



Cara Ungar, Instrument

Heart Intelligence – Loving Your Way to Great Work



Great work depends on collaboration, creativity, playfulness and heartfelt relationships. It can be difficult to accomplish this ideal. Most of us want to collaborate, but we also want to own our disciplinary expertise. A strategist wants to do strategy and likely has more experience in that realm than say, a back-end developer, and vice versa.

Still, as an industry, many of us are beginning to ask under what conditions can a developer drive strategy? Is it possible for a strategist to contribute meaningfully to art direction? What about a designer-producer? What happens when real interdisciplinary collaboration transpires?

At Instrument, we're asking these questions. In fact, such questions are echoing throughout this new building where our people come together and where our work

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comes to fruition. The space responds as if it were, itself, a player in the creative process.

Great Space

JD Hooge, a Partner and CCO of the agency, spearheaded the new office design. He worked with designers, strategists, producers, writers and developers. He considered work and life. He looked, with others, through the lens of user experience to create a feature set that spoke to what employees need. What he might not have anticipated, though, was that this careful, meticulous, collaborative consideration would yield another “Instrumenter” (A term used affectionately by employees at Instrument to refer to one another).

A New Colleague

If someone asked our building, “What do you do?” the building would respond, “I’m the Organizational Host. It’s a new position.” Like the host of a party, the building makes the event (in this case, great work) better. It ushers in visual thinking, interdisciplinary conversation, dynamic partner meetings, hallway talk and lunchtime laughter. There’s room for kids, massage, meditation, balloons on birthdays and waffles on work anniversaries. Almost every surface is fodder for ideation. As a result, our passions take shape more meaningfully.

Great Love

The building inspires us to practice a new kind of intelligence – heart intelligence, an activated “knowing” or wisdom characterized by:

- **Compassion:** the understanding that people are doing the best that they can do and that we are all seeking connection;
- **Generosity:** a commitment to being collaborative, accountable, hard on issues and soft on people;
- **Vulnerability:** as researcher and storyteller Brené Brown defines it, “daring to show up and let yourself be seen;”
- **Curiosity:** contemplating what people think and feel, why they do what they do, why you do what you do, and how you can do the best work together.

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My colleagues and I are tapping into this heart intelligence to realize great work. We’re communicating and innovating more lovingly. We’re trying hard to listen to what we actually know about compassion, generosity, vulnerability and curiosity. In this way, we become more skillful in interdisciplinary collaboration.

Be Great!

To evolve our workspaces into an “Organizational Host,” we should invest more energy into harnessing heart intelligence. Begin by asking questions and getting attuned to the needs and desires of the people around you. Only by talking to one another will you be able to discover the factors that have the potential to underlie (or foil) true collaboration. Tap into your team’s collective emotional, mental and creative intelligence. Then do it!

***About the author:** Cara is a Senior Strategist at Instrument, an independent digital creative agency in Portland, Oregon. She has a PhD in Rhetoric and Cultural Studies, and served as Executive Director at two statewide non-profits, in addition to being the sole proprietor of a content-strategy based consultancy. She does yoga, meditates, writes, talks big ideas with friends, reads, watches movies, sees live music and*

hangs out with her two young sons. She loves her job.

Illustration by UK-based illustrator, [Owen Gent](#)

