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## *Creating dynamic tension and laser-beam focus*

**W**hat is your team focused on? How do you keep them pumped up and enthusiastic? How do you deal with tensions between people or departments that get in the way of success?

In the world of advertising and marketing — my world — the lines are usually drawn between the account side and the creative team. The suits and the clowns. The boring and the clever. The bean counters and the bean growers. They have a million names for each other.

This tension has been going on since the beginning of time. Some of it is good. A little competition makes things interesting and can sometimes bring out some excellent work. And you can't completely muzzle it anyway.

But if you see much of this kind of negativity in your company, you can do something about it. And you should. Politics can be a huge waste of energy. Where there are winners, there are losers. That means a good portion of your team could be deeply unhappy at any given time.

**Keep your eye on the prize:** I recommend you refocus your team. For us, the focus is always on what's best for our clients. We specifically reward team members when they give 110 percent — not to benefit our company, but to benefit the client. This is often easier for the account team than creative. Account people are more naturally client-centric. You'll always find a few folks with a creative title who believe their gift for writing or design supersedes all else.

Whom do you work for? What are their goals? This is a great way to help your team know what's truly important. Your customer may be another internal department — or it may be the big customer who pays all the bills.

Be sure to maintain a clear-eyed view. Even the client can have a less-than-whole-

### MARKETING WISE



Spyro  
Kourtis

sales needle.

It can be tempting to accommodate a client and just give back exactly what was asked. Better in the long run — and a more interesting challenge — to determine what all the goals are and come up with the breakthrough solution that can achieve them all.

Be open to out-of-the-box thinking. But know when to shut the box and say, "We're done."

If you've ever had to brainstorm alone, you know dynamic tension can be a huge benefit. Bouncing ideas off someone else requires that they toss those ideas back, showing you a different angle. When you're working with ideas, it can be hard to know when to stop brainstorming and start executing.

Many creative people will tell you to never stop brainstorming when you have your first good idea. That's absolutely true. Your first workable idea is likely not your best.

But some people have a hard time letting go of any idea. They feel that if there's anything of value in it at all, it must be saved and worked through and refined and polished.

Someone (very likely you) will have to take control and let the group know when

some agenda. For example, a particular contact in the client organization may be thinking more about his or her own career than the good of the company. So, in our case, they may want a marketing campaign that wins a creative award — not necessarily what moves the

it's time to close the door on some excellent ideas and pursue the best one.

**Keep your co-workers close.** Your enemies are somewhere else: Nothing — and I mean nothing — brings a group together like a common adversary. Too often the enemy is another internal department, or a particular person who may be in line for the same promotion, or the boss who is somehow holding you back from greatness.

To keep your team working together and not tearing each other apart, make sure you don't get trapped in their perspective — where another person or team in the organization becomes the enemy. I find that when a boss just listens sympathetically to gossip or fails to shut down an employee who takes a potshot at a co-worker, it is enough to de-focus a team.

You can still use this quirk of human nature to build more positive tension. Just remember: A far better adversary for your team is your actual competition.

It's a joy to be on a team that's fired up to win. Winning is extra sweet when the big, bad guys you've been competing with are the losers. Because of my naturally competitive nature, I don't find it nearly as satisfying to compete against myself. I want to know how I compare. This is true of many of my colleagues as well.

So when we're pitching new business, we always want to know whom we're up against. We figure out their weaknesses and frame at least a portion of our presentation to subtly draw attention to those areas.

Dynamic tension is one more tool you can use to build a successful team. When you keep the positive focus on your clients' goals and the negative focus on your competition, you'll see a far better return on the energy investment of your employees.

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