

## **Expert Interview I with Ilya Petrov, Partnership Transformation Director, Nike Including | thoughts on breaking up with numbers and starting a new mission**

>> Ilya guest curated Strands on September 1st 2022. [Read it here.](#)

### **Tell us a little bit about yourself and what keeps you busy. How did you end up doing what you're doing today?**

For the first half of my life (calculated as of today), I was really good at math, ranking #18 in my country and knowing 14 languages to control a computer. So I just quit the university and... ended up doing websites for a small communication agency for about 250 euros/month. Somehow, things next door appeared to be more exciting. I broke up with numbers and descended on my new mission: to learn the one language to control humans.

Since that time, my passion was to bring sense back to creativity and build strategies that solve problems for consumers and business, not for awards. My motto was always to help good businesses to grow. Seven years ago, I finally found a good business and decided to settle (at least for a while). Today I'm the partnership transformation director at Nike, responsible for the future of our partners: dreaming about it, bringing it closer. My new motto is to shape a better future for human-kind businesses and for the good of the planet via analytics and imagination.

### **What excites you most about what you do?**

18 years later, I'm still in love with advertising. This is the most funded science on the essence of everything. To know it means to understand people: how they think and what drives their behavior. It's about life. Every new client is an opportunity to learn something new: how to bake bread, how furniture is made, and what makes excellent sneakers the greatest.

### **What beliefs define your approach to work? How would you define your leadership style?**

Never stop dreaming. There are a lot of people out there talking, so go and do it.



Process over a project. With everything we are doing, we are solving for content, but we are also solving for time. Building and evolving systems (that produce projects) are usually more important than achieving one-off results.

I'm a visionary, and also a fan of leadership as a service. Leading others for me comes to drawing an aspirational vision of the future and then putting the team upfront, and supporting them with everything needed to accomplish the job and grow. Heroes are shaped by the challenges they overcame. So, it's all about designing the right experiences for people to grow faster and also solve for consumer and business needs.

### **What has been the most rewarding project you've worked on and why?**

In 2013 I launched an app called Strategy Deck: all communication strategy frameworks in one place, in one deck of tips cards. Now it's offline because of tech issues, but I'm working on the update with the idea to relaunch it later in September. 50 thousand planners worldwide were using the app in the last nine years: as a reminder, a source of ideas, or a starting point for the new learning curve. Even today, I'm constantly receiving emails with questions about frameworks from the app from all around the world. I feel like I'm giving back to the planning community. This makes it very rewarding for me.

### **We are big believers in diversity -- Not only because we believe in equality, but because we also think it's better for business. The Black Lives Matter movement has shaped industry conversations around both global injustice, and also lack of representation in our industry. How do you frame these kinds of conversations, both internally and with clients? Is there an emphasis on action, or are the conversations really more about communication?**

I'm starting with the idea that we could have a diverse image of this topic and lack of education and experience. So, let's learn together. Acceptance that injustice and

unbalance exist, understanding its nature, and sparking the discussion are already great first steps.

**Switching gears a bit, how do you find time to balance personal interests with your career? Do you believe work/life balance is possible? Anything you've implemented that you recommend that others try?**

I'm a parent of a 5 month old girl, so for now the only balance I know is being 100% parent and trying to squeeze in the remains of my previous life. My approach to work and life is to find some high concept that unites them. For me, it's the future: science and fiction. While my job is more rational (following trends, building strategies, managing commercial terms, etc.), my hobbies are compensating for the creative part (writing sci-fi stories, indie game development, cooking). It's all coming together as a passion for what's next and different ways to explore it.

**What's your media diet? Where do you find inspiration?**

Recently, my main info sources were YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, and email subscriptions. The more diverse content the better. The first rule of creativity says there is nothing new, just new links between the existing concepts. So, of course, it would help if you were a real expert in what you are doing. Please, continue. But have some fun and read anything from the great history of pizza to political views on theories of Mars colonization.

**As you know, we believe there is so much value in having a wide range of teachers. What's the best piece of advice/knowledge you've stolen, and who/where'd you steal it from?**

It's funny, but it's actually "steal with pride". My first boss taught me that. If you don't know how to do stuff, watch how others are doing it. Learn to recognize the good, the bad, and the masterpiece. Steal the masterpiece and try to replicate it. At some point, you'll see that masterpiece is here, but you haven't stolen anything. This is how you became a master.