

# The love story of an engine and a compass

 By [Damon Stapleton](#)

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Years ago, I was lucky enough to work with two giants in the advertising industry. Out of respect, I am not going to name them because they would want it that way.



Photo by [Pete Johnson on Pexels.com](#)

One was a suit, the other a creative. They were both very impressive. They liked each other. They also used to fight a lot. Invariably, the argument would be a clash about research and proof on the one hand, and the power of imagination on the other.

This created a strange tension in the agency. At any time, there could be two answers for any situation or problem. This tension made the agency work. It created a bizarre and slightly uncomfortable equilibrium. It also gave the agency energy and the idea that there were always multiple solutions to any brief.

It instilled in me this idea of being open to solutions. Answers are not pre-ordained and can come from anywhere. Ideas can semi belong to one person and half belong to another. Ideas are not very fond of rules and restrictions.

I mention this because lately, I have noticed two strange things in our business:

Firstly, **rules, have begun to crop up before there is even an idea to judge.**

“ I will hear conversations about how something is going to happen long before we even know what is going to happen. It has to be mobile, digital or if you are doing a film, it has to be this long or that way. And we still have no idea of what we are doing yet. ”

It is what I call 'putting the accuracy before the horse'. The idea should come first.

Secondly, right now, **advertising seems to be made up of absolute entrenched positions**. Advertising's strength has always been about being able to look at a problem from multiple perspectives.

Like the suit and the creative I mentioned earlier, the different points of view created friction but also made the work better. When it comes to the messy business of having ideas, deciding there is only one right way, is the easiest and fastest way to be wrong. The trick is to stay open to ideas and possibilities. That is what a creative should do. That is his or her job.

Trying to have some iron-clad formula, or methodology, will only give you what you already have. There are some very polarised views at the moment. It feels like many believe they have to back just one horse.

**The horses' names are accuracy and attraction. And my money is on a dead heat.**

Before you place your bets, do yourself a favour and read Ian Leslie's brilliant article in the [New Statesman](#).

It shows the schism that is emerging in our business far more eloquently than I ever could. From a creative perspective, it really does feel like this thinking is pushing meaningless choices or creating filters and channels long before there is an idea.

There is often a large discussion about accuracy and very little about attraction.



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To use Rory Sutherland's analogy, these days we talk a lot about where the weeds should go because that can be measured. Speaking to many creatives, the flower can often be an afterthought. I guess the issue is a beautiful flower is a lot like charm. Desirable, yet hard to measure.

## Radiant beauty, a good yarn and a dollop of charm

Imagine somebody, let's call him Sven. He has a well-paid job making things more streamlined, measurable and efficient. One day he pops into his favourite French bistro after work with one of his workmates called Doug.

Sven likes going there because of the foreign music, the old-school posters on the walls and the slightly mad ambiance. He enjoys the crazy chef who shouts a lot. The host has loads of funny stories, is effortlessly charming and always remembers Sven's name.

While all this pleasantness is washing over him, Doug says to him, "Why do you like coming here? The tables are too bloody small." He had never noticed.

That's the thing about radiant beauty, a good yarn and a dollop of charm: in the right hands, they are way more powerful than being correct and accurate.

Some in our industry might want to discard or minimise these things because they are hard to measure, yet they have never been needed more than now.

There is a simple reason for this:

**People like them. People want them. People need them.**

Take Tinder. You can create an efficient service that gives you lots of data and measurement. But where the technology ends, people begin. You might be able to get them that date very efficiently.

But, it is those pesky humans who are going to have the date. So, the next day, the story isn't about Tinder and efficiency. It's about the date Jenny had with the weird guy who had a mullet and a very large goldfish collection.

Or, perhaps, how she just met the love of her life. It is not just about what we efficiently give. It is also about what people want. And, what people often want is immeasurable:

**Charm, beauty, seduction, surprise, love and new stories. Human experience. The things that make life worth living.**

We need what can be measured. Time and distance. This is the compass. However, we also need what *can't* be measured. The story of what happened on the journey. This is the engine.

And we need to quickly realise, one is very pointless without the other.

*"A flower is basically a weed with an advertising budget."* – Rory Sutherland

## ABOUT DAMON STAPLETON

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

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