

## Creating Success: six ways financial planners can develop leadership

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It is said that creativity and leadership are a great team; for success in financial advice, creativity and leadership are essential. Yet, working in a creative industry, I have heard so many in senior financial management positions say; "I just can't be creative". My view is that creativity can be learned, it is not a gift from the gods (for most of us). The best place to learn is from the creative departments of advertising agencies. I've employed or contracted many creative teams and have learned many leadership lessons from "the tricks of the creative professionals".

For a start, I know for certain that becoming creative is not necessarily about become another Einstein or Picasso. Many quite average and ordinary people have found their creative side. If you lock into your own creative juices, you will become a better leader. You'll also be more fun, more interesting, happier and more of a contributor. Overall, that makes you a better communicator.

Creativity can be as simple as new ways for old situations. For example, at home, your creativity might produce a new way for the family to have fun together, or a new approach for the sporting club. At work, it can be about solving old problems in new ways. Here are some tips from my observation of the professional creative teams:

### Re-build an open mind

When we were kids everything was new and we had an open way of looking at things. It's worth trying to get this back now that you are in leadership. Your financial team will value your open mind and as you become more open and more creative, your leadership persona will develop. That's good for any practice.

### Don't censor yourself

One of my colleagues would be the one to say "I know this is a dumb question, but..." and then he'd ask the very question that was on everyone's mind. We don't ask these dumb questions because our mind acts as a censor. It says "you should know" or "they will laugh at you". Just because you are in a leadership and financial advisory role, this does not mean you know everything. Importantly, you are not expected to know everything, so you'll lead better by being the first to say; "I don't know".

### Move on from mistakes

I watched a creative team of art director and copywriter working on an advertising campaign. Some of their words or ideas were clearly ridiculous. As they talked, one or the other would come up with a lousy line or a weak joke. They just moved on. They did not keep reminding each other of the pathetic effort. They did not fear mistakes; nor should you as a leader. Your marketing ideas sessions will work better if colleagues do not have a fear that dumb ideas will be held against them later; instead, release the creative juices by moving on from (not condemning) bad ideas.

### Keep active, be involved

Creativity needs feeding, and the best food is the wonderful diversity of human life. To keep your creative energies growing, get out of the chair. See a movie. If you must watch TV, watch something you would normally reject. You don't have to sit glued to the business news or current affairs. Buy a different magazine. Don't keep closing more and more doors on the outside world; start to smash some of them open. That's a big step towards real leadership. One leading financial adviser is actively involved in his footy club, another is on the board of a local arts group; both are better advisers because of their outside interests.

### Leave things alone

Sometimes you need to get up from the desk, walk away and not come back to the issue for a while. "Let's sleep on that" can be good advice, and it takes a leader to know when to say it.

### Act on the idea

Once creativity arises, you have to put it to work. Pass it on, write it down, take the action, share the idea with friends or colleagues or take any action that commits the creativity to memory. One financial group recently decided to send a short email to all key clients once a fortnight, attaching any item, not necessarily finance, that would make good reading. It worked because they implemented it straight away. One of the big differences between real leaders and the rest is the courage to put ideas into action.

To get ahead in financial advice today, you need more than technical or professional skills – you also need creative communication, the ability to get the message across. Even in sports, the most successful sporting figures are also good, highly trained, communicators. It is also vital for those who want to get more out of community involvement. A good communication skills course could give you a competitive edge, and it is never too late to start.

The beauty about learning good communication is that you win in both ways – you'll be more likely to be a leader and you will be happier. So, how long since you chose a communication course? It's your move.

We are living in a time that is uncertain yet creative. Leaders need to think about the wonderful opportunities ahead. Knowledge is exploding. We can talk to anybody, anywhere and anytime. Even corporations are looking for friends and partners. Nothing is impossible. A sense of community will make this century great. The human spirit can make it different. To develop as a leader, get out of your seats. Talk to someone. Talk to employees and colleagues. Talk to your family. The future awaits: what are you going to do?

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