



**SPIRO ASSOCIATES**  
MARKETING | ADVERTISING | PUBLIC RELATIONS | BRAND ARCHITECTURE

sass culture



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sassculture\*

\*subject to change at any moment.

# welcome

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our origin story

So, you're  
officially a  
Brand  
Architect...

# welcome



The name of the agency is Spiro & Associates Marketing, Advertising, Public Relations and Brand Architecture or, as we like to call ourselves, SASS. However, one could describe it as a whacky, dysfunctional family that comes together when it really matters. Think the cast of "Shameless," but with real jobs and fewer addictions. But as anyone here will tell you, it's part of what makes us tick.

We tell you this because we're all here to do great work and succeed...together. If you came to us from some "normal" place, this is analogous to a disclaimer—one that, we hope, will prepare you to not just survive, but thrive here. That's what this manual is about. Not a bunch of boring crap about procedures, policies, and the like. The law makes us issue a Company Handbook for that.

**This Culture Manual belongs to everyone here.**

Read it. Own it. Add to it. Improve it.

**Now, let's get to it.**

## **THE BUILDING BLOCKS of SASS**

(a.k.a. our core values):

- We place a high value on ideas (our product) and good, quality work.
- We put family first. (If it's not right at home, it's not going to be right here.)
- We value mutual respect. (We insist on honesty & integrity in all we do.)
- We value teamwork. (Internal, external, and influential)
- We value relationships. (internal, external, and influential)

Boiled down, the soul of SASS is

**"Ideas. Family. Respect. Teamwork. Relationships."**

# section 1

## Creative lives matter.

**We are here for one reason:** to do phenomenal work that makes a positive difference for our clients. If that's not you, then our interview process obviously needs some revamping!

Our collaborative, creative culture allows us to produce that phenomenal work. Each of us is responsible for helping to nurture this creative culture, so be sure to pitch in. If you don't add to it, you may get left behind.

## So, now what?

Glad you asked...because your first deadline is upon you.

Done yet? No? What do you mean you don't read minds?

Okay, since it's your first day, we'll give you a break. But in all seriousness, this brings up two important points:

- 1) This is a deadline-driven business, and
- 2) There will be times when you'll be asked to create ideas without the 'ideal' amount of intel.

Clients come to us for solutions, so sometimes client input is thin or non-existent. That doesn't mean we don't try to get it. It means sometimes clients just honestly

don't know. A pessimist will say, "that sucks." However, an optimist sees this as an opportunity. An opportunity to re-write the rules and do something people in most lines of work can only lust for...to get creative and make a difference.

We are oftentimes a client's first experience working with an agency. Yeah, of course they have some distant cousin who has an uncle who worked at a shop in a major market. But we periodically have "rookie" clients. This means they are new to this, don't understand what we do, don't yet understand our value to their team, or how long things can take.

Our creative methodology runs the gamut of "**Proof > Review > Comments > New Proof > Review > Comments...**" until the work is finally approved and presented to the clients. We must set the clients' initial expectations in accordance with this process.

So, now that you've got your big kid pants on, read on.

## Not everyone is the same.

No, that doesn't mean some people are more important than others, it just means we all have our own style. What works for you might not work for the next person, and vice versa. Be respectful of this.

Being creative means we exist outside the proverbial box, so trying to make you operate inside one makes no sense at all. There are rules, though:

- 1) Be on time. (around here, 15 minutes early is "on time.")
- 2) Give us your all. If you don't, we'll know it and call you on it.
- 3) Respect each other at all times. No questions asked.
- 4) You have a question? Ask it! You cannot be shy around here. Things move quickly, and you need access to answers to help you be successful. Just ask!

*Nothing too nutty...*

## **Work it. Own it.**

Things move pretty fast around here, so finding a balance between getting things done and making everyone happy is part of life in an agency.

We hired you to think for yourself, so don't be afraid to speak your mind. You won't be scolded if you do. Now, you won't always win every debate, but that doesn't mean you keep your opinions to yourself. The exchange of all ideas is healthy and often sparks something new and exciting as a result. If it moves things forward, that's a good thing.

## **It's not always filet mignon.**

Award-winning work is great, but not everything wins awards. In fact, most of the things you'll do in your career won't. Much of what a client needs is more "meat and potatoes" than it is sexy. This is a reality many may struggle with. There will always be opportunities to swing for the fence, but games can be won on a string of singles and doubles, too. Always do the best job you can, and we'll be guaranteed to put points on the board for our clients.

We are here to make our clients successful and if, along the way, we win a few awards, so be it. Trust us, do right by the client and awards WILL come. We have proof in our conference room. Or, should we say our trophy room? Have you SEEN our trophy room?! We need more shelves!

## **This is a business, not a cause.**

Many people who enter this business do so with a wide-eyed enthusiasm that is truly one of the most precious things in life. The balance you've got to work toward is realizing that brand building is not an altruistic thing. It's commerce. Brands are built to move merchandise, sell services, and make our clients (and us) money. Keep that in the front of your head and it will have a greater chance of not exploding. And, yes, we do this for money....money we earn to pay you, keep the lights and water working, and keep a few pennies for the old guy in the back office as well.

### **When we consider which projects to work on, we think of three main things:**

- Does it make money?
- Is it good for the agency?
- Is it fun?

Each endeavor should have at least two of these factors in order for us to choose to work on them.

Now, do we believe in causes? Yes. Do we support and work with causes?

Absolutely, yes! However, in the realm of our daily business, we focus 100% on what is good for the agency from a business standpoint. Don't worry; when we're working on a worthy cause, you'll know it and you'll be involved!

# section 2

## **Teamwork works.**

We're passionate individuals who are fueled by our unique insights, but we're all in the same boat. There are no heroes here. Those who are successful here understand this and want to be part our team.

On large-scale deadlines where we're really up against the clock, and often throughout "season," EVERYONE jumps in to help! This means you may be designing a new website one minute, and then you're three-hole punching a Marketing Action Plan the next. When we call for "all hands on deck," we mean ALL hands on deck. Everyone pitches in around here, and that includes taking out the trash.

## **Trust the system.**

The dichotomy of a branding agency has always been balancing creativity with productivity. Account service team members are different from creative team members. Creatives are different from media, PR, and social media team members. Web coders are...well, different altogether. But all in a good way.

The common ground is our system. The system is our way of doing things around here. It's our process. It's how we get from A to Z, and all points in between. It's the synergy amongst all our team members. It's how our creativity flourishes through open, candid discussions. The system keeps us all on the same track, working toward a common goal. Respect that, and each other, at all times.

## **Ideas can come from anyone.**

Our business is chock full of lore about everyone from the brand-new team member to the CEO coming up with the spark of a great idea. We applaud and encourage that.

If you're a creative person, keep your eyes and ears open...you never know when someone might utter an unwitting gem. It's your job to recognize them. If you're not in the creative department, don't be afraid to contribute in meetings. Your idea might not win, or it might not be ultimately executed exactly how you envisioned. That's okay. The main thing is you contributed. Jump into the deep end with us. You won't regret it.

## **Time manages to fly...so manage it.**

Time constraints are like a distant six-fingered cousin we all avoid at the reunion. Those of you from the North might not get that joke...sorry.

What we're saying here is deadlines are part of the business, and not something you can avoid. And, as part of a team, your deadline affects those of others. So, give yourself deadlines to get things done, and never be afraid to come in ahead of deadline. Don't be that person who lets the job expand to fill the time you have, because there will always be a surprise "attack" by a client who needs something yesterday.

Also, we are pretty cool about working with you when you need time off for a doctor's appointment, or to see your bail bondsman, or your therapist. We believe in work/life balance, as we all know how important our families are to us. We work our schedules out to facilitate this, and we simply ask that you do the same. Most here are salaried, so the "nine to five" thing is merely a suggestion of the hours to start and stop work.

# section 3

## **Your mother doesn't work here.**

Hands are made for working, not holding. This means you'll sometimes be on your own to figure things out. We're not saying not to ask for help, but don't expect others to hold your hand. Again, asking questions is vital to your growth and our success. However, not carrying your share of the load leads to poor morale.

If you see something you think can be organized better or done better, speak up. Or, you might be tempted to say something such as, "It would be nice if someone would organize the [server, kitchen, furniture]." At Spiro & Associates, you ARE that someone. If you see supplies are low on items, make a list and discuss it with team members, rather than just ignoring it. We all clean the kitchen and we all take out the trash. There are no magical kitchen fairies that visit our sanctum overnight in order to clean your dishes. We repeat: your mother doesn't work here. Clean up after yourself.

And, if you want to update, change, or fix something, go for it. Seriously. Every awesome thing you see here is like that because someone like you decided to do it. Don't be shy. Make the magic happen.

## **Guess what? Change happens.**

The only thing constant in life is change. And the only person who likes a change is, well, a baby. So, embrace this fact...it affects us all. Everything in life is either growing or dying. Let's make everything grow.

Sometimes you'll find the big-wigs affect change simply to get a reaction out of you, or to make sure that you're still breathing. Be open to it. It's going to happen.

## **Technology can be an awful/good thing.**

Few things change as quickly as technology in today's world. And, in our business, this affects us all. New tech, new ideas, new methods. We all have a responsibility to ourselves to stay aware of this. We don't all have to be experts in it; just know that the ability to adapt is key to surviving and not tearing your hair out.

And while we do control a certain amount of technology, recognize that we own neither the wheels, nor the hamsters...so, sometimes speed and convenience are beyond our control. Learn to accept what you can't control. It's hard, but it's a big key to mental health.



## **Clients change their minds.**

We try to manage this, but it doesn't always work that way. He who writes the check can also write the rules. It's not fair, but it is life. Speaking of "fair," that's where people give a blue ribbon to a pig. It's not reality. If the request is reasonable, no problem. If it's insane, we'll push back and counsel our clients where we can. It's one thing for a client to change his/her mind. What we don't want is for them to change agencies—unless we want them to.

## **Change your approach.**

If something isn't working...an idea, a system, your hairstyle...change it. It's amazing how changing a few small things or how you look at them can open your mind up in new directions. We are in a business that demands breaking new ground, so dig deep.

Oftentimes the only feedback you will receive from the team is a simple "dig deeper"...or "REALLY?" These are meant to say, "Dear valued staff member, creative genius, art direction diva, we know you are working hard and slaving away on multiple unrealistic deadlines for clients who do not respect or understand the value of what you bring to the table, but could you please give this concept, design, layout, paragraph, hairstyle another look and see if, perhaps, even you can top your own creative genius?" Never take feedback personally. It is given to help you grow, not to beat you down. We are all continuously learning.

# section 4

## What the FAQ?!

We know we covered the big stuff, but as the saying goes, "It's the little things." So, here they are.

### **WHY BRAND ARCHITECTS?**

Why not? We design and build brands for our clients.

Our business is about differentiation, and we're our own favorite client.

### **DO I HAVE TO RAISE MY HAND TO ASK A QUESTION?**

Don't you dare...just don't interrupt people...unless they're saying something stupid, or talking negatively about the Florida Gators.

## CAN I WORK LATE, COME IN EARLY, OR ON WEEKENDS?

Yes, you have a key and an alarm code...use them on the way in and out.

## IF THERE'S FOOD IN THE FRIDGE, CAN I EAT IT?

Only if it says "CTS" on it...(it's short for "Consume This Soon"). Respect the "Client Zone" in the fridge. If the Client Zone is near empty, let us know, or refill it yourself if you can. There is nothing more embarrassing than offering a visitor water when there is actually no water.

## DO I NEED TO STAY AT MY DESK?

If the seatbelt sign is off, feel free to move about the office. Collaborate with others as often as possible. Utilize the "Red Zone" for group meetings and brainstorming. The Red Zone is the incubator in which great ideas grow and come together. You can also use the conference room if it's available, or a corner of the floor.

## CAMERAS? IS THIS A REALITY SHOW?

No, we're not watching you... They are there for your safety, and for expanded security. Smile!

## CAN I WEAR HEADPHONES?

Yes, but just don't shut yourself off to others entirely...this is a team. And, if you're playing a really good jam you think everyone would enjoy, unplug the earphones and share. We all like music here.

## CAN I EAT AT MY DESK?

Yes, but make sure you clean up. This is Florida, and that means bugs who love leftovers.

# section 5



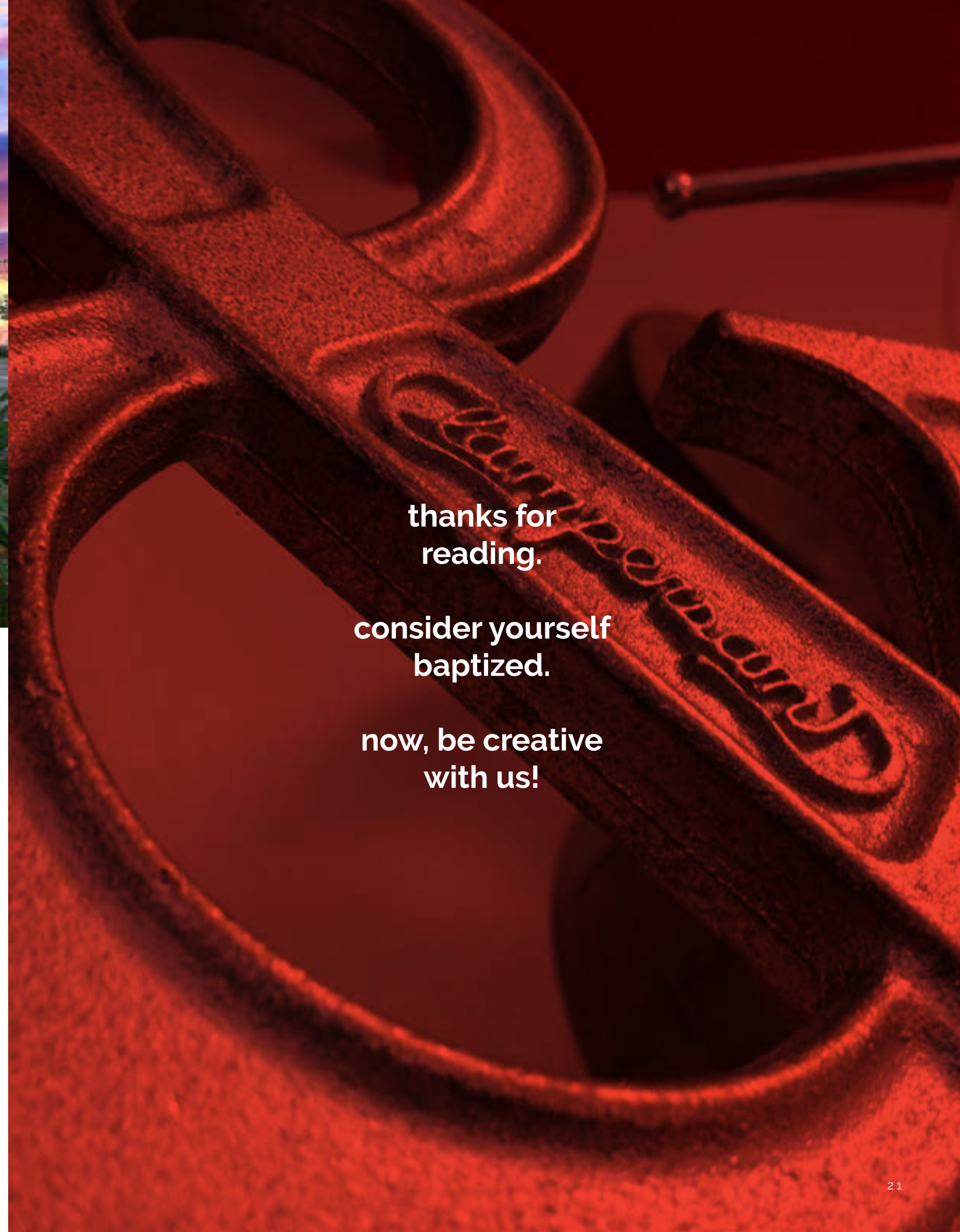


*Today – Spiro & Associates' downtown office in Fort Myers, FL.*

**Many moons ago** when many of you were still in diapers or grade school, a young aspiring art director named **Christopher Spiro** met a man named **William Ernest 'Bill' Waites**. Bill had retired from advertising (or so he thought) after working for industry icon David Ogilvy at Ogilvy & Mather in Chicago, Detroit, New York and Australia. Bill moved to Fort Myers to do his own thing—at the time, that was radio, jingle and audio production.

After working together on several projects, Spiro and Waites decided to partner up and start an agency they cleverly named **Spiro & Waites** (note the signature ampersand).

Under Bill's mentorship, the brash young Spiro was taught agency structure, using Ogilvy & Mather as the template. They quickly rose to be one of the more formidable shops in Southwest Florida, and the surrounding area. Bill retired in 2000, but his legacy lives on here in the die he helped cast in 1988.



thanks for  
reading.

consider yourself  
baptized.

now, be creative  
with us!

**you're on the team now.**

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we look forward to getting to know each other.



# culture

noun | cul·ture | \ kəl-çər \

the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization

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**USAGE EXAMPLE:**

The Spiro & Associates culture really kicks some serious SASS.

**SPIRO**  **ASSOCIATES**  
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