

Find your niche, but don't stick to it

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"Figure out what you're good at and cultivate that one skill for the rest of your career," says almost everyone in our industry.



Now, I don't disagree with this statement, but I don't really agree with it either. Yes, it's important to know where your strengths lie, but based on my own experiences I have come to believe that you shouldn't make the mistake of exclusively sticking to your niche once you find it. Why? Well, it's simple. More often than not it's all of the other skills that will help you to amplify and polish that one thing that you know you're good at – and ultimately help you to climb the ladder and become the best of the best.

Hear me out.

When I joined my first agency early 2016, I was completely overwhelmed by how little I knew and understood about this world. I was a trained journalist and a natural empath who made a career change and the only thing I knew, was how to look at a situation from as many different perspectives as possible. To always consider both sides of the story and to come to rational and objective conclusions based on everything that I heard and saw. I quickly realised that this was the opposite of how things work in an agency – especially when you're part of a creative team where there's an expectation to be conceptual. To my surprise, the ability to bring these concepts to life – something that (along with writing) I consider to be a strength of mine – was a lot less valued. My creative directors and bosses also wasted no time to point out that I needed to let go of my rational side and learn how to come up with big ideas in order to further my career.

Now, how do you change the essence of who you are as a person?

I've always been a very driven person who wants to move up in life, so after being told that this was the only box I still had to tick before I could be promoted, I became obsessed with figuring out how to crack that Cannes-worthy concept. I was willing to unlearn everything that I knew before. And let me tell you – I really, really tried. But to say that I struggled is an understatement. The more pressure I put on myself, the more I started doubting myself, and the more my creative brain switched off. During this process, I made a concerted effort to understand exactly how every single department in the agency worked, the role that insights, strategy, design, and client service play in the greater process, as well as which software and techniques they used to get their jobs done. I was hoping that this knowledge would spark something – almost jumpstart my big thinking. But, spoiler alert, it didn't. What it did do, however, was show me that I was a strategic thinker and it also helped me to understand why data and insights should always be at the centre of creative work and roll-out. Two skills that taught me how to see the bigger picture and ultimately add more value through my writing and execution. But, somehow, it felt like the spotlight was still shining on the one thing that I wasn't good at.

I started over-extending myself and taking on way too much work in an attempt to prove my worth to the decision-makers around me. I went from backing myself and my skills to believing that I wasn't good enough. My confidence was at an all-time low.

Fast-forward to a few months later. I got a job offer from the one agency that I always wanted to work for – completely out of the blue. And the best part? They didn't care about (or even mention) the fact that coming up with big ideas wasn't my strength. They wanted me to join the team because they saw the skills that I can bring to the table – the things that I forgot I was good at. I went through a lot of emotions at the time and it wasn't easy to leave, but I obviously jumped at the opportunity.

The transition also had its own challenges. Newness is never easy. But after a few weeks at my new agency I woke up one morning and realised that I'm the happiest that I've been in a very long time. I found myself feeling excited about the work that we do I started feeling like the best version of myself again. I also completely forgot about that spotlight that was shining on my shortcomings. And then, on a random Tuesday afternoon it finally happened - I came up with my very first big idea. And the best part? I wasn't even thinking about it.

The lesson in all of this?

- Stay open to criticism and feedback. Learn from it and allow yourself to grow through of it - but don't get fixated and don't try too hard to prove yourself.
- Don't allow yourself to be part of the 53% of people in the world who are unhappy with their jobs. Listen to your inner voice when it tells you that it's time to move on to new things – whether that means a job change, an industry change, or simply moving to another department within your current agency.
- Have more conversations with your colleagues from other departments. Ask them questions about why they love their jobs, which processes they follow and why, and what you can do to better work with them towards the end goal of delivering great work.
- Keep learning new skills that fall inside and outside of your current field. You never know when they might come in handy or how important it'll be in the bigger scheme of things.

Yes, I'm fortunate to know what my niche is and I'm even more fortunate to find myself in a happy work environment with people who share my passions, but the fact that circumstances haven't always allowed me to stick to my niche is the best thing that could ever have happened to me. And it's still helping me grow, collect vital knowledge, and ultimately further my career in a big way. So much so, that I can almost guarantee that it'll do the same for you.

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