

Arrive & Thrive

September 2023



Introduction

The Account Planning Group exists to champion the role of planning and strategy in the broad field of communications, and to support people doing those strategic roles.

The 'Arrive and Thrive' initiative marries those two aims. The approach sets out ways in which we can support new strategists coming into the industry, helping people of all backgrounds build rewarding careers and, in turn, improve the relevance of the work we make.

Like our 'Right to Disconnect' initiative, this is a cross-industry plan, bringing agencies together for the good of our businesses and our people.

Why we need a new approach

Over the last decade we have seen increasing efforts across our industry to improve diversity. There has been limited success: gender balance has improved, as has the mix of ethnicities in our businesses. But progress is slow and inconsistent across different types of diversity, and data measuring progress is incomplete.

There is a particular imbalance when it comes to social and economic background with our industry still being dominated by people from more affluent groups. Whilst many agencies have schemes to recruit talent from outside of top tier universities and from across the UK, statistics show those people are less likely to stay beyond their first year.

The traditions, unwritten rules and behaviour, and the way we support new talent could be making our industry less appealing to everyone, but significantly less inclusive of people from diverse backgrounds.



The business case

The cost of hiring and failing to retain talent is high. It wastes time and money; and high churn affects morale within a business and the reputation outside of it.

There is also a threat to the work we make. Our industry is consistently seen as being out of touch with the realities of people's lives; the less diverse our businesses, the more likely that is to be true. The work we make suffers when it is made by a small, and more privileged sub-section of the people to whom we need to appeal.

Our agencies rely on having great talent. On a case by case basis we often compete. But when we stand back and see the bigger picture, it is clearly in all of our best interests to collaborate and build a cross-agency culture where new strategists can Arrive and Thrive.



What is planning?

Planning is people. It's listening and looking and wondering why. It's asking a question and truly hearing the answer; catching what's said and what's not. It's watching what people do and wondering why they do it, and wondering if they know why they do it, and why they say what they say when asked.

Planning is problems. It's figuring out who might like to buy the thing you have to sell; or how to get them to do the thing you want them to do (or not do the thing you want them not to do). It's seeing the flaws and the opportunities. It's thinking about time and place – where to talk about a thing, or who else you might get to talk about a thing to make it sound better, or cooler, or more important.

Planning is creativity. It's about seeing, reading, hearing, watching things and wondering how you can fit them together differently to make something new.

Planning is generosity. It's borrowing this fact in return for that thought. It's about starting a thought and being happy when someone makes it better.

Planning is learning. It's not knowing everything, or being the best educated, or the loudest, the 'big brain' the one quickest to comment. It's taking things in, having a view, seeing the upside and the opportunity. It's making stuff, and making mistakes and both of those being good.

Planning is time alone and teamwork; exploration and imagination; it's friendship and fun and seeking out strangers; building brands and businesses, fuelling passions. It's about seeing your work change the world.

Planning is about everything and everyone - it's about all of us, and it's only any good if all of us are included.



Three Arrive and Thrive pillars

Get In



From first contact to the first few weeks

Get Good



Building skills and adding value

Get On



Promotions, pay rises and progress



The problem to tackle

Planning has historically favoured people with high 'social confidence' – a characteristic not exclusive to but definitely amplified at public school and top tier universities. Young people with lower social confidence may do less well at traditional interviews and give a less polished first impression. Seeing the person not the confidence is an essential part of dismantling bias against young people from socially diverse backgrounds.

Actions to take now

- Offer an 'interview before the interview'. A 20 minute chat to set out what you'll want to talk about and ask the candidate what they would like to cover off too
- Ask questions which give the candidate chance to show you how they think about a topic that's familiar to them – not about brands or ads
- Be clear to new joiners about how your work-place works. Ambiguity can wrong-foot people so be definitive and set clear expectations
- Help people learn the common language of your business. Create a glossary of your processes, places and people
- Wrap a team around each new recruit – line manager, mentor, account lead. Be clear on what role each will play in helping them thrive

Get In

The APG can help

**APG Strategy A-Z
with Charlie Snow**

All the basics of Planning and Strategy in a series of short, entertaining videos packed with stories, definitions and things to try yourself. This covers everything from A is for Advertising to Z is for....You find out!
(Coming soon...)



The problem to tackle

The lack of structure, the multitude of ways we go about tasks and the informal culture in many agencies can create barriers for many. For new recruits to get good – agencies need to get specific. An over reliance on people ‘picking it up’ exacerbates the divide. If we are recruiting from diverse backgrounds, we cannot assume that everyone has the traditional academic practice of moving between topics, assimilating information and constructing a point of view around it. Helping people to ‘Get Good’ is about combining theory and application in a supportive environment and about being really clear on what is expected.

Actions to take now

- Think about about the agency as a ‘training hospital’. The balance for the first 6-12 months for new recruits should be on their learning, not their doing
- Support people to speak up, ask their views and actively draw people into the discussion. If, for example, you have a tradition of who speaks first in creative reviews, make sure everyone knows it. Unwritten rules create inequity
- Allocate a mentor to each new person and make sure that mentor can give 20% of their time to mentoring well
- Create an environment of continuous feedback. Review work regularly and respectfully with the intention of building foundational strategy skills
- Set time expectations on key tasks so that people know a reasonable pace too work at and learn to prioritise their to-do list

Get Good

The APG can help

How to be a Mentor

Training to build the skills mentors really need to guide and support those just starting out.

Night School (coming soon)

An accessible online, simple set of evening sessions for planners starting out. Each session features a 45 minute pre-recorded presentation + 30-45 minute live Q&A sessions.
£50+vat for 8 sessions.



The problem to tackle

There's been a well-documented shift in how people from younger generations approach progress in the workplace. But whilst, as a general truth, someone in their 20s is more likely to ask for a pay rise than 20-somethings of yesteryear, this is still an area where confidence plays a big role. Young people from less privileged backgrounds are less likely to advocate for their own pay and promotion and these are major reasons for moving jobs. Agencies need to communicate clearly and proactively about how careers develop and how decisions about pay and promotion are made.

Get On

Actions to take now

- Where possible, group new starters together (across disciplines) to create a ready-made crew who are learning about the business at the same time
- Provide written job specifications for the role the new recruit is in now, and the one they will most likely do next and set clear promotion objectives to get there
- Be candid and transparent about pay. Clarity on grades or banding, review periods and how your agency decides increases are vital. For all new recruits pay increases and bonuses are vital but especially for those who cannot rely on family help and may be supporting family themselves.
- Invest in out of agency training, talks and events so that new recruits get exposure to different approaches and build a network of peers outside of the business too



Do some things even if you can't do everything right now

The individual actions laid out in Arrive and Thrive all count; you don't have to be able to do everything at once. We all know that agencies are running leaner than ever with greater focus on costs. But many of the ideas laid out in this document are time and cost free – clarity and transparency require small changes which will have a big impact on the experience of all new talent, but especially the people who have traditionally felt excluded from planning.

The new APG courses and sources are all available at no or low cost to make them as accessible to as many people as possible. Find out more on apg.org.uk

Together, we can help more people access the careers we love and make our businesses better at the same time.

