



Tom Kelley:

Next speaker, Phyllis Aragaki. Phyllis may have flown in from Minneapolis for AIGA Gain 2008, but she's no stranger to Manhattan, having lived here for 20 years. When she opened herself up a while back to the possibility of career options, you know, west of the Hudson, she got an invitation to join Target, which as I think we all know is one of the great design stories of the current world. And though she said she'd always loved the brand, she asked herself the same question I asked Luis Fitch yesterday, which was "Minneapolis?" Right? And she really wasn't sure that a dyed-in-the-wool New York designer could be happy in the northern Midwest. But she did, at the suggestion of a headhunter she did make the trip to Minneapolis, and she said it was the people that won her over. She said she works at a place where her personal values really overlap with the corporate values, and she feels right at home in Minneapolis today. So please welcome back to New York, Phyllis Aragaki.

[roll title slide and Target commercial]

Phyllis Aragaki:

That's one of my favorite spots.

[Applause]

I mean, to everyone here it's absolutely no surprise that design plays a vital role at Target. It drives who we are and how we do things. As Tom mentioned, I've been at Target for three years now, and I can tell you that the brand experience we all know and love is truly and simply an extension of the people that built it. The work you see from Target is created by a combination of external agency partners and target's internal teams. Our agencies are truly the best in the world, and actually Tom's agency is one of them. And our internal teams are comprised of truly gifted individuals. In addition to having the great... the talent to create great work, we also have the ability to produce lots of it. Last year we managed and or produced a staggering 14,000 projects. I know.

[laughter]

In addition to design, our quest for innovation and excellence is another key driver. Constantly pushing the work and moving forward, it's just how we do it. And as a culture, we're always looking for ways to improve or evolve. Even when something's great, we always find ourselves asking, "Can it be better?" And I'm sure many of you are having similar conversations yourself. The notion of forward movement also applies to the organization. Our senior leaders, with their infinite wisdom, asked, "Are we prepared for the future? Is our creative organization designed to meet our strategic objectives, and this is the important part, fulfill the desires of the team?" Last year I was asked to help answer these questions by leading the reshaping of our internal creative groups into a formalized in-house studio. This involved combining two design teams, four production teams, a copywriting team, and an interactive team totaling about 150 people.

So when it came time to designing the new organization, we took the best of what we were already doing, the needs of the company, and the hopes and dreams of the team. We combined these things together to help shape the design of a new in-house studio. The first thing we did was clearly define our purpose and vision for the organization. We created ours

with input from everyone. Our purpose statement is simple, and sets us on our quest to "dream and do the remarkable for our guests and ourselves every day." This is our rallying cry, our reason for being. It inspires us, and reminds us to keep dreaming and to keep moving forward. Our vision describes our culture, and captures our desires. What if your job was to crack open fresh, unseen possibilities, and then put those brave ideas into action tomorrow. What if collaboration happened without thinking twice, and your daily assignment is to spark greatness within yourself, and all around you. What if every one of us lived the same goal, to create the truly remarkable.

Together, the purpose and vision statements define what the studio was and was not going to be. They served as both beacon and benchmark, providing guardrails during the six-month development period. With our purpose and vision established, our next step was to identify the philosophical and practical needs that we wanted to meet. We ended up with eight essential requirements, and even though I wanted to get to ten 'cause it was so much neater, we ended up with eight. So the first is we needed an organization that provided a clear reporting structure, while providing us the freedom to be nimble when it came to the work. The right structure would allow us to pool our talent together, and work as one big group, and then at the same time allow us to easily scale down, and break into smaller, customized teams so we can remain fast and keep the work fresh. And while the organization required structure, we wanted the culture to be open and collaborative. And by that I mean to be authentic, it needed to be defined and created by the team. This was their opportunity to make it their own, take ownership and make it everything they wanted it to be. The next principle will probably sound familiar, particularly to those of you who come from large families. We believe that making everyone responsible for the work makes it better. So if you can make the work better, speak up. If you're on the receiving end, be open and take it in. Our believe is, an individual success will be seen as a win for the entire studio. We love using healthy competition as a fun and invigorating way to push the work. For bigger, more strategic projects, multiple teams are assigned. We found that it's important to make sure from the start that everyone understands and accepts that the best idea wins. This keeps the competition fun, and hurt feelings to a minimum. Also if we can improve the work by borrowing ideas from the other concepts, we will do so openly and generously.

Since every action has a ripple effect, we must work and execute responsibly and respectfully as a team. This means we must refine our ways of working so the overall experience is effortless for us and our partners. Our best work is often achieved when we pair up writers and designers from the beginning. Even work that's design-heavy benefits from a copywriter's perspective. We believe it ensures additional focus on the message, and how we're delivering it. As a result, we're strengthening and growing our writing team, and ensuring there's a writer available for every project. Now many of you have probably already discovered that iterative or templative work is better executed by production designers. We've also found this to be true, so we created a new production-design team to take care of this type of work. A benefit for this team is that it creates visibility to talented production artists, and provides them with a defined career path to becoming a designer. So now a gifted EP artist can move on to become a production designer, demonstrate their skills in that role, and then potentially move on to a design team.

And lastly, we recognize that some creators love to lead, and others love to do. We wanted to provide an enriching career path for both. The first path is a traditional one, it's for creatives

who love leading people, and are really great at inspiring and developing the talent within their teams. These are the bosses. We also recognize that gurus on the other hand, needed an alternate path. So we created one for them. It's for extremely talented, highly influential individuals, with a proven history of success, whose greatest value for the company and themselves is continuing to do the work and mentoring others. We refer to these designers, or writers, sorry about the writers, as principle creatives, or as I like to think of them, as national treasures of Target.

So, it's been about six months since the studio went live, working together, evolving our behavior and defining our culture. We've already learned a lot, and realize there's still so much more. I'm in awe of the power and direction our purpose and vision statement has generated. I see the philosophical and practical needs that we identified in shaping the studio brought to life by the team's daily actions, and the palpable energy in the air. Group crits have become the norm, and they're sharing their ideas. They're identifying problems, and the beauty of this is that they're also coming and providing solutions. They're having fun while getting things done, and they truly feel that the studio is theirs and have embraced making it their own. Their engagement level has become a force of its own, and a force that feeds desires of the creative team, and helps move us forward, because that's just how we like to do it. Before I step away, I thought I'd give you a little peek behind the curtain, and show you the people and the place I've been talking about.

[Roll video]

So from all of us at Target, a heartfelt thanks.

[Applause]

Tom Kelley:

Okay. So you know, I think part of my role here is to play the surrogate for the audience, and ask the question that's on your mind. And so to save Phyllis being asked 700 times individually, I suppose I might as well ask the question directly, which is how do we apply?

[laughter]

Phyllis Aragaki:

Sorry?

Tom Kelley:

See? That's a good -- No, how, if we all wanted to get a job in the Target design group --

[laughter]

how would we go about that?

Phyllis Aragaki:

I would love that.

[laughter]

Tom Kelley:

You'd have a bigger team. Okay, let me skip, that was slightly rhetorical. Though you will get it live and in person later today, I predict. Okay, so the thing that stuck in my mind, sometimes there's a number that catches my eye, that 2,392 weekends. But in this one, really early on you talk about 14,000 projects.

Phyllis Aragaki:

Yeah.

Tom Kelley:

Right? So my firm's been in existence for 30 years, and if we exist for another 30 years, maybe we'll get to 14,000 projects at the end of that time. So how do you, how do you do it? I mean, how does that work? We're really -- well I am -- really puzzled at how you would manage so many.

Phyllis Aragaki:

Well we were actually really surprised when that number came up. I mean we -- in this thinking about the studio, and defining capacity, trying to understand how to organize the team, and structure the teams was the first time, interesting enough, that we actually went and asked how much work do we do, because it was never an issue. At Target we just... a project comes up, we find a team, whether it's our own team or we reach out to others, the work gets done. And no one ever stopped to think about, well, how much work is that really. So with this project, we actually went and had someone go back and look, and we were astonished to find out it was 14,000 projects. And, of course, the first reaction was well that makes sense, cause everyone's feeling it. But I think the way that we got it done was relying on really great agency partners, and some of them are here today, and also just the, and also just the internal team as well. And so that's how we got it done. And again, just truthfully, those 14,000 could be including things like our broadcast spots that a lot of you see, our signs in stores. It could be a project, could even be a single mail or a single vehicle for carrying something. So it could be big, or it could be really small. But when we looked at it, we were amazed that it was actually over 14,000.

Tom Kelley:

You know, designers I think, by our nature, we're optimists. And your presentation, as everyone at Gain has done, is draw upon the positive, on the good stuff to you. Anything that you can reveal that didn't work as planned, as you made this transition into the, into the in-house group?

Phyllis Aragaki:

I think the part that I didn't think about in terms of something that might come up was the transition from our in-house team. And so our in-house team, prior to this formalization of the studio, they were clients and they were designers. But they were never truly an agency. And so I think that the thing that I didn't think about, 'cause I come from an agency background, so I, you know... how you act and how you behave, and how you react to feedback as an agency, is very different than when you're the client. So a number of designers, and of

those 150, 60 of them are graphic designers, their biggest transition that I didn't think about, or prepare them for, was becoming an agency and getting... understanding how to handle feedback, how to work with that, and how to have a positive conversation versus being... feeling like they're just being told what to do, too much and too often. So that was I think the biggest transition, the biggest unanticipated thing that we came across was that particular one.

Tom Kelley:

Great, thank you very much.

Phyllis Aragaki:

Thanks. Thank you.