

Are you working on an object? Try working on subjects instead

The Empathy Map is designed to put relationships first in the creative process.



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"Subjectivity is truth, and truth is subjectivity."

— Søren Kierkegaard

For about the past 2.6 million years, human beings have left their mark as builders of objects. We've built tools to build still more tools, and structures, and vehicles, and toys, and furnishings, and clothing ... and, ultimately, the [anthroposphere](#) that covers our planet and currently threatens its health.

Paleontology suggests we've had an equally long run as communicators: We build things, and then we talk about the things we've built.

Those things aren't just physical artifacts, either, although they may be recorded in physical media. Art and science and their commercial applications are all things we create and discuss.

In the digital era, we create things — and true to our DNA, we tend to think about them as objects. Agencies alone are an endless source of shiny new things, from decks to designs to logos to blog posts. Few of them are tangible, but we still tend to speak about them as objects: as assets or deliverables.

But here's the thing: These things are less significant as objects than they are as subjects. It's that other human capability — talking about things with other people — that give them value. As subjects.

It's that exercise in comparing and contrasting subjective views that lets us test the validity of ideas and forge relationships with the people we're creating these things for — clients, audiences, customers.

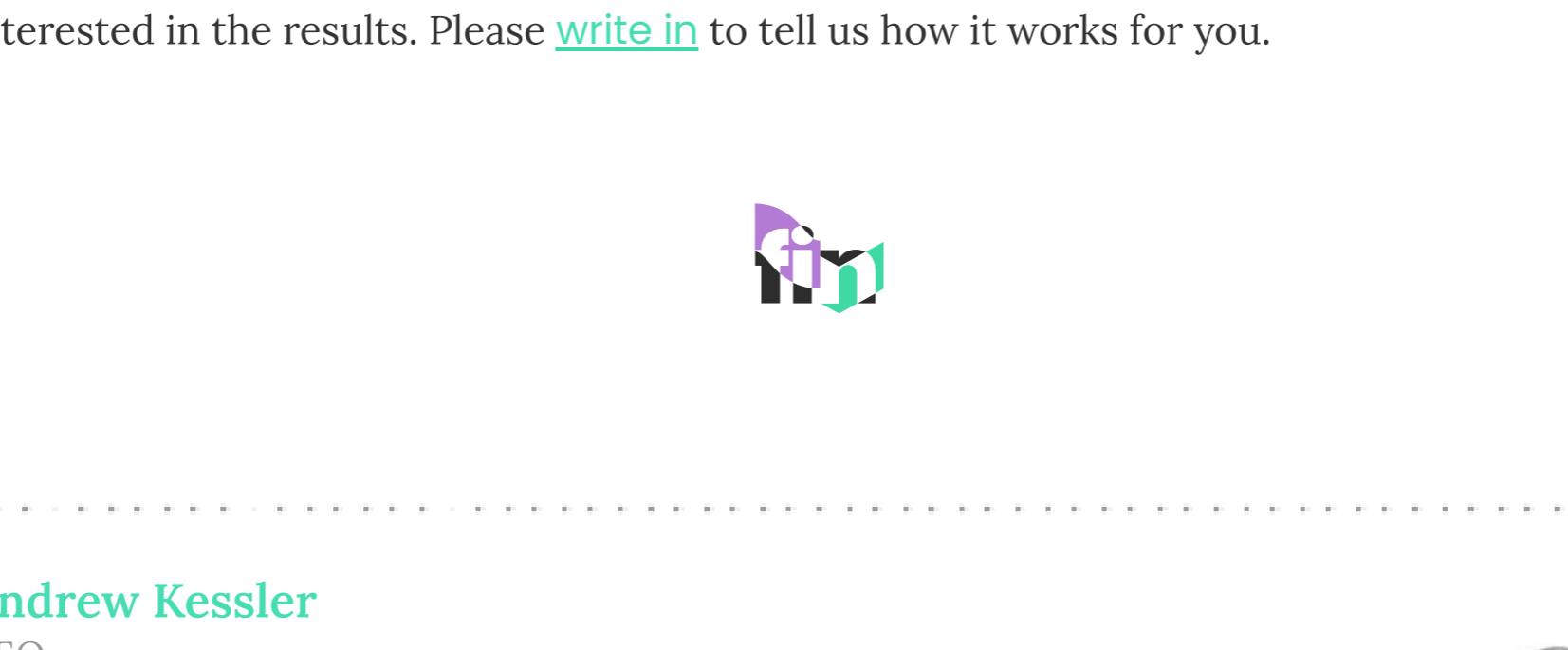
That relationship is the real goal, not the artifact. And in an era when traditional channels of communication have been disrupted, those relationships require more craft and care than ever.

We've written before about these creative, subjective relationships: "[I]f you forget about them? If you don't put their needs and wants and pains above your own? Then they'll see you for what you are: selfish. Thoughtless. Transactional. Which means you, your agency, your marketing team, whatever—you're just gonna be a thingmaker.

"You don't want to be just a thingmaker.

"You want to be a maker of relationships."

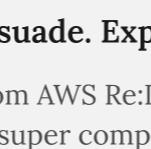
Decoding the complex, subjective relationships necessary for creativity to thrive requires the empathy to see the exchange from the perspective of the other participants. To help that process along, we encourage you to adopt and adapt this [Empathy Map](#):



First created by XPlane and available here in fabulous Google Slides, The Empathy Map is designed to put relationships first in the creative process. Use it when you start a project to align your team with the people they're creating the work for.

Open it, edit it, present it, live it. If you're making a new relationship, a foundation of empathy is the right place to begin — and focusing on empathy is more important than ever.

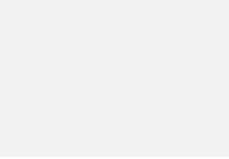
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