

THE 7 KRYPTONITES TO CREATIVITY: TIMELESS THREATS THAT KILL GREAT IDEAS

By Chad Baker and Johnny Mackin

Creativity is often treated as purely a product of talent. We celebrate the gifted thinkers, the breakthrough ideas and the flashes of inspiration that seem to come from nowhere.

But in our combined 60 years of marketing and branding experience – working with brands across agriculture, food and beverage, and health and wellness – we've found great creative work is often less about possessing some rare superpower and more about managing the forces that weaken it.

Like Superman, creativity has its kryptonite. It shows up in agencies, marketing departments, boardrooms and brainstorming sessions every day. Left unchecked, it can quietly drain the energy from an idea before it ever has a chance to fly.

Here are seven of the biggest threats to creative thinking – and some of the habits we've observed that can help keep them from bringing the work down.

1 FEAR **Every meaningful creative endeavor begins with uncertainty.**

The problem is that uncertainty often feels a lot like danger. We worry about looking foolish. We worry that clients or customers won't buy it. We worry that colleagues won't understand it. So we self-edit before anyone else has the chance.

Fear isn't the enemy of creativity. In many ways, it's evidence you're onto something interesting. If an idea gives you sweaty palms, it may be because it takes you somewhere unexpected. Give your team — and your audience — the benefit of the doubt. People are often more willing to embrace bold ideas than we assume.

2 COMPLACENCY **Creativity dies when we become too complacent.**

The temptation is understandable. Once we've found a formula that works, we want to repeat it. We lean on familiar solutions, established approaches and proven tricks. But every creative challenge deserves fresh eyes.

Start with a beginner's mindset. Resist the urge to lean into references, precedents or assumptions about where the work should go. Creativity often rewards the willingness to wander.

3 EGO **Creative work is personal. That's part of what makes it powerful.**

But there's a difference between putting yourself into the work and making the work about yourself. Ego convinces us that our ideas deserve special treatment. It makes us defend concepts because they're ours rather than because they're right. It turns collaboration into competition.

The best ideas are often those where nobody can put their name on it, but everyone can see their hand in it. That requires humility. It requires listening. And it requires beginning with empathy. Think first about the person receiving the message rather than the person creating it.

4 RIGIDITY

Ideation fails when we deny ourselves the freedom to discover.

Creativity requires asking the right questions before arriving at an answer. Sometimes the most useful exercise is imagining the most outlandish version of an idea and then working backward from there. Not because that's where you'll end up, but because it expands what's possible.

Posing the question "What if?" can immediately expand the aperture. Allow the problem to be as big as it needs to be. The breakthrough solution often lives beyond the boundaries we initially impose.

5 PERFECTIONISM

Perfectionism disguises itself as a virtue.

In reality, it often becomes a form of avoidance. The pursuit of perfection can prevent us from making progress. We become so concerned with getting it right that we never surrender ourselves to the necessary and messy process of discovering all the ways to get it wrong.

Worthy ideas rarely arrive fully formed. They emerge through false starts, rough drafts and imperfect beginnings. The creative process requires a willingness to dwell in the discomfort. Give yourself permission to be interesting before you worry about being polished.

6 ATTACHMENT

One of the hardest lessons in creative work is learning when to let go.

We become attached to our favorite lines, our most clever concepts or the amount of effort we've invested. We start protecting ideas instead of evaluating them. Always remember that your audience doesn't care how long something took to make. They care whether it resonates.

Focus on what people need to hear, not what you're eager to say. When an idea no longer serves the work, have the courage to kill it. Creative progress often depends on letting go of good ideas so better ones can surface.

7 SETTLING

This form of surrender is a slippery slope that leads to work that only gets worse going forward.

It happens when teams stop asking hard questions. When briefs become accepted as-is rather than challenged. When everyone quietly agrees to execute the assignment instead of pursuing the best possible work.

Great ideas require ownership at every stage. Strategists must own the problem. Account leaders must own difficult conversations. Creatives must own the responsibility of pushing beyond the obvious. And the whole team must take on the onus of championing the best idea, not accepting the easy "yes."

A UNIVERSAL ANTIDOTE

Creativity doesn't thrive on consensus. It thrives on conviction.

Teams must be willing to challenge one another. Productive disagreement is often a sign that the work matters. If everyone walks away completely comfortable, there's a good chance the idea isn't ambitious enough.

In many ways, that's the best antidote for overcoming the different forms of kryptonite that will always pose a threat to the creative process. Muster the courage to recognize them and show the strength to resist them. That's how you create the conditions that reward curiosity, support creativity and give great ideas their moment to soar.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Chad Baker is a Vice President of Creative at Meyocks. Copywriter by trade. Class clown by birth. Champion of creative who feels privileged that he gets to spend every day encouraging a group of passionate and talented individuals to pursue creative work that builds business, earns trust, fosters pride and occasionally wins a few accolades.



Johnny Mackin is a Vice President of Creative at Meyocks. After 33 years of staring at blank pieces of paper and making something out of nothing, he feels that he may have finally started to figure out this creativity thing. Eager to lead by example, he enjoys supporting a talented team of out of the box thinkers in their daily pursuit of creative solutions.

