5 Things Planners Should Keep in Mind to Create Change in 2019



Eliza Esquivel, a marketing consultant, shares her insights on the future of account planning with Jessica Abo.

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In this video, consultant Eliza Esquivel shared her insight on future of account planning with me. Here are two important questions for Esquivel about business planning in 2019.

What opportunities do you see for the planning discipline in 2019?

Esquivel: The account planning practice has remained largely

hidden from anyone outside of advertising, so I see a huge opportunity in 2019 to explain what we do and apply it more broadly. If the planning mindset were applied to the bigger forces shaping our society today like technology, entertainment, media and even organizational design we could have wide-reaching impact in creating a world we all want to live in.

This is the year planners can unlock new growth and revenue streams in ways that have wide benefit for people and society.

Professionals trained in account planning can rally together to find new ways to bridge the way creativity has been generated in advertising with the way creativity is generated beyond advertising and marketing.

Account planning is a disciplined process of connecting the dots from radically diverse perspectives:

- We generate insight and foresight,
- We conduct audience analysis through a incisive cultural lens,
- We distill information for maximum stimulation of the imagination, and
- We lead fearless ideation that gets results.

What are the five things planners should keep in mind to create change?

First we need to distinguish strategy from planning.

Sir Lawrence Freedman, Professor of War Studies at King's College defines strategy as a focus on power and the use of resources. Exploring power dynamics and the flow of resources, especially financial resources, is an important part of business success. And is a critical element of what we do. But strategy is not planning. Planning is the application of multiple ways of knowing and seeing to essentialize a problem so that can be acted on by the

imagination. Put another way, planning is about powerful art. In order to be successful in building a bridge outside of advertising, we need to be adept at both strategy and planning. But planning is the bit the larger world has yet to understand and utilize to its greatest potential.

Second, we need to embrace “new power.”

Old power is about hierarchy, exclusion and resource consolidation. New power is about networked governance, transparency, inclusion, and shared resources. Often times, new power is informal. Look at culture, at categories, and industries for signs of new power – where are informal networks collaborating to create new approaches and or breaking through the status quo? This is where the opportunity for planners lies because these groups of people will likely be the most open to new approaches and fresh ways of solving problems.

Third, we need to keep art in focus.

It might sound counter-intuitive for me to recommend that you focus on art after I’ve just talked about power dynamics, but being able to understand radically different perspectives is one of the things that makes planner’s valuable. Art is not just about going to museum’s or watching art films – although these are great ways to start. But art is about all the arts which include architecture, literature, film, music and so on. The most valuable approach is not to simply look at art, but to study it like an artist. How do ideas float across artistic disciplines? How do other artists and critics talk about and think about the ideas in their art? For example, one of my favorite things to do is read everything about a film I loved – from the directors, writers, producers and to also try and study the development process and funding of the film.

Fourth, we need architect creativity as part of the way we

architect growth.

Architecting growth is about going beyond consumer understanding and imaginative leaps to provide platforms for business growth based on understanding sources of revenue and profit. It's needed. But it's not enough. We also need to become "architects of creativity." This is about understanding the structural and contextual requirements for creative breakthrough and then designing those elements into the places they are needed most. Linda Hill's staging matrix for innovation is a great example of this: make room for creative abrasion (being able to have real debate about ideas), creative agility (psychological safety for experimentation) and creative resolution (decisions that embrace risk). We need to create "cultural experiences" within an organization where creativity itself can be practiced.

Lastly, we need to defend the science of the imagination.

According to the World Economic Forum, creativity will be the third most important skill required in 2040 (behind complex problem solving and critical thinking). Increasingly creativity is desired more in business, but it's not fully understood or embraced. Business decision-making has real financial consequences so factual proofs are often preferred over alignment to unknown unverifiable "gut." However, there is a science of creativity and the imagination. It was Einstein himself who reportedly said, "The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination." So we need to become more familiar with the science of imagination – and to package and process ways to access intuitive thinking as well as analytical thinking.

The ultimate opportunity for planners is to redefine our discipline and process to appeal to worlds beyond marketing, especially in industries that could benefit from a more rigorous and holistic approach to "creation" for the greater

good.

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