

COLUMNS

## Anna Wintour: Noise and light distract from thought and creativity

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*Anna Wintour speaking at Cannes Lions 2016*

By [Charlotte Wooding](#)

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CANNES, France "A perfectionist, a hard task-master and someone who does nothing half-heartedly underneath the iconic bob and famous sunglasses lies an incredible woman."

Burberry CEO and chief creative officer Christopher Bailey was giving high praise indeed when he introduced Anna Wintour yesterday on stage at this week's Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity in Cannes in the South of France. But Ms. Wintour is an icon: the editor in chief of American Vogue and the artistic director of Cond Nast, which runs 21 of the world's most-read magazines and digital platforms.

"She knows the influence she has and how she can use it to help others," Mr. Bailey said, noting her philanthropic work.

But she also has a keen understanding of how brands are developing in the new digital age, he said.

This a challenge that has united both Vogue and Burberry. Both of them as all brands in the digital age - must keep on changing or they will die.

"We must take aspirational brands into democratic spaces," Mr. Bailey said. "Take slow and eternal things and translate them for this fast new digital world."

As both Burberry and Vogue have tackled the issue head-on, they have both become two of the most innovative luxury brands out there.

In the trenches

With Mr. Bailey then passing over the mic to the immaculately dressed Ms. Wintour, she started her address by highlighting the importance of still pursuing big ideas in the digital. But this does not mean simply twisting the editorial line to meet search engine optimization demands, or chasing clicks, which is unimaginative.

It does not mean Cond Nast "competing with the likes of Ten surprising facts about Donald Trump's hair."

No, to have a lasting impact, Ms. Wintour said, brands need to consider the lives of audiences if we want to engage with them.

"The artistic director's role is to help organizations find their way in a digital age," Ms. Wintour said. "It's not just

about surviving, it's not just about algorithms. Creativity is thinking about the lives of audiences. Staying nimble and letting us make mistakes."

This is an ideal that Ms. Wintour continues to live her life by, and provides an outline for her approach to creativity. This boils down to four key rules, which she shared with the Cannes audience.

### 1. Aim high

According to Ms. Wintour, digital is making creatives less ambitious. It is all too easy to increase quantity in the digital world, but often this lacks creativity.

Ms. Wintour wants to make a case for "highly polished, grand ideas with big investment." She encouraged the audience not to simply create content with immediate impact yet less effort, as we can all see how easily distracted people are online.

Instead, we must "publish things of immediate impact, but with lasting significance," she said.

Here, she referenced Caitlyn Jenner's cover for Vanity Fair, which she described as, "what will probably be the most discussed cover of the decade." That would not have happened if Cond Nast went for quick wins over hard work.

### 2. Dare to be different

Next up, Ms. Wintour explained why we need to dare to be different. There is a constant pressure to produce in volume and the market always wants to see a bit more.

"Audiences want to feel like they've found something special, something they've not seen before," Ms. Wintour noted.

An example of this can be seen in the speed of the fashion world and couture shows.

"Fashion, which often seems to be on a path to be bigger, more Instagram-ready, can also achieve its best through sincerity," Ms. Wintour said.

One of the designers that she commended was Demna Gvasalia, the new creative director of Balenciaga, who took over the creative direction of the Parisian label, producing a collection that Ms. Wintour felt sincere and real.

In contrast to this, Ms. Wintour brought up another show that she went to last year which was full of flash and had iPhones everywhere, which meant she barely saw the clothes at all.

"That show had nothing to do with creativity on the runway, and nobody had given any thought as to why we were there," she said. "Too often I see noise and light to distract from the lack of thought and creativity."

### 3. Use all of your gold

"You learn from what you've done, not in spite of it." This is Ms. Wintour's third lesson, and one she believes in particular is why Burberry's Mr. Bailey is so successful. He is quick to react and respond, and identify what works most for him.

And highlighting a personal failure of her own, Ms. Wintour said, "Stepping out of the mainstream requires great courage and confidence."

At Vogue, there was recent a security breach which resulted in a leak of a shoot including Gigi Hadid and Zayn Malik.

Vogue's response was to publish all the shots from the shoot online, ahead of schedule, which ended up being one of their most viewed pieces of content of the year.

### 4. Make interesting friends

Interact with people on a daily basis and be widely available. This is the final of Ms. Wintour's four pillars, and a big reason why she still remains one of the most respected and inspired leaders in the world of luxury, fashion and publishing.

"Be as inclusive as you can," Ms. Wintour said. "The landscape is so atomized these days that people are looking for supportive relationship.

"Don't sit in a room creating abstract ideas for what you think audiences want," she said. "Go out and find what audiences want."

After all, relationships accrue and can help create interesting ideas.

IF YOU LOOK at the brands most celebrated today, they all thrive from their embracement of collaboration. It is a hugely powerful and positive thought to take going on. And set Ms. Wintour nicely up for a provocative conclusion.

"When we're young, we dream on moving upwards," Ms. Wintour said, "but I now see that joy in life is moving forwards."

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