Running On Empty?
It may be time for a tune-up.

Whether you have designers on your team with high mileage or others who just rolled out of the show-room, like your car, you need to change the spark plugs and rotate the tires on a regular basis to ensure the team is running at top performance and with a full tank.

Let's face it. Everybody needs a tune-up now and then—physically, mentally, spiritually, at work, at home and in relationships. And if you neglect the most precious resources at work—the designers—you run the risk of burning them out. Repetitive work assignments, isolation from the mainstream, client abuse, lack of opportunity, stifling corporate cultures and claustrophobic workstations are just a few of the things that can lead to low morale, uninspired design, burnout and poor performance.

So go ahead and take a look under the hood. You might not like what you see, but I believe the following tips may prevent overheating and give you better mileage:

PASS TO THE RIGHT

Often a designer will take ownership of a particular project because it provides a certain level of comfort, knowing the designer can produce quality results very efficiently. But over time this strategy can lead to boredom and uninspired work because the designer is no longer challenged.

I found moving projects around the room from designer to designer gives everyone the opportunity to work on different project types, including some that may be unfamiliar. It also pushes creatives to break old habits and try something new. Your production flow may take a hit until each designer becomes more familiar with the new work, but in the long run, you'll be adding horsepower to the team by enabling each of your designers to enhance creative and technical skills.

A variation on this idea is "tag-team design"—that is, one designer develops a concept or layout for an ad, for example, then passes it on to the next designer, who formats and lays out the type, and then passes it on to the next designer, who chooses and places the artwork, and so on.

GET AROUND

Feeling alone? Neglected? Isolated from the main-stream design community? You're not alone. Many

Glenn John Arnowitz is the director of Creative Services at Wyeth, a research-based, global pharmaceutical company, where he manages an award-winning team of designers. He contributes to several publications and speaks at numerous conferences. As cofounder of *InSource* (www.in-source.org), he is passionately committed to helping in-house creatives achieve design excellence and recognition within their companies and the business community.

in-house designers suffer as a result of the cloistered corporate environment that can sometimes suck the life out of you. Most affected are designers who are a one-person department and don't have the opportunity to share and discuss their work with a colleague.

Fortunately, organizations such as DMI and AIGA hold conferences that give you and your team the chance to connect with peers. InSource—a nonprofit trade organization committed to helping in-house creatives achieve design excellence and recognition within their companies and the business community—was established to address the sense of isolation most in-house designers feel. InSource (www.in-source.org) has built a community where designers can share strategies and information, solve problems and network with peers.

It is also a good idea to reach out to your neighbors—you know, those people in the cubicles down the hall. Come up for air once in a while. Explore opportunities for collaboration and look for ways to build new business relationships with groups within the company.

And don't forget about your other neighbors, too—in those big buildings outside, across the street, down the block. Hook up with creatives in the 'hood for coffee, lunch or a beer. And think about extending a hand to establish a relationship with your outside design agencies. Networking is a necessary ingredient to building community; it can also alleviate the isolation and help strengthen your standing in the creative community.

BACKSEAT DRIVERS

Nothing can lock the brakes faster than an unorganized, exploiting client. Because your internal stakeholders are only an elevator ride or cubicle away, the breathing down your neck may get a little uncomfortable. The on-site convenience you provide is invaluable, but overly protective clients with separation anxiety can prevent you from doing your job by abusing the relationship and never leaving you alone. And clients who insist on art-directing projects are the worst.

Design by committee? Never works. What to do? Use your company's branding guidelines (you do have them, right?) to justify design decisions. This strategy can be effective and moves the conversation from a

subjective to an objective level, focusing on whether or not the design complies with corporate standards. Remember, you're the expert. By showing clients you have experience and knowledge, they will begin to value your judgment and respect your choices.

GET THE BIG PICTURE
One item that still resonates with me from my high-school drivers education class is to not only focus on the car in front of you, but look behind you, to the side and at the oncoming traffic. Get the "big picture."

Depending on how your in-house department is structured, there may not be any opportunity for advancement. Although the agency hierarchy offers more chances for promotion, most in-house design departments are flat models with each designer wearing a variety of hats: customer service rep, art director, designer, production coordinator.

Look left. Look right. Get out and about. See what's around the corner and down the hall. Get the big picture. There may be opportunities with a department or at a different site in another city or country. Remember, as an in-house designer you have access to many resources that are unavailable to the agency or freelance designer: Public Affairs, Human Resources, Benefits, Marketing, Sales, Finance, Meeting Planning.

Know your company, know its products and services, its culture and brand essence. Understand and live its vision, and learn how you can support it. Familiarize yourself with the corporate organizational chart and reporting structure, and find out where you fit in. Become involved with business strategies your company is pursuing. Learn more about the business and see how you can become involved as a business partner. You never know where it could lead you.

TAKE THE LONG WAY HOME
You know the drill, right? Probably all too well: Our daily routines and habits can often lead to complacency. There are a few things you can do to stimulate, motivate and shake up your designers. Have weekly staff meetings in a different room or outside (weather permitting). Organize an internal design contest or a show-and-tell. Grab some popcorn and show staff an inspirational video or screen a movie

everyone likes. Go on a field trip to a local museum or gallery. Go to a paper show together. Play board games. Share books and articles with the team. Rearrange your work space. Try to inject a little friendly subversiveness into the daily routine.

GET REVVED UP
Many companies have internal training programs that allow employees to brush up on technical and people skills. Look for ways to learn and expand your knowledge base—whether it's beefing up PowerPoint skills or becoming a better writer. Beyond the basic training class, your company may also have management or leadership training. These team-building retreats give you the tools for improving your effectiveness in leading others—showing how leadership behavior can positively impact on collaboration, initiative and staff development—and fostering a climate of learning, performance and pride.

HOW'S MY DRIVING?
Take the time to recognize the achievements of staff and the good work your department does. Celebrate birthdays, anniversaries and other important milestones. Employees want to feel their efforts are making a difference, and it's your responsibility to acknowledge team members. And do it as often as possible: at staff meetings, in front of clients. Display work throughout the department or in the pages of a company newsletter. Has the staff been putting in extra time? Give a comp day. I made a collection of cards modeled after the Monopoly Chance cards that say, "Congratulations! You Can Leave An Hour Earlier Today" and "This Card Entitles You To A Complimentary Day Off!" Show your appreciation and don't forget to say "Thank You."

LONG MAY YOU RUN
These are just a few of the things you can do to keep a team in good running condition. Watch out, though, there are plenty of potholes and detours on the road ahead. But with a good preventive maintenance schedule in place and plenty of fuel, you'll find you and your team will be stronger and better prepared to take on any challenge, put the pedal to the metal and deliver the goods. 𝐆

ONE ITEM THAT STILL RESONATES WITH ME FROM MY HIGH SCHOOL DRIVERS EDUCATION CLASS IS TO NOT ONLY FOCUS ON THE CAR IN FRONT OF YOU, BUT LOOK BEHIND YOU, TO THE SIDE AND AT THE ONCOMING TRAFFIC. GET THE "BIG PICTURE."