



Slightly Disruptive.

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remember, fire is hot.

How often do you drive home from work, arriving in your driveway without even realizing you're home? You have no recollection of your route, the traffic, or even the songs on the radio.

During WWII, The Nazi Luftwaffe (air force) attached whistles to the bombs dropped over London. The screeching shriek made by the whistle as the bomb raced to its target initially had a demoralizing effect on the citizens of London. However, after months of endless night raids, the citizens became used to the sounds. Some even complaining, once the war was over, that they had trouble getting a sound night's sleep without the whistles.

We as humans have a remarkable ability to adapt to our environment. We learn from new experiences, spot patterns in those experiences, and translate that learning into routines. Imagine if you had to relearn that fire burns, the right pedal on the car is to accelerate, or the most basic of your work tasks. (Much less how to get to work.)

Without this "learning" mechanism, we would be overwhelmed. Like driving all the way home without realizing it, our brains stop processing repetitive input from our senses. We essentially become isolated from the outside world, deep in thoughts. That's a great place to be if you're going about rote activities, like getting ready for work in the morning or mowing a lawn. However, that sensory fatigue is the worst place to be if you want to be innovative or creative. That's where "slightly disruptive" comes in.

{ be open...be inspired...break your pattern of thinking }

slightly what?

There are some actions that you don't want to have to think about. Instead, you want the tasks to be rote, like the rehearsed performance of a ballerina. Imagine if a surgeon had to re-learn a type of surgery each time she was about to perform that surgery. Those tasks need to be programmed and second nature. But creativity and innovation require a different way of thinking and acting. A way of thinking that is open to new stimuli and processing those stimuli. Looking at more stuff and thinking about it harder.

So why slightly disruptive? To see the same thing you see everyday through new eyes. To see the things that are there, but you've never noticed. To become aware of your environment, and ideally inspire new ideas.

So what is slightly disruptive? Well, it is both a mindset and a method. As a method, you have to first physically make yourself aware. It is similar to the "listening versus hearing" skills. As a mindset, it is being open to what you are experiencing. Being inspired, and seeking out new experiences. We're not talking about "jumping out of an airplane" experiences. We're talking about looking at something very ordinary and being very curious about it.

the mindset.

The notion of slightly disruptive as a mindset is being consciously acute and curious. Something like the mindset you might have as you wander through a museum. While at a museum, you explore and appreciate a variety of artwork, from a variety of artists throughout history. Your mind is open as you explore impressionists painting from the 19th century, then turn a corner and see an eight hundred year old Mayan hieroglyph. Your mindset and way of thinking are open to the variety, breadth, and scope of stimuli. You are curious as you explore the museum. That is the same mindset you need to be slightly disruptive. The slightly disruptive mindset lets you re-discover some of the things that have become rote.

the method.

The notion of slightly disruptive as a method is based on deliberately introducing new stimuli to your life. Nothing dramatic, just simple things to disrupt you out of patterned thinking. The slightly disruptive method lets you inspire new things by looking at more stuff.

So how can you be slightly disruptive?

physics 101.

The second law of thermodynamics states that closed systems die. The flow of information into a system is critical to the growth and sustainability for that system. So what do physics and slightly disruptive have in common? We need to treat ourselves as an open system -- we need to constantly bring in information and stimuli. But remember, as humans, our brains are wired to spot patterns, and develop routines around those patterns. It's not natural to look for inspiration in the world around us.

In order to be slightly disruptive, you have to reawaken your senses to the world around you. Adopt the museum mentality even when you are not in a museum. On your way home from work this evening, make a deliberate observation about something you see during the commute. Be curious. Why do we travel on the right side of traffic? Why are stop signs octagonal? Don't just come up with an answer. Try to figure out what factors influenced the final decision or solution.

Now apply that same mindset to work the next day. Make deliberate observations around the patterns you have developed. Re-invent some of your routines. Be curious. Ask yourself how you can re-invent the way in which you do business. Remember the 2nd law of thermodynamics and treat yourself like an open system. Grow, innovate, and create through inspiration and observation. Reawaken your senses. And for goodness sakes, get up from your desk and walk around.

Make the slightly disruptive mindset sustainable. Artists keep what they call a "morgue"-- it is a journal of images, ideas, and sketches they gathered from all sorts of sources. They are able to refer to the journal in the studio for inspiration and ideas. Record your thoughts and ideas in a journal. Add stimulation from other observations--magazine articles, images, and ideas. The goal is to break your pattern of thinking and look at the same things you do everyday through a different lens.



In her Brown Daily Herald article, "Fairey RISD '92 spreads message of dissent with "Obey Giant" art campaign," author Jane Tanimura details the history of the Andre the Giant stickers.

"The Obey Giant art campaign founded by Shepard Fairey started by accident. When he was a sophomore, Fairey was looking at a magazine for stencil ideas for a T-shirt when he stumbled upon a "funny wrestling ad" of Andre the Giant -- the former pro wrestler popularized as the "gentle giant" after his appearance in the movie "The Princess Bride."

Fairey toyed with the image to create a stenciled face of Andre, delineated in bold black lines and tightly cropped in a black box. Stamped underneath the icon was the command: obey.

Fifteen years later, more than 1 million stickers and 15,000 posters of the Obey Giant icon have been posted around the world. What started as a test in reverse psychology that asked people not to blindly obey has now made Fairey one of the most popular street artists of his generation. The Obey Giant art campaign is one of the most ambitious in recent history.

Even though the Obey Giant campaign started as something fun, over the years its message has evolved into an experiment of reawakening people's curiosity about their environment, Fairey said."

Andre the Giant says OBEY.

You may have seen black and white stickers of a menacing face with the word “obey” printed below it. The Obey stickers, and other stickers and graffiti like them, are examples of phenomenology. Phenomenology is a movement in philosophy that studies the “structures of experience, or consciousness.” In other words, phenomenology looks at the way we experience things, and the meanings those things have in our experience. Because it is a study of “consciousness,” phenomenology relies on our ability to break out from our patterns of thinking and look at things differently. It relies on stimuli, like the Obey sticker, to be slightly disruptive enough to awaken us to our surroundings.

This is the same theory behind the posters you’ve been getting from Play over the past six months. (remember the posters? three so far—clearly blurry, LAMSTAIH and slightly disruptive?) The absurdity of a poster, picturing a poster hanging in a workplace, is designed to disrupt people out of their pattern of thinking. Especially when the posters are displayed next to the “success stories” posters that line the halls of most organizations. Go ahead and be slightly disruptive. Hang up your posters. Disrupt your co-workers out of their patterns of thinking. And, in the spirit of phenomenology, use the posters to spark conversations around creativity and innovation in the workplace.



Red Paper P.O.V.

This red paper on the concept of “slightly disruptive” is brought to you by Geof Hammond -- a naturally curious tinker-er, an accomplished content and process builder here at Play and an amazing Thanksgiving turkey chef (the secret is in the salt-water brine). He is also the hottest member of Play’s team. He can be reached at: geof@lookatmorestuff.com.

Genesis Of The Red Paper.

White papers are opinion pieces on policy or technology that present a conclusion or position. They were termed such in England to distinguish short government reports from long, detailed ones, referred to articulately as “blue books,” for their blue cover. The white papers were named in similar poetic form for the white paper on which they were printed. Play has taken this spirit a step further, and out of our fondness for the color red, we’ve designated papers by Play as “red papers.” They still express our point of view, but are brief pontifications on some less technical subjects, designed to provide some practical guidance for creativity and innovation. You may draw your own conclusions. Enjoy.

Legalese.

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