/payment process.

In Jack Morton's line of work which involves large-scale physical production in addition to digital creative work, what are some challenges to be mindful of with that boots-on-the-ground labor?

Making sure that we're getting the right people for the right job, of course. That said, the benefit of a lot of our freelancer work is that we don't have them siloed necessarily.

For example, somebody who's working as a copywriter on one project might have the ability or the bandwidth to take on a program management role in another job that we're doing. So it can be that one freelancer is working on multiple jobs in

multiple different roles. And that's just a testament to how versatile and agile our freelancers are. And the deep, deep talent network that we have to draw on.

In terms of the difference between the boots on the ground and the digital space, that's hugely important to make sure that we've got good chemistry with the teams that we're working with because it's not the on-the-ground stuff is so much more intense because you are there for 10-12 hour days, you are working significant overtime and doing everything within our power to manage the challenges and then to make sure that this event comes off without a hitch for our clients.

And so making sure that we've got the right personalities and talent sets for all of our on-the-ground jobs is an essential consideration when we're reaching out to and engaging with our freelancers.

What's your favorite event or activation that involved a lot of freelancers?

I loved McDonald's. So our team has put on the McDonald's employee conference for a couple of years now, and we're working on the one in 2024 as well. There are just

“
It's hardly ever a “one-and-done” deal – we're not just building a product or an event for our clients, we're building relationships. The same goes for freelancer relationships.

”

so many moving parts to that event. Everything from getting our audio visual to getting the stage set; to making sure that we've got the restrooms or working with the venue; to bringing in the merch and making sure that we've got the right print vendors...

I really feel like with as many moving parts as are involved with an on-the-ground event like that, so much can go wrong. We need to make sure that we've got people who are just ready to roll with the punches. And build those relationships and then continue to come back for more fun later, which they always do.

Love it. What is something about engaging a globally diverse workforce that you find really interesting? You mentioned before getting to work with so many different people in all different places... Are there any important things to consider?

Yes absolutely, and thank you for that because one of Jack Morton's huge strategic priorities for the next couple of years is diversity – vendor diversity. And we want to make sure that our DEIB initiatives are being met across the board.

That includes our internal employees, our suppliers, our clients, and then of course, our freelancers. So fortunately, our friends over at Worksuite have helped us come up with a way to track the diversity metrics

of all of our freelancers, self-reported, of course, because these are the folks who own and know their own diversity classifications.

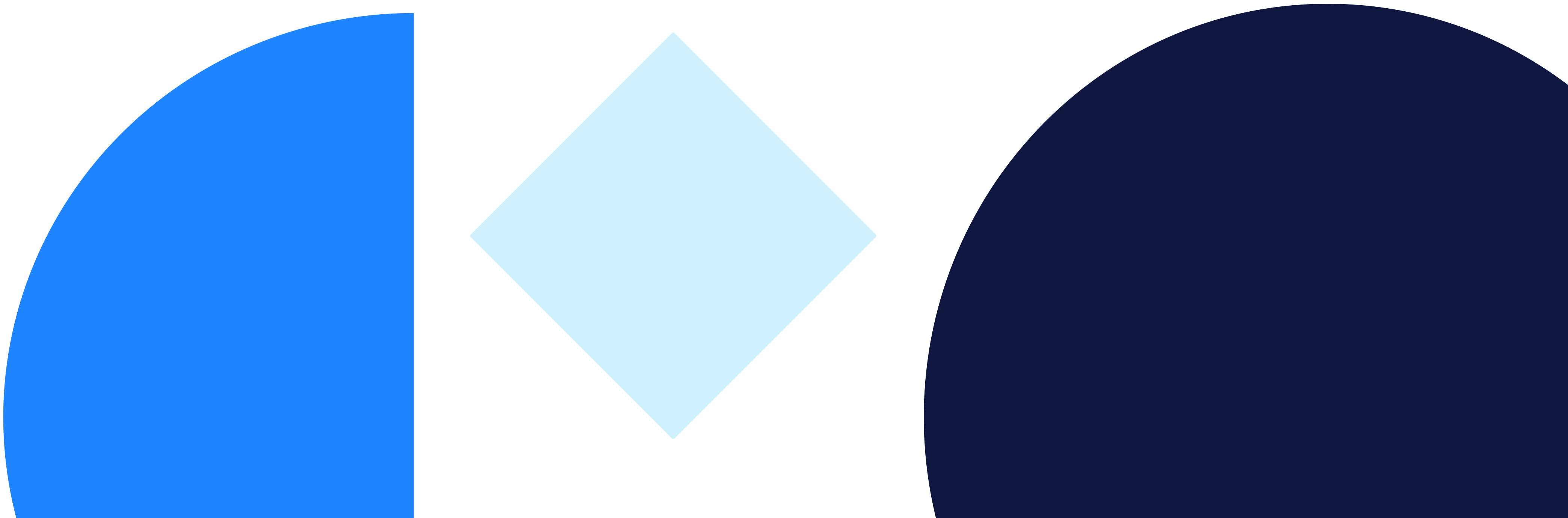
So as we are ramping up our reporting and our numbers so that we can really wow our clients with the level of diversity. At every level of the project, we're grateful to be able to collect that data through Worksuite's platform and to be able to report it back to every interested party.

Then let our clients know the level of diversity that we're able to engage with in our freelancer population.

I love that. Switching gears slightly... when it comes to making sure projects are on-budget and things go off without a hitch, what's your advice to keep clients happy and teams happy?

Review early and often just make sure that we are building in a cadence of review, whether it's checking in every day or every week or whatever the cadence is that works best for your teams, just making sure to set those checkpoints and then frequently communicating with the clients to make sure that they know where we are within our budget.

Any significant changes to those budgets should be communicated early and often



and just make sure that we are on track and that there are no surprises at the end of the day. Important. We use some internal budgeting tools to estimate all of the different costs, including tax, because that's been one of the big considerations for some of our clients. Again, just establish that early and often cadence of reviews.

Don't spend your whole day just watching the pennies go up and up. However, when we know that there are going to be significant costs incurred, check in with everybody, make sure that we're all on board, and then just move forward.

Great. In regards to vetting and organizing your talent, what do you look for? What are the most important qualities when it comes to freelance talent that you continually re-engage?

Good communicators. People who are clear and upfront from the start, who respond to us quickly. Those are the folks that we want to work with. We don't want to be chasing, chasing people to get an answer or to get an update. So clear communicators, risk takers, you know, people with big ideas and lots and lots of passion.

As mentioned, Jack Morton's three pillar core values are Passion, Agility and Respect. So the fact that we've got passionate folks who are able to learn on a dime is the agility piece. And then of course, showing the ultimate respect, deference, and belief in what it is that we can accomplish together is key.

Those are the types of people we look for, as well as a good reputation. If you are absolutely knocking it out of the park for us, we're going to bring you back and we're going to tell other people about your work.

What advice would you give to growing companies out there who are in creative production, for effectively scaling their workforce?

Work with Worksuite! You guys have a phenomenal system that can be really tailored to individual needs. The fact that we were able to build out our workflow for exactly the steps that we wanted and get rid of whatever steps we didn't, and then build in a couple of new custom steps that you guys helped walk us through, it is an entirely wonderful system to be able to manage at scale and not have to be tracking down the documents left and right and up and down.

So that really is something that has helped us organize our little black book and utilize it more effectively.

What does the 'future of work' mean to you? What are you seeing in the contingent workforce space that you think is going to be really important for people to know?

Diversity and agility for sure. We would like to engage with freelancers who share our core values – diversity being chief among them.

That is such a huge strategic priority for us. So if you are a freelancer who works in diverse spaces, or you have those diversity classifications yourself, make sure that you are making those known, because that is going to be such a huge consideration. These are things that we're going to be tracking and reporting to all of the interested parties over the next couple of years.

So, do get involved. Do explore and lean into every element and every area of diversity that is available to you. Because it can only make you a better and more well-rounded person, and can only give you more value as to what you can provide to other people.

Excellent. And you mentioned agility as well. Can you share more about how companies can be more agile in their workforce operations?

You must have the right people, and agility from a core operational level. I mean, a cruise ship is not going to be able to turn on a dime because that's not how a cruise ship is built. So if you have to take your cruise ship apart and rebuild it as a nice little speedboat, do that, do that because the ability to create an incredibly meaningful, impactful, exceptional experience for your client is going to require agility and not just that myopic vision.

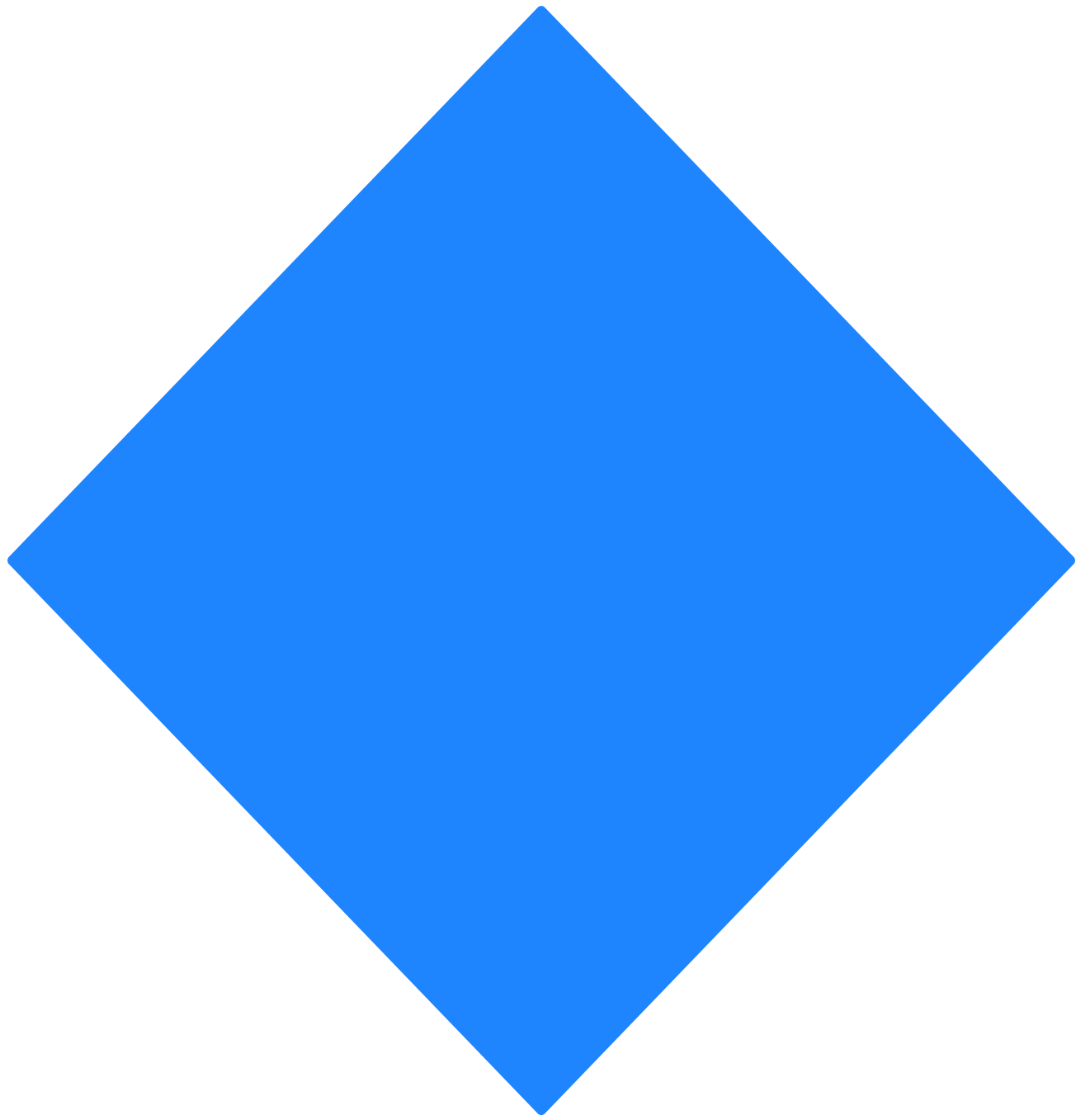
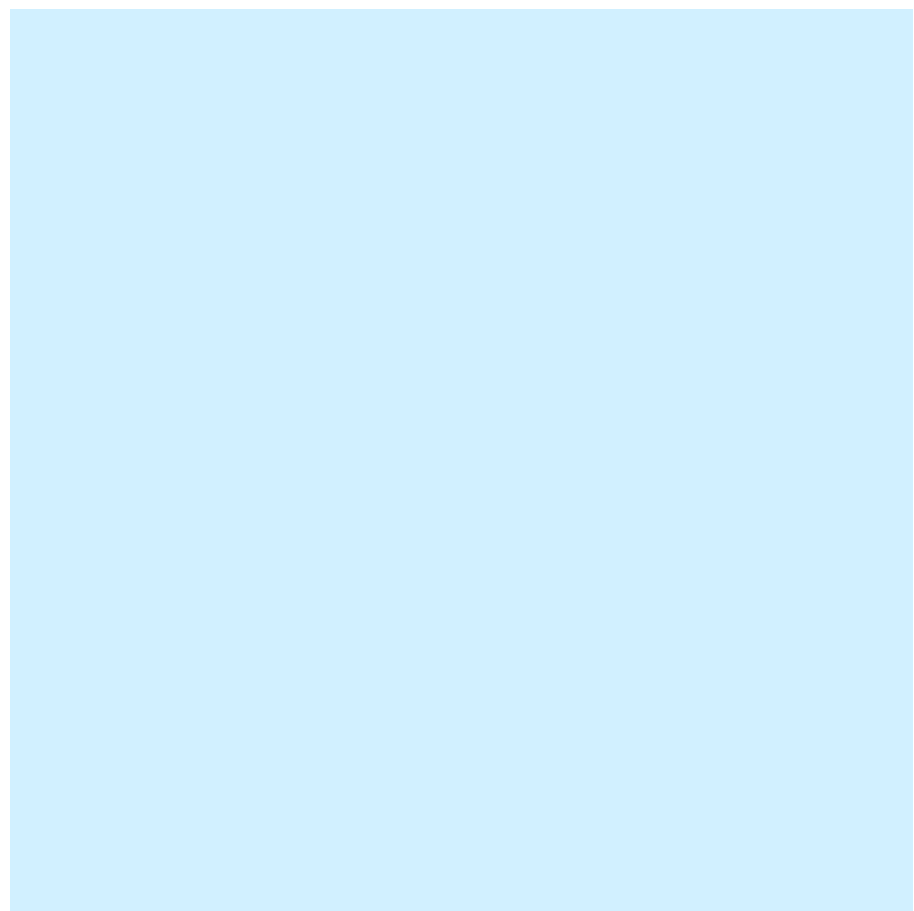
You gotta be able to think on your feet, you gotta be able to make last-minute changes because they are going to come your way.

Reach out and do those checkpoints and touch-bases to make sure that everybody is going in the same direction, as opposed to just barreling forward with what you believe is your idea of where you should be heading, and then finding out later, nope, I should have gone this way the entire time.

So, again, communication – open, honest, early communication. I think that's a huge way to make sure that everyone is in alignment and can move quickly on a dime.

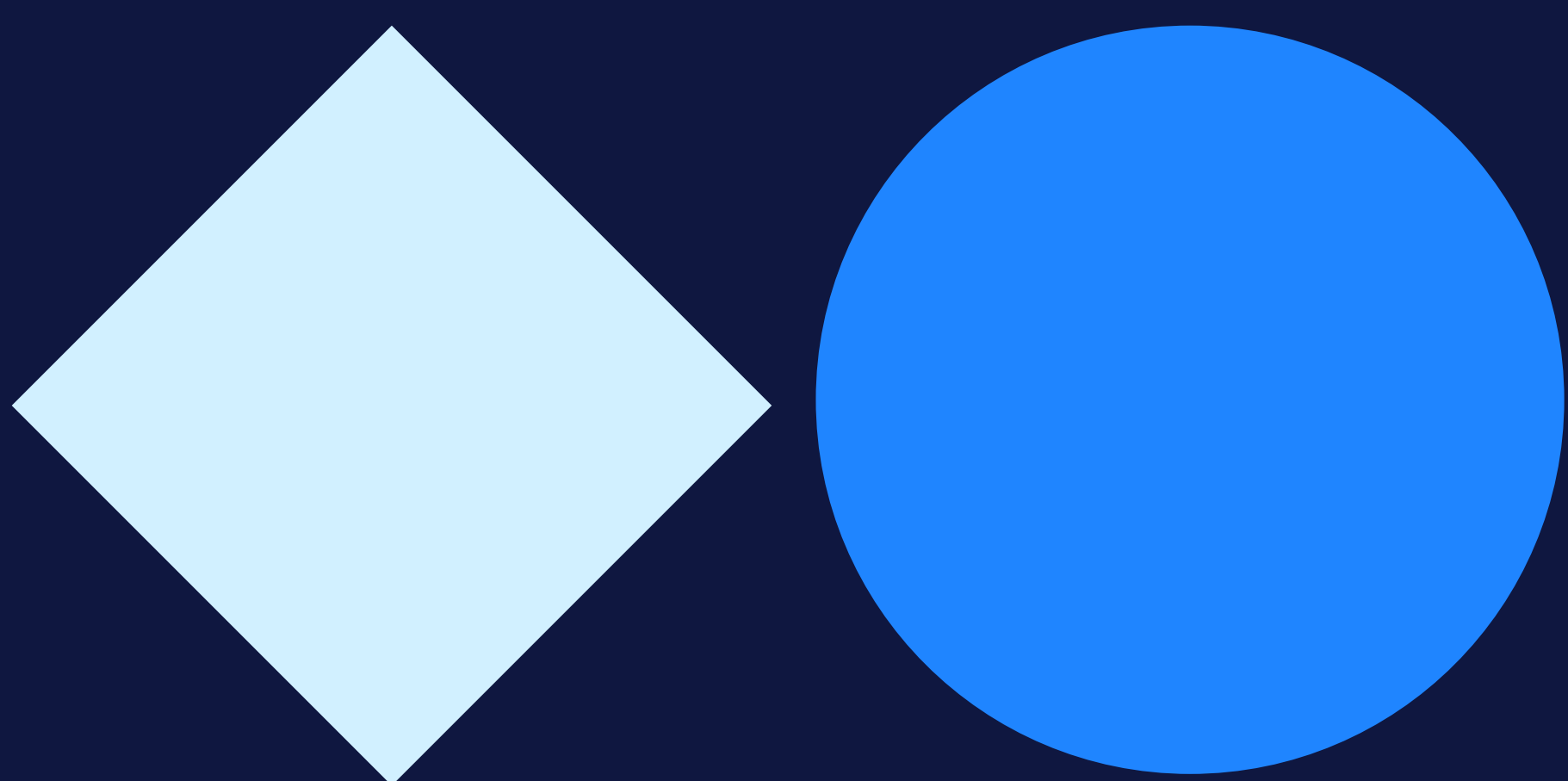
Any last words of wisdom?

Just that we are always looking for brand new talent, folks who are in the industry or want to get into the industry, come our way, if you're, if you're ready to do exceptional work, please come hang out with us.



Key Takeaways

- Establish clear expectations at the outset
- Automate your onboarding workflows
- Track and improve your DEI metrics
- Build strong relationships with talent for the long term, to re-engage on future projects
- Review early and often: Build a cadence of checkpoints to maintain frequent communication (across talent, teams, clients)
- Look for good communicators who respond quickly and are passionate about the work
- Diversity and agility are key when building your talent pool





Justin Rentzel

Creative Director, Red Tettemer O'Connell + Partners
Former Head of Creative, Insomnia Cookies

Justin Rentzel is currently Creative Director at Red Tettemer O'Connell + Partners (RTO+P) based out of Philadelphia. He previously was Head of Creative at Insomnia Cookies. Justin has led creative work for brands including Chipotle, Hendrick's Gin, Dick's Sporting Goods, Dietz & Watson, Victory Motorcycles and Century 21.

“ My skills with managing freelance talent actually got exponentially better during Covid, because basically everybody was a ‘freelancer’ at that point. I actually started my job in-house for Insomnia Cookies, the week before the whole pandemic shutdown. ”

What do you love about your job when it comes to managing creative work?

Oh man. One, that I don't have to do it anymore. No, I'm just kidding. You know, I've always loved the "idea." The execution is fun too, but to me, the real fun part is concepting that initial idea.

And as creative director now I can give a starting place, that initial idea to the team and let them kind of push the pixels, write the copy, and then just guide them in my vision. It's nice to have it. I mean, obviously I still have executive directors but it's nice for it to be, you know, my full vision and the way I see it from art to copy.

Awesome. And when it comes to bigger brand projects, obviously you have production crews, you have freelancers, you have internal and external resources alike. What are some challenges that you've seen along the way?

The distance is a big challenge with managing freelancers. My skills with managing freelance talent actually got exponentially better during Covid, because basically everybody was a 'freelancer' at that point. I actually started my job in-house for Insomnia Cookies, the week before the whole pandemic shutdown.

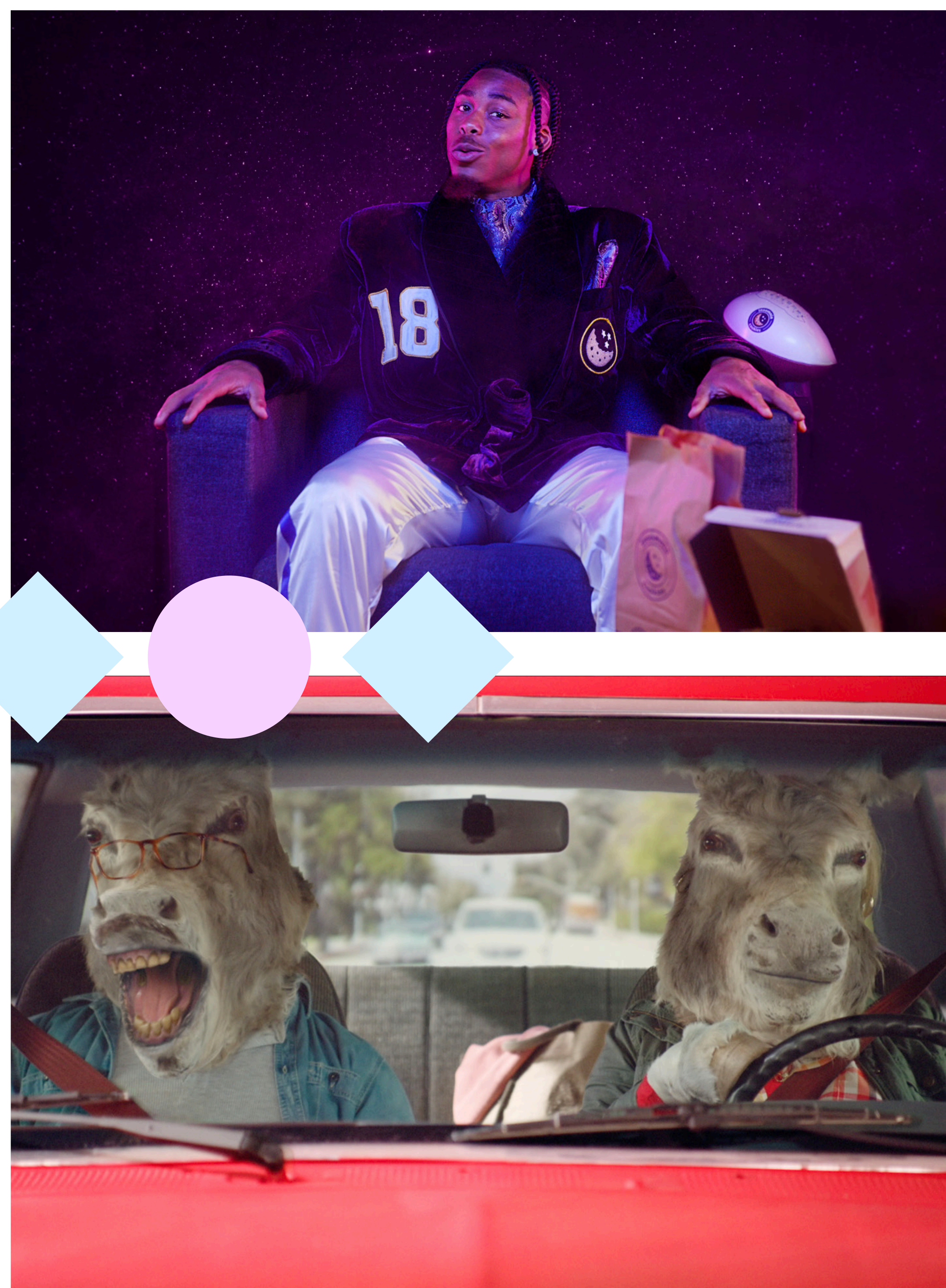
So I never even got to meet my team in real life for about a year and a half which was pretty crazy. So basically at that point I am managing freelancers. So I had a team then and then we would also work with freelance vendors and whatnot. But you know, over that two year span.

Now I feel like I can come into any position now that we're back in the real world, and manage from a distance, which was unbelievably hard at the time to do.

Yeah, we've heard that a lot with just the different time zones and, and even just collaborating creatively. From afar. What are some actionable ways to do that? How did you find solutions to bridge that distance gap?

So a few different ways. Obviously the old-school way is, is email that's what obviously everybody does, but. I was never into project management tools until again, I went in-house at Insomnia Cookies. Everything was a little bit different.

And we started using Asana, which was really great. I've always been one of those kinds of people that when I get feedback I love to be in the office. I love to be able to walk down the hall or bring you in. You walk me through it in person. We workshop it live.



But obviously with video, you can't do that.

So these project management tools really helped and just really staying constantly in communication on Slack, you know, starting Slack channels outside of the company, I didn't even know you could do that. But now I know you can actually have cross-company slack channels or you know, with your freelance vendor or whatever it might be.

But I think the key is to really stay in constant communication. I've also learned, to your point about time zones, that never even crossed my mind before. And I've actually missed so many meetings where I was late or early due to the timezone difference.

So now I have this paranoia. When I'm setting up meetings, even if I know where the vendor's at, I, it's just habit now to write EST or check in with them and see what their time zone is. But that's definitely a key piece of information that now I do all the time as a habit.

How do you brief out creative work to make sure that people are working within the vision that you mentioned? Has that changed?

Not really. My go-to for briefing creative work is I usually like putting together a Google Slides deck. It's almost templated at this point — mood board, color palette, reference imagery. And then I'll even start throwing even if it's a TV spot, I'll just start writing headlines in there.

Just to get that tone of voice that's in my head, for part of that mood board. So it's almost a five to six-page deck that is one big mood board of where my direction is heading. And then I followed up with white paper ideas of just initial thought starters

“

I don't think any idea is a bad idea. I think there's always something interesting in there, and you just have to dig it out. ”

of, of nuggets of information or ideas that can be to see if you could explore it, to see if they have legs and, and where they go.

So I enjoy giving a starting point, but I also encourage them to add their own ideas in and I found that I've gotten pretty good over the years of taking that idea, their nugget whatever they come up with, and finding that kind of diamond in the rough in it, and then polishing that up and bringing that to life.

I don't think any idea is a bad idea. I think there's always something interesting in there, and you just have to dig it out.

Nice. I'd love to learn more about that. Especially when it comes to external talent — such as designers — how do you pull those nuggets of insight out of an idea that you think has legs?

Especially from afar that is, that's kind of an intangible it's, it's almost like a gut feeling like this idea might not be right, but I think we could take it this way. Here's how I see it.

And then they're like, oh yeah, it's interesting.

And then they start building upon that. But yeah, there's really no rhyme or reason to it. It's. I just feel like, oh, this is, there's something really interesting here. And I'm a big analytics and data guy too. I love thinking about the insights as well. I think if they come up with the idea that there is some sort of human truth or insight. That's what I kind of latch onto.

The fluff ideas you know, you can squeak one through here and there, but I find the best ideas, the ones that have legs and can go far are the ones with those truths built into them.

Yeah. I love that. Switching gears a little bit when it comes to working with new talent, How do you onboard new talent into a project or brand?

Well, starting with brand guidelines is a good place for onboarding. And even outside of the brand guidelines, what does this brand stand for? I think brands are way more extensive now than they used to be in the sense of, they're almost lifestyles now.

And yeah, while you have your color palettes and tone of voice and everything, they're the successful ones are really more of a vibe, more of a lifestyle and trying to get that lifestyle and vibe and you know,

general direction of the company and what they stand for and what the product means to consumers.

I think is the most important. Obviously, you can walk anybody through a brand guide and show them, Oh, Sheetz has red and yellow as their colors, but like what they really stand for is their people, what they call their 'Sheetz freaks.' And it's a whole lifestyle. You come in there, you get your gas, but you also get your food and any other, you know, things you're picking up along your road trip. So yeah, does that answer your question?

I'm curious about some of those "intangible" nuances. When it comes to matching talent from your rolodex to the right project, what goes through your mind? What do you look for?

Yeah, I think this is going to sound very basic, but just their style. And you know, if you're a photographer, you have a specific post-production treatment, you have a certain way.

That you shoot people, what angles you know, what their lighting looks like. If it's a designer, you know, if, if I have a brand that's fresh and modern, uber modern and minimalist, then, you know, I'll, I'll go through my Rolodex of that specific type of designer. Same thing with copywriters.



If it's a brand like Sheetz, for example, again, we have our more comedic writers right. But I've also farmed out a 2,000-page guide for processes. I think it was an SOP, I think where I went right to my technical writer who I knew I would never let around my headlines or TV spots, but damn, can they write some great technical copy and love it too.

Nice. Switching gears a little bit... so you and I met way back when we were working on some Philly Ad Club freelance projects. As someone who has worked on all 3 sides (freelance, agency, enterprise brand), what advice would you give to creative resource managers on how to get the best out of their talent?

Again, going back to that constant communication, I think the more check-ins the better. I don't want to call it hand-holding, but I'm kind of a hand-holder. I don't believe in wasting people's time, especially when it comes down to paying freelance hours. So I like to stay pretty involved in the process, and just not have them run down paths that I just don't think are going to work.

I think it's crucial to really manage those small amounts of freelance hours that you

have. Because budgets, you know, are getting slashed year after year and you have fewer hours to use. So you really have to be smart with them. And you really have to consider you know, if it's a larger scale project, you have to consider if I already know I need a full day of photography, right?

Does that eat into my design hours? Does it eat into my copywriting hours? So kind of thinking through the scope of each of those segments before the project even starts is super helpful because you don't want to spend all your hours on one facet of the project and have nothing left for your designers, because then you're going to do it yourself. I've been there.

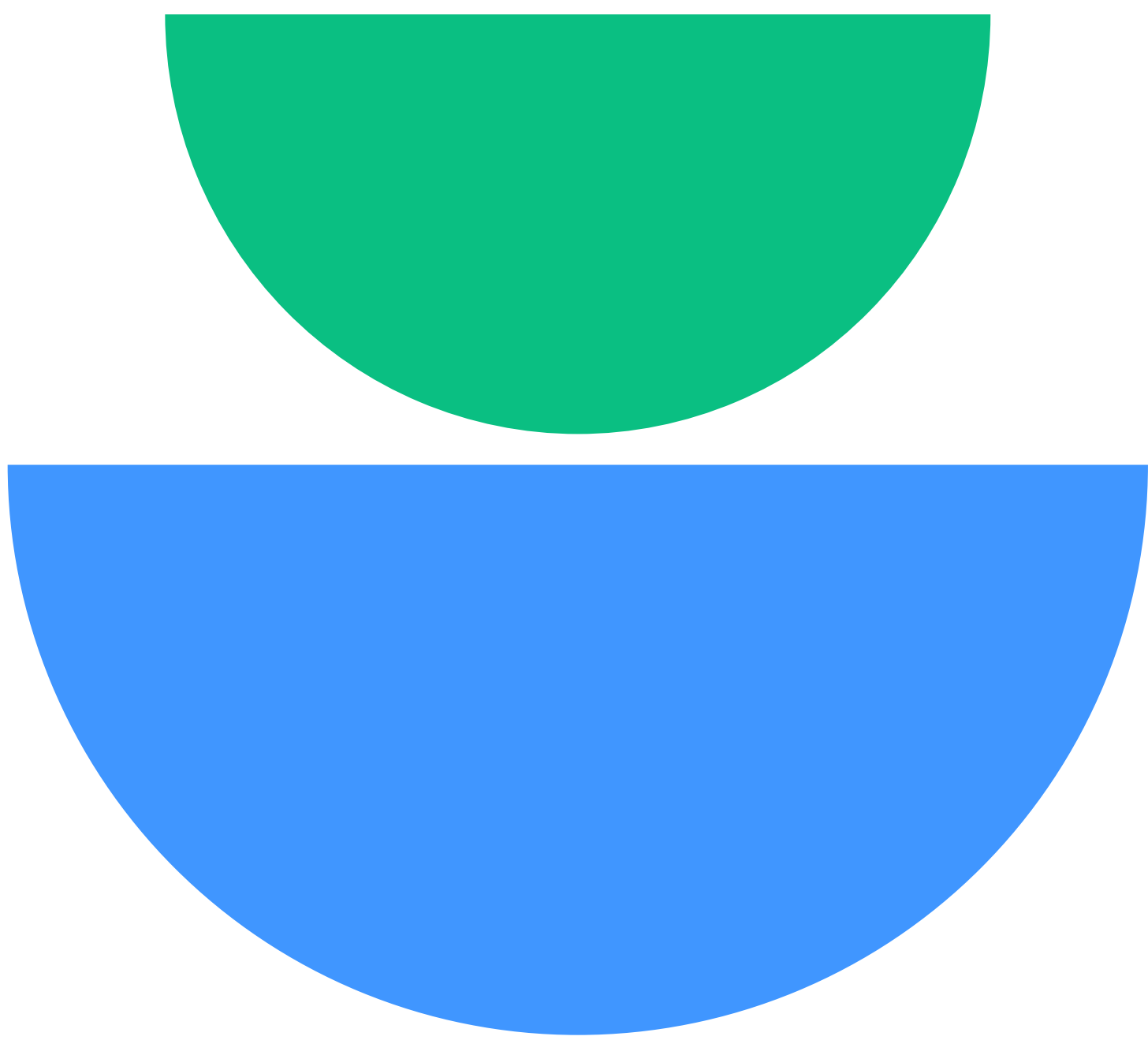
How do you control that scope creep? You mentioned budgeting and making sure people don't go down the wrong path creatively, especially when it comes to limited freelance hours. How do you make sure that you don't have that "rogue spend"?

Yeah I think that comes to that pre-planning thinking about siloing your hours and then staying in constant communication with them, constant check-ins and it's kind of like case by case it's hard to really give one specific answer.

“

I don't believe in wasting people's time, especially when it comes down to paying freelance hours. So I like to stay pretty involved in the process, and just not have them run down paths that I just don't think are going to work.

”



Is there an example that comes to mind where things were kind of “going rogue” with freelance hours and you had to approach that and figure out how to reallocate things?

Yeah, a good project recently was I worked with a freelance photographer and production company producer on some social media spots with Justin Jefferson for Insomnia Cookies.

And the budget was already very, very low to begin with. And that it just kept creeping up. And creeping up and creeping up. So what we did is kind of put the creative concepting and planning on pause at the beginning. And we said, Alright, so this is heading in a direction that is going to be very expensive.

Just with my background in production, I can start seeing like the dollar signs flashing with, you know, what the background of the set’s going to look like, the location and everything. So I’m like, let’s pause this, let’s all meet up as a team. So me, the photographer and the producer came together and said, all right, let’s figure out a way to cut the location.

And let’s figure out a way to cut the props and cut the wardrobe and do something really creative. And it ended up actually benefiting the project exponentially

because we had to be really creative. chopping a lot of that out, but we came up with this really great idea of almost placing him watching TV in this void.

Think of Stranger Things — that dark void. So we really found this dark studio that we had just two lights and we didn’t have to get all the exponential lights. We had some mood lighting set up around, and then we just added a little touch of atmosphere in post and, you know, the end product ended up being way cooler than I think it would have been if it was just in, you know, what we would consider his house or, or whatever.

So it added this layer of creativity and unexpectedness to the project.

I guess it’s true what they say then about creative limitations leading to better ideas.

Yep. Yeah. It really forces you to think creatively. Sometimes you get caught up in muscle memory and, and going back to this stuff that you know, or you’ve seen, but when you actually have to stop and think like, Hey, we get, how do we do this within a certain budget?

You start getting really creative and diving into the depths of your brain that you didn’t really know you had.

That’s awesome. Another project that I remember you worked on that I’d love to hear about if you’re willing to share is that Super Bowl spot with Craig Robinson. I imagine that was crazy... with internal, external talent, probably different vendors, a very strict timeline, the budget’s probably pretty crazy. Can you share more about that experience in terms of managing all the creative resources and production?

Yeah. So it’s funny. I don’t know how to

answer this one because we actually got managed by the production company, if that makes sense. So what I mean by that is we actually reached out to Neil Brennan, Dave Chappelle's writing partner. And he started getting into directing at the time.

I think he had done a couple other smaller spots. But super talented, super funny but he really kind of led the charge on a lot of the decisions. We brought the idea, obviously, of the product, which we had worked on internally at the agency. Wrote the concept, the scripts and everything, but he was very influential on you know, tweaking the scripts to add extra layers of comedic value.

And you know how the shots should be laid out and the location that it should be at and, and really brought just another level to the spot. He did a really great job with it. And, but again, that was you know, that was a team effort, but he definitely elevated the project. That's so cool.

Was there anything unexpected that happened along the way that you guys had to solve for?

Craig Robinson was a little late, but that's like every celebrity. Oh, actually there was something... So Craig did the spot with his brother. That wasn't our original intention and was kind of a really big surprise.

His brother had never done any acting, at least that I know of. But I think he was trying to get into it and he's like, "If you want me, you were using my brother." But it ended up working out great. They had great chemistry. I just liked that layer of it being his brother versus just some random friend.

And it just brought some authenticity to it. That was really interesting. He's so talented, man. He even did the riff, this

whole keyboard song about hoagies. We gave him kind of like a starting point, but he almost ad-lib some of it, and it was hilarious.

He's a super, super talented, super funny guy.



That's awesome. Well, just one other question. What does the future of creative work mean to you?

It's definitely a generational shift, and I think it's going to be a massive divide in certain generations with other generations and also the collaboration of bridging that divide, I think is going to be "interesting" is one word for it.

I'm a big collaborator. Like we talked about, I like doing everything in-person. I like being around the team. It brings energy. It brings ideas. Some of our best TV spots, like when that Craig Robinson thing, the "Dietz Nuts" thing. That was at 1 a.m. Over a beer with some buddies. We were just sitting in our office, and talking about it.

And it ended up becoming a new product, the Super Bowl spot. And we got to work with Craig Robinson. That's my take. I totally see where the whole freelance thing comes from. But I think what it comes down to is it adds an extra stressor to creative directors, and brands, because now managing is not just managing the creative, it's managing people.

And I'm not saying all creative directors are terrible at it, but they like managing the creative and not the people. And it's really hard to do that from afar. And it's really hard to collaborate from afar and give direction. And then you just miss that energy and that connection with other humans. Make it a point to really stay connected with your team, even if you're not there in-person. Don't make everything impersonal with emails and Slacks.

You can rely on tech like Zooms and all of that, but you need to see that person, look them in the eye, have conversations whether they're hard or fun, or whatever it might be, but make sure that you never lose that human touch, because that's where at least a lot of my creativity comes from.

I feed off the energy and the ideas of other people. And I think it really only benefits the work.

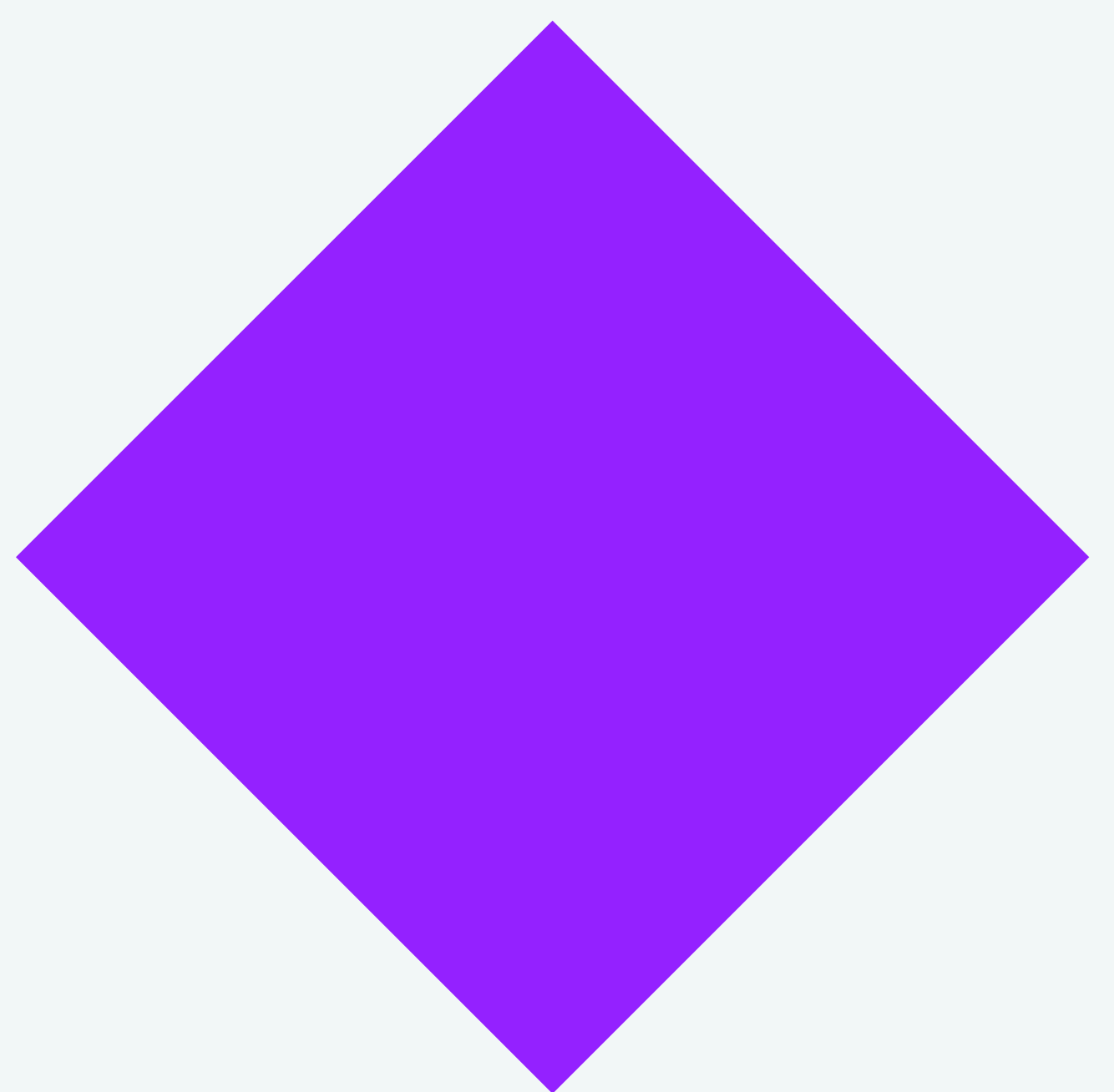
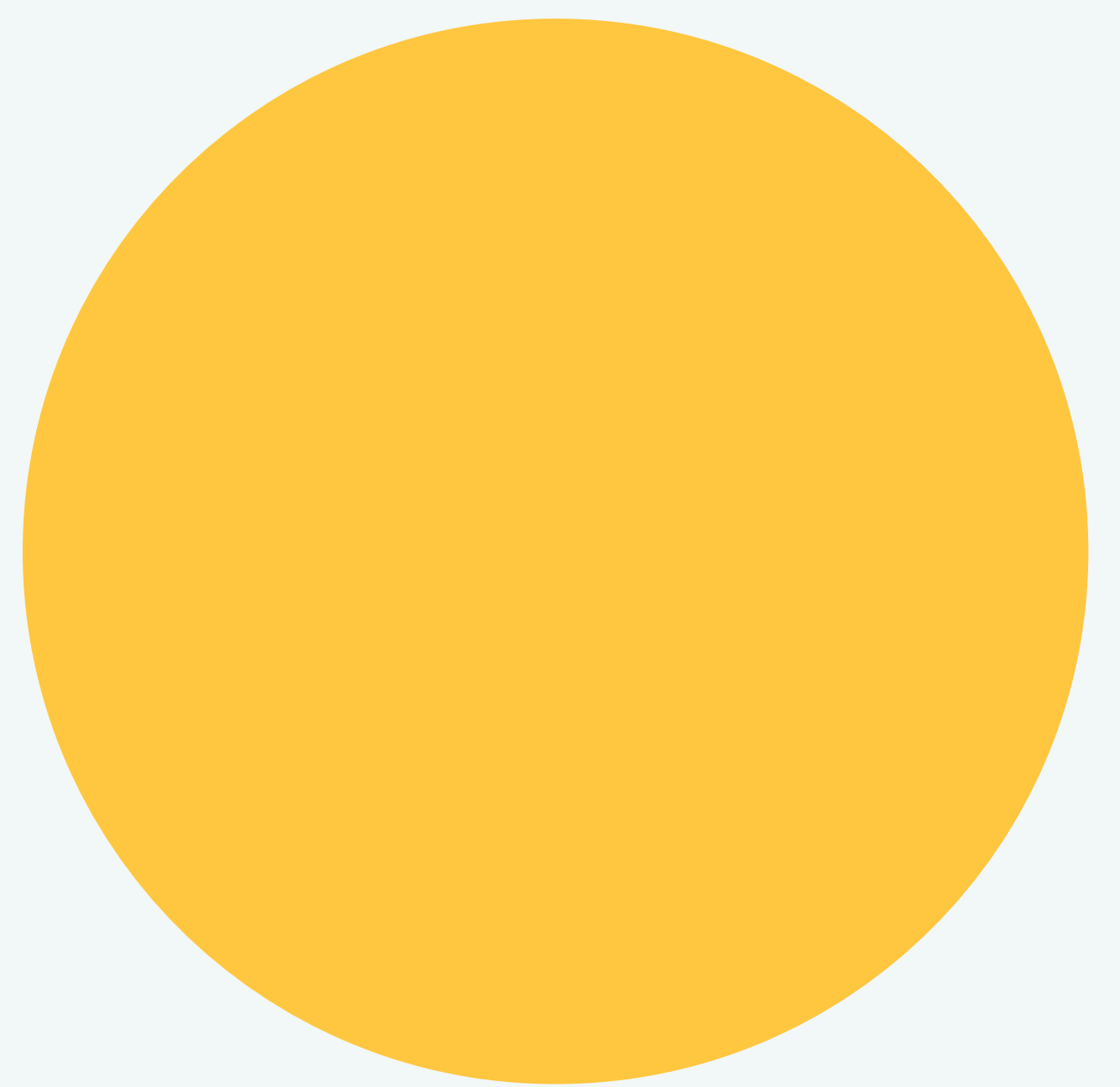
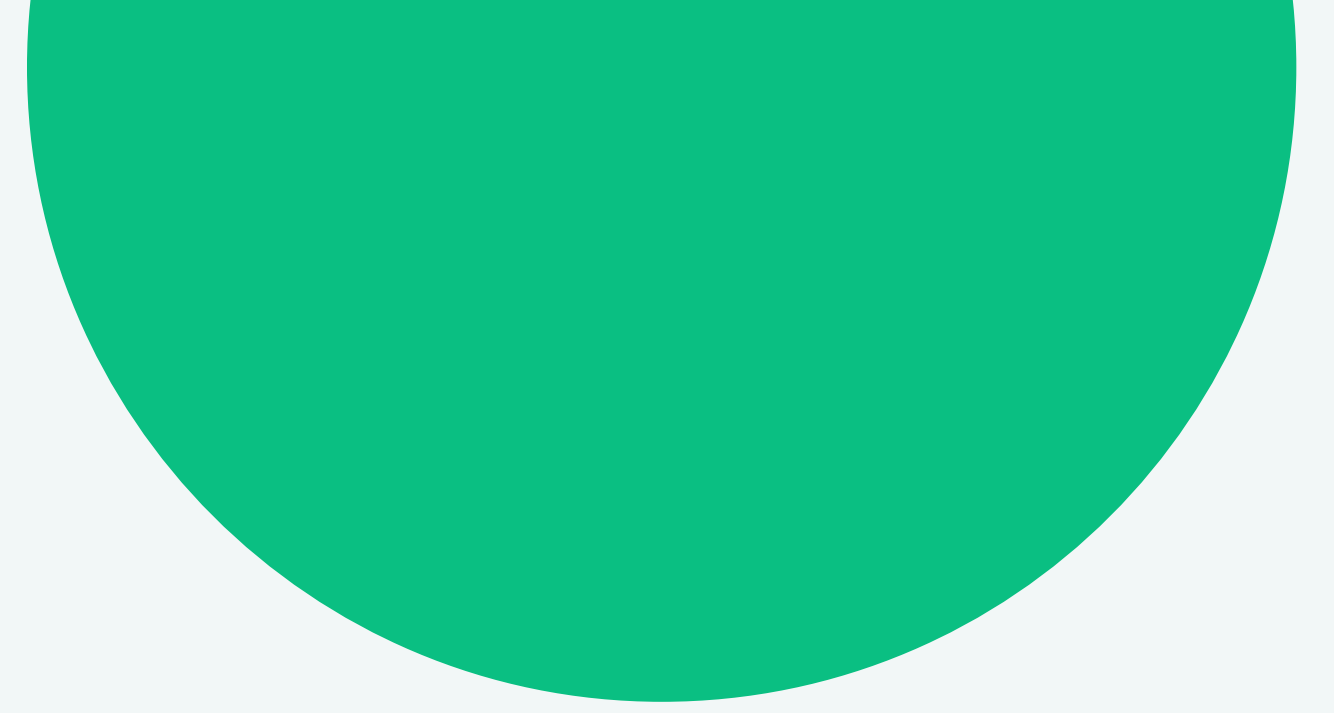
“

Make it a point to really stay connected with your team, even if you're not there in-person. Don't make everything impersonal with emails and Slacks.

”

Key Takeaways

- Managing creative talent from afar is a common challenge
- Over-communicate with frequent check-ins and task management tools to stay aligned on the creative direction
- Constant communication and involvement in the creative process ensures your freelancers don't go down paths that aren't going to work (thereby saving budget)
- The best ideas are the ones that have truths baked in
- Build a reusable Creative Brief Template for scalability (mood board, color palette, reference imagery, tone of voice, headline ideas)
- Brands are a lifestyle now. When onboarding new talent into a brand, make it clear, "what does this brand stand for?"
- Use tools and templates wisely to free up time for creativity and human connection

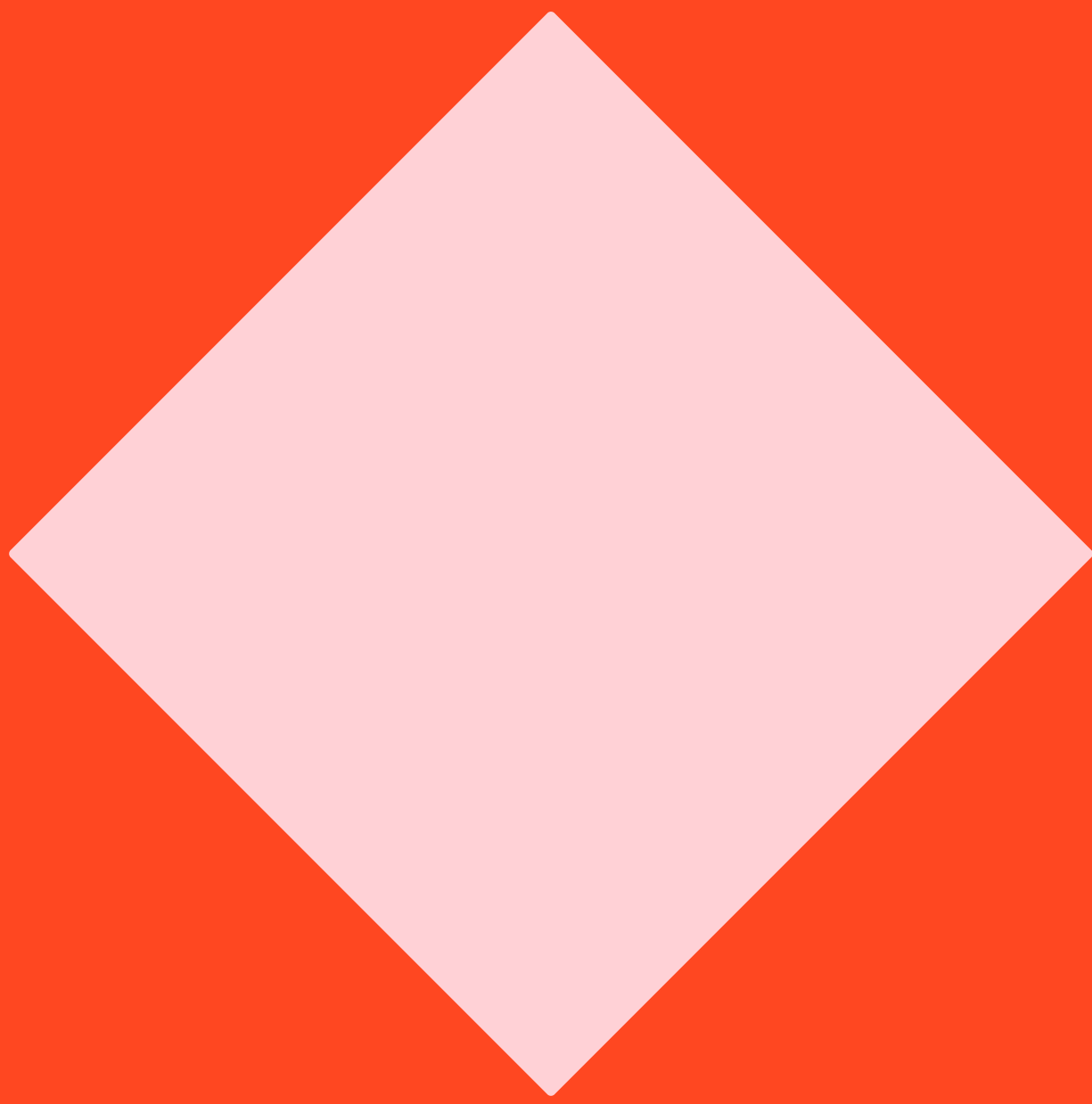




Kellie Jeswald

*Global Lead, Project Management and Studio Operations,
Bloomberg*

Kellie has focused most of her 20-year career within creative project management and operations. Her experience spans across small boutique agencies to larger NYC advertising firms, she’s also spent time as a consultant helping stand up vendor support models for various in-house agencies. Currently, Kellie manages a global PM team within Bloomberg LP’s in-house agency focused on finding efficiencies and partnering with Bloomberg’s Studio, Events, and Marketing leadership to ensure the right people and workflows are in place based on the volume and type of work flowing through the Studio teams.



“ You should always be the *calm within the storm.* You are on the front lines as the project manager. ”

Thanks so much for joining us to talk about mastering freelancer management. I'd love to start with the easy stuff – about you. What do you love about your job when it comes to managing creative resources?

Throughout my career, I've really always focused on creative project management. 'Project manager' is such a broad term, but I've leaned in with creative teams – working in both small boutique firms and larger New York City agencies.

I moved on to Accenture where I was the vendor companies were engaging with to help get their work done. Fast-forward to today, I'm in-house at Bloomberg. I've done a lot within the creative space, and I just love being around creative people. The work we do is exciting and fun.

When you get to see all the hard work that you've helped bring to life – whether it's in the subway as you're headed to work, or online – it just makes it really fulfilling. Plus, it's usually a very nice group of people to work with. You have very creative minds, which make the day-to-day fun.

If we're speaking about the freelance contract worker, that was always a big part of every aspect of my career, especially now where I landed at Bloomberg, here I am the primary person who engages with these external vendors to help us with our volume concerns.

You mentioned project management vs. creative project management. Can you talk to me more about that? Are there any unique challenges that arise with managing that type of talent or that type of work?

Good question. Sometimes when you're collaborating with the creative mind, it can be a bit harder to keep people focused

on a deadline. So you have your "type A" project manager who needs something delivered by X time. And then you have your talent who may need to get their creative juices flowing.

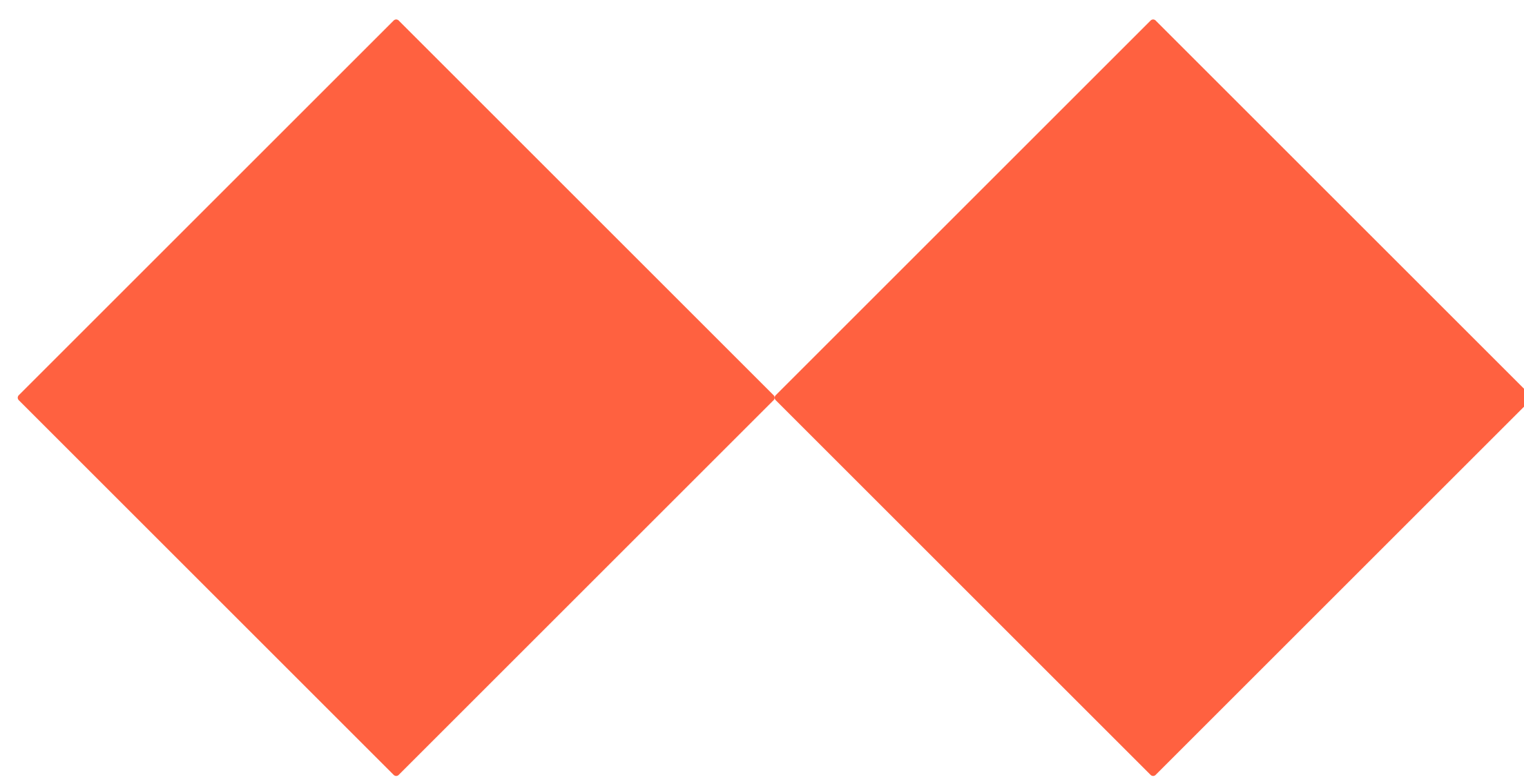
While I always respect the process, sometimes the timeline only allows so much room for the creativity to flow. So it's a bit of a catch-22. But again, the role that the project manager plays is to make sure the creative team feels like they have the time and space needed to do a good job.

So it's fulfilling, but it can be difficult.

Understandable! What are some of your top tips for efficiently managing creative freelancers?

You should always be the "calm within the storm." You are on the front lines as the project manager. You are working with the stakeholders, the people requesting the work, so you are a bit of a go-between. And so you might be the one receiving some of that pressure. However, what I've found to be most successful is if I can turn that into motivation on the other side. Anything from bringing them donuts in the morning to keep everyone's energy high to hit these deadlines, to really rolling up your sleeves and working with them versus just directing them on what you need and when.

It becomes a true partnership, which is how to build great long-term relationships with talent.



What challenges have you run into with managing different types of workers (contractors, vendors, flex teams)?

Time zone differences, whether you're full-time or contract, are always really tough for communication. At Bloomberg, we have Studio teams in New York, Singapore, Hong Kong, London, and São Paulo. Trying to get the teams to truly collaborate can be hard.

You can only do so many stand-ups and statuses. However, once a given team logs off, there's still work happening with another team. Trying to keep everyone up-to-date is never easy across time zones. With full-time employees, it may be a little bit easier – only because the investment in the company is there.

But with the contract workers we've engaged – they're hungry. They really want to stay online and prove their skills. So they also really put forth the effort when it comes to cross-collaborating – whether it's across regions or even within our own four walls – they're putting forth their best selves. Which is great.

Also, if you get to a point with a contract worker where maybe that person isn't the right fit, there is a path forward if you need to bring in someone else who is better suited for the role at hand.

Can you share more about that talent matching process? How do you pick the right resources for the right projects, especially with such a global network?

Skill set is key. Again, if you think about the role of the project manager, it is to really know the strengths and weaknesses of everyone on the team.

For example, one person might be incredibly creative, but they're a little bit slower at getting the work done. Someone else might be less creative, but they can cruise through multiple projects in a given day. It's critical to understand those strengths, and how you need to work with each individual to keep them motivated. It may not always be that easy though, especially when there's a high volume of requests coming through.

It's really about ensuring you have the right people with the right skill sets picking up that work, so we don't run into any delays or get backed up.

What are some systems or frameworks you like to use when it comes to just managing that volume of workload?

We're in the process of transitioning to a new project management tool, which I think is going to be really great for us. It'll add more transparency and help us with some of the

“

Skill set is key. Again, if you think about the role of the project manager, it is to really know the strengths and weaknesses of everyone on the team.

”

resource management issues – making sure everyone has a comfortable level of work. No one's over- or under-allocated.

We're also putting in a framework for prioritization as well – what I'm calling the **"level of effort"** scale.

This is a framework to determine how much effort should be applied to each project. Because not all projects have the same level of importance, we created this weighted system to help us identify where our time should be spent.

And so each campaign, or event, or project that comes through gets filtered through the system. And once we have a score, that number tells us things like:

- Should this be templated?
- Or does this require creative concepting?
- Or is it a mix in between?

I think that's key, because we were a company that used to treat every project coming through as a top priority. Everything got all the bells and whistles. We went 115 percent on all the work, but it caused a lot of bottlenecks, and it really was starting to burn the team out.

Now, we actually have a system in place to determine, 'Okay, this falls in this low category. It's just a template. It's a copy change. We're not changing creative.'

Meanwhile, for these other projects, we want to make sure we have the time to do them right, because these are the higher priority initiatives requiring a higher level of effort.

That's interesting. Do you have any advice around keeping talent engaged and motivated, even on the 'lower priority' work?

It's ironic you say that, because the purpose for us not really calling it a priority conversation yet, but rather a "level of effort" conversation is because we don't want people to think that all they're working on is low-priority work.

It truly is a level of effort scale, and I think a lot of the teams appreciate that. They might be seeing a lot of things that hit that "lower effort" category. But honestly, these are the things we now look at to see if they can be self-serve. Can we use tools like Canva to just build out the templates, but have the requester customize it themselves?

This is also where we engage with a couple different agency vendor partners, to really help us knock out that low-effort, high-volume work. This way, our core team that we have here can really focus on those initiatives where their deep knowledge of the company and our brand helps them focus on those higher-level of effort

projects. So we don't say priority. All work is a priority. It's just that the level of effort for each one can shift.

Zooming out, what do you feel is the most important aspect of managing creative resources?

Be open and listen. As a project manager, just being someone who listens and understands your talent's challenges, goes a long way. I would say the other half of my role is really operational, process, workflows – and that's where the key insights come in. I've learned, you have two types of people: certain people who will just suffer in silence, unless you prod and poke and ask for their input; and certain people who just tell you so much and you can't ever really please them.

“

Be open and listen. As a project manager, just being someone who listens and understands your talent's challenges, goes a long way. I would say the other half of my role is really operational, process, workflows – and that's where the key insights come in.

”

And so you must figure out that healthy mix between both of them. Because you do want to help them, if there's an issue in the workflow, if things aren't working, does what we're asking them to do make sense? I think to be the project manager is to be the person who listens. The one who really helps facilitate.

I would never want people to feel like “what we say goes.” Rather, everyone has a voice in this conversation. And when you hear and take action on that feedback as it comes in, it makes the working relationship stronger, and people feel more confident and comfortable.

And that probably is true for everyone – not solely working with creatives. Again, being that calming force. A big part of that is listening and helping to improve things moving forward.

Love it. For global companies like yours who work in different locations and cultures, have you experienced any other challenges?

One of the things if we're thinking specifically around creative, is consistency in the creative work.

For example, we could develop this grand campaign in New York, and we share that out thinking this is our “global campaign.” We share it with our teams in Hong Kong and London, and they react with, “Whoa you can't say that!” or “Whoa you can't use that color,” or any number of intricacies you may not think of when you're only focused on your own region.

So one thing we've been trying to get better at is inclusion: Making sure, for example, if something is meant to be global and not solely focused in an individual region, how are we communicating that to our creative

partners in those offices? Always making sure we're doing and saying what would resonate just as well in those regions. We have definitely gotten better at that.

But when you're talking about different groups and different time zones doing creative for the same company, again, we're, the same company, the same client base – we're an in-house agency. You need to make sure there is that consistency across the brand.

Another tool we are heavy users of is Slack. We have various forums where you drop creative in, you can collect instant feedback from the group within those channels, just to make sure what we're doing really would make sense globally, and keep our brand voice consistent.

I'd just love to learn more about the workflows that you recommend when it comes to managing creative work at scale...

We instituted what we're calling the “**studio engagement process**”, which has been a game-changer for our team. Before – and honestly this is a problem for a lot of in-house agency environments – creative teams felt like order-takers.

“People are just telling me what they want, and I'm delivering on what they ask.” Maybe this process doesn't make the most sense.

We manage our social channels. We manage our websites. We manage all of these ways to communicate with our clients. And some of the requests felt like they just didn't make sense for what we were trying to accomplish.

So we scrapped our old way of working, and we created the studio engagement process. This process entails: a brief

comes in, a strategist reviews it, then they work with our studio team internally, and we are the ones putting together the scope of work.

From a studio perspective, we are the channel owners. We do manage those audiences, so it's important that we have someone who's looking at that end-to-end customer journey with a global purview for those audiences we're trying to reach.

And we have the strategy team coming in to support the people requesting the work to ensure we're no longer order-takers. We're actually part of the conversation proposing what will work for the request or problem from the brief. There is also a creative point of contact in those initial conversations so they are able to voice their opinion upfront.

Then, when we're kicking off with the team, it's more cohesive. Everyone understands the goal – what we're trying to do. We're crafting that brief and that strategy framework together, versus feeling like, “Here, just do it.”

That's really helped the team feel like they have a say in what we're doing, which has really helped motivate our talent.

Love that. One last question that I'm asking everybody. What does the future of work mean to you? What are you seeing that is going to be important for the future of workforce management?

I really love the idea of a flex team. I was part of a flex team earlier in my career, in which I was the vendor who was engaged to come into a company and help with their volume.

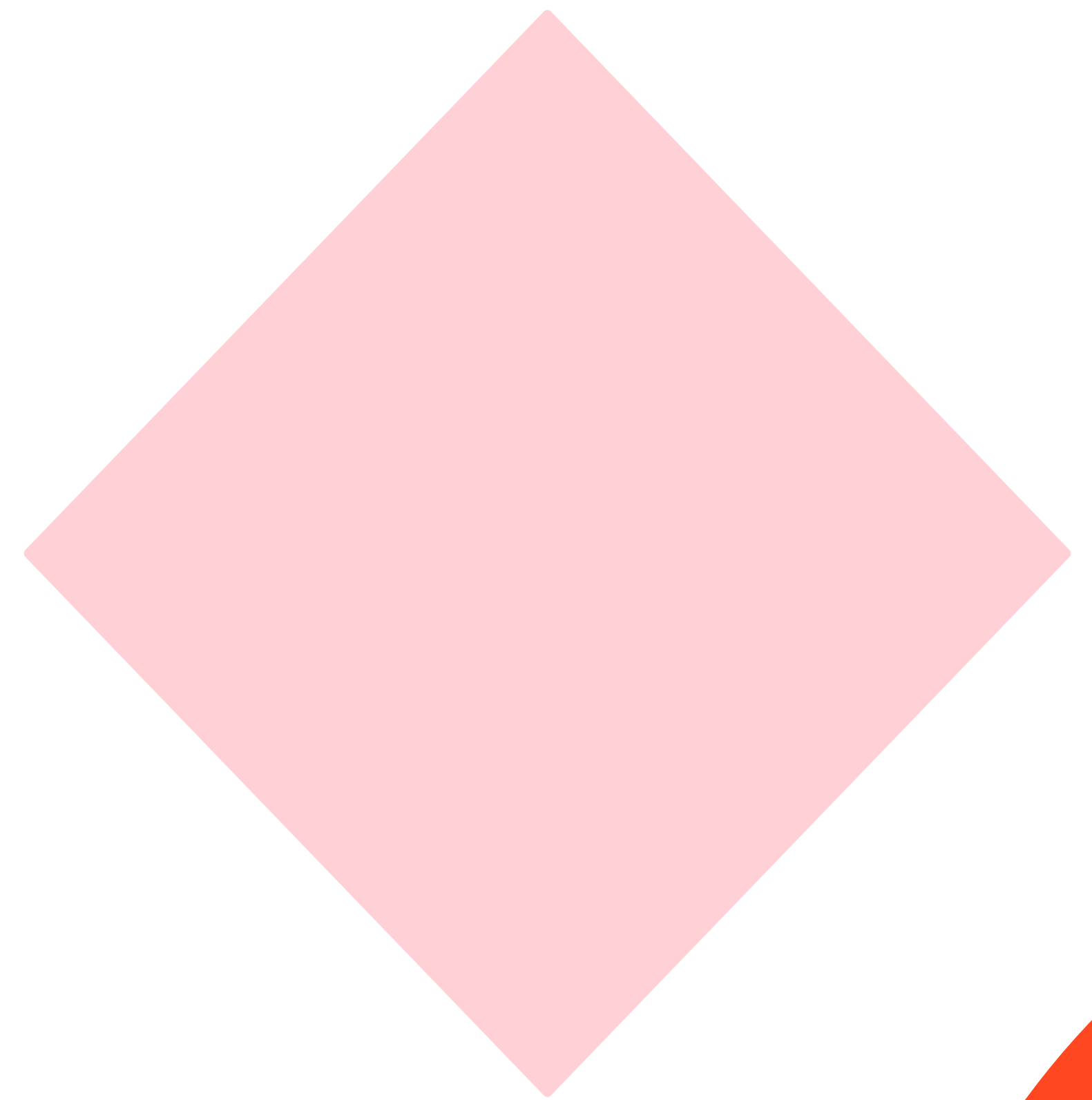
Work peaks and valleys. And you really can't staff appropriately in an in-house agency

environment, because you never know what might happen.

Having the capability and having the contacts and the vendors set up in the system “ready to go” really helps when you hit those bottlenecks of too much work volume – those moments when you feel, “There’s no way we’re going to get it all done.”

Conversely, with a flex team and system in place, you can have peace of mind and efficiently manage that volume. “Okay, there’s this whole group of people over here. We’ve already onboarded them to the brand. They’re fully capable and ready to work. We gave them access to our systems.”

And now they’re just an extension of our team, when we need it in the peak seasons. Or even, for example, when everyone takes vacation at the same time in August. It could be anything. Having that capability to really ease the minds of everyone, to know we have this flex team that we can pull from who can jump in in a pinch, and really deliver on the work – I think that has a lot of benefits. and I can see that being a huge part of our future moving forward.



“

Conversely, with a flex team and system in place, you can have peace of mind and efficiently manage that volume.

”

Key Takeaways

- Be the “calm within the storm” as a creative project manager, supporting your talent and acting as a motivator and facilitator rather than just directing.
- Foster a collaborative environment by engaging freelancers as long-term partners rather than just task-doers.
- Utilize project management tools and proven frameworks for efficient resource allocation and workload prioritization.
- Implement structured request processes, like Bloomberg’s “studio engagement process,” to ensure alignment with project goals and avoid miscommunications.
- Embrace the concept of Flex Teams to efficiently address fluctuations in workload and avoid stressful overwhelm during peak periods.
- Engage external vendors, freelancers and agency partners to knock out the low-effort, high-volume work – to keep your internal team focused on strategy.
- Clearly communicate guidelines for global brand consistency, especially when managing talent in different international locations.

Closing Thoughts

Managing freelancers can be a cumbersome process, especially remotely and on a global scale. The key to freelance management success is nurturing open and honest dialogue, clearly communicating expectations, and creating a consistent cadence of check-ins with your talent.

It's crucial to make your freelancers feel like an integral part of your extended team, and to regularly celebrate victories, while collectively identifying areas for improvement through retrospectives.

Remember that diverse perspectives and agility can fuel innovation among your scaling workforce. Tools such as Worksuite can help bridge the distance gap, aiding in efficient management of creative work — and reduced burden from administrative work.

Having a clear vision for your brand and communicating guidelines clearly when onboarding external talent can be a game changer. By using tools and templates wisely, you can free up time for the most critical aspects of your job — creativity and human connection.

The future of work is here. And Worksuite can help.

If managing global contractors feels like an uphill battle, freelance management systems might just be the answer to your challenges.

It's time to embrace the future of creative work — where the best ideas can come from anywhere in the world.

Transform Your Talent Operations with Worksuite

Explore Worksuite's freelancer management system today, and say goodbye to spreadsheets and email chains forever.

[Learn more at worksuite.com](https://worksuite.com)