

The importance of agency culture

 By Ann Nurock

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Live from the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity, Ann Nurock spoke with FCB Worldwide CEO Carter Murray, about the group's showing at this year's awards. He focused on culture particularly and pointed out that it's much more than a byproduct or a corporate word.

Nurock: Why is Cannes so important for FCB as a group?

Murray: Cannes is important not just for FCB but for our industry, and as I always tell my team, Cannes is part of the journey, not the destination. It's good to have a place where you can meet with clients, with employees, with prospects and with journalists once a year and to see what is the leading work in the industry right now. Where are people innovating and why? Where can we learn? How can we get even better creative product? How can we have a topic around what creativity is and where is it going? Cannes is incredibly useful as a meeting point to do that.



Carter Murray

And then of course there are many other reasons and dimensions and shapes to Cannes, but overall that's it – I'd prescribe Cannes to clients when they're looking for innovation and for how to get creatively inspired, this is a very useful place to come.

Nurock: How have you found the Festival this year in terms of the work?

Murray: At FCB we're happy, because the Festival's not yet finished and we've had the best in our history; we've won a Grand Prix for the fourth time in a row. You need a certain amount of good fortune to win a Grand Prix and to win four in four years... I'm just unbelievably proud of our clients and our teams.

Nurock: Tell us about the campaign you won the 2016 Grand Prix for.

Murray: This year we won for our work for client Pearson. It's [a literacy project](#) and it's an amazing campaign as it's really making a difference in the world for one of the world's largest educators and publishers, and we're very proud of it.

Nurock: If someone had to ask me for one take-out from Cannes this year' particularly in terms of looking at the work – and the work that's won and won big – it's about doing good. Do you agree?

Murray: I think it's a very good observation. That is what is winning. I think there's a theme that's come out in the last two or three years from Cannes that is even more important to our clients' business. That is obviously critically important, but additionally it's how you use technology to grow your brands and how you use technology to bring creative ideas and brand ideas to life in ways they were never able to come to life before. So, when I think of the Nivea Doll, when I think of Utech, the water billboards – they're not just doing them as one-off executions, but actually they're being real positioning and heart to the brand. Over the last two or three years, in terms of being able to bring creative directors' dreams to life, to really bring brands to life, to help clients with their business, I think the way we're using technology to serve the idea, as opposed to the technology to serve the technology up to a customer because, "Oh, it's cool technology..." I think that whole debate is a really healthy one and I'm seeing some really interesting campaigns win around that area, too.

Nurock: There've been some exciting developments at FCB, tell me about those.

Murray: Thank you, yes. There's a real sense of momentum at FCB around the world, which I think you can feel when you meet the people here. I'm really proud of that, and I think the key thing is to find likeminded people with the same values, the same beliefs in what we do. Funny enough to your point earlier about making with purpose, about purpose-driven brands and people that want to make a difference in the world – I like working with people like that. We've managed to get likeminded people together and make it all about great creative work and all about the talent for our clients. It's not rocket science, even when I'm saying it now it seems so obvious, but for some reason, in some areas of our industry, people have forgotten that. So that's what has given us over 200 new business wins across the world last year, our fourth Grand Prix.

We just did our climate survey, where we asked our employees what they thought of us and 91% of our global company responded. We created it from scratch three years ago and every year the results go up because we make it actionable. Literally, if you're a South African employee the question in the climate survey would be: "Do you think Brett Morris is a good CEO?" It's pretty accountable stuff – I hold myself and my employees and the CEOs accountable and then we make them feed it back at agency meetings. Last year, on the back of the survey, I made some changes in some key places. I haven't seen the results yet, but I'm hearing the top line is, "Where we listened to employees and made the changes regarding drastic issues I was completely unaware of or partially aware of, the survey jumped some 20 points this year, so it really works. There are the checks and balances, and listening really works. I work on it every day. As you can see, I'm more of a talker so I try and learn to listen every day.

Nurock: You've got a great agency in South Africa. Brett and his team are really good.

Murray: You like that I put a creative in charge of an agency?

Nurock: I love it.

Murray: Some people thought I'd lost my mind when I did it! Jonathan Harries, who's South African, is now our global chairman. So our chairman is a creative person. Susan Credle, who has come onboard as our chief creative officer, is just a force of nature, and she's come in and raised everyone's game in her first six months. I always introduce myself as her business partner, and then I'm the global CEO!

Nurock: Tell me a little about what's happening with FCB in Africa.

Murray: When I appointed Brett as our CEO, we had had a good CEO beforehand and I met Brett and listened to everybody in the market – the clients, the press, the employees, one or two prospects, and everyone was just so complimentary about Brett – as a human being, as a marketer – that it was just the easiest decision, even though on paper people asked me "Are you sure? South Africa's one of your five most important markets. You've got massive scale there. You've got such an established reputation and you're putting a creative in charge?" I said, "I'm not putting a creative

person in charge, I'm putting Brett in charge.”

We went on to win the South African Tourism Board last year, which is one of the most competitive pitches, against two other really good agencies. That speaks volumes. And then, as I learn more and more in this job each day, I'm sort of an unfinished project, that's my philosophy in life and how I look after clients – to never be finished learning, and culturally, if you look at what Brett's done, it really is everything. And it's not just a byproduct or a corporate word. How you create and manage culture, particularly how Brett has done in South Africa, is inspiring.

How he has chosen first to go BEE black-majority owned, not by giving it to one individual who is getting wealthier but putting it into a trust where you get black South African women into education, hiring people like Thabang Skwambane in Johannesburg is just great. What's happening in our agency in South Africa is a beacon of how I want our culture to be around the world.

ABOUT ANN NUROCK

Ann is a Partner at Relationship Audits and Management, a global consultancy that measures and optimizes client /agency relationships. Her proprietary Radar tool is used by 30 corporates globally and as a result she interacts with over 80 agencies of all disciplines. Ann spent 25 years plus in the advertising industry as CEO of Grey Advertising South Africa, and head of the Africa region followed by President and CEO of Grey Canada. Contact details: ann.nurock@relationshipaudits.com | Twitter @Annnurock

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