

Good morning,

Today I'd like to share with you one big framework on how to revitalize the value of our Planning discipline. I aspire to reframe the value of the planner and redirect its meaning.

I firmly believe that there are **two clear-cut areas for planners to be valuable**.

The most obvious one is the value of planners with respect to the quality of their agency's work. In this sense planners act as quality control making sure that creatives fire their mental ammo in the right direction, with the right quantity and the correct intensity. Planners also spend time as consumer ambassadors to make sure everything the agency produces is relevant. **This is value that is projected outwards.**

The second type of value is the one planners can provide to the agency culture, structure and process in itself. In this sense the contribution of a planner is to help make the agency function better, equipping it with the necessary tools and capabilities to overcome the foreseeable future. **This is value that is channelled inwards.**

This second angle to a planner's role and utility is seldom discussed or nurtured, as it serves directly no client brand. But it serves the **agency's dark matter**, the particles you don't see but occupy 80% of the space that defines the agency's own brand. My framework today lives and breathes within this second, often abandoned inward directed value.

The value of planners to the culture, structure, process and hence future prospects of their agency is achieved by applying an **Antifragile mindset** to everything we do within our agency environment

So what do I mean by Antifragile mindset?

Antifragile: Things that gain from disorder is a book written by **Nassim Taleb**.

In this book Mr. Taleb describes three categories of things. The first, **fragile** things that are weakened when exposed to randomness, disorder or stressors. Porcelain for instance is fragile and will break when you strike it with a small amount of force.

But what is the exact opposite of fragile? It isn't **robust** or resilient because these things remain the same under volatility and stress.

The opposite would be something beyond robust. Things that actually get stronger or that benefit from an applied force of stress. These things are **antifragile**. They use uncertainty to their advantage. The human body functions in this way, if you apply stress in the form of regular exercise your body will adapt and enhance its capabilities.

Antifragility applies not only to organic entities but also to organisations. An advertising agency I am sure you will agree is antifragile up to a point. An agency thrives when stress is applied to it. Creativity explodes when challenged. We make a living by harnessing uncertainty and turning it into business results.

This is where *antiplanning* comes in. Antiplanning as I see it has one definition:

The constant dedication of planners to help their agencies become more antifragile.

From the walls in, we are ***Chief Antifragile Officers*** as far as I'm concerned.

Antiplanning is about igniting actions, processes, cultures in the agency that will help it become stronger.

People say "*shit happens*". Antiplanners change the verb tense and therefore the focus of this phrase. Antiplanners say "*shit WILL happen*". For sure. At some point. Whether its new competition, a weak cycle, losing a big account or great talent.

Antiplanning's reason for being is simple. Everyday your job is to make your agency as "*shit proof*" as possible. And that is done on a daily basis. It's an incremental procedure. It's an attitude.

How do we do this? Well despite me being here giving this speech, its accomplished by doing rather than talking, being critical, changing things, questioning processes, making mistakes and encouraging your colleagues to do so as well. From the way we recruit to the way we brief, to the manner in which we present, to the research we undertake.

5 PRINCIPLES FOR ANTIPLANNING

1. ANTIPLANNERS CHANGE THE PLAN

There's a scene in The Dark Knight where The Joker verbally attacks what he calls *The Schemers*. He says "*Nobody panics when everything goes according to plan, even when the plan is horrifying*".

Sometimes the way we do things internally in an agency might not be horrifying but it certainly doesn't do us any good in the long run. Antiplanning needs to assess the manner in which we do things internally, and try to change them if and when they are not optimal.

2. ANTIPLANNERS SPECIALISE IN NOTHING AT ALL

In my view, this constant challenge to how we do things can only be “pulled off” by planners. We are the only ones with enough freedom of movement and experience amongst the different departments to have a somewhat insightful opinion of what can be optimized. Management is busy with relationships and the P&L. Account people are too attached to the urgent everyday client and creatives are sometimes too detached from reality.

There is a quote in a book written by **Robert A. Heinlein** in 1973 called *A time for Love*, that praises this “*Jack of all trades*” capacity in human endeavours. To be able to antiplan you should relate to this quote.

“A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects”.

3. ANTIPLANNERS ARE ANNOYED AND ANNOYING

Anti planners are like the character Wolverine: they’re “pissed off”, “they say it like it is”. If you are too polite or too complacent nothing will change. It is often said that planners should be “curious” and I agree. But anti planners should also be a bit angry. Anger is a much more potent motivator for change than curiosity.

4. ANTIPLANNERS DON’T LIKE SHORT CUTS

Antifragility is all about using randomness, not hiding from it. In its antiplanning application this means that anti planners enjoy adventure and risk. However, when you take short cuts you leave no margin for either. You are focused on the destination and not on the journey and therefore no learning can take place. This refers to the safety we often find in “copy paste”, templates and “recycled” presentations. Anti planning embraces uncertainty and errors because no error goes in vain. Every error within the agency space gets us one step closer to our true potential.

5. ANTIPLANNERS ACT AS AGENCY INSURANCE

Sir Martin Sorrell delivered a lecture in 1996 (I was 14 at the time) called *Beans & Pearls*. In it he addressed our creative industry and said something which I believe still stands today:

“I think you are a great deal better at advising and promoting your clients than you are at directing yourselves. And I’m not at all sure you give nearly enough thought to the future”

Antiplanning is all about the future. We don't dare predict, but we do anticipate, and we definitely prepare. An *antiplanner* should be an agency's safeguard to a brighter future.

Who could benefit most from antiplanning? In all honesty, the big agencies. **Big players are more fragile.** We have seen as of late some very newsworthy M&A activity. I used to work in M&A and I know that most of it nowadays is defensive. It is not undertaken to win but undertaken not to lose.

Size is great, don't get me wrong. But with abundance comes relaxation, with processes and boundaries and departments may come a lack of spark.

Steve Jobs famously said "*stay hungry, stay foolish*". People gravitate towards the "hungry and foolish" part of the phrase so much that they forget the verb. You need to "Stay". Perhaps not physically because you need to grow, but you need to "stay" mentally. Otherwise, in the end agencies will become not "*Too Big to Fail*", but "*Too big not to fail*".

What if, my agency in Madrid, is not big. But we have made this our best competitive advantage. I am privileged to be the planner in a place where changing the plan, being angry and not taking shortcuts is valued and encouraged.

Of course changing everything all the time is not feasible, not desirable and not efficient. But what I am suggesting is inserting voluntarily bits of selective randomness and friendly disruptive chaos into the agency dark matter to make us more immune to the generalist randomness and enemy chaos that is out there.

And granted, this is really hard. We all like "*getting the hang of things*", being used to a certain way of working, routines

The antiplanning mind-set forces us, constantly to place ourselves out of our comfort zone. We must strive to never give in to conformity, never settle, and never feel fully at ease. We must bring destabilizing forces into our agency. Forces that may not be received favourably at first, but that will, in the long run bring prosperity and growth.

Mr. Taleb is a person with a somewhat extreme view of The World and, though I have not met him I think he might disapprove of me using his *antifragile concept* in an advertising scenario. Most of all once I confess that I did not finish reading the whole thing! But to him, I am grateful. Thanks to his book, I am here in this great event with you wonderful people. Please come by later for a chat and if you are ever in Madrid or Spain for that matter, give me a shout.

Muchas gracias.

Slides used during presentation:

<http://www.slideshare.net/4AsPresents/hector-saracho-inspire-winner-4as-strategy-festival-2013>