

Permission to Play: A playbook for Creativity in Corporate Communications

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studio**giggle**

Introducing...

Have you noticed that the world is becoming an increasingly stressful place? Turn on the news or flick through your preferred aggregator, and it's clear that there is a great deal of anxiety and fear being used to garner responses. Perhaps it has always been this way, but since lockdown, we have lost something in how we approach the world and how it is conveyed back to us. This is also true at work; perhaps surprisingly, this is felt as much by the younger generations as by the older generations.

What we have lost is fundamental to the human experience and an integral part of the learning experience for every mammal on the planet (if everything I have seen in the series Planet Earth is true, which it must be).

We have forgotten how to play... or, more precisely, why **Permission to Play** is so important.

Wait, come back.... I know this might sound silly, childish, and perhaps irrelevant to the complexities of big business, your monthly town halls, or the release of another set of less-than-stellar sales figures, but give me five minutes. I will explain why giving your workforce permission to play can transform their ability to communicate effectively, problem-solve more creatively, and bond better as a team.

A lot of bold claims, you might think. How does it work - should we leap from our desks for a quick hide-and-seek game between Zoom calls? Maybe, but also probably not.

Play in one company could look very different from play in another company. It's never a one-size-fits-all proposition, and it's essential that it's managed and the outcomes are measurable (got to keep those KPIs in check). So, I've broken it down into a series of simple questions that explain why play is essential and how it might work in your company. And remember - you can use play to figure out how you might use play...



What is the purpose of play in business?

To get us started, let's tackle the **why**. Why would I want to instigate a Permission to Play policy in meetings?
What are the benefits?

This one is pretty straightforward. Play has a twofold effect on problem-solving or creativity. Firstly, it's a **disruptor** (with a small d). It helps people break down their standard modes of thinking and opens the door to surprises, misunderstandings, confusion and, best of all, stuff that's just a bit weird. None of this would typically happen in a meeting or presentation, so everything in a playful meeting will be different from the accepted norms of your processes.

In the world of play, **different is good**. Because from different comes **new**, and from new comes **change**.

Play has several purposes - Fun/surprise/ disruption/ Competition or No Competition/ Humour/ Exploration/ story/ Play for play's sake.

All of these are points of **engagement** for staff. That engagement may be with each other, the brand, the business or a new product; it all depends on how you set up the play and its defined purpose.



What can play do that other more formal processes can't?

It goes without saying (although I am) that a Permission to Play methodology is not appropriate in every meeting. Still, it also doesn't have to be limited to creative or brainstorming meetings. Play can be used as an **icebreaker** in a more extensive meeting or to **change the rhythm** of a long meeting. The best kind of play is virtually invisible to those in the room; if it's done well, they won't even know it's happened, but the mood will have changed; people will be talking freely and probably more physically engaged (sitting up and active rather than back and passive). Looking for **physical responses** is an excellent way of measuring the success of a particular play task.

This needs careful moderation, and no "play" activity should be embarked upon without setting a clear set of rules. Every game has rules, and there is good reason; as Monica from friends said, "**Rules control the fun**". It sounds silly, but it's true. Jenga would be a peculiar game without a simple set of rules.

You must set clear boundaries so everyone can play to the same simple, understandable rules.



Why do we (Giggle) focus on play as part of the creative process?

We use play as a critical part of our **development** process. It's not always discussed as a play, but as a Creative Director, I am keen to create an environment where staff have Permission to Play. This process is more for "creative Brainstorm" meetings than the more weighty process or finance meetings - but it can work for all of them.

- Start meetings with a light discussion or tell a story that frames the problem in a **fun way** - this conveys a tone of play for the meeting
- Set a clear objective - "From this meeting, I would like everyone to be able to come back in two days with an idea for..."
- **Everyone gets to speak**
- Nobody interrupts
- Everyone can ask a question
- **Yes, and** any ideas... until they break.
- Avoid A2B thinking - Work towards A2C thinking
- **Everyone takes notes**. Write down things that feel important to you.
- Keep the agenda light and the meeting short. **Don't overload**



Why do we (Giggle) focus on play as part of the creative process?

In our round-table creative discussions, when we kick off projects, I have always been keen to involve people at all levels and experience within the business. Anyone free can join the meeting, including creative, production, technical, and even finance. All ideas are **shared** and discussed, and we strive to find the **positives** in any suggestion. In this way, the creative can be pushed much further, and we get a lot of buy-in from the team as they know they will be heard. It's a simple game of **show and tell** with one rule - any response to an idea must start with "**Yes and...**".

This game is used a lot in Improv training to help people tap into their creativity and reduce the natural urge to block ideas. Blocking is easy, 'yes and' - is a lot harder. You need to add to the idea if you want to say something. Try it with your kids next time they can't agree on what to do next - you will find yourself having a really strange but fun day (as long as you set a price or time limit, that is).



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A2C thinking is also critical to the process. This skill needs practising, but it's not hard; it just requires you to take a leap when thinking creatively. It looks something like this:

Think of an object, anything you like: Bread! Now, think of a word connected to bread. A2B thinking would give a direct association like Butter, Jam, or Sandwich... you get the Idea. A2C asks you to take the next step in your associative thinking - so from bread, we leap right over sandwich and instead propose Ducks, or Money or Market.

When you apply that concept to Brand communication or messaging around an AGM, some interesting things happen.

A2C thinking is playful. When we do this with clients, the room is always full of surprises, laughter and joy. Understanding why someone associates a particular value word with their aunt's dog is wonderful. A lot of what you discover isn't immediately helpful, but giving people Permission to Play allows them not to solve the problem immediately; they can be playful, explore, and perhaps uncover something new. It's vital to avoid value judgments at this stage; they are a very adult idea and always limit play; nothing is bad, nothing is wrong, and everything is interesting.



What does this look like for a client?

Permission to Play can be as simple as engaging with a company called **Studio Giggle** for some clients.

Our very name is playful and has been the basis of many conversations. I get meetings with companies just because they are intrigued by the name. As with any brand, we must live up to that expectation. In storytelling language, this is referred to as 'The Promise', what the reader expects from a title, character or genre... you have to live up to the promise; otherwise, the reader will soon move on. So, at Giggle, Permission to Play is **part of our culture**. We are a playful team; we laugh and joke a lot together, share stories, share jokes, and share inspirations, music, and ideas. We have digital platforms that allow us to do this even though we occupy three separate Offices. It's such an integral part of our culture that during a recent discussion about moving everyone to Teams, the need for social interaction was very high on the considerations list.

This means **enjoying our work**, our time at work, and working with people we enjoy being with. For our clients, this means working with Giggle is often **the most fun they have all year**, and I believe this is because of our ethos around play. Our clients are very loyal, many of them have been with us for over 5 years and in a recent survey one of the main reasons put forward for this was they had fun working with us. That can be a difficult thing to understand from the outside. Work is supposed to be a very serious grown-up affair, and we are all very serious people in high-powered jobs. But play doesn't mean you are silly or act unprofessional; play has rules which clearly define how we "play" with each client. As we have grown confident with our identity, this has become easier to explore with our long-term clients



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In most cases, it is simply the natural consequence of our work together and doesn't require something structured to make it happen. This is just how we work. It will be fun, and you will enjoy the experience. It will be creative.

However, we are always looking for new ways **to get the creative ball rolling** with new clients. Signalling to a team that they have **permission to play** is an essential part of the process; how that happens can vary from company to company and department to department. Ideally, **permission will come from a senior team member**, and the play can take many forms.

- Brainstorming
- Problem-solving
- Immersive
- Experiential
- Task-based
- Discussion/ presentations
- Practical Comms (Films/Podcasts)
- Graphics/Design

Anyone of these can be made playful, and the more playful it is, the more fun the experience will be and the more engaged the participants will feel. The content or outcome from the sessions will be far more likely to be used, as those who create it will champion it more.



Want to know more about playfulness in business and how you can incorporate playfulness into corporate communications? Or want Steve to come in and present to your team? Please contact Steve by emailing steve@studiogiggle.co.uk or call 0117 972 0081

