

# Human Conditions

Exploring the messy, contradictory, and reflective side of creativity



## We’ve made some mistakes.

Fair warning! We’ve been here before.

As is customary at the end of the year, Article Group used to reflect on the past and plan for the future we aspired to via a list of all the ways we’d fucked up that year. It was meant to be less resolution, more mirror, in hopes that we wouldn’t repeat our mistakes and, yeah, that we could rectify a little along the way.

In [2018](#) and [2019](#), our reflections were bloated with self-congratulations for creative innovation and revenue growth, and then again with talk of missed opportunities for communication and transparency. In [2020](#), our tone shifted. We acknowledged our failures in diversity, equity, and inclusion — an embarrassingly overdue confession.

This year, we waited until long after the resolution cutoff mark to reflect on what went wrong in 2023. As we’ve matured as an agency, we’ve developed a peculiar, almost self-flagellating interest in thinking about what can’t be solved easily. It’s more interesting, more human, and more fun to write about. So rather than come to you with promises of better workflows for our staff or an update on our corporate responsibility practices (both deserving of a different spotlight), here we are with a list of mistakes we don’t have a solution for.

### Our 2023 approach to exploring new business ventures was flawed.

There’s a whisper of truth in the phrase “always be selling” for agencies, and it requires a mindset that embraces both exposure and dismissal. But the challenge of consistently fueling a proactive sales motion feels Sisyphean, and cold calling businesses we want to work with is the wrong way to open a door.

In “[The Art of Asking](#),” Amanda Palmer writes about how making art is a game of failure. We like this idea a lot more than ABS. Success in our business isn’t about capturing the attention of the masses. It’s far more nuanced than that; it’s about building trust and understanding with people grappling with the same things. And in a world where genuine connection is a rarity, we’re playing a losing game. Still, we’ll continue to reach out and fuel our business pipeline — just not in a rolling-boulders-uphill way.

### We were afraid to own the middle of the funnel outwardly.

When people hear the phrase creative agency, they typically think of the over-the-top multichannel marketing stunts that make [headlines](#). They also might think about a group of people (men, probably) straddling their chairs backward, throwing craaaaazy ideas around while they puff on their Juul. And in many cases, they’re not wrong. We just don’t think that way.

AirBnB has put out some relentless [discourse](#) about abandoning performance marketing in favor of brand, and it’s a really sexy idea on paper. But wild, unrestrained creativity isn’t a guaranteed conduit for sales, just like putting a group of vaping men together isn’t a guaranteed recipe for [good ideas](#).

Much as we would like to show our grandkids how we did an outrageous Super Bowl spot one day, that’s not where our expertise lies. Nor do we buy that changing the color on a CTA for a 0.1% better conversion rate is the right way to market. And while none of these opinions are new for us, we haven’t communicated them well enough.

The middle of the funnel — the content and ideas that actually build relationships — isn’t always seductive and doesn’t always provide an immediate return. And what agency wants to tout being better than anyone else at the hard-working shit? We do, we should, we need to. Build relationships before things. It’s literally one of our agency [principles](#).

### We haven’t unlocked remote connection.

We recently wrote a little LinkedIn post about our AG offsite in New Orleans — a weeklong whirlwind of in-person planning, workshops, vision-sharing, and merrymaking. It showed us some things we knew but hadn’t said: hurricanes are a terrible thing, even in cocktail form, [I Want it That Way](#) is a great equalizer, real-life connection is vital to working our best, and we never want to go back to an office full time.

The psychology of creativity is fascinating, and something we may never fully comprehend. But recent [studies](#) have shown that certain types of idleness can create a fertile environment for inspiration and insight. Charles Darwin was notorious for his ideal work-from-home schedule: work for a couple hours and then tinker in his garden, work some more, and then go on a long walk. What this tells us, aside from Darwin having it made, is that your conscious mind, the one you use in meetings and in heads down working time, needs a break. When allowed to take over, the unconscious mind continues thinking in lateral ways, often expanding on what the conscious has exhausted. Working from home allows us that necessary unconscious.

While we haven’t been able to tackle how to encourage our colleagues to take breaks for the unconscious during the work day (rest at work is hard, harder often than work), we do know how much a flexible, remote setup is a privilege. It just doesn’t bring offer of the most important aspects of work: energy, relationship-building, sense of purpose and belonging, opportunities for natural observation — the list goes on.

Our [trip](#) to Nola was a start at creating the type of work environment that’s actually an environment, but we need more, more often, and we need it to not fuck up our moments for creative unconscious.

—

We don’t have a natural end here. And while we don’t have a bulleted list of learnings for you to pass onto your own place of employment, we do have some commitments. You might like to make some, too.

- Be effective at work instead of cosplaying work
- Refocus on the right connection, and make sure it’s genuine
- Continue continuous reflection
- Own our strengths loudly (and do it with a unified voice)
- Not be assholes along the way

This email was sent to [tuohy@articlegroup.com](mailto:tuohy@articlegroup.com)  
[why did I get this?](#) [unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)  
Article Group · 222 Livingston · Floor 2 · Brooklyn, NY 11201 · USA