

DECEMBER 2022		PROGRESS					BEST OF EDITION		
								A collection of SYLVAIN's musings on curiosity, growth, responsibility, and more.	
@SYLVAINLABS		REPORT						SYLVAIN.CO	
		SYLVAIN							
What is Progress Report? Nontraditional business intelligence with matching action steps to help you change your business and grow your teams. Now that's progress.¹ Periodically we deliver Off-white Papers² and Best Of Newspapers like this one, in which we explore how we're responding to our rapidly-changing world with ideas on how you can take our thoughts beyond the page. Every week we deliver a newsletter with topline on need-to-know leadership imperatives and tips for what to do about them. The goal is to keep it thoughtful but, you know, fun.³ Because we don't need to be perfect, we just need to keep making progress.						SYLVAIN is a strategy and design consultancy that seeks to provoke progress for people, organizations, and society at large. We do that through Innovation, Brand, and Organizational Strategy & Design. OFFICES NEW YORK CITY 176 Grand Street, 3rd Fl. New York, NY 10013 +1 (646) 308 1611 RICHMOND 217 W. 7th Street Richmond, VA 23224 +1 (804) 325 4255 AMSTERDAM Keizersgracht 5551017 DR Amsterdam +31 20 708 4560			
¹ If we do say so ourselves...		² We would like to state, as a matter of record, that we coined this term two years before Virgil. We thought about changing this, but "Eggshell Paper" didn't have the same ring.		³ The tone of this introductory copy should give you a good sense of what we're going for.		PROUDLY CERTIFIED B CORP MINORITY BUSINESS ENTERPRISE CERTIFIED MEMBER OF KYU COLLECTIVE 			
DECEMBER 2022		SYLVAIN						BEST OF EDITION	
THE YEAR SHUG JOINED US								OUR ATTEMPT, AT LEAST...	

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Editor's Note

Every couple of weeks, the people at SYLVAIN send their thoughts on culture, brands, and progress straight to your inboxes. You're probably familiar with the Progress Report newsletter, but if you aren't, subscribe here.

What many of you may not know is that Progress Report is more than just a biweekly newsletter. It's representative of a larger ecosystem of thought and care here at SYLVAIN. It's a manifestation of all the things we're contemplating on a daily basis for our own personal lives, work lives, and client projects. And in some ways it's an exercise in self-reflection as much as it is an exercise in external tangibility and application.

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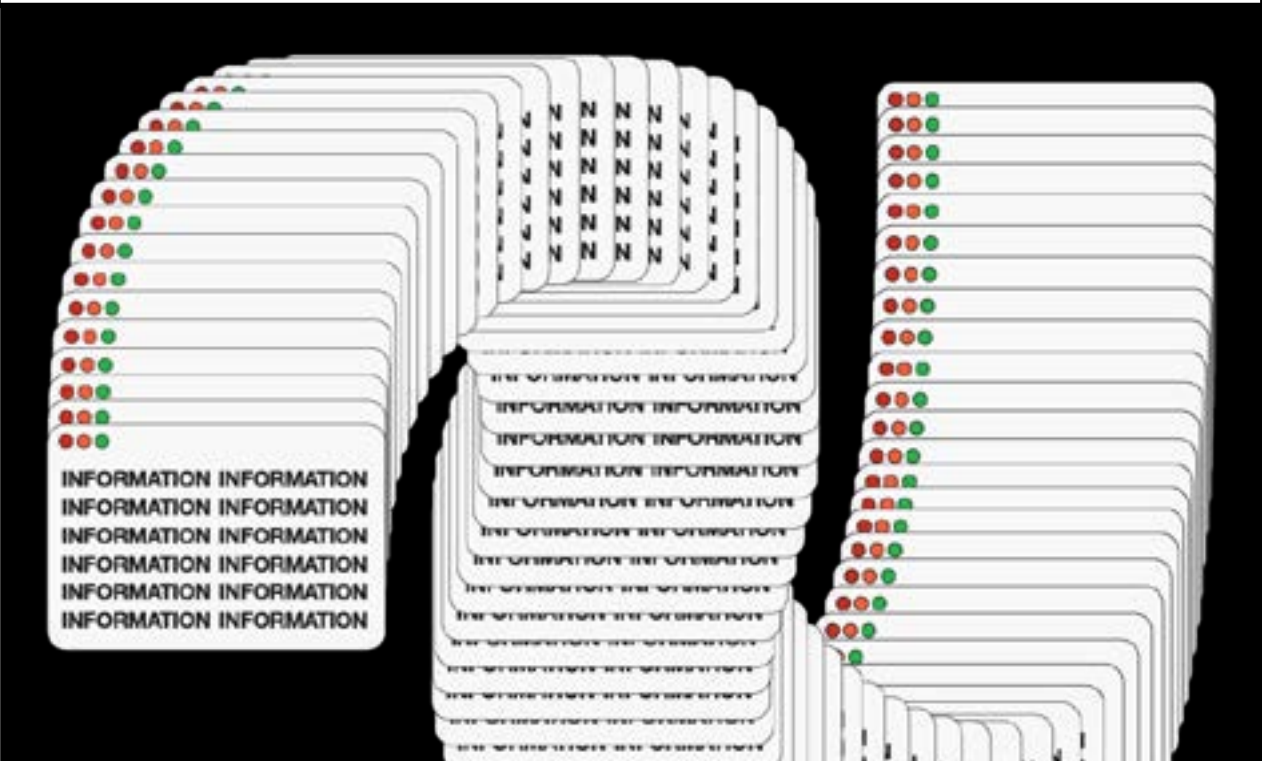
In that same spirit, of both guidance and introspection, we compiled this paper, which features some of our most-read pieces alongside some net-new content and distinctly-SYLVAIN easter eggs. The chapters on Curiosity, Identity, and Creativity reflect both the state of the world and the challenges we're working on for our clients. Those on Power, Growth, and Responsibility explore the key themes we've been navigating internally this year.

In 2022, our footprint has grown, our design practice has gained recognition, we've spoken on more global stages than ever before, we've been measuring ourselves on the impact report traits we set out last year, and we joined the kyu Collective. Through it all, we've been thinking a lot about how our role evolves and how our purpose can manifest in new ways. In other words: we've had to stare progress in the face more directly than ever before.

If this year has taught us anything, it's that growth does not always equal progress. In fact, getting bigger can make it harder to have the sort of impact on the world that you imagine. Our first-hand findings are consistent with everything we've gleaned from editing this newsletter over the past two years: progress is messy, nonlinear, sometimes confusing, but absolutely essential. This paper, and every Progress Report newsletter we send, is an attempt to make sense of that mess so we can all move forward together, provoking progress for people, organizations, and society at large.

One Thing You Can Do Right Now? **Read on.**

THE STATE OF CURIOSITY



The Curiosity Crisis

BY CHRIS KONYA EDITION 073 ILLUSTRATION BY LUCY CHEN



TL;DR

Curiosity is an innate human trait linked to the survival of our species. It's driven many of our great thinkers, creators and innovators across history and culture, from Albert Einstein to Rosalind Franklin to Kendrick Lamar. But the way we live today actively discourages curiosity—everyday we're inundated with an information overload that leaves us overwhelmed rather than inquiring for more. Without intention or realizing, we're discouraging and diminishing this fundamental human trait and proven source of fuel for the evolution of our species. As a society we are facing a curiosity crisis that no one is acknowledging.

WHY IT MATTERS

Curiosity is the instinct that drives our ability to discover new potentials and adapt when our environment changes. It is our impulse to seek out information, to see more than we have before, and to explore novel possibilities that become the basis for innovation and evolution. And it is essential to our survival and evolution. In fact, theorists across the twentieth century categorized curiosity alongside fundamental survival instincts like hunger and thirst.

As children we are born curious—it's what helps us learn, grow and thrive. Ironically, as we grow older and learn more, our curiosity slows. This is a natural progression that has always taken place. However, we're now reaching a time in which we have moved from what scientists call a natural "curiosity shutdown" to what I believe is a cultural curiosity crisis.

When I look at how we live today I see our curiosity being challenged in so many ways—the most obvious being the emotional overwhelm of our Information Age. While this is well-trodden territory, the knock-on effects are confounding. Some theorists describe it as the everyday abandonment of deep reading and resulting cognitive impatience, which feels to me like a step back in our cognitive development and evolution as a species. Some say it contributes to slowly degrading levels of comprehension and critical thinking across our society, including the cognitive performance required in voting booths. In addition, the dominance of standardized testing and memorization in school systems has our youth focused on rote practice rather than the pursuit of logical discoveries. Critics call it a system that rewards answering regardless of understanding. Even in the workplace, efficiency is often championed over the deep thinking that creates unexpected solutions and ironically more consistently successful results.

A seemingly pedestrian, yet highly visceral, demonstration of this was published as "The Tyranny of Choice," in the journal *Judgment and Decision Making*, where psychologists Arne Roets, Barry Schwartz, and Yanjun Guan studied the effects of our proliferation of choice on happiness. The three prevailing emotions that

came from mass quantities of information at our fingertips were 1) the burden of information-gathering, 2) a feeling of dissatisfaction with our selection, and 3) regret for our choices in sources. The authors claim that in the Western World our "excess of freedom has resulted in a dramatic increase in people's dissatisfaction with their lives and even in clinical depression." Why delve deeply into a question or curiosity when we will only be left feeling worse off?

The irony is that curiosity is needed now more than ever. The everyday ability to learn and adapt, observe and ask questions, is not just important, but central to how we live today. Amidst our fourth industrial revolution, entering the metaverse and Web3, the only way to keep up with the times is to learn in real time. And when we look at industry beyond individuals, the emergence of tech giants like Netflix and Amazon, who exist off status quo disruption and innovation that changes our everyday, are proof that we've surpassed the era of efficiency as industry; rather, creativity-driven innovation is the new frontier. They are also evidence that individuals and organizations that can sustain curiosity can leapfrog those who don't.

However, all curiosity is not proven equal. Scientists claim Epistemic curiosity—the type that drives learning and thinking—is made up of two types of underlying inquiry. The first is diverse curiosity, which tends to be abundant and encouraged in our world today. This is the curiosity that drives us through wormholes across the internet, creates wide topic-to-topic explorations, and distracts us when we open our smartphones. However, our lifestyles actively discourage specific curiosity. This is the kind of curiosity that aims at minimizing uncertainty and filling gaps in knowledge. It is the sustained, purposeful curiosity that drives idea generation and solutioning. Without both, diverse and specific curiosity we lack the follow-through for true innovation.

Even beyond industry and innovation, curiosity is important to our personal happiness and satisfaction. Modern culture and our recent shared traumas have left us strained in a time when agency and self-efficacy is more important than ever. It's time to take back our energy and agency, to delve into the depths of our own curiosities and find new perspectives, discoveries, and truths. Somehow, in our wild world of modern day access, the agency to be truly and authentically ourselves has become our new definition of luxury. And yet, we should all have the ability to happily indulge in the curiosity that creates agency.

One Thing You Can Do Right Now

BE INSISTENT WITH STOKING CURIOUS ENERGY

Fueling The Unexpected

BY SOFIA CARAZA EDITION 072



TL;DR

When uncertainty runs rampant and transparency is demanded rather than given, building mystery brings an opportunity to relish the mystique of business and the unknown: it gives us the power to intrigue, rather than predict.

WHY IT MATTERS

Mystery snaps us out of snooze mode: it creates a buzz, converting data into a story people are eager to uncover through participatory discovery. While being transparent can be great practice for companies and relationships, it can backfire if treated as an end in itself. Too much of it can create a reactive blaming culture, fueled by distrust and resistance when things don't go as expected.

Mystery has the power to level the playing field by framing uncertainty as an exciting learning experience. Facing the unknown forges connections by true affinity rather than status or the promise of advancement. That is how secret innovation societies can discuss business ideas regardless of identity, and how BCC parties subsist: with the promise of seeking the unknown together.

The music and gaming industries are miles ahead of us in forming this connection through cryptic campaigns. Such is the case with twenty-one pilots' Trench album launch, which led with storytelling and gamification to design an internet scavenger hunt to find and decode clues, bringing fans closer to their brand.

One Thing You Can Do Right Now

GIVE A FRIEND A MYSTERY TO SOLVE OVER THE WEEKEND

TIPS TO START THE MYSTERY

MOTIVATE TO FOLLOW THE TRAIL

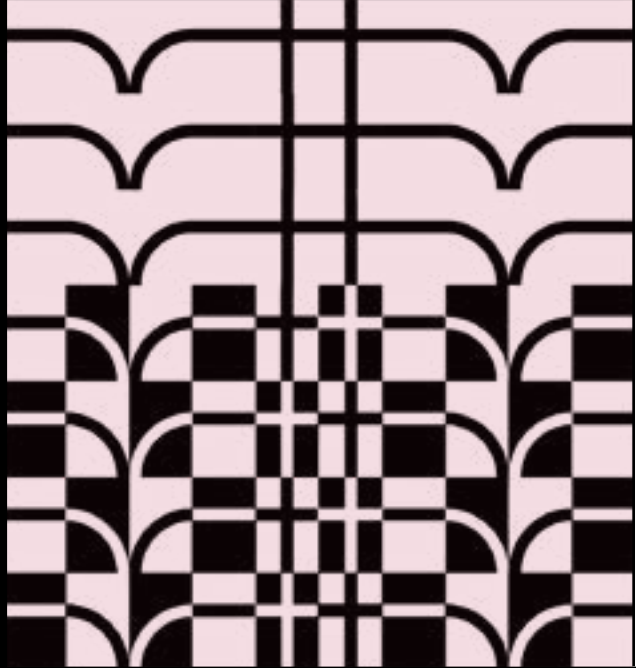
Is there a rabbit hole (indie games, Wikipedia topics, spooky foodie spots, cinematic experiences, or geocaching outings) that your friend has been craving to go to but hasn't had the time? Is there a theme, or an upcoming holiday or birthday you can use to drive this mystery?

RESIST FILLING IN THE BLANKS

Leave TMI at the door. Knowledge is power, but not knowing everything is a more powerful experience. What is this friend eager to uncover about this particular subject? What kind of stories or facts do they usually latch on to?

LEAVE ENOUGH BREADCRUMBS

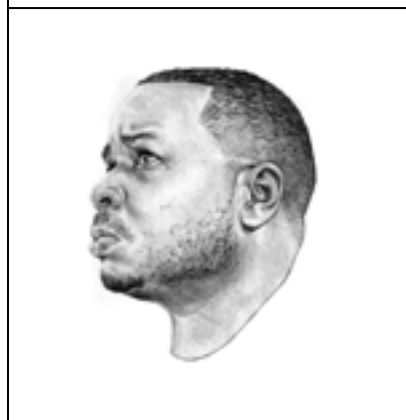
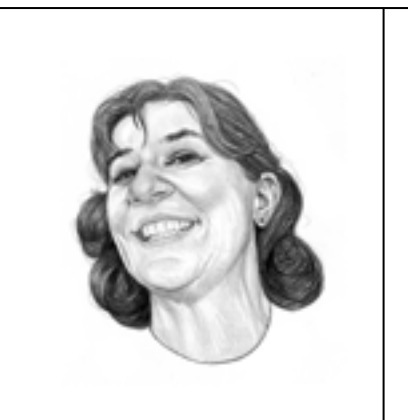
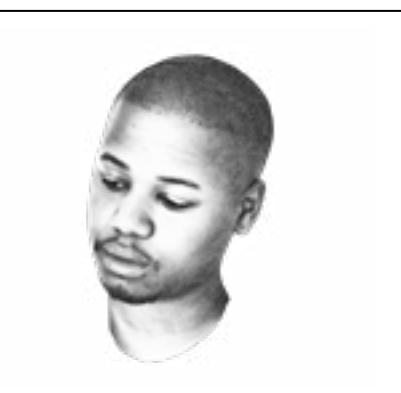
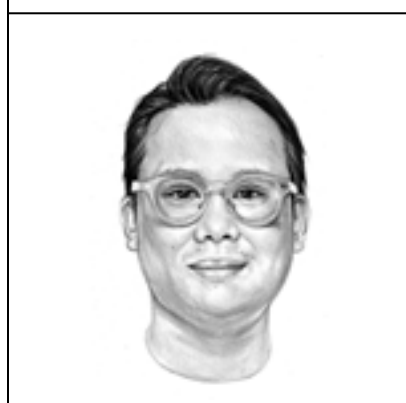
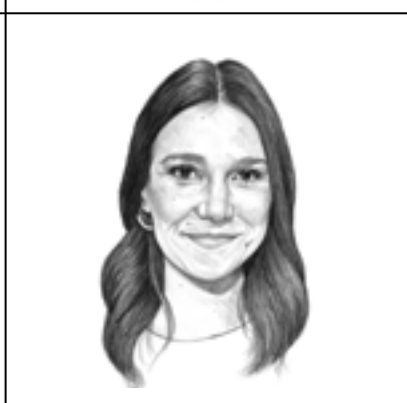
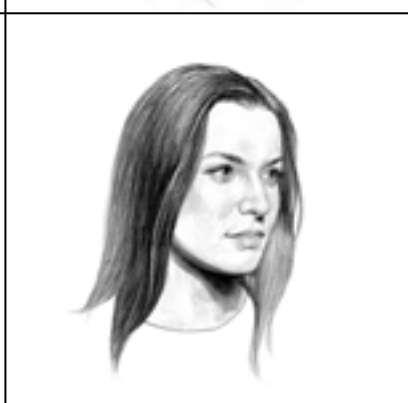
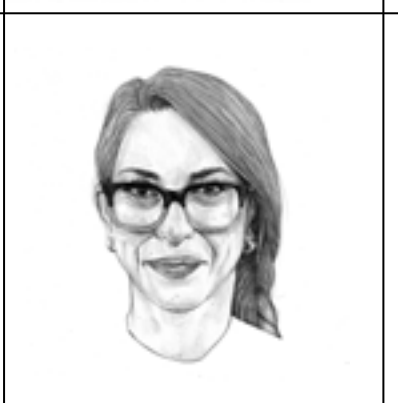
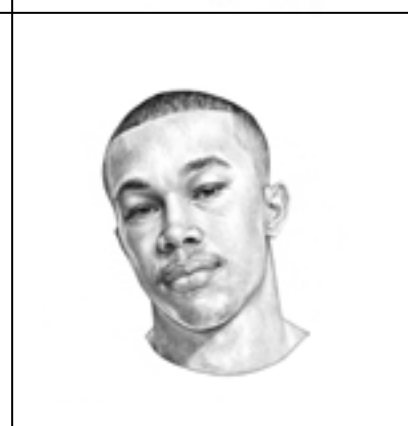
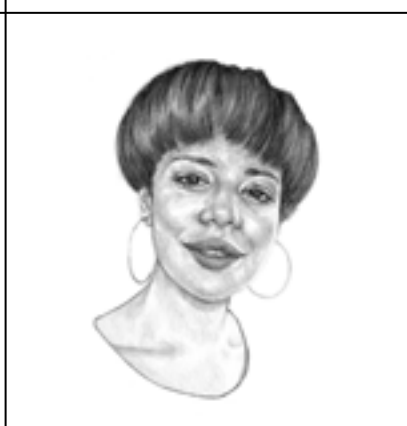
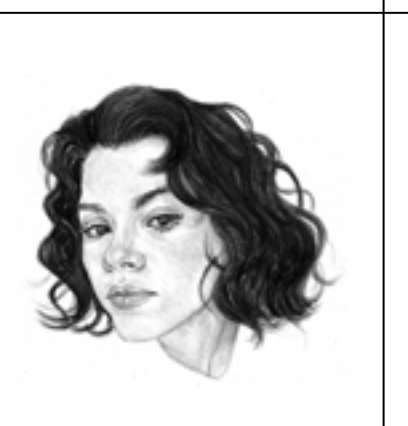
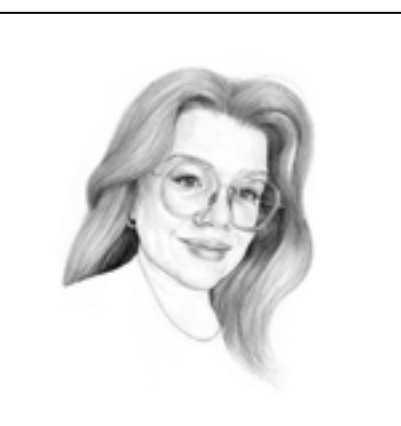
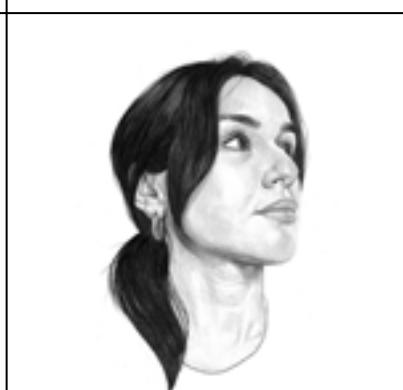
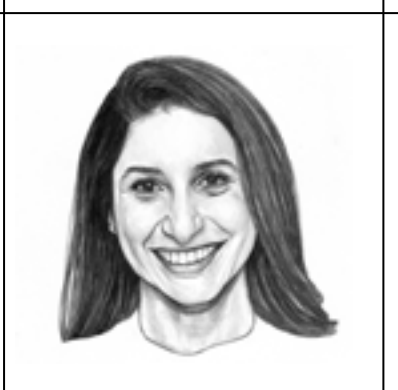
How will you dose information so that they don't feel it's too easy or too difficult to solve?



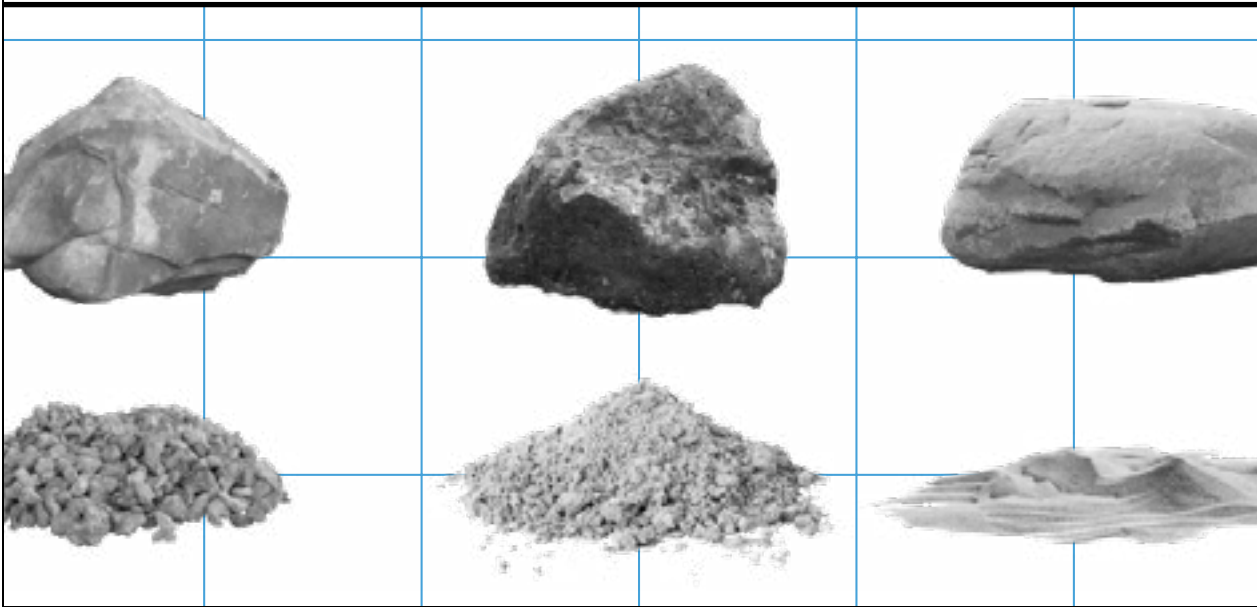
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ILLUSTRATION BY SHIQI CAO

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THE STATE OF IDENTITY



The Empty Promise of Permanence

BY MICHAEL IAN KAYE EDITION 040



What is this thing we call branding? For branding professionals, it's all about making companies and products attractive to consumers; making the abstract concrete, the unruly understandable, and the forgotten forefront by assigning them unique attributes and corresponding visual iconography. All for the sake of defining brands in perpetuity, and a higher belief that if we create things of meaning and importance, they will last forever. But is this promise of permanence even possible? Is it a good thing? Do we need to rebrand branding?



TL;DR
In this online [commemoration vault](#) of old brand logos, it's easy to reminisce over the warmly nostalgic logos of our past. They become familiar parts of our lives through the products we use and the experiences we have, and then one day they're gone, replaced by modern, trendier updates.

WHY IT MATTERS
Nothing is forever. And when that reality comes to pass, things like logo updates, and bigger brand identity shifts, are often done for the wrong reasons. It's important to remember that brands can and should evolve, just as individuals and culture do. We



CREDIT LOGORIP.COM

see this in the coming and going of logos, and yet, the practice of assigning and creating an identity for brands is still often seen as something of permanence. To that end, when steps are taken to reinvent a brand's identity, that original notion of permanence makes many updates feel wrong, flat, boring, or worse, useless.

I've spent the majority of my career defining brands. Populating dashboards. Assigning brands human characteristics, DNA, personality, values, etc... You—the greater you—begin to form relationships with these identities, assigning meaning, building relationships. And so when reinvention happens, it can be painful, both emotionally and financially.

I've seen the design work of my heroes retired or reinvented to a much lesser form like the UPS logo originally [designed by Paul Rand](#). Or historic icons disposed of for the uneventful like [Yves Saint Laurent](#), by [AM Cassandre](#) (although it does live on for the beauty brand...head scratch). Logos like Uber's where "whatever" to start with became "should have never been" to "OK, I get it." There have been reinventions that are throwbacks, [like Burger King](#), that delight. Reinventions that fast-forward, [like Pfizer](#), that fall flat. I have even seen my own work for Kate Spade [redesigned for more relevance](#)...the jury is still out.

Ultimately, it comes down to the rusty ideology that brands must be created for relevance in perpetuity, making it harder to be relevant when culture calls for it (and it will). Instead, brands must view all things that a brand does as branding, putting less pressure on the tools surrounding it and more pressure on how we use and imbue them with relevance.

One Thing You Can Do Right Now

RELY ON ACTIONS, NOT AESTHETICS

Pop Your Bubble

BY MEGAN JAMIESON EDITION 074



ILLUSTRATION BY CYRA CUPID

TL;DR

To make our way into the lives of others, we must first find a way out of our own—by taking the initiative to pop our own bubble and exist outside of the monoculture that agencies are so often subject to. Rather than desperately placing the very humans we are trying to decode into limited categories, such as generational buckets, we should turn to moments of passion, habit and temperament that ultimately unite us. In doing so, we can catalyze more truthful, empathetic work.

WHY IT MATTERS

In a perfect world, people fit exactly into precise buckets—but our world isn't perfect, so why do we hopelessly try to squeeze complex individuals into such rigid classifications? With only 39% of [Gen Zs](#) in the US identifying with the Gen Z label, these generalized buckets end up fueling stereotypes that are disconnected from reality. By failing to acknowledge that insights around generations exist at the group level and not the individual one, we fuel stereotype-based explanations for structural problems and alienate ourselves from one another further.

Being more critical in how we come to understand the lives of those around us means taking a leap of faith out of our own. By recognizing the unique lives of individuals and working more authentically with shared struggles, values and behavior, is where real change can happen.

Take the [OXO Good Grip](#), for example: OXO took a deep dive into the lives of those with arthritis to design curated culinary tools that worked with them, not against them. In the process of doing so, they uncovered that such a design benefited individuals far beyond their initial audience, ultimately changing the way we interact with culinary tools forever.

Exercising critique in how we approach our understanding of those we are trying to unravel and recognizing their wonderful ambiguities is what ultimately makes people that much more interesting—and the work that much more rewarding.

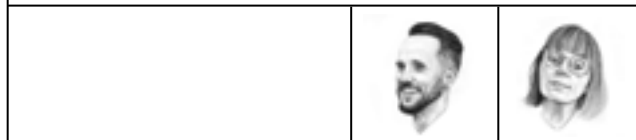
One Thing You Can Do Right Now

DEDICATE TIME TO UNDERSTANDING BEFORE ASSUMING

THE STATE OF POWER

Power in the Face of Nihilism

BY JOEY CAMIRE EDITION 067



TL;DR

There have been a series of articles written about the growing sentiment of malaise and discontent in the workforce. Often couched in ideas like “[anti-work](#)” or “[anti-ambition](#),” these articles paint a picture of a generation unready, unwilling or incapable of participating in work.



ILLUSTRATION BY ASH CASPER

WHY IT MATTERS

It's important to remain skeptical in determining whether these are real feelings in the world, or simply sticky stories that become mimetically self-perpetuating in the media. You know, one person writes a great piece, and then every outlet has to have their own version.

Let's assume, for the sake of discussion, these ideas of “anti-work” or “anti-ambition” are real. Why would they exist? A growing and self-perpetuating income inequality. A global climate crisis that seems to be ignored by the most powerful. Systemic racism, gender discrimination and generally uncaring, unempathetic systems. And, of course, a global pandemic isolating so many from family, friends and extended community. Couple this with companies that are either trying but struggling to modernize their approach to work, or choosing to remain intentionally ignorant to life outside the walls of work, and it's easy to imagine how a group of people would be ready to pack it up, or at a minimum, phone it in.

But here's why it matters. Whether real or media created, it speaks to a rising threat of nihilism. The idea that each of our power, our ability to generate change, is non-existent. That we are helpless to affect the world.

That everything is meaningless. That we're giving up.

“Après nous, le déluge”—after us, the flood.

Attributed to Madame de Pompadour, a mistress of Louis XV, the phrase is a sort of nihilist exemplar. Used to mean everything after our death is meaningless. Beyond the simple hopelessness of nihilism, there is a deeper problem—nihilism is narcissism. It is a narrowing of the world into a focus on ourselves and our own experiences, and then determining that they have no meaning.

I'm afraid of nihilism. All of those problems above matter. All of those problems need action. Work, the future of work, what that looks and feels like, how people are treated—that needs action. And if we're finding ourselves in a time of hopelessness we need to figure out what needs to be done to fix it. All of us, but especially those of us with the power to change things, need to feel like our actions can have an impact.

Progress doesn't exist without action. If we're stilled by a feeling of meaninglessness, there is no progress.

FINAL THOUGHTS

There's an antidote to nihilism, one that all of us should be thinking about: a sense of Internalized Agency. We all need to feel like our actions have power and influence, that they matter. That all outcomes aren't equal. It's not enough to hear it from someone else; we need to believe it for ourselves. How do we get that?

Find your “give a shit.” Something you care about, without convincing. If you're currently feeling some of this nihilism, or simply apathy, start small. Find a thing you care about that needs changing, fixing, or improving. For me, my “give a shit” has always been around people. Teaching people, hiring people, helping people.

Distribute your power. Power is a non-zero sum game. If you are in a position of power, share and distribute your power. It's time to let go of individual control in favor of collective action. We need to relinquish our control, power, or even a single decision to empower someone else. The goal is not to abdicate your participation in the process, but to elevate the participation and ideas of others.

Aggregate your power. This is #MeToo, this is BLM, this is labor organizing, this is the coinbase defections. For an industry that speaks about collaboration, I would guess, more than any other in the world—this part should be easy. Bring your power together. There is power in numbers, it's trite but true.

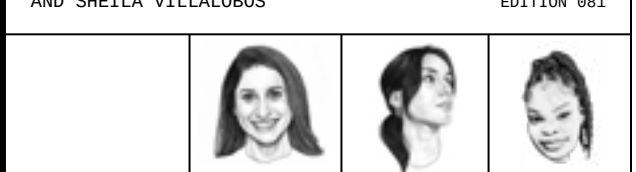
Use your power. This is the scary step. You have to be ready to lose, but not let it stop you. Making an improvement in, on, or around something you care about is like a glass of water in the desert of nihilism. And by taking actions to fix things, we grow our belief in ourselves to take action the next time we encounter something that needs to be fixed. The “Great Resignation” by another name, was a huge swathe of people feeling the ability to change their circumstances and acting upon it.

One Thing You Can Do Right Now

RELINQUISH YOUR CONTROL, POWER, OR A SINGLE DECISION TO EMPOWER SOMEONE ELSE

Reskilling for Resilience

BY SHERZAD RAHMATIAN AND SHEILA VILLALOBOS EDITION 081



TL;DR

In today's [strained talent](#) and macroeconomic climate, leaders should reorient learning and development towards ‘soft skills’ like empathy, optimism, grit, and mindfulness. These resilience skills not only empower individuals, they also have a multiplying effect on morale and output for teams.

WHY IT MATTERS

The pandemic permanently blurred the lines between our personal and professional lives. Emerging out of it, employees are in the thick of recalibrating their relationships with work—rejecting work mentalities that have led to burnout and declining mental health. Helping people navigate this mental health crisis is critical. Leaders are reporting high absenteeism and low engagement, leading to diminishing productivity and growth. As a response, organizations have been rethinking their policies and benefits to account for employees' mental health and happiness (e.g. hybrid work).

But leaders can go beyond accommodations to re-engage and strengthen their teams by helping them cultivate the [resilience skills](#) to weather current and future challenges. Resilience skills not only help us bounce back from personal setbacks, they help us mitigate the risk of burnout and [perform better](#) at work by making us more adaptable.

Encouraging employees' resilience skill-building may be the best L&D investment yet, because personal growth begets growth in all areas of life, including professional growth. Lessons learned from overcoming a difficult personal challenge or perfecting a hobby can be applied to managing a tricky client or acquiring a hard skill (and vice versa). Overall, the mastery of these skills makes us mentally [stronger and happier](#)—whether we're at home, at work, or in a mingling of both.

And there's also a significant, tangible business benefit. In a [PwC study](#), initiatives that fostered a resilient workplace returned \$2.30 for every dollar spent. Further, [Irrational Capital](#), a firm that uses behavioral economics to understand the connection between human capital and business performance, has found a positive correlation between motivated employees and a company's stock price.

When leadership also embodies these resilience skills it has multiplying effects. It not only brings out the best in leaders—it brings out the best in teams. Individual team members feel empowered to maximize their own contributions, [increasing productivity and retention](#). When those individuals work together, it amplifies the potential of teams to unleash diverse, creative solutions, leading to a resilient organization that [thrives](#) in the face of changing demands and environments.

Things You Can Do Right Now

PUT THE MASK ON FIRST

Before investing in individual team members, leaders should level up their own resilience skills so they can positively influence and equip their teams. After all, leadership behaviors are [contagious](#). Services like [BetterUp](#) and [Reset](#) are tailored to help leaders take care of themselves.

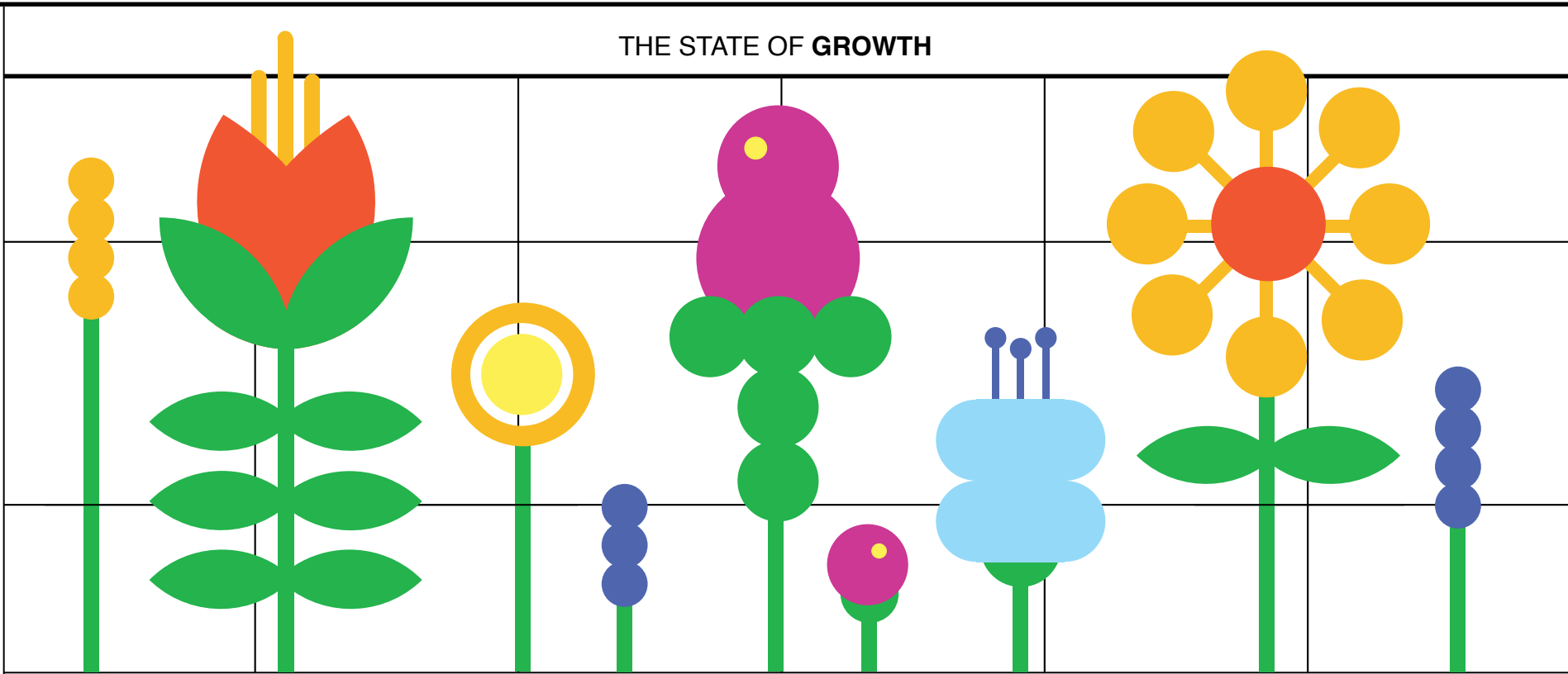
MAKE RESILIENCE STICK

Mastery of resilience skills is key to ensuring retention and application. Consider using Gagne's [Nine Levels of Learning](#) to teach and measure your team's resilience. Couple classes with in-person workshops during work-from-office days, and make resilience skill measurement part of employee development plans.

Power In The Wrong Hands Can Be Catastrophic.

*Thank
Goodness It's
In Yours*

QUOTE FROM AARON POWERS



Reappraising Discomfort

BY MERIDETH BOGARD EDITION 082 ILLUSTRATIONS BY CYRA CUPID

As humans, we're hardwired to seek comfort, and as a society, we're increasingly conditioned to view stress as a burden to be managed and minimized. But, while we're trained to see discomfort as a sign of a problem, in reality it's a sign of progress. So, it's time we each reappraise discomfort—instead of running away from it, we must run towards it with open arms because discomfort is the breeding ground for growth.

TL;DR

This is me, getting uncomfortable. I'm not a fan of the spotlight nor am I one to raise my hand and broadcast opinions. My comfort zone is in the work solving the challenge at hand. Perhaps it's modesty, or more likely a fear of saying something stupid (according to Myers-Briggs my worst nightmare is saying something idiotic every time I open my mouth). So, why am I sitting here, writing this, and feeling all squeamish inside?

Because I'm reminding myself that discomfort breeds growth. Writing this piece is a step in my journey to growing and getting wonderfully uncomfortable along the way. And it's a friendly reminder for us all to welcome more discomfort in our lives everyday.

WHY IT MATTERS TO US ALL

It's human nature for us to drift towards comfort. Even the dictionary definition of comfort feels like a warm hug: "affording or enjoying contentment and security," "free from vexation or doubt," "free from stress or fear." In fact, our comfort zones are hardwired. When you're comfortable, your brain releases chemicals like dopamine and serotonin, which lead to positive, happy feelings.

It's also no secret that we're living in a world that's more stressful than ever so it's only natural that we retreat to our safe spaces in these burdensome times. We see a great retreat to comfort in the clothes we wear with the rise of soft fabrics like mohair and velvet. We see it in the spaces we live, with home decor experiencing

a spike in neutral, nature-inspired surfaces like marbles and round shapes and curves in furniture. We see it in the movies we watch, with the five top box office hits in 2022 all being movie franchises with a dose of nostalgia, from Jurassic Park to Top Gun. We see it in the music we listen to, with artists like Beyoncé and Taylor Swift using their latest albums to explore inner monologues and reject the burden of perfection. At the same time, stress management is a booming billion dollar industry that surrounds us with encouragement to soothe and comfort ourselves every day.

But, while comfort feels like a worthy ambition, in reality, comfort is one of our biggest built-in barriers to growth. When imagining what growth feels like, we envision feelings of fulfillment and uplift, like flowers growing on a warm sunny day. But, the truth is, growth often feels the opposite. Growth feels awkward, itchy, and painful at times. Growth is stretching yourself into spaces you've never been. When you jump your personal S curve to take on a new skill or area of growth, you cross a chasm to a space where you're no longer an expert but a newbie. And being a newbie feels weird. Ultimately, building new skills is a lot like building muscles. We exert ourselves and our muscles go into metabolic stress. The muscle fibers are damaged, but ultimately we heal, recover, and grow stronger and better from it.

So, what if we flipped our mindset and reappraised discomfort? What if instead of seeing discomfort as a sign of a problem, we flipped to seeing it as a sign of progress? What if discomfort wasn't something to be avoided, but rather something to be sought after and appreciated?

In fact, research shows that if we view discomfort as part of our growth process, then we experience more positive emotions and outcomes. In a 2022 research study, people who were encouraged to embrace discomfort when doing different activities like improv or journaling felt more motivated, persistent, and open to new knowledge. Researcher Jeremy Jamieson also demonstrated that students asked to reframe pre-test anxiety as beneficial actually perform better on their exams. Another stream of research done by Peter Salovey and Shawn Achor illustrated that people with a "stress is enhancing" mindset have a more moderate cortisol response and are more open to feedback to learn and grow in the long-term.

Things You Can Do Right Now

By writing this piece and through my own practice I'm learning to sit with my own discomfort for growth. These are actions we can practice for ourselves but also model for our teams to create a space where it feels natural and exciting for everyone to get wonderfully uncomfortable and grow together.

SEE IT

The first step to transforming your response to discomfort is to 'see' it. Identify it and put a name to it. What is really leading you to feel the way you are? Take time to figure out the true source of discomfort and label it. For me, through this process, I'm calling it what it is: "Publishing personal perspectives stresses me out because I'm worried I'm going to say something stupid and you're going to judge me." That's the first step.

EMBRACE IT

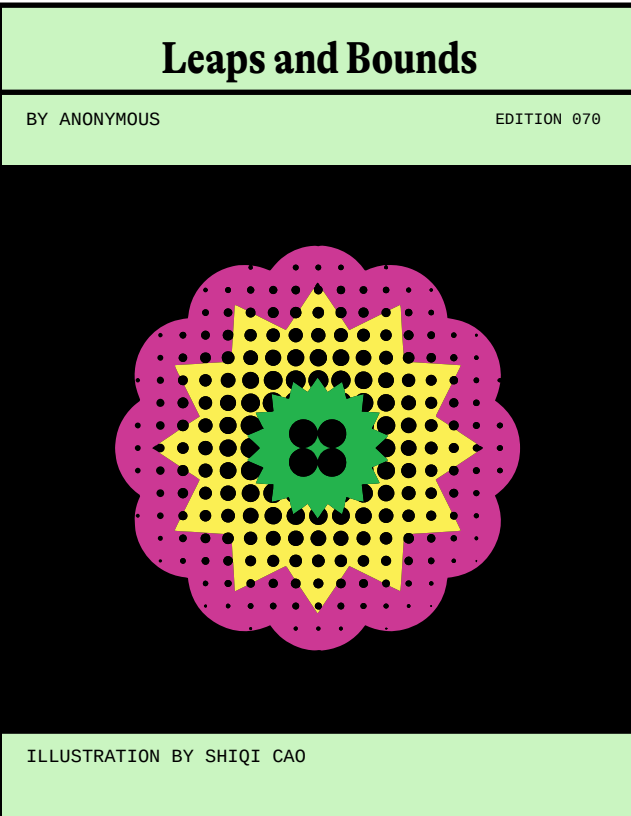
Stop yourself from rationalizing away why the new thing isn't worth doing and instead just do it. It's easy to tell yourself that doing the thing isn't that important or that you just don't have the time for it. The voice in my head says things like, "It's more about the quality of the project work, I've got other important stuff I have to get done first, blah blah." When you find yourself making excuses, check yourself and make the choice to pursue the uncomfortable.

SPEAK IT

Don't keep the discomfort bottled inside. Let it out with a little mad truth saying. Joke about it to bring some levity. Vent about it with your teams. Bond over it. Yes, it takes vulnerability, but vocalizing your feelings will lift some of the burden and give you a natural support system to help you grow through it.

OWN IT

Last but not least: take control of your discomfort and make it your own. Resist the idea that there's a single "right" way to do anything. Find a way to bring your own personality and style to the areas outside your comfort zone. Let's say you dread publishing an article? Take the article and do it your way. Or, say you avoid schmoozing with strangers at 'networking' events, how can you do that in a way that's your own? How can you tweak the situation to your liking? Instead of being overwhelmed by a new situation, how can you take control and make it your own?



TL;DR

Change is a practice. In Hope and Dread, a podcast series co-hosted by journalist Charlotte Burns and leading art advisor Allan Schwartzman, the hosts examine how various organizations and individuals in the art world are responding to change—or resisting it—amidst tectonic cultural shifts. Baby steps may be impossible, as our times demand that we leap right in.

The Crossword

BY TESSA KALINOSKY AND CARA LOHMAN

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ACROSS

1. _____ Nonsense, SYLVAIN's podcast
9. Columns and _____
13. A type of tomato sauce
14. _____ of expertise
16. Fungal and algal reproductive cells
17. Turn in

19. _____ Next Pro, a client of SYLVAIN
20. 35-down, or fresh from the keg
22. Simulated
23. Mineral Suffix
24. One backward musician?
25. It shapes your habits and can be changed over time
27. Embedded
29. Velvet finish?

30. Location of one of SYLVAIN's offices, along with NYC and RVA
31. The result of one's actions and SYLVAIN's annual report
32. "Is it too audacious of me?"
34. 1974 Gould/Sutherland C.I.A. spoof

WHY IT MATTERS

Interviewing board members, art dealers, curators, and artists, the podcast Hope and Dread is a series that illuminates how the art world is restructuring in response to questions relating to equity, justice, and diversity. "Change is scary because I think we're treating justice right now like there's some kind of endgame. 'We're going to do this until we die. We will not win while we are alive'—that's not how this works. This is a long game," says Deana Haggag in the episode Burning Down The House. "You have to make space for the language of the street to actually be said out loud within the walls of your institution, and you have to build up a stomach for it." What impact actually requires: collective intelligence, imagination across systems, and sustained collaboration. Don't just settle for cosmetic change but commit to pursuing complex questions.

THOUGHT STARTERS

Rethink how you define excellence. "[O]nce you question that idea of excellence and what it really means, and you want to be excellent, but actually who defines that and what is it being defined?" – Max Hollein, CEO, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Ask if your organization is built to protect the most vulnerable person. "I think generally, a good organizing tool is, 'Look at the most vulnerable person.' The most vulnerable person's needs will protect everybody. That's how this works. We don't start at the top." – Deanna Haggag, Program Officer in Arts and Culture at the Mellon Foundation

One Thing You Can Do Right Now

REASSESS PROJECTS RELATING TO SOCIAL IMPACT BY TESTING AGAINST EXAMPLES AND ADOPTING MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

DOWN

1. Procurement exec.
2. About 70 degrees fahrenheit
3. "Yawn"
4. Spinning toys
5. Vow words
6. Small crown
7. Playground response to "am too"
8. Show depicting the adventures of Oceanic Flight 815 for 6 seasons
9. More hoarse
10. Tulsa sch.
11. Online symptom checker
12. Potato and pea stuffed deep fried snack popular in India
15. "Attack, Rosie!"
18. _____ Booth for discounted seats for Broadway
21. You're _____ one, Mr. Grinch
23. In-depth interviews, abbr.
24. Key on top left of keyboard
26. Richmond to Manhattan direction
28. With El, city in Texas

32. Pair
33. "Yeah, right!"
35. 20-across, or fresh from the keg
37. To cover with or as if with clothing
38. Makeup of Team USA
39. Car-racing org.
41. Purple tuber
42. More straightforward than it should be
43. A while back
44. When repeated, been had
45. Sylvan _____
46. Dutch oven brand
47. Used the @ function in Slack or Google Spaces
49. Chemical "twin"
51. Titter
56. Instrument similar to a lyre
57. Four: Prefix
59. Cousin of Monday
Night Football, abbr.
61. Old T-shirt, maybe
62. Federal entity enforcing the tax code, abbr.

52. matching card game
53. Specific business structure, abbr.
54. Wise
55. Spirit of a culture, era, or community
57. _____ the line
58. Should have, in slang
60. Italian almond cookies
63. Has-_____ (ones who are washed up)

64. Assemble, again
65. Resist, as orders
66. 43-across of _____



Back To The Lab

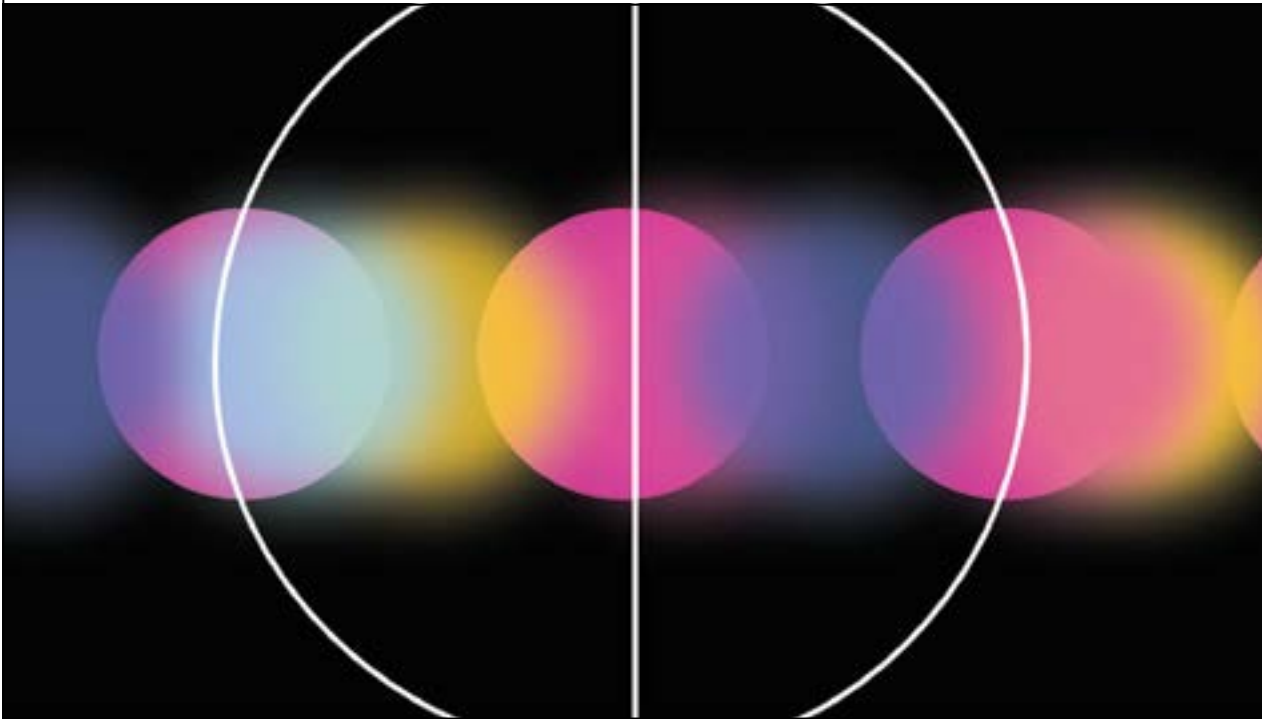
A playlist that slaps

- Son Shine
- Sault
- Street Player
- Chicago
- Hit Or Miss
- Odetta
- Woke Up This Morning
- Resistance Revival Chorus
- See-Line Women
- Atjazz, Dominique Flis-Aimé
- Be Thankful For What You Got
- William DeV Vaughn
- My Brudda
- Nnèlè
- Aventurera
- Natalia Lafourcade, Alex Ferreira
- Welcome Back
- Count Bass D
- Pressure
- Koffee
- We Are The Sun
- Sault
- Aint No Sunshine
- Sivuca
- Made Me Everything
- TOBI
- Algeria
- Elia Y Elizabeth
- Freedom
- Sampa The Great
- Sorry
- Beyoncé
- Let's Go Crazy
- Prince
- Ija (TOKIMONSTA Remix)
- Ayra Starr, Mavins, TOKIMONSTA
- Bad Idea
- Cordae, Chance The Rapper
- I Love You For All Seasons
- Discos Resaca Collective & Mariposas
- Del Alma
- 16 Toneladas
- Noriel Vilela
- Love And Happiness
- Monty Alexander
- Mabuhay Boy
- Vex Ruffin
- Marigold
- Jelani Aryeh
- Woman
- Little Simz, Cleo Sol
- Enjoy
- Tekno, Mafikizolo
- Summer Sun
- Koop
- Uptown
- Prince
- Any Other Way
- Jackie Shane
- Out Of Touch
- Shad, pHoenix Pagliacci
- Swan Lake
- Blackalicious
- Te Queria
- Lido Pimenta
- Do Yourself
- Angélique Kidjo, Burna Boy
- Let Me Turn You On
- Biz Markie
- Grow
- Samm Henshaw
- Aloha
- Maluma, Beéle, Rauw Alejandro
- Borracho Bailando Champeta
- Kevin Florez, Captain Planet
- Love Me
- Juls, Niniola

Listen along with the code below.



More Isn't Always More



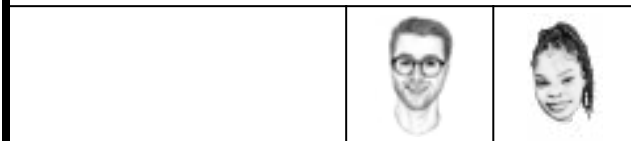
BY JILLTAN ROSEN, JENNY CAVAIOLI, AND CAMILLE DRUCKER



TL;DR
The hype around “growth” as the end-all-be-all marker of success in business has become ubiquitous. The general consensus amongst leaders is “if you’re not growing, you’re dying.” Whether that growth be in employee count, products, services, or profit. But especially in the thralls of a recession, it’s important to remember that while growth itself is usually positive, we must also apply a healthy criticism to it. After all, there are many ways to prosper beyond traditional growth—ways that are more socially, economically, and environmentally responsible.

WHY IT MATTERS
In the past several weeks, we’ve seen massive employers like Meta, Amazon, and Twitter lay off tens of thousands of employees. This is just one Silicon Valley-shaped indicator that the looming recession is certainly different than the last one. Especially when it comes to tech companies.
There are several obvious reasons for this: tech companies enjoyed the tailwinds of strong growth during the pandemic. But now they’re feeling the reverberations of that growth, along with the effects of things like inflation, rising interest rates, a ‘maturing’ internet, changing consumption behaviors, and importantly, over-hiring.
These are all signs of a recession to come. But also that a uniform approach to growth can be risky, and result in severe, unintended consequences. And while we don’t all work for big tech (it’s certainly not all one-to-one), there’s still a lesson to learn from these organizations. Sometimes, hyper-fast, traditional growth can make it harder for companies to maintain and/or achieve the kind of impact they want. It can pose a threat to the reason a company came into being in the first place. Why? Because as headcounts and footprints expand, everything gets just a little bit muddier. Priorities become harder to identify. Nuance gets lost. Egos get too big. Issues get overlooked. Future responsibilities become distorted by the excitement of the present.
We shouldn’t be too critical of linear growth. Of course, economic expansion depends on it. And

BY TREVOR LARRY EDITION 062



High-growth projects, platforms, and companies can sometimes spin out of control, with unintended use cases and ethical dilemmas abounding. At some point, structure needs to be implemented so that all stakeholders are on the same page about the purpose, limitations, and consequences. How do leaders know when to institute these guardrails? What is the best way to both create them and communicate them? And how can we stay within the realms of ‘responsible innovation’ while still leaving room for spontaneity?

TL;DR
How do you design digital tools that can empower millions of people to communicate and create together, without inadvertently enabling people with bad intentions to use them for harm? According to Sahar Massachi, there’s much to learn from how we build healthy cities in how we might build new tech platforms.

WHY IT MATTERS
We’ve seen buzzworthy products like Clubhouse and Meta make headlines in recent years for their potential to ‘change the internet.’ But after the buzz subsided, news of misinformation, harassment, and abuse showed the harm caused by people using both platforms. As the tech industry grapples with the negative impact of their products, specialists advocate for bringing back healthy friction, like limiting the number of posts people can make, into digital products to slow bad behavior. Even if you’re not building the next social platform, the lessons being implemented can be useful for anyone pursuing more responsible innovation: protect people at greater risk, incentivize good behavior, and introduce healthy friction before your product launches.
TIPS
When building any product, we often have a key person in mind who we imagine might use our service. In collective exercises, we may build a user persona or design target to picture who this person is across a team. During this exercise, aim to center people who may be at greater risk (of misogyny, racism, trolling, identity theft, etc.), and then focus on making it difficult for those who may cause them harm.

One Thing You Can Do Right Now
CENTER PEOPLE WHO ARE AT GREATER RISK IN YOUR DESIGN PROCESS



ILLUSTRATION BY CYRA CUPID

The Past Year at SYLVAIN

You may know us as the authors, editors, and illustrators of *Progress Report*, but we do so much more. Here’s a peek at some of the other moments we’re proud of from 2022.

CALENDER 2022 WHAT A YEAR IT WAS

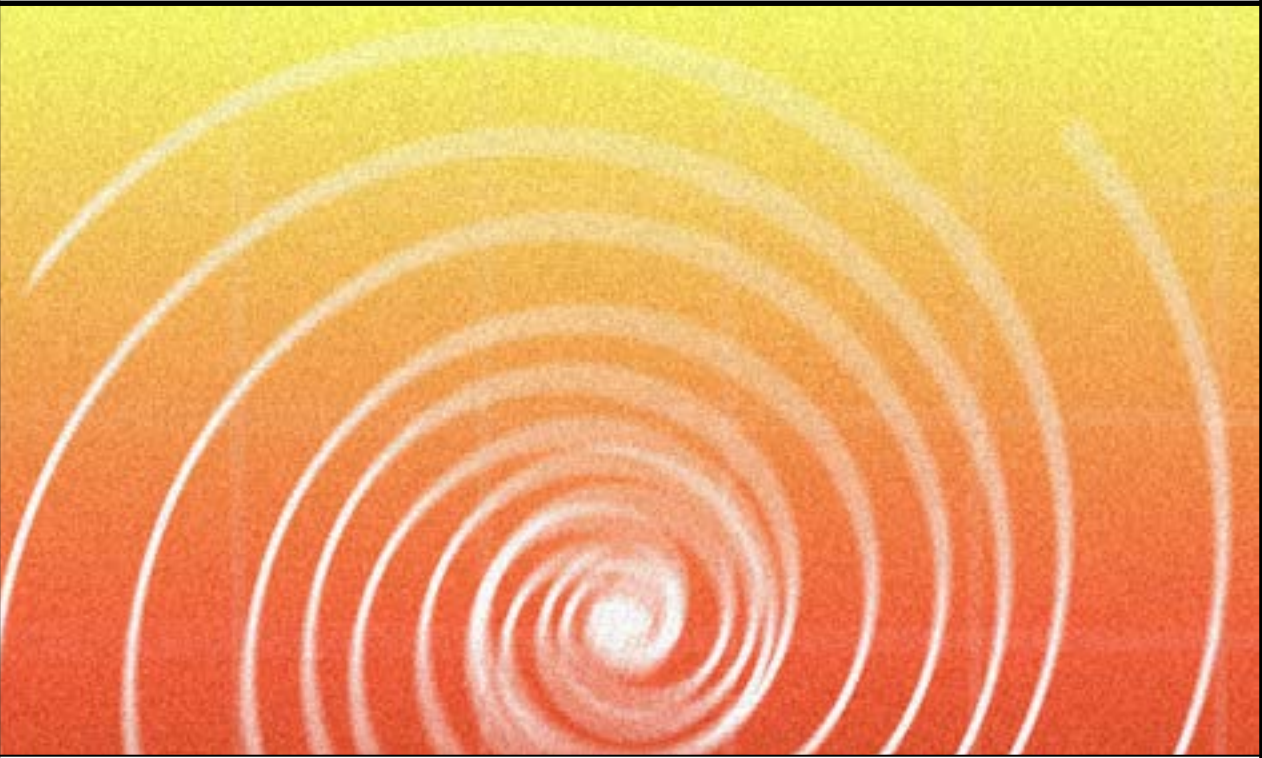
- ★ **SHUG THE OFFICE DOG JOINS** 01.21.22
- ★ **BLOOMBERG WORK SHIFTING 2.0** 03.09.22
- ★ **NEW RVA OFFICE OPENS** 04.05.22
- ★ **NEW AMS OFFICE OPENS** 04.06.22
- ★ **NEW WEBSITE LAUNCH** 05.05.22
- ★ **KYU ACQUISITION** 05.12.22
- ★ **SUMMER INTERNSHIP STARTS** 06.06.22
- ★ **COLLISION CONFERENCE** 06.21.22
- ★ **SUMMER EXTRAVAGANZA** 06.28.22
- ★ **4A’S STRATFEST** 09.13.22
- ★ **ADOBE MAX** 10.18.22
- ★ **TECHCRUNCH DISRUPT** 10.19.22
- ★ **ADVERTISING WEEK NEW YORK** 10.19.22
- ★ **POPTech** 10.28.22
- ★ **AIGA NEW YORK** 10.28.22, 12.01.22
- ★ **WEB SUMMIT** 11.02.22, 11.03.22
- ★ **CRITICAL NONSENSE 200TH EPISODE** 11.28.22

Critical Nonsense from Aaron, Joey, and Jess

Disney Pixar’s Soul, fridge magnets, the Princess Diaries Series of novels, the Drake Equation and other UFO/UAP talk, tranches, and the science behind wombats’ cube-shaped poop, the most progressive movie genres, Atomic Blonde, Sigourney Weaver, ideas on Twitter, deep cleaning our feeds, and “the holey sock problem.”, public restrooms, toilet paper, and two-dollar bills, chime in with their annual predictions for the new year. They talk about crypto crashing, the return of rollerskating, the low-rise revival, gap-year popularity, Home-Ec classes for adults, and psychedelics, the metaverse, Web3, public ledgers of information, entropy, “baroque speculative fiction,” and nerds, the ever-elusive vanilla cookie, nuance and complexity, imagining beyond your means, kinetic linking, mirroring, and tennis culture, British colonization, transgenerational cultural drama, kink subcultures, coded branding, sex education through dance, and the F-word, bowling within your bumpers, preference vs. morality, misplaced concern, the persistence of old candy, utility vs. nostalgia, and fidget spinners, catfishing, Inventing Anna, desperation and risk analysis, vibe shifts, “youth culture” as a construct, and Williamsburg, Facebook/Meta business strategy, The Viola Davis Orbit, positive affirmation, and creators vs. lurkers, fast furniture, Shein, quality-assurance signaling, direct-to-consumer mattresses, darning, and nubby sherpa chairs, Pi Day, songlines, dead reckoning, Billy Joel, the Flynn effect, and the global mean hat size, versions of Goblin Mode, pandemic nihilism, identity politics, repressing trauma, the western medical industrial complex, and “The Man.”, aphantasia, internal monologues, learning styles, pilfering printer paper, binder clips, and ugly cups, ame Impala, Rock subgenres, Baroque Pop, genetics vs. culture, epigenetics, and beaches, Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” law, rules, Originalism, lip balm, deodorant, and skin care routines, Kellogg’s vs. General Mills, character strength, biome corners, villains, tummy troubles, and the rampant commingling of ice cream and ce-sourcing, walking away, New York laundry, er-amplitude of the feeling biffing and flop sweat, Tok, Twitter, admitting hijacking, ice plunges, Super Mario Bros., order and structure, chaos theory, privacy safety, the Midwest, ercise, and zoos, corn brown sugar, extrusion, talk about that famous ics, recognition, distin-The Infatuation, and bike sharing overages, invisible wisdom, dumpling teamwork, and apprenticeship, Sega vs. Nintendo, the L.A. donut scene, the coastal bagel war, birthday themes, the responsibility phases, and cake-flavored foods, Sesame Street, Ren & Stimpy, Disney, Don Bluth, The Lion King, and The Muppets, zeitgeist, movie marketing, Timbaland, Beyoncé vs. Azealia Banks, Western musical notes, and Baroque Pop (again), falconry, Top Gun, sword fighting, peatlands, owls, and mushrooms, loud and quiet aliens, LaMDA, Santa, unfortunate dinners, waste aversion, and dumplings, fast food french fries, hybrid potatoes, tubers and roots, apple cider, ube, and taro, nihilism, venting, the time horizons of change, young converts, kidnapping, and genetic influences on optimism and pessimism, Mrs. Henry’s Ping Pong Method vs. Mrs. Henry’s Oreo Cookie Method, the Shit Sandwich Method of delivering feedback, music theory, the Straw Man Argument vs. the Steel Man Argument, Schrödinger’s cat, and memetics (again), fabric of the universe, cookbooks and menus, painting a sensory picture, quantum consciousness, Spacetime, and butt donuts, category mistakes, synesthesia, projective questioning, names, berries, and, apperantly, not-berries, Web3, blockchain, Balaji Srinivasa, network states, Neom, and zero-knowledge proofs, reading, BookTok, Colleen Hoover, productive leisure, the affects of the pandemic, and quiet quitting, knitting, boredom, thumb wars, bird watching, snackable goals, and giving yourself room to fail, AI art generators, DALL-E 2, Midjourney, creativity and craft, the proliferation of beautiful things, and homogeneity, orca fashion, climate change, forest network interconnectivity, divergence, AI consciousness, and Trevor’s beard, bagels, English adjective order, Trevor Noah, performance mode, pickleball, and chess cheating, tiny clothes, reading horror, delight, Friends, subtle fear, and gourds, updates on the “fights”, meme culture, when something stops being funny, the consent paradox of pranking, entertaining each other, and the oversaturated market of bad jokes, pandemic “normalcy,” earnestness, parasocial relationships, referees, social media, and taxons, akanakuy, intimacy, eruption of conflict, Love Island, hiding, and conflict languages, Sax-a-booms, mushrooms, preserving the dead, aquamation, Fruit Loop hair, objectivity, and averages, death, recency bias, in memoriams, James Dean, one-hit wonders, and headstones, plastic, grandpa strips, popcorn, warm legs.

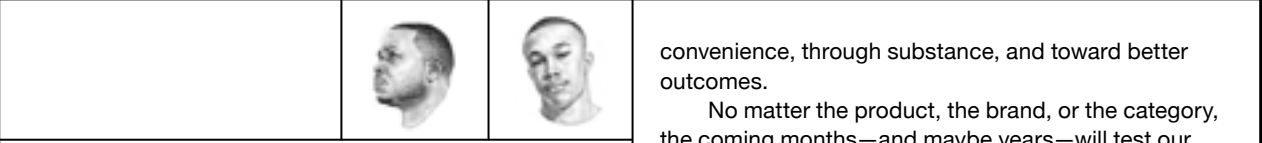
Special Guests: Nora Mestrich x3, Payal Pereira, Trevor Larry, Ilana Bondell, Harmand Ponder, Cara Lohman, Dylan Fowler, Eric Ferrer-Vaughn, and Ash Casper.

Listen in for more nonsense at thisisnonsense.com



The Creative Conscience: Infusing Invention with Virtue

BY AARON POWERS EDITION 077 ILLUSTRATION BY MARQUES ODEN



TL;DR
Entrepreneurial players in the business world are letting amoral creativity run amok. For the sake of our economy, we need to stop worshipping creativity as an economic cure-all and imbue our personal creativity with optimism, responsibility, and substance.

WHY IT MATTERS
As a society, and as an industry, we worship creativity. We believe it will bring us salvation. We believe it's an innate, immutable character trait, rather than a trained skill. And we believe that only some are touched with this otherworldly magic.

But creativity isn't inherently virtuous. And this false premise is potentially catastrophic right now for one simple reason: recession.

The fast-approaching global recession (if we're not already in it now) is sending seismic waves through major American institutions. And if history serves as a guide, economic downturns are a breeding ground for creativity. They are moments of an intense spike in problem solving and an intense demand for change.

But before we celebrate, many businesses choose to unleash their creativity, as though creativity itself is the solution. However, creativity unchecked can lead to disastrous outcomes. This creativity is almost nihilistic in its aims: it seems to crow "make it bigger, first, faster, and different, consequences be damned."

Virtuous creativity demands optimism, but optimism and positivity are different things. Positivity lacks substance, is easy to deliver, and can be just as toxic as unchecked creativity. Optimism on the other hand, takes work to access and pushes against our default cultural state of pessimism. Due to the intentionality wrapped around it, optimism gives creativity direction. It steers us away from

THREE THINGS YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

convenience, through substance, and toward better outcomes.

No matter the product, the brand, or the category, the coming months—and maybe years—will test our ability to create solutions that glitter like intellectual candy, but contain the strategic nutrition that meaningfully meet consumers' and employees' needs.

KILL YOUR NEXT THREE IDEAS

Demanding times require a higher bar. Discarding your next three solutions will result in one of two outcomes: (1) enough meditation to rescue and elevate an idea that was in the bin, or (2) freedom from your "business as usual" mindset. How are you pushing yourself and your teams to deliver greater substance in the thinking behind their solutions? When might you reward substance over speed? How might you infuse real impact into your sexiest ideas?

MARRY THE TRUTH

The truth can be as easy to avoid as it is unsettling to face. But when we start with the truth, the answers simply work. And that means we need to steep our work in the truth, fact check the presumptions of others, and challenge the notion of "common sense" whenever it arises. This commitment to objectivity has a ripple effect on everyone around you, and we imbue the creative process with collective conviction.

BE SERIOUS ABOUT CREATIVITY

There is no question: creative work can be flat-out fun. In order to keep our race for the next emotional high from overcoming the effectiveness of our ideas, though, we need to stay humble in the face of creative forces. The true act of creation—introducing something completely new, resurfacing that which has been forgotten, or ascribing new meaning to age-old ideas—is the most powerful force in the galaxy. When we're doing so, we need to treat it with respect. Because that power in the wrong hands can be catastrophic. Thank goodness it's in yours.

BY JESS VANDER EDITION 078



ILLUSTRATION BY COURTNEY PERETS

When starting a new venture or project, it's useful to rely on others' (or even your own) existing 'recipes.' But is there a danger in relying too much on an established framework or instruction manual? How do you know when to diverge from the steps and improvise a little?

TL;DR
“손맛 (sohn mat)—literally ‘hand taste’—explains why it can be so hard to replicate your own mother’s food, even when you follow her directions word for word, and why yours will never come out exactly like hers.” That’s why Eric Kim spent a year at home writing his new cookbook, *Korean American*: to study his mother’s deft and dear sohn mat and develop his own by her side.

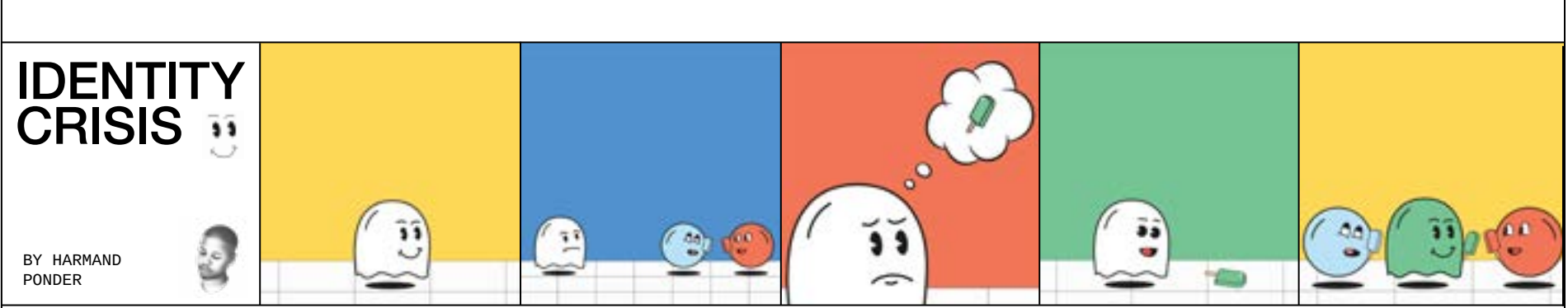
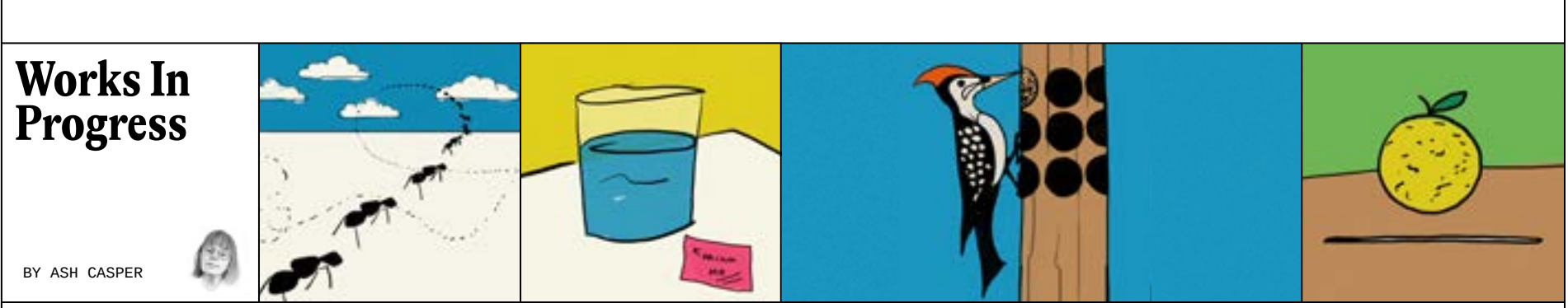
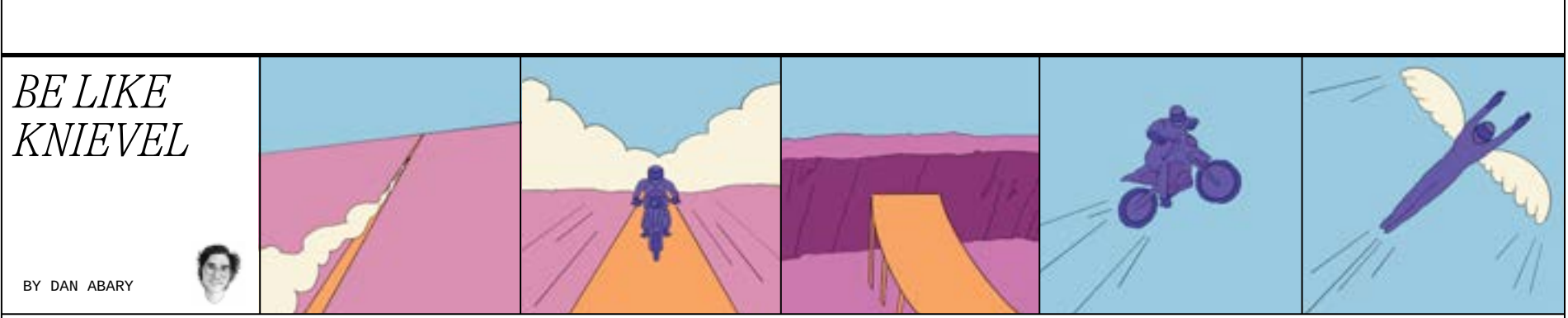
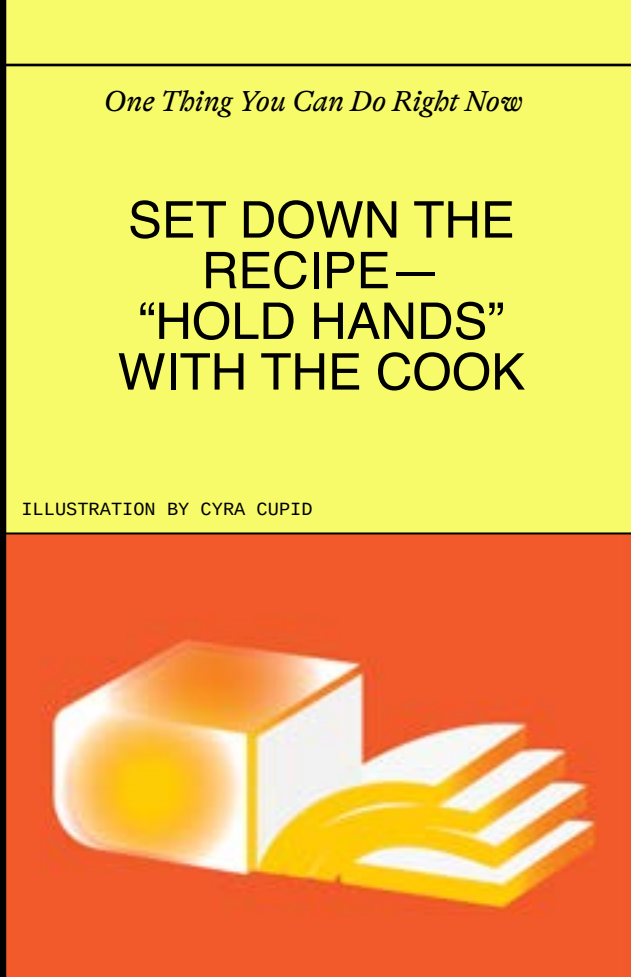
WHY IT MATTERS

A recipe isn't the end-all, be-all. No recipe is perfect (just ask anyone who's assembled IKEA furniture, competed in Write It Do It, or baked anything ever). Even recipes that come close can't quite capture the sohn mat. Sure, fast food and cola companies are known for nailing a certain consistency. But for so much else, consistency isn't the point. It's that savvy, indescribable signature of someone's craft and care we crave. That's what keeps us going back to a business that treats us well, back to see a favorite musician live (even though you know every song by heart), and back for a meal at home. Sohn mat—sazón, माँ के हाथ का खाना, სამიშ —is an essential ingredient no recipe can contain.

One Thing You Can Do Right Now

SET DOWN THE RECIPE — “HOLD HANDS” WITH THE COOK

ILLUSTRATION BY CYRA CUPID



BY DAN ABARY BY ASH CASPER BY HARMAND PONDER

AI Tries to Understand the Chat

☰

AI Tries to Understand the Chat

➡ Dylan announces the birth of Katie. Shannon, Dylan, and Xahra wish Queen Drizzy a happy birthday. 🔍 🗨️ 🗑️

➡ Lucy Chen, Harmand Ponder, and others discuss watching Star Wars. 🔍 🗨️ 🗑️

➡ Joey says someone did a schnauzer as a jedi. Jess and Dylan compliment Joey. 🔍 🗨️ 🗑️

➡ Les announces an epic Today's Hip-Hop and Rap rematch between our Verzuz Heavyweights and most prolific competitors Chris and Brett. Sofia Caraza forgot it was Friday today. 🔍 🗨️ 🗑️

➡ Dylan, Amanda, and others are discussing sliced bread. 🔍 🗨️ 🗑️

➡ Xahra is the costume queen. Eric shares photos of Ace as spiderman. José dressed León as Batman, and León is not a fan. Shug is a bumblebee. 🔍 🗨️ 🗑️

➡ Ash, Courtney, and Dan talk about their love of Lucha Libre and starting Danshirts.com 🔍 🗨️ 🗑️

Jess's Wrap Up Corner

That's many more than one thing we can do right now. Just maybe, if we say them aloud, we will.

Hold us to it?

The Work



ANDSCAPE
Launching a global media platform where Blackness is infinite



THE MOM PROJECT
Unleashing every side of motherhood at work



STACKABL
Turning waste into wonders



MLS NEXT PRO
Defining a new league to elevate North American soccer



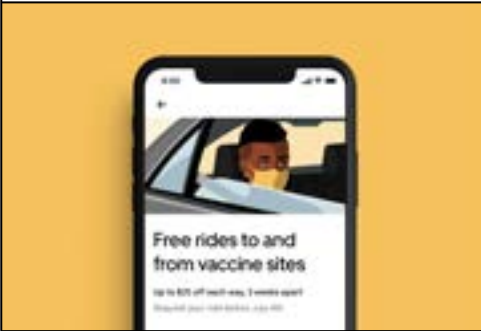
GOOGLE TEC
Gathering voices for an inclusive future in tech



SPOTIFY
Directing a promising new offering for Spotify



KATE SPADE
Dreaming up a perfect day in the park for Kate Spade's spring campaign



UBER
Infusing social impact into Uber's business strategy



NIKE
Developing a Web3 strategy

CLIENTS

- AB InBev
- Airbnb
- Amazon
- American Express
- Apple
- BlackRock
- Bloomberg
- Calvin Klein
- Chanel
- Diageo
- Disney
- General Motors
- Google
- Hilton
- IKEA
- Kate Spade
- Masterclass
- Meta
- MLS
- MoMA
- Nationwide
- NBA
- Netflix
- The New York Times
- Nike
- PepsiCo
- Samsung
- Spotify
- Tripadvisor
- Twitter
- Uber
- Viacom

One Thing You Can Do Right Now

SLOW DOWN AND ENJOY YOURSELF.



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SYLVAN

BEST OF EDITION