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"PLUSSING" – LEARNING AND WORKING IN A COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT

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tl;dr:

- No one says, “No, but...”
- Only, “Yes, and...”
- Instead of subtracting... plussing.

It's About Iterating On Ideas

Plussing is a technique that allows people to iterate on ideas without using harsh or judgmental language. While used typically in teams and on the ideas of others, it works equally well on ones own ideas - when ones self critic can be particularly vocal.

Plussing is about finding what’s good about an idea, making subtle suggestions, building on the sound things that are already within the concept, and making it even better by propelling continuous improvement. And it's a little like improv. (More on that in a bit.)

Turn That Frown Upside Down!

The concept of plussing is attributed to Walt Disney and his production meetings - where instead of shooting down ideas, every criticism had to come with “a plus,” a new idea or suggestion for strengthening the original.

The fundamental idea being that when you're just criticizing an idea and not providing an alternative solution, or a means to strengthen the original idea, you're not really helping the situation or your team. With “plussing,” everyone is expected to contribute and collaborate to make the idea better.

Without plussing, Disney's (and later Pixar's) crit sessions would have been pretty negative and emotionally draining. With plussing, the same meetings instead were imbued with a positive tone and a direct connection between criticism and newer or better ideas for the work at hand. Those meetings probably still felt like a fight at times, but they felt like the healthy, respectful fights that keep teams and ideas growing as well as changing for the better.

An example: Consider the situation where an creative director (CD) is working with a motion designer on a web banner. The CD may not like much about the entire sequence. However, she will identify one aspect of the execution that she does like and then say “I like how that element comes in from the right, and what if it were to bounce before it comes to rest?” Now the designer has some feedback to build on. Notice that “and” opens up possibilities for discussion - it does not imply judgment as the word “but” would have.

Pixar Plusses Disney

Pixar took the Disney concept of plussing and added two concepts that came from improv as a guiding principle to their way of collaborating:

1. ACCEPT EVERY OFFER.

What's an offer? It's a core concept of improv, a way of “setting the stage.” Imagine an improv act going something like this:

- The first guy says, “Such a great day on the beach today, isn't it?”
- The second guy says, “No, we're not on the beach. We're at a bus stop.”

That’s a dead end. It’s not going anywhere. If anything, it’ll turn into a struggle between beach and bus stop, which it’s going to be. At best, one will get what he wants. At worst, neither will.

Now consider this alternative:

- The first guy says, “Such a great day on the beach today, isn’t it?”
- The second guy says, “Yeah, and what an odd place to put a bus stop.”

With the first alternative, you've got a sure thing: dead end. With the other, almost infinite possibilities.

Kids at play are great at this. Somewhere along the way to adulthood, we can lose our ability to do so easily and instead dismiss ideas instead of “accepting the offer.”

2. MAKE YOUR PARTNER(S) LOOK GOOD.

When you know others will try to make your idea better, not just shoot it down, you become free, and you have the opportunity to “plus” any idea that is put forth. The idea of “plussing” means not to say that the idea (or thing) is bad or wishing it was something else, but to accept it as the starting point and make it even better. We then use our capabilities to make our teammates look good instead of just critiquing their ideas.

Where Do We Go From Here?

- Plussing takes cooperation to the infinite possibilities of true creative collaboration
- Is there anything that can't be “plussed”?
- We'd love to hear from you - how has “Yes, and” made your art more remarkable?

Learn More

- *How Walt Disney used the Power of “Plussing” - Dale Carnegie* <http://www.dalecarnegieways.com/2013/07/29/how-walt-disney-used-the-power-of-plussing/>

- *How to Be Like Walt: Capturing the Disney Magic Every Day of Your Life* by Pat Williams: <http://www.amazon.com/How-Be-Like-Walt-Capturing-ebook/dp/B004FN1SP4/>
- *Creating Magic: 10 Common Sense Leadership Strategies from a Life at Disney* <http://www.amazon.com/Creating-Magic-Common-Leadership-Strategies/dp/0385523866>
- *Randy Nelson on Learning and Working in the Collaborative Age* <http://www.edutopia.org/randy-nelson-school-to-career-video>
- *Little Bets: How Breakthrough Ideas Emerge from Small Discoveries* <http://www.amazon.com/Little-Bets-Breakthrough-Emerge-Discoveries/dp/1439170428/>

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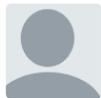
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