

Q&A

WITH GERILYN HISIGER

BY CHARLIE BOSHOFF

Q: WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON NOW?

A: WE ARE ACTUALLY WORKING ON ONE OF THE BIGGEST PRODUCTS THAT WE WORK ON ALL YEAR IS CALLED THE YEAR REVIEW. SO WE MY TEAM AND I, WHO IS JUST ONE OTHER PERSON IN THE VIDEO SECTOR, WE PUT TOGETHER AN ENTIRE YEAR REVIEW FROM A BOTH A BRAND, CORPORATE STORYTELLING, INTERNAL STORYTELLING, BRAND PR, ALL OF THAT. WE'RE GONNA BE PUTTING TOGETHER A 4 MINUTE VIDEO FOR YOUTUBE AND THEN CHOPPING IT UP FOR SOCIAL MEDIA, AND THEN WE ARE GONNA SHARE IT INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY. SO THAT IS BY FAR THE BIGGEST THING I'M WORKING ON RIGHT NOW. VERY EXCITING. I LOVE WORKING IN VIDEO. IT'S OBVIOUSLY WHAT I STARTED MY CAREER IN, SO IT'S DEFINITELY ONE OF MY FAVORITE PARTS TO WORK ON.

Q: DESCRIBE A TYPICAL DAY

A: A TYPICAL DAY FOR ME INVOLVES A LOT OF MEETINGS. AS THE CREATIVE DIRECTOR, MUCH OF MY ROLE IS ABOUT INSPIRING AND GUIDING MY TEAM TO BRING IDEAS TO LIFE. I'M CONSTANTLY CONNECTING DOTS, STRATEGIZING HOW TO COMMUNICATE PROJECTS ACROSS VARIOUS MEDIUMS—PRINT, EMAIL, EVENTS, VIDEOS. I FOCUS HEAVILY ON DESIGN STRATEGY, THINKING NOT JUST ABOUT HOW THINGS LOOK BUT ALSO HOW THEY CAN BE EFFECTIVELY SHARED GLOBALLY, ESPECIALLY WITH BOTH PROSPECTIVE AND CURRENT EMPLOYEES. MY DAY INCLUDES CRITIQUING DESIGNS, DISCUSSING STRATEGIES, AND COLLABORATING WITH THE TEAM ON PROJECTS LIKE NEWSLETTERS AND EMAIL ARTICLES. IT'S A MIX OF CREATIVE AND STRATEGIC WORK, FINDING INSPIRATION IN EVERY MEETING. I ALSO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN NON-CREATIVES AND CREATIVES, MAKING SURE EVERYTHING WORKS COHESIVELY.

Q: WHAT SOFTWARE DO YOU USE FOR YOUR NEWSLETTERS?

A: ADOBE CREATIVE SUITE IS STILL OUR FOUNDATION, BUT WE'VE TRANSITIONED TO USING FIGMA MUCH MORE OVER THE PAST YEAR. I NOW ONLY USE INDESIGN AND OTHER ADOBE TOOLS FOR SPECIFIC TASKS, WHILE FIGMA IS MY GO-TO APPLICATION EVERY DAY. IT'S INCREDIBLY EFFICIENT, ESPECIALLY WHEN WORKING WITH MY INTERNATIONAL TEAM. WE CAN ALL COLLABORATE SEAMLESSLY ON THE SAME BOARDS. FROM A NEWS CENTER PERSPECTIVE, WE USE AN EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION PLATFORM CALLED "FIRST UP," WHICH IS WIDGET-BASED. WE DESIGN IN FIGMA, THEN BRING THOSE DESIGNS INTO OUR BLOCKS, WHERE WE CAN ADD LIVE TEXT AND OTHER ELEMENTS TO COMPLETE THE CONTENT.

WE ARE LEARNING HOW TO USE FIGMA IN CLASS, IT'S REALLY HARD, BUT I THINK THAT I'M GETTING GETTING INTO IT MORE.

A: I FEEL LIKE IT'S PRETTY INTUITIVE, ESPECIALLY SINCE MANY OF THE SHORTCUTS IN ADOBE CARRY OVER TO FIGMA. THE MORE YOU USE IT, THE MORE CONFIDENT YOU BECOME. AS A FREELANCER OR A TEAM PLAYER, IT'S AN INCREDIBLY EFFICIENT TOOL. I'M ALL ABOUT ORGANIZATION, AND FIGMA'S ABILITY TO KEEP EVERYTHING IN ONE PLACE IS A GAME CHANGER. WHETHER I'M WORKING INDEPENDENTLY OR WITH A TEAM, I CAN EASILY SEND A LINK TO SOMEONE AND SAY, "HEY, TAKE A LOOK AT THIS DESIGN. FEEL FREE TO EDIT OR LEAVE COMMENTS." IT MAKES COLLABORATION SO MUCH SMOOTHER. ADOBE REALLY CAN'T MATCH THAT. PLUS, BEING ABLE TO CONNECT WITH DEVELOPMENT TEAMS WITHOUT NEEDING TO KNOW HTML OR ALL THE TECHNICAL JARGON IS SUCH A TIME-SAVER—IT'S A SHORTHAND THAT MAKES COMMUNICATION MUCH EASIER.

Q: WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING SOMEONE SHOULD LEARN IF THEY WANT TO PURSUE THE SAME PATH?

A: THE HARDEST PART IS THE LACK OF TIME. COMING OUT OF GRAD SCHOOL, THERE WAS PLENTY OF TIME FOR ITERATIONS, CRITIQUES, AND REFINING. NOW, THERE'S BARELY ANY TIME—SOMETIMES EVEN NEGATIVE TIME. IT'S ALL ABOUT BEING FLEXIBLE AND FIGURING OUT HOW TO DO A LOT WITH A LITTLE, WHETHER THAT'S TIME OR RESOURCES. YOU ALSO HAVE TO LEARN TO ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF TO GET MORE. ONE THING I'VE GOTTEN GOOD AT IS LETTING GO OF IDEAS THAT DON'T HAVE TIME TO COME TO LIFE. IT'S TOUGH, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT'S SOMETHING YOU TRULY BELIEVE IN. BUT WORKING IN-HOUSE, I'VE LEARNED THAT THINGS OFTEN GET CUT DUE TO TIME CONSTRAINTS. STILL, I'VE BECOME ADAPTABLE. I MIGHT NOT GET EVERYTHING DONE, BUT I FOCUS ON DELIVERING SOMETHING THAT'S REALLY GOOD. FOR EXAMPLE, IF SOMEONE ASKS, "I LOVED THE ANIMATION YOU DID. CAN YOU DO ANOTHER ONE?" I'LL RESPOND, "SURE, BUT CAN I GET AN EXTRA DAY OR WEEK?" THAT EXTRA TIME HELPS ME DELIVER MY BEST WORK. THERE'S NEVER ENOUGH TIME, THOUGH. NEVER ENOUGH HOURS IN THE DAY. AND, WORKING IN-HOUSE, I DON'T COLLABORATE WITH A LOT OF OTHER CREATIVES, SO MY TEAM IS THE MOST CREATIVE ONE IN OUR DEPARTMENT.

Q: WHAT’S THE WORST THING ABOUT YOUR JOB?

A: THE MEETINGS. YOU KNOW WHAT? IT'S FOR LACK OF TIME. THE NUMBER ONE THING THAT I THOUGHT COME OUT OF GRAD SCHOOL, YOU YOU HAVE ITERATIONS OF VERSIONS AND CRIT TIME, AND THERE'S ALL THIS TIME. THERE IS NO TIME TO DO ANYTHING. YOU HAVE NEGATIVE TIME. I THINK THAT'S THE HARDEST PART. IT GOES BACK TO BEING FLEXIBLE. IT'S HOW DO YOU DO A LOT WITH A LITTLE, WHETHER THAT'D BE TIME, RESOURCES, HOW DO YOU ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF TO GET MORE. I THINK THAT THE HARDEST PART IS THAT WHEN YOU YOU KNOW, I'VE GOTTEN REALLY GOOD AT LETTING, AS THEY SAY, KILLING MY DARLINGS. LIKE, IF I CAN LET IT GO IF IT'S NOT GONNA COME TO LIFE. BUT THEN YOU'RE HOLDING FOR BUT IT'S THE STUFF THAT YOU REALLY BELIEVE IN. BUT I THINK THAT THE THING IS THAT, ESPECIALLY WORKING IN HOUSE, STUFF'S GONNA GET KILLED AT THE TIME. TIME DOES NOT ALLOW YOU TO DO ALL THE WORK THAT YOU WANNA DO. BUT I'VE BEEN ABLE TO BE MALLEABLE IN THAT SPACE TO SAY, “OH, WAIT. I CAN'T GET ALL OF THIS DONE, BUT I CAN GET THIS ONE GOOD THING DONE.” LET'S SAY ANIMATION. “I LOVE THE ANIMATION THAT YOU DID. CAN I GET ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE?” AND I WOULD SAY, “SURE. CAN I HAVE AN EXTRA DAY? SURE. CAN I HAVE AN EXTRA WEEK?” AND THEN IT GIVES ME THE MORE TIME THAT I NEED. AND SO, YEAH, 100%. IT'S NEVER ENOUGH TIME. NEVER NEVER ENOUGH TIME. NEVER ENOUGH HOURS IN THE DAY. AND I THINK YOU KNOW WHAT? AGAIN, WORKING IN HOUSE, I DON'T WORK WITH A LOT OF CREATIVES. MY TEAM IS THE MOST CREATIVE TEAM ON MY LARGER DEPARTMENT.

Q: WHAT’S THE BEST THING?

A: IT NEVER GETS OLD BRINGING AN IDEA TO LIFE. WORKING WITH SOMEONE AND SEEING THEM HAVE THAT BREAKTHROUGH MOMENT—WHEN THEY COME UP WITH AN IDEA, AND THEN I GET TO CREATE IT IN MY OWN WAY—IS ALWAYS EXCITING. COLLABORATING AND SEEING THE FINAL PIECE COME TOGETHER IS INCREDIBLY REWARDING. WHAT MAKES IT EVEN BETTER IS THEIR REACTION WHEN THEY SEE THE OUTCOME, LIKE, “OH MY GOD, IT’S EXACTLY WHAT I WAS THINKING!” OR “I’VE NEVER SEEN IT THIS WAY, I’M SO EXCITED!” THAT’S BY FAR THE BEST PART OF THE PROCESS. IF THAT EVER STOPS EXCITING ME, THEN I KNOW IT’S TIME TO RETIRE. THE THRILL OF BRINGING SOMETHING TO LIFE FOR SOMEONE IS ALWAYS FULFILLING.

Q: DO YOU HAVE A MENTOR? HOW HAVE THEY INFLUENCED YOU?

A: I DON’T HAVE A SINGLE CREATIVE MENTOR. INSTEAD, I FIND MENTORSHIP IN THE PEOPLE AROUND ME—PARTICULARLY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS IN ALL WALKS OF LIFE. MY FRIENDS, ESPECIALLY THE WOMEN, ARE THE MOST ASPIRATIONAL PEOPLE I KNOW. I DRAW A LOT OF INSPIRATION AND MOTIVATION FROM THEM. WATCHING THEM BUILD DEPARTMENTS, START COMPANIES, OR EVEN OPEN A BOOKSTORE PUSHES ME TO KEEP IMPROVING AND STRIVE TO BE AT THEIR LEVEL. I TRULY BELIEVE THAT WE, AS WOMEN, ARE CAPABLE OF ANYTHING. KEEPING PEOPLE AROUND ME WHO CHALLENGE AND INSPIRE ME IS A KEY PART OF MY PERSONAL GROWTH. ADDITIONALLY, I NEVER LET A CONNECTION GO TO WASTE. I’VE BEEN OUT OF GRAD SCHOOL FOR 10 YEARS AND COLLEGE FOR 20, AND I STILL REACH OUT TO MY TEACHERS OR FOLLOW THEM ON SOCIAL MEDIA, LETTING THEM KNOW I ADMIRE WHAT THEY’RE DOING. BUILDING AND MAINTAINING A STRONG NETWORK IS INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT TO ME. I’M NOT SHY ABOUT REACHING OUT FOR ADVICE OR OFFERING SUPPORT IN RETURN. I THINK MENTORSHIP SHOULD ALWAYS BE RECIPROCAL—THERE’S ALWAYS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THIS TO BE A TWO-WAY CONVERSATION, WHERE I CAN INSPIRE OTHERS AS MUCH AS THEY INSPIRE ME.

Q: HOW DO YOU KEEP YOUR FEELINGS SEPARATE FROM YOUR DECISION-MAKING?

A: HONESTLY, WORKING IN-HOUSE HAS HELPED ME MANAGE THIS MINDSET THE MOST. THESE AREN’T MY DESIGNS—THEY’RE RALPH’S. THAT PERSPECTIVE ALLOWS ME TO LET GO A BIT. OF COURSE, I POUR MY ENERGY, CREATIVITY, AND EFFORT INTO THE WORK, BUT I’VE LEARNED TO EMBRACE THE ITERATIVE PROCESS. I’VE COME TO ACCEPT THAT I’LL NEVER GET IT “PERFECT” ON THE FIRST TRY. IT’S JUST NOT REALISTIC, AND THAT’S OKAY. IF I EVER DID MANAGE PERFECTION RIGHT AWAY, I’D PROBABLY GO BUY A LOTTERY TICKET! INSTEAD OF SETTING MYSELF UP FOR FRUSTRATION, I APPROACH EACH PROJECT WITH PRIDE IN MY INITIAL EFFORT AND AN OPENNESS TO FEEDBACK. REVISIONS ARE PART OF THE PROCESS, NOT A CRITIQUE OF MY ABILITIES. WHEN WORKING FOR A BRAND LIKE RALPH LAUREN, MY GOAL IS ALWAYS TO ALIGN WITH THE COMPANY’S STYLE AND ETHOS. I THINK OF IT AS HAVING A “RALPH LAUREN TOOLKIT”—A RESOURCE OF DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND BRANDING GUIDELINES I CAN DRAW FROM TO ENSURE MY WORK REFLECTS THE BRAND. IF I’M STUCK, I REVISIT THAT TOOLKIT TO RECALIBRATE. ULTIMATELY, I’VE LEARNED TO SEE THE PROCESS AS A PARTNERSHIP RATHER THAN A JUDGMENT ON MY SKILLS. IT’S ABOUT COLLABORATION AND CREATING SOMETHING THAT NOT ONLY WORKS FOR ME BUT IS ALIGNED WITH THE COMPANY’S VISION AND VALUES.

Q: HOW DO YOU PRESENT AND DEFEND YOUR DESIGN CHOICES TO CLIENTS OR TEAM MEMBERS?

A: I THINK MANY PEOPLE ASSUME DESIGN IS JUST ABOUT WHAT LOOKS GOOD OR FEELS RIGHT. WHILE THERE’S A VISUAL ELEMENT TO IT, EFFECTIVE DESIGN IS OFTEN ABOUT STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN AESTHETICS, FUNCTIONALITY, AND THE CLIENT’S NEEDS. ONE APPROACH I’VE FOUND HELPFUL IS BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN “DESIGN SPEAK” AND WHAT THE CLIENT ENVISIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN EXPLAINING CONCEPTS LIKE USING ODD NUMBERS OVER EVEN (E.G., THREE ELEMENTS INSTEAD OF TWO OR FIVE INSTEAD OF FOUR), I HIGHLIGHT WHY ODD GROUPINGS ARE MORE VISUALLY DYNAMIC. SIMILARLY, I MIGHT ASK WHETHER THEY PREFER SYMMETRY OR SOMETHING MORE ASYMMETRICAL, DEPENDING ON THE FEELING THEY WANT TO EVOKE.

BY INVOLVING CLIENTS IN THE CREATIVE PROCESS, I’VE FOUND THAT PARTNERSHIPS GROW STRONGER. WHEN THEY FEEL INCLUDED, THEY NOT ONLY GAIN A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF DESIGN BUT ALSO BECOME MORE EXCITED ABOUT THE WORK. FOR INSTANCE, I’M A BIG TYPE NERD, AND I LOVE DISCUSSING TYPEFACES WITH CLIENTS. I’LL EXPLAIN WHY CERTAIN CHOICES ARE NON-NEGOTIABLE FOR A DESIGN, OUTLINING MY REASONING, WHILE OFFERING FLEXIBILITY IN OTHER AREAS. IT’S ALL ABOUT COLLABORATION. IF SOMETHING CAN’T BE DONE, I’LL PRESENT AN ALTERNATIVE: “WE CAN’T DO THAT, BUT HERE’S WHAT WE CAN TRY.” THIS “SOFT NO” APPROACH AVOIDS CONFRONTATION AND KEEPS THE PROCESS CONSTRUCTIVE. ULTIMATELY, BRINGING CLIENTS ALONG FOR THE JOURNEY TRANSFORMS THE EXPERIENCE INTO A PARTNERSHIP, NOT JUST A TRANSACTION.

Q: HAVE YOU EVER HAD CLIENTS THAT GET, REALLY UPSET WITH YOU WHEN YOU TRY TO GIVE THE SOFT NO?

A: I’VE DEFINITELY ENCOUNTERED PEOPLE WHO ARE MORE FORCEFUL WITH THEIR FEEDBACK THAN OTHERS. WHEN THAT HAPPENS, ESPECIALLY IF WE’RE COMPLETELY MISALIGNED ON THE DESIGN, I LIKE TO STEP BACK AND ASK FOUNDATIONAL QUESTIONS: WHAT IS THIS GRAPHIC TRYING TO DO? WHAT IS THIS PROJECT MEANT TO ACHIEVE? HOW DO WE WANT THE AUDIENCE TO FEEL? AS THEY ARTICULATE THEIR THOUGHTS, I CAN OFTEN IDENTIFY WHERE THE DISCONNECT LIES. FOR EXAMPLE, MAYBE I LEANED TOO WHIMSICAL WHEN THEY WANTED SOMETHING MORE STRUCTURED. IT’S ABOUT UNPACKING THEIR FEEDBACK. SOMETIMES CLIENTS SAY THINGS LIKE, “I DON’T LIKE IT,” OR “MAKE THIS BIGGER/SMALLER,” OR “IT’S NOT THE RIGHT VIBE.” TO MOVE FORWARD, I NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY MEAN BY THAT.

I’VE FOUND THAT PEOPLE WHO AREN’T USED TO CREATIVE WORK OFTEN STRUGGLE TO EXPRESS WHAT THEY’RE LOOKING FOR. SO INSTEAD OF PUSHING BACK IMMEDIATELY, I WORK TO CLARIFY: WHAT DO YOU WANT THE AUDIENCE TO FEEL? IF THEY SAY, “WE WANT THEM TO FEEL WARM, LIKE A HUG,” THEN WE CAN EXPLORE HOW TO ACHIEVE THAT—MAYBE BY ADJUSTING THE COLORS OR OTHER ELEMENTS. AT THE SAME TIME, I TRY TO APPROACH DISAGREEMENTS CONSTRUCTIVELY. I MIGHT SAY, “I UNDERSTAND YOUR PERSPECTIVE, BUT I SEE IT DIFFERENTLY—LET’S DISCUSS AND FIND COMMON GROUND.” FOR ME, THE KEY IS COMMUNICATION. CLEAR CONVERSATIONS LEAD TO CLEAR SOLUTIONS, AND THAT’S HOW WE GET BACK ON THE SAME PAGE.

Q: HOW DO YOU HANDLE WORKING ON PROJECTS YOU’RE NOT PERSONALLY PASSIONATE ABOUT?

A: IT’S A TOUGH REALITY IN THE WORKPLACE—THERE ARE SO MANY PROJECTS YOU JUST DON’T CARE ABOUT. HONESTLY, I’D ARGUE THAT MAYBE THE MAJORITY OF THEM FALL INTO THAT CATEGORY. THE KEY, I THINK, IS FINDING A PLACE WHERE MOST OF THE WORK, SAY 75%, EXCITES YOU, AND THE OTHER 25% DOESN’T. THAT BALANCE MAKES IT MANAGEABLE.

FOR THE UNINSPIRING WORK, WHAT GETS ME THROUGH IS STAYING INSPIRED BY THE SMALL THINGS. FOR EXAMPLE, I WORK ON BENEFITS—IT’S A HUGE PART OF MY ROLE. IT’S REPETITIVE, PREDICTABLE, AND, FRANKLY, BORING. BUT I FOUND WAYS TO MAKE IT A BIT MORE FUN, LIKE DESIGNING A CUSTOM LOGO FOR IT USING MY HANDWRITING. I BROUGHT IT INTO ILLUSTRATOR, LIVE-TRACED IT, AND MADE SOMETHING UNIQUELY MINE. THOSE LITTLE CREATIVE MOMENTS KEEP ME ENGAGED. I LIKE TO THINK OF IT AS BEING ON TWO RIVERS. ONE IS FILLED WITH SLUDGE AND GARBAGE, AND THE OTHER IS THE BEAUTIFUL NILE—A GORGEOUS RIVER WHERE I’M ON A BOAT, FANNED BY PEOPLE WITH PALM LEAVES. THE KEY IS REMEMBERING HOW AMAZING IT FEELS TO BE ON THAT BEAUTIFUL RIVER, EVEN WHEN YOU’RE SLOGGING THROUGH THE SLUDGE. THE REALITY IS THAT THE LESS EXCITING PROJECTS OFTEN PAY THE BILLS AND KEEP THE LIGHTS ON, ENABLING YOU TO WORK ON THE PROJECTS YOU TRULY LOVE.

IT’S ALSO ABOUT BALANCE. I USE THE INSPIRING PROJECTS TO TEST MY BOUNDARIES AND GROW CREATIVELY, WHICH THEN MAKES THE UNINSPIRING WORK FEEL MORE TOLERABLE. SOMETIMES, I EVEN BRING TECHNIQUES OR IDEAS FROM THE “FUN” WORK INTO THE MORE BORING STUFF, WHICH GIVES ME A SMALL WIN AND KEEPS THINGS INTERESTING.

AND HERE’S ANOTHER THING—BORING DOESN’T MEAN UNIMPORTANT. I’VE FOUND THAT PEOPLE GENUINELY APPRECIATE EVEN THE DULLEST TASKS WHEN YOU BRING YOUR SKILLS TO THEM. FOR EXAMPLE, IF I HELP SOMEONE WITH A BASIC, UNINSPIRING PRESENTATION, THEIR EXCITEMENT AND GRATITUDE MAKE ALL THE HOURS I PUT INTO IT FEEL WORTH IT. KNOWING I’VE MADE SOMEONE’S DAY BETTER OR HELPED THEM SHINE IS A REWARD IN ITSELF.

Q: HOW DO YOU BALANCE YOUR WORK AND HOME LIFE?

A: IT’S DEFINITELY A STRUGGLE, BUT I’M MUCH BETTER NOW THAN I WAS WHEN I WAS YOUNGER. IN THE CREATIVE WORLD, PEOPLE OFTEN TAKE MORE THAN YOU’RE WILLING TO GIVE. THAT’S WHERE FLEXIBILITY COMES IN. I COME FROM A GENERATION WHERE YOU HAD TO BE THE FIRST ONE IN AND THE LAST ONE OUT OF THE OFFICE, BUT I DON’T SEE THAT AS NECESSARY ANYMORE. YOU GET TO CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES. THERE’S ALWAYS GOING TO BE SOMETHING YOU’RE PASSIONATE ABOUT, A PROJECT YOU BELIEVE IN, AND YOU WANT TO PUSH IT FORWARD. BUT IT’S CRUCIAL NOT TO DO THAT EVERY TIME.

WITH TIME, I’VE LEARNED TO DECIDE HOW I ALLOCATE MY ENERGY—WHETHER IT’S SPENDING 20 MINUTES ON SOMETHING AND KNOWING WHEN TO STOP. THE HARDEST PART IS KNOWING WHEN ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. I COULD SPEND HOURS REFINING A PROJECT, ENDLESSLY THINKING, “IT’S NOT PERFECT YET.” BUT THAT BALANCE COMES WITH TIME AND CONFIDENCE IN YOUR ROLE. WHEN IT COMES TO WORK-LIFE BALANCE, IT’S ABOUT KNOWING WHAT YOU’RE PRIORITIZING. IF YOU CHOOSE TO PRIORITIZE WORK AND NEGLECT YOUR SOCIAL LIFE, YOU NEED TO BE OKAY WITH THAT DECISION. IT’S NOT ABOUT RIGIDLY SPLITTING YOUR LIFE INTO WORK AND PERSONAL BOXES, ESPECIALLY IN A PLACE LIKE NEW YORK. IT’S MORE ABOUT SAYING, “TODAY, I’M WORKING AN EXTRA HOUR, BUT TOMORROW, I’LL MAKE SURE TO STOP ON TIME.” IT’S ABOUT CREATING A FLOW, RECOGNIZING WHEN YOUR WORK IS CONSUMING YOU, AND KNOWING HOW TO TAKE BREAKS TO RESET. I’M ALSO A HUGE ADVOCATE FOR HOBBIES. I’M VERY ACTIVE, AND I KEEP MYSELF GROUNDED THROUGH ACTIVITIES LIKE TRIVIA, BACKGAMMON, AND ANYTHING THAT TAKES ME OUT OF THE WORKSPACE. WORK-LIFE BALANCE WILL NEVER BE EXACTLY 50/50; IT EBBS AND FLOWS. WHAT MATTERS MOST IS WHETHER I’M BEING TRUE TO MYSELF. IF I WAKE UP FEELING DISCONNECTED FROM WHO I WANT TO BE, THAT’S WHEN I NEED TO REASSESS AND RESET MY BOUNDARIES. AS WOMEN, ESPECIALLY WITH STRONG WORK ETHICS, IT’S IMPORTANT TO REFRAME DOWNTIME. IT’S NOT ABOUT GIVING UP SOMETHING FROM THE PIE, BUT RECHARGING YOUR CREATIVE BATTERY. DOWNTIME ISN’T WEAKNESS—IT’S STRENGTH TO KEEP GOING. AND IF YOU’RE HAVING A CREATIVE BLOCK, FORCING YOURSELF TO PUSH THROUGH WON’T HELP. YOU’LL JUST GET FRUSTRATED AND WASTE MORE TIME. SOMETIMES, STEPPING AWAY—WHETHER IT’S FOR A COFFEE BREAK OR SOMETHING ELSE—CAN GIVE YOU THE RESET YOU NEED.

LASTLY, MANAGING MULTIPLE JOBS AND RESPONSIBILITIES REQUIRES TIME MANAGEMENT WITH YOUR TEAM. OVER-COMMUNICATION IS KEY. ESPECIALLY DURING BUSY PERIODS, I ALWAYS LET MY CLIENTS OR PARTNERS KNOW WHAT I CAN AND CAN’T DO, AND SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS. I USED TO WORRY ABOUT DISAPPOINTING OTHERS, BUT NOW I’VE LEARNED THAT OVER-PROMISING LEADS TO BURNOUT. BY COMMUNICATING CLEARLY AND HONESTLY, I’VE FOUND GREATER SUCCESS AND TRUST FROM OTHERS. IT’S ALL ABOUT SETTING BOUNDARIES THAT FEEL RIGHT, AND SHOWING UP IN A WAY THAT MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD.

Q: HOW DO YOU APPROACH SETTING RATES OR DISCUSSING BUDGETS WITH CLIENTS?

A: THERE’S SOMEONE I FOLLOW—I THINK IT MIGHT BE JESSICA HIRSCH—WHO RECENTLY SHARED A REALLY HELPFUL PDF ON THIS TOPIC. I’LL TRY TO FIND IT AND SEND IT TO YOU. BUT ONE OF THE MOST VALUABLE LESSONS I LEARNED IN GRAD SCHOOL CAME FROM MY PROFESSOR, EMILY WARDWELL. SHE TOLD US, “YOU’RE WORTH IT.” SHE WAS VERY CLEAR: ANY LOGO, \$1,000. AT THE TIME, I THOUGHT, A THOUSAND DOLLARS? THAT’S A LOT OF MONEY! BUT SHE EXPLAINED THE VALUE OF YOUR WORK. THINK ABOUT IT—IF YOU DESIGNED THE NIKE LOGO AND THAT COMPANY BECOMES A MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR BRAND, IS \$1,000 REALLY ENOUGH FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION? PROBABLY NOT.

WHAT SHE EMPHASIZED IS UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF YOUR TIME AND EXPERIENCE. AS YOUR EXPERIENCE GROWS, YOUR FEES SHOULD, TOO. WHEN I WAS FREELANCING FULL-TIME, I USUALLY OFFERED CLIENTS A CHOICE: A FLAT RATE OR AN HOURLY RATE. WE’D DISCUSS WHICH MADE THE MOST SENSE FOR THE PROJECT, AND I’D CALCULATE ACCORDINGLY. START BY ASKING YOURSELF: HOW MUCH IS ONE HOUR OF MY TIME WORTH? MAYBE IT’S \$25, \$50, OR EVEN \$100. IF YOU’RE NEWER BUT STILL HAVE A SOLID BACKGROUND, \$50 TO \$75 PER HOUR MIGHT FEEL RIGHT—IT SHOWS THAT YOU AND YOUR CLIENTS VALUE YOUR WORK. YOU CAN ALSO ADJUST PRICING BASED ON WHAT’S INCLUDED. FOR EXAMPLE, IF YOU’RE IN THE \$35-\$50 PER HOUR RANGE, YOU COULD SAY, “AT \$35 PER HOUR, YOU’LL GET X. IF WE GO TO \$50 PER HOUR, I’LL ALSO INCLUDE Y.” IT’S ABOUT DEMONSTRATING THE VALUE OF YOUR WORK AND SHOWING CLIENTS WHY IT’S WORTH INVESTING IN.

EVEN AS A STUDENT, REMEMBER THAT YOU BRING MORE TO THE TABLE THAN JUST “STUDENT WORK.” YOU’VE GOT A DECADE OF LIFE EXPERIENCE AND A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE, WHICH ADDS REAL VALUE. WHEN SETTING RATES, BREAKING THEM DOWN CAN HELP. FOR INSTANCE, IF YOUR DAY RATE IS \$125 AND A PROJECT WILL TAKE TWO FULL WEEKS, MULTIPLY \$125 BY 14 DAYS—THAT’S YOUR RATE. FOR LONGER PROJECTS, LIKE A LOGO THAT MIGHT TAKE A MONTH, CALCULATE BASED ON THE HOURS AND VERSION CONTROL INVOLVED. TRANSPARENCY IS KEY. BRING CLIENTS ALONG ON THE JOURNEY OF HOW YOU DETERMINE YOUR PRICE, BUT ALSO DON’T UNDERCUT YOURSELF. UNDERVALUING YOUR WORK DOESN’T JUST AFFECT YOUR EARNINGS—IT IMPACTS HOW OTHERS PERCEIVE THE WORTH OF YOUR ART. PRICING YOUR WORK FAIRLY SAYS, “VALUE ME, BECAUSE I VALUE MYSELF.”

Q: WHAT’S A PIECE OF ADVICE YOU RECEIVED EARLY IN YOUR CAREER THAT STILL STICKS WITH YOU?

A: IT’S FUNNY—I SAW THIS ON TIKTOK THE OTHER DAY, AND IT REALLY RESONATED WITH ME. ONE PIECE OF ADVICE I’VE RECEIVED —AND I THINK I’VE MENTIONED A FEW TODAY—IS CLEAR IS KIND. ANOTHER IS THE CONCEPT OF THE SOFT NO, WHICH HAS BEEN ESPECIALLY MEANINGFUL TO ME AS A PEOPLE PLEASER. ELIZABETH OLSEN ONCE SAID IN AN INTERVIEW THAT HER SISTERS, MARY-KATE AND ASHLEY, TAUGHT HER THAT “NO” IS A COMPLETE SENTENCE. WHEN I WAS YOUNGER IN MY CAREER, I STRUGGLED WITH SAYING NO. THE IDEA OF A SOFT NO HELPED ME. IT’S ABOUT SAYING, I CAN’T DO THIS, BUT I CAN DO THAT. IT’S NOT A FLAT REJECTION; IT’S FINDING A WAY TO MAKE THINGS WORK IN A WAY THAT FEELS AUTHENTIC. THAT’S A LESSON THAT’S STUCK WITH ME: STAYING AUTHENTIC AND TRUE TO MYSELF. I’LL BE HONEST—WHEN I FIRST JOINED RALPH LAUREN, MY ORIGINAL BOSS ALMOST DIDN’T HIRE ME. I WAS TOO LOUD, TOO VERBOSE, AND MORE ENERGETIC THAN MY COLLEAGUES. BUT SOMEONE ELSE TOOK A CHANCE ON ME, SAYING, HIRE HER ANYWAY. SHE’S A GOOD TIME. WHAT’S CARRIED ME THROUGH IS STAYING TRUE TO WHO I AM. SURE, I CAN TONE THINGS DOWN WHEN NEEDED, BUT I’VE NEVER WAVERED IN MY AUTHENTICITY. LOOKING BACK, I DIDN’T FEEL VERY RALPH LAUREN WHEN I STARTED. MY OPENING OUTFIT? ATROCIOUS. I’D NEVER WEAR IT AGAIN! BUT I STAYED TRUE TO MYSELF AND FOUND MY WAY WITHIN THAT SPACE. AS LONG AS YOU CAN STAY PROUD OF WHO YOU ARE AND CARRY YOURSELF WITH DIGNITY, EVERYTHING ELSE FALLS INTO PLACE.

Q: WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST CHALLENGING CLIENT FEEDBACK YOU’VE RECEIVED, AND HOW DID YOU ADDRESS IT?

A: I WAS TOLD I WAS COMMON ONCE. THAT IF YOU WENT ON GOOGLE, YOU COULD FIND THIS. THAT REALLY HURT ME. IT CAME FROM A REALLY BIG ASSHOLE, SO I THOUGHT, “OH, HE’S JUST BEING AN ASSHOLE.” BUT WHAT WAS REALLY IMPORTANT FOR ME— AND ALSO REALLY HARD—WAS KEEPING MY COOL. THAT’S SOMETHING SO IMPORTANT. THERE ARE TIMES TO SHOW EMOTION AND BRING PEOPLE INTO YOUR RAGE, SADNESS, OR WHATEVER YOU’RE FEELING. BUT I KNEW THAT WASN’T THE MOMENT. HERE’S THIS PERSON WHO WOULD’VE JUST BEEN MORE OF AN ASSHOLE IF I SHOWED EMOTION.

I SAID SOMETHING LIKE, “THANK YOU VERY LITTLE,” AND MOVED ON. IF I’D LOST CONTROL, HE WOULD’VE WON EVEN MORE. I THINK THIS CONVERSATION IS ALL ABOUT BALANCE—KNOWING WHEN TO STRIKE THE RIGHT EMOTION. UNFORTUNATELY, WE STILL HAVE A LOT OF WORK TO DO WHEN IT COMES TO EQUITY. I WORK IN A COED ENVIRONMENT WITH PEOPLE RANGING FROM 25 TO 85 YEARS OLD, SO I INTERACT WITH A LOT OF DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES.

I BRING EMOTION AND PASSION TO MY CONVERSATIONS. SOMETIMES I’M MORE PASSIONATE THAN AT OTHER TIMES, AND THAT’S FINE. BUT WHEN I WAS TOLD I WAS COMMON, I’LL NEVER FORGET THAT. I KEPT MY COOL AND ASKED, “WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?” SINCE HE WAS A CREATIVE, I ASKED, “HOW WOULD YOU CHANGE THIS? WHAT DO YOU WANT PEOPLE TO FEEL?” WE WERE ABLE TO GET SOMEWHERE. LATER, HE CALLED AND ADMITTED HIS FEEDBACK HAD BEEN HARSH. I SAID, “I’D AGREE WITH THAT.”

I’VE CRIED IN MEETINGS AND RARELY YELLED. BUT I’M NOT AFRAID OF CRYING WHEN IT HAPPENS. TEARS COME WHEN SOMETHING MATTERS TO ME, AND I THINK THAT’S VALID. IF SOMEONE QUESTIONS WHY YOU’RE CRYING, YOU CAN SAY, “I CARE ABOUT MY WORK AND THIS PROJECT. THAT’S WHY YOU’RE SEEING THIS EMOTION.” IT’S NOT ABOUT BEING A CRYBABY BUT STAYING TRUE TO YOURSELF AND USING EMOTION AUTHENTICALLY.

IT’S ALSO IMPORTANT TO BE CLEAR WHEN SOMETHING FEELS OFF. YOU CAN SAY, “THE FEEDBACK FEELS HARSH,” OR “THIS IS HITTING ME IN THE WRONG WAY; I’LL TAKE A MOMENT AND COME BACK TO YOU.” THAT’S ALLOWED. I’VE LEARNED THAT OVER TIME. IF YOU DON’T FEEL CONFIDENT IN A CONVERSATION, YOU CAN GO TO YOUR BOSS AFTERWARD AND SAY, “I DIDN’T FEEL GOOD ABOUT THAT.” WHETHER YOU’RE AN ASSOCIATE OR A CREATIVE DIRECTOR, OPEN A TWO-WAY CONVERSATION.

BAD MEETINGS HAPPEN, BUT WE CAN HOLD ON TO THEM TO LEARN AND FIX PROCESSES. SOMETIMES, THOUGH, YOU HAVE TO LET IT GO BECAUSE IT’S JUST AN ASSHOLE BEING AN ASSHOLE.

I'VE DEFINITELY BEEN TOLD THAT I'M OVEREMOTIONAL WHEN IT COMES TO GETTING CRITIQUED. SO PEOPLE HAVE TOLD ME TO JUST BE NEUTRAL AND BLOCK IT AND NOT HAVE ANY EMOTIONAL CONNECTION TO PROJECTS OR ANYTHING. SO IT'S DEFINITELY HARD AND GETTING MIXED MESSAGES OF, YES, I WANNA BE PASSIONATE ABOUT MY WORK, BUT ALSO NOT TO LET THE FEEDBACK AFFECT ME. BUT IT'S HARD

A: NO. IT’S A REALLY HARD BALANCE. WHEN YOU’RE RECEIVING BAD FEEDBACK OR CRITIQUE YOU MIGHT AGREE WITH, IT’S IMPORTANT TO ASK, WHAT VALUE DOES THIS HAVE FOR ME? IT’S A BIT LIKE THE MARIE KONDO APPROACH: DOES THIS BRING YOU JOY? WITH EVERY CRITIQUE, YOU CAN TAKE WHAT RESONATES AND LEAVE THE REST. THAT’S HOW YOU UNLEASH THE POWER CRITIQUE CAN HOLD OVER YOU. YOU DON’T HAVE TO DECIDE IN THE MOMENT WHAT BRINGS YOU JOY. THERE’S POWER IN RESTRAINT. SAYING, THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK. I’LL TAKE IT ON AND COME BACK TO YOU, CAN BE INCREDIBLY POWERFUL. I’D RATHER MY EMPLOYEES SAY THAT THAN REACT IMPULSIVELY, LEADING TO A BAD CONVERSATION OR A DOWNWARD SPIRAL BECAUSE WE CAN’T AGREE ON THE FEEDBACK. IT’S ALSO IMPORTANT TO TETHER THE POWER CRITIQUE HOLDS OVER YOUR ART. THINK ABOUT IT: YOU’RE ONE OF THE FEW PEOPLE WHO PUT YOURSELF OUT THERE SO VULNERABLY EVERY DAY. DOCTORS DON’T DO THAT. LAWYERS DON’T DO THAT. TEACHERS MIGHT. BUT YOU’RE TAKING PARTS OF YOURSELF, LIKE HORCRUXES, AND PUTTING THEM OUT THERE FOR OTHERS TO CRITIQUE. THAT’S INCREDIBLE—AND INCREDIBLY BRAVE.

Q: HOW CAN YOU NOT TAKE THAT PERSONAL?

A: BUILDING THAT SPACE IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE THEIR CRITIQUE HAS NO POWER OVER YOUR VALUE. THEIR CRITIQUE IS JUST THEIR OPINION; IT DOESN’T MEAN YOU’RE A BAD PERSON OR A BAD ARTIST BECAUSE SOMEONE DOESN’T LIKE YOUR WORK. IT’S ABOUT FINDING THAT BALANCE AND SAYING, I’M STILL A GOOD ARTIST, WHETHER THEY LIKE THIS OR NOT. IF THEY DO LIKE IT, GREAT—WE’RE ON THE SAME PAGE. I ALSO LOVE NOT BEING THE GREATEST ARTIST IN THE ROOM. I ENJOY HIRING PEOPLE WHO ARE BETTER ARTISTS THAN ME BECAUSE IT’S EXCITING TO SEE THEIR STRENGTHS AND THINK ABOUT HOW I CAN HELP THEM GROW TO THE NEXT LEVEL. THAT’S WHAT’S SO IMPORTANT ABOUT ART: IT’S SUBJECTIVE, BUT IT’S ALSO COLLABORATIVE. CRITIQUE BUILDS COMMUNITY AND STRENGTHENS ARTISTRY WHEN VIEWED THAT WAY. IT’S ABOUT TAKING WHAT RESONATES AND LEAVING THE REST. YOU DON’T HAVE TO ABSORB EVERYTHING SOMEONE SAYS. TAKE THE INTERESTING POINTS, DECIDE IF THEY’RE USEFUL, AND EITHER ADD THEM TO YOUR TOOLBOX OR LET THEM GO.

TEN

KEY POINTS

1. CURRENT PROJECTS:

GERILYN'S TEAM IS WORKING ON A YEAR-IN-REVIEW VIDEO FOR THE COMPANY, WHICH SHE ENJOYS AS IT'S PART OF HER ROOTS IN VIDEO WORK. THEY AIM TO SHOWCASE CORPORATE STORYTELLING THROUGH VARIOUS MEDIUMS LIKE YOUTUBE, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS.

2. DAILY WORK:

AS A CREATIVE DIRECTOR, GERILYN'S DAY INVOLVES A LOT OF MEETINGS WHERE SHE CONNECTS THE DOTS BETWEEN CREATIVE AND NON-CREATIVE TEAMS. HER FOCUS IS ON DESIGN STRATEGY, ENSURING PROJECTS ARE BROUGHT TO LIFE BOTH VISUALLY AND FUNCTIONALLY.

3. DESIGN TOOLS:

GERILYN HEAVILY USES FIGMA, WHICH ALLOWS FOR COLLABORATIVE, EFFICIENT WORK ACROSS HER INTERNATIONAL TEAM. FOR NEWSLETTERS, SHE USES FIRSTUP, AN EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS PLATFORM.

4. CAREER ADVICE:

SHE EMPHASIZES THE IMPORTANCE OF FLEXIBILITY, SELF-ADVOCACY, AND BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF. GERILYN BELIEVES CREATIVITY THRIVES WHEN YOU ARE ADAPTABLE AND WILLING TO CHAMPION YOUR OWN WORK AND IDEAS.

5. CHALLENGES:

THE HARDEST PART OF HER JOB IS THE LACK OF TIME, ESPECIALLY WITH THE DEMANDS OF WORKING IN-HOUSE. SHE OFTEN HAS TO MAKE DIFFICULT DECISIONS ABOUT WHAT TO PRIORITIZE IN HER PROJECTS.

6. MENTORSHIP AND INSPIRATION:

ALTHOUGH GERILYN DOESN'T HAVE A SINGLE CREATIVE MENTOR, SHE DRAWS INSPIRATION FROM HER FRIENDS AND NETWORK, PARTICULARLY WOMEN WHO ARE ENTREPRENEURIAL. SHE BELIEVES IN BUILDING AND NURTURING HER NETWORK FOR ONGOING GROWTH.

7. WORK-LIFE BALANCE:

SHE HAS LEARNED TO SET BOUNDARIES BETWEEN WORK AND PERSONAL LIFE, ESPECIALLY AS A CREATIVE. GERILYN ADVISES NOT TO FEEL GUILTY FOR TAKING BREAKS AND STRESSES THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE TO AVOID BURNOUT.

8. CREATIVE CHALLENGES:

GERILYN HAS FACED DIFFICULT CLIENT FEEDBACK, WHICH SHE APPROACHES BY REMAINING CALM, ASKING CLARIFYING QUESTIONS, AND FINDING A WAY TO MEET THE CLIENT'S VISION. SHE ALSO STRESSES THE IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN HANDLING CRITIQUES.

9. PRICING AND BUDGETING:

WHEN SETTING RATES, GERILYN SUGGESTS CONSIDERING BOTH TIME AND EXPERIENCE. SHE ADVOCATES FOR VALUING YOUR WORK AND CLEARLY COMMUNICATING WITH CLIENTS ABOUT THE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT AND YOUR RATES.

10. PROJECT FEEDBACK

SHE RECOMMENDS STAYING TRUE TO YOUR DESIGN PRINCIPLES WHILE REMAINING OPEN TO CLIENT INPUT, AND WHEN NECESSARY, GENTLY PUSHING BACK WITH A "SOFT NO" TO MAINTAIN CREATIVE INTEGRITY.