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# Collaborative Insight: Fostering Communication between Designers and Their Clients

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COLLABORATIVE INSIGHT: FOSTERING COMMUNICATION  
BETWEEN DESIGNERS AND THEIR CLIENTS

A Synthesis Project Presented

By

ANDREA BRENNER-SHAEVITZ

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston,  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

MAY 2005

Critical and Creative Thinking Program

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## ABSTRACT

### COLLABORATIVE INSIGHT: FOSTERING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DESIGNERS AND THEIR CLIENTS

May 2005

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The subject matter explored was a result of my curiosity as to why clients have a tendency to fixate over specific details once a design solution is proposed. Through the enlightenment of a personal experience of implementing an “educational session” for a client as part of the design process, this synthesis addresses the benefits of and ways to further develop better communication through improving relationships. Specifically the themes of engagement, dialogue, language and value are examined. These themes are essential contributions to encouraging communication and understanding between a designer and their client. Design firms effectively using these concepts will be highlighted as examples.

In order to further understand how society views the design profession, why misconceptions exist and how these misconceptions interfere with current client/designer relationships will also be discussed. Future developments of this subject matter, place the initiative on the design profession and educators. Approaches to use in the classroom as well as in the boardroom to implement the themes of engagement, dialogue, language and value will be introduced. Design professionals need to take the initiative to develop the relationships needed to place design as a strategic entity in the minds of business.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: INITIATING KNOWLEDGE AND CONVERSATION

“CREATIVE THINKING IS NOT AN OXYMORON...we are responsible for the growth of creative design and we can certainly do a better job of promoting its importance. This means being business people first and foremost. We are in the business of providing sound strategic thinking. And until clients start thinking of us this way, we will be relegated to the level of vendor and not consultant. As long as our clients think of our services as a luxury and not a cost of business, then we have failed them, our industry and ourselves (Han 89).

When I read the above quote, I was in the middle of a difficult relationship with a client.

A company I was working for was hired to design a website. During the design process, the client continued to approach us with suggestions of how to improve our proposed solution.

The design team wondered why this client had hired us in the first place if they were planning on simply dictating ideas completely different from our own. While I believe most designers have had this frustrating experience of clients indicating their preference for imagery and color, I had never really stopped to think about why this happened. Could the reason for this phenomenon be that clients are not convinced that design decisions are informed decisions?

If the relationship included developing a better understanding of the people and the process, would this eliminate the “unknown” of the design process?

After reading the above quote by Ed Han, I became curious and inspired to change the way I approached my next client. “I am not here to make your website look pretty” I exclaimed, and proceeded to promote a new kind of working relationship.

The design profession needs to take the initiative to emphasize engagement, dialogue, language and value as essential elements of the design process. These four themes will enable rapport and trust to be developed and to advance the relationship between designers and clients. A solid relationship will allow the design process to be understood in a way that the client is clear as to how decisions for the solution came to light. The relationship establishes a team environment consisting of the designer and client working together to develop the basis for an appropriate solution. This approach keeps the client abreast of the knowledge gained in leading to the ultimate decisions. In this scenario, there is little to no need for buy-in because there are no surprises.

My personal understanding of and participation in a more collaborative effort with a client, allowed me to realize the positive effects of such an experience. After realizing what I needed to do in order to establish an improved relationship with the client, I took action to implement an “educational session” about the design process. This included engaging the client in a dialogue about their own perceptions of themselves, their competition and their customers. Taking the time to discuss their needs, while keeping business goals in mind, enabled the client to feel confident about the solutions that were presented. They understood through the interaction with them, that I was truly interested. This discourse brought assurance and trust to the relationship.

This new approach enlightened my client by enabling them to understand why I made the decisions I did for the solution to their problem. Implementing an “educational session” before uncovering the design solution was a new process that I had neither embraced nor been educated on.

My previous experiences communicating design solutions had focused more on the aesthetic nature of the design rather than the strategic component that had been the reason for the

design solution in the first place. While I had always been conscious of the client's objectives during the design process, I was not necessarily communicating their needs as it related to the solution I was presenting.

Modifying the language I used to describe the reasoning behind the solution, contributed to a clearer vision. After reading the aforementioned article written by Ed Han, it finally occurred to me that I needed to speak in a way that clearly articulated the reasons behind the design solution. The advantage of this realization was not only that the client would understand the proposed solution as it related to their business goals, but it would also enable them to understand where my ideas originated.

An example of a design firm, whose process has influenced corporate America, is IDEO, a leader among industrial design firms. IDEO was founded in 1991 as the result of a merger of Dave Kelly Design, who created the first mouse for Apple Computer, and ID Two, which designed the first laptop computer. Since its inception, IDEO has been a leader in designing products such as PDA's, the Palm V, Polaroid's I-Zone cameras as well as the stand-up toothpaste tube for Proctor and Gamble. Numerous companies recognize the success of IDEO and strive to learn the process of innovation, which they implement into their work. Companies such as Steelcase International, McDonald's, Pepsi-Cola, Warnaco Intimate Apparel Group, Nestle, and American Airlines have come to IDEO for advice because of the design firm's unique approach to innovation. The allure of IDEO is more of the "how" or work practices than it is in the "what" (Fredman 54). IDEO's interaction with both their clients and employees promote an understanding. This serves as an ideal model for cultivating working relationships.

By acknowledging the interests and values of the client combined with an engaging dialogue allow for the initial stages of a trusting relationship to be established. The knowledge



and language the client acquires from understanding the process will allow them to look at and express their concerns toward the big picture, in turn preventing fixation over the specific details like images and colors. Engagement in the design process will allow for both the client and designer to reach a common purpose, which is the essential component to the success of business objectives.

In this synthesis, I speak to the importance of and methods of establishing ways to initiate a better understanding and working relationship between the designer and their clients. This synthesis is also a first draft towards future material for students to understand the design process and their inevitable role of working with clients.

I begin by looking at the misconceptions of the design profession, why these misconceptions exist and how they interfere with current client/designer relationships (Chapter 2). I then provide the best practices of three Boston area design firms: examples that confirm that engagement, dialogue, language and recognizing value establish a community that enables a relationship to cultivate (Chapter 3).

Chapter 4 compares and contrasts themes discussed in the interviews conducted. By elaborating on the themes, I offer rationale and connections of the significance toward the design process and the interaction of the designer and client.

Chapter 5 reviews various brainstorming tools that are used to facilitate engagement and dialogue with clients. Additionally, Chapter 5 reviews how these problem-solving tools can be used in a design curriculum. I give insight to my own use of these techniques in a Concept Development course. Also, I review how the significance of having students fill out a design brief places emphasis on the importance of the objectives of a project.

The last chapter discusses insight to the future of the design profession. Individual and employee responsibility is essential to maintain and foster development. Additionally, design schools need to incorporate interpersonal skills into the curriculum in order for students to recognize and hone the skills of engagement, dialogue, language and value as a vital component to the design process.

Thus, “Collaborative Insight: Fostering Communication between Designers and Clients”, explores the importance of creating techniques used in developing trust and a rapport to begin a working relationship. Inevitably, it is up to the designer to be proactive in initiating new ways of communication to place themselves in a position of strategic value within business organizations.

As a backdrop to promoting the importance of the relationship between designers and clients, let me first speak of the current state of affairs in which there are widespread misconceptions about design. I consider why they exist and the impact of such misconceptions on the design profession.

## CHAPTER 2

### MISCONCEPTIONS SOCIETY HAS ON DESIGN

Clarifying definitions of creativity and design will serve to improve perceptions of the design industry within society. Misconceptions that exist come from the belief that the responsibility taken on by designers does not include critical thinking. This may be due to a lack of understanding that design is an undervalued entity relative to its potential role in business strategy.

There are times where design solutions are proposed and the client is not satisfied with the solution. When this scenario occurs, clients may take it upon themselves to rethink the solution, or even design what they feel is a more appropriate resolution. This type of participation by the client often makes the task appear simple without any level of concentrated thought. This scenario is extremely frustrating to designers as it weakens their own credibility as well as credibility of the profession.

People tend not to consider decision making as an attribute of creativity, and because design is associated with the term creativity, designers bear the weight of this disconnect. Similarities between definitions of creativity and characteristics of design shed light on the correlation between the two more clearly. More often than not creativity is associated with terms such as original, novel, innovative and unexpected. Robert Sternberg and Todd Lubart co-authors of the *Handbook of Creativity* conclude that creative solutions must be of value and should be appropriate, useful and adaptive concerning task constraints (Sternberg and Lubart in Murad and West 188). Teresa Amabile a Harvard specialist on creativity in business maintains a similar definition of creativity. She explains creativity as “simply the production of novel,

appropriate ideas in any realm of human activity, from science, to the arts, to education, to business, to everyday life. The ideas must be novel – different from what’s been done before – but they can’t be simply bizarre; they must be appropriate to the problem or opportunity presented” (Amabile 1997). What is essential to note here is that creativity is a form of problem solving which requires insight and knowledge and must be appropriate to the ultimate solution.

The aforementioned interpretations of creativity embrace the essence of the definition and process of design. In order for a design to benefit the client and their consumer, it must communicate and be appropriate. The solution must look beyond the aesthetic to be of value. “Design is about doing things consciously, not because they have always been done in a certain way or because it is the easiest option. Design is about building on ideas, trying things out, comparing alternatives, exploring opportunities to finally select the best possible solution” (von Stamm 2).

The design process is non-linear and a designer uses both sides of their brain during the many stages of the process. Creative activities occurring on the right side of the brain encompass emotion and intuitive behaviors. During the initial stage of concept development, non-verbal and analytical skills are suspended. Judging ideas prematurely during this process will hinder any novel ideas from surfacing. Examining a problem from different perspectives allows numerous options to be considered in order to decide on the most appropriate solution. This form of intelligence is distinct from verbal and analytical ways of thinking that are processed on the left side of the brain. While generating design solutions requires an open mind, it also requires analysis in order to choose the most appropriate solution.

Establishing an understanding of the definition of design and creativity is a beginning to clarifying misconceptions of the design profession. This understanding will further promote the

collaboration and understanding of the designer and client relationship. Misconceptions exist due to a general lack of knowledge. In order to make progress, it is important to understand specifically where these false impressions come from and how to overcome them.

### Where Do Design Fallacies Come From?

There exists a lexicon in the minds of the public of what the term “design” actually implies and what the role of a designer is. “Too many hold the view that graphic designers are specialists who do piecemeal work after the heavy thinking has been done. That is we sketch pretty pictures, select colors and assemble digital montages or web sites” (Brown 6).

The design industry continues to battle with current perceptions that do not place design as a problem solving discipline therefore continuing to be overlooked as a value to success of a business. Why do these fallacies exist? Could these fallacies form by the way that designers portray themselves? If designers want these misconceptions to change, we must first make the changes within our profession.

While I believe that most people will agree that design is of value towards business, I do not believe that most people perceive design in terms of a value proposition. Many view it merely as a visual discipline that is temporary and disposable. I suggest that one of the causes is that we, the design community, do this to ourselves. The self-image of designers is at odds with the manner in which we work. Although designers recognize that design decisions are more than just making the design aesthetically pleasing, they are still having difficulty communicating this awareness to the client.

From my own personal experiences, a designer’s intuitive mindset focuses first on the aesthetic and second on business goals. As we mature as designers, we realize that while the

aesthetic is important to the overall tone and message, ensuring that the objectives of the project are in line with the client's business goals is ultimately most important.

Designers are somewhat hindered by their view of themselves as uneasy in a verbal culture.

It is as if young designers view design as primarily a matter of individual self-expression, which just happens to take place in an employment context, which involves relationships with the client and other designers. If, on the other hand, these relationships are regarded as integral to design, as is increasingly recognized in the literature on design participation, the skills of verbal-visual translation must be recognized as integral to the design process (Tomes, A., Oates, C., Armstrong, P. 137).

Although designers understand that there are business goals in any design project, we naturally respond to the aesthetics of a solution. Whether conscious or not, we want the client to choose the solution we would consider being most effective. I propose that the emotion present in the right side of our brain when we design is conveyed when presenting and speaking about our work. We are naturally attached to the solutions we "create". Although we make conscious decisions to select the most appropriate solutions, if when we present our work we speak using design terminology conveying emotion, then the client may not be convinced that we solved the problem with business goals as the priority.

This further contributes to the perceptions that businesses have toward designers. I believe it is important that designers understand it is not the design alone that will make or break the success of the project. While the intuitive nature of a designer's brain may always gravitate toward the aesthetic, it does not mean that designers cannot learn to speak about their work in a language that the client can relate in terms of their own business goals.

The language and tone in which we communicate design solutions is a crucial component to establishing trust with the client. As visual problem solvers, it may not be our forte to verbally communicate effectively even though we are in the communications profession. While critiquing work is stressed in an undergraduate design education, the language that we are initially taught to use when speaking about our work is not necessarily understood by the client and certainly not focused on business goals. “To be successful, students have to learn to tell the story of design in contrast to the prevalent view of visual design as something which ought to speak for itself” (Tomes, A., Oates, C., Armstrong, P. 127). This shortcoming needs to be addressed by design educators and will be discussed later in this paper.

The general persona that the design profession represents to society may be another cause of the misconceptions. While the profession wants to stress that the role of the designer is to problem solve, the word “art” continues to be associated with the profession. For example, college art departments typically house graphic design programs where graduates obtain a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. The American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) is the principal professional group for graphic designers and Communication Arts is one of the premier magazines in the graphic design industry. Design award shows are primarily judged by the aesthetic nature of the design and not necessarily, whether or not the solution met the objectives of the project. If the term “art” is associated with design organizations then how can we expect society to look past the perception of design being artistic? While groups within the design profession recognize business as a vital component, there is an inevitable association to the outside world that design merely is an art form. Conscious modifications need to occur in order to educate and communicate the design process more clearly to the client.

In order to understand what makes the relationship between a designer and client successful, we need to look at design firms with success in this arena. Through interviews that are presented in Chapter 3, similarities are revealed that reiterate the importance of engagement, dialogue, language and recognizing value as essential components to success and establishing credibility.



## CHAPTER 3

### BEST PRACTICES OF THREE DESIGN FIRMS

In an effort to highlight, in my opinion, some of the best practices between design and business, I interviewed three designers from multi-disciplinary design firms in the Boston area: Florian Altman, Senior Designer at IDEO, Michael McPherson Partner and Creative Director of Corey McPherson Nash and Andrew Maydoney, Creative Director of Sametz Blackstone. My interest in conducting the interviews was in uncovering techniques that were currently being used in the design profession to influence communication with clients. I was specifically interested in the details of each organizations process, how the client was engaged in this process and what methods were used when conflict arose. The interviews provided much insight to process, personal experience and beliefs that have contributed to the success of each individual and the company in which they are associated. These accounts have enlightened my own understanding of applying communication techniques to the design process. Additionally, the information could stand as a model for enabling students to acquire an understanding of the complete set of skills needed to accomplish a design project successfully.

#### Florian Altman, IDEO

In my interview with Florian Altman of IDEO, I began the conversation inquiring about the design process at IDEO. Florian described it as follows.

IDEO's process begins with dividing the project into five phases, 0-4. The benefit being that the phases act as marketing tools enabling the design team to break down the process into manageable steps.

Phase 0 looks at the project from the largest possible picture. This phase is founded on the idea that previous business philosophies consisted of a client approaching a design firm with their needs already determined. The design firm was simply a vendor making “X”. Today, stakes are much higher in the corporate world. Large corporations especially, are looking for more than just a “vendor” to produce “X” they are looking for a completely thought out solutions to solidify their vision. This vision may be something other than or in addition to what the client had originally come to IDEO for. IDEO serves as the visionary formulating strategies to increase profit as well as business and intellectual properties of their clients. Therefore becoming of significant value to their clients.

IDEO engages in non-traditional approaches that look at their clients, their competition and their products in unique ways. The Deep Dive, IDEO’s practice of investigation, uses various forms of brainstorming to obtain information from numerous points of view. IDEO draws on human factors specialists such as cognitive psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists to team up with the designers and corporate clients to understand the consumer experience. The team literally goes into the environment where that product and its customers exist and observes. By going out into the field, observing and being inquisitive, it allows the designer to get a first hand view of the problem they need to solve. This visual knowledge enables the creative process to start with ideas that may not have been initiated sitting down at a desk.

Phase 1 begins to uncover possible solutions to the problem based on the findings from Phase 0. Once the information is disseminated to the team, each person vocalizes ideas. No idea is considered outrageous and judgment is prohibited. The outrageous ideas are essential to help provide thinking in ways that may not have ever been previously considered. The entire group uses a voting process based on the objectives, to narrow down ideas to possible solutions. This

phase is still very experimental. The designers are producing ideas with the end user in mind in mind in order to develop the best solution. All ideas are possibilities with room for modification.

Incorporated into this phase are prototypes. With the design in its infancy, the prototype allows a conversation to occur between the client and designer that might not have taken place through answering questions on a design brief. The physical entity, whether it is a product or brochure, brings about a dialogue. Suggestions that have not been mentioned previously are considered. Interacting with the possible solution leaves little room for imagination or interpretation. The more information that is articulated in the beginning, the better the results.

During Phase 2, design is implemented. Technical challenges are addressed and worked through. The importance of being thorough in phases 0 and 1 are clearly revealed in phase 2. Without the proper knowledge acquired, the design concept would not be established and therefore the prototype completed in phase 2 would not solve the problem. Cost and time are significant factors during this phase and so it is essential that what is created addresses most of, if not all of the objectives.

Phase 3 consists of detailed engineering of structure and materials. Design is involved, and engineers take over. Transferring the proper knowledge to the engineers is essential so they are able to complete the task with a clear vision of the objectives.

Phase 4 comprises manufacturing the product. Troubleshooting manufactured parts and looking for people who can help produce the final product is included in this phase.

Altman's experiences with the IDEO process have been positive. Occasionally the client may feel overwhelmed with the process due to a lack of experience working with IDEO. Asking questions such as, how can we help you understand what we are doing or what are your

expectations can assist with clarification. It is important for clients to understand that the process is not random and has been consciously designed.

IDEO U was established to help companies understand the process more completely as well as help them unleash their own creative powers. Exercises that are completed through this educational experience deal with specific problems and include brainstorming, leveraging and connecting the right people with one another. Assessing where a company is and where they want to go enables people to think beyond where they typically are, thus creating a long-term effect for their own growth.

With or without engaging in IDEO U, the client is involved in the entire process. If resistance occurs during the process, it is an indication that more time needs to be spent on communication to ensure that the entire team is on the same page. Speaking to a person who is resisting and making the extra effort to involve them in a discussion will engage them in the process and get them on board. This involvement allows for trust and rapport to be developed with the entire team and is advantageous to the present as well as any future interaction.

IDEO's process is used among several disciplines within the company: product development, package design, exhibits and displays, and digital interactions to name a few. Altman's advice is that you have to be flexible when creative problem solving. The trick is to know when to use past experiences and when to ignore them and go with what you think is best for the moment.

Michael McPherson, Corey McPherson Nash (CMN)

I began my conversation with Michael McPherson of Corey McPherson Nash, about the value of design and asked him to elaborate on an article that he wrote entitled, *Redefining “Good design is good business”* (2003). His response was as follows.

Design enhances the branding and definition of a company. Clients hire designers to accomplish these goals. The idea of wanting to “look good” is one of the values that design provides. If the client does not come in to the project thinking what they are about to buy is of value then there is a problem from the start. There shouldn’t be an argument of whether design is of value. It obviously is or else they would not be coming to us in the first place.

We wonder why people have this perception of designers as artists. We are hired not because we are great business people but because we can make things look good. We like the hands on experience – that is who we are. It is important to remember why we got into the field in the first place. We can go overboard if we are too “business minded”, taking the joy out of design. At the same time, our clients need to recognize that our decisions are thoughtful decisions. Not based on personal likes and dislikes, but are applicable to their intended goals. Also, not all design firms have the same level of expertise. Many firms provide a service only and do not pay attention to the strategic component that is essential to the whole solution. These design firms contribute to the confusion of the image of design.

The desire to quantify outcomes of design additionally contributes to the frustration relating to value. A designer would like to speak in the same language as their clients in terms of measurable results of what they do. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to alienate design and measure how the design specifically has an impact on results. A design could be extremely beautiful, meet the criteria and be incredible effective yet fail in the business world. We cannot

save people's businesses. We can only do so much with the design end of it. It is then up to the organization to do its share in order to drive their business.

The business world has begun to recognize design as a means to problem solving. Recently an article appeared in The Harvard Business Review written by Daniel Pink (2004) entitled, *The MFA is the New MBA*. Creative people look at the world in a way that could be of benefit to business innovation. Designers look at how things work visually, how things connect with one another and find new relationships among already existing elements.

### The Design Process at CMN

The process at CMN design begins with a proposal. The proposal works out terms of the agreement, process and schedule. The next phase is messaging and CMN's mantra is define, design and implement. Research is compiled using interviews – both group and individual. Sometimes a research firm is hired and sometimes the client will provide information. The data is clarified and a design brief is delivered.

The design brief provides specifications about the project: objectives, concept, strategy, visual elements and any additional mandatory requirements. While information is typically gathered and delivered during this stage of design, McPherson points out that it is mandatory for his clients to sign the design brief before the project proceeds. Signing the design brief reiterates the importance of the information provided. Clients make changes on completed work when what they see is not in line with their vision. The objectives and vision should be stated clearly in the design brief at the beginning of the relationship. Signing the design brief also justifies having to charge additional money for changes to the design that were not originally acknowledged.

Involving people in the process is essential for the buy-in. If a person enters the process in the middle of development, they will not be aware of prior information. Many times decisions could be made with the knowledge of five people, but twenty people will end up being interviewed. People want to feel they had an influence toward the solution. Ideally, it is best to have all decision makers present for all meetings. This insures that all of the necessary information that would ultimately affect the solution is communicated and accurate.

### An Example: Developing a Naming Platform

CMN was asked to create a new name for a pharmaceutical company. The company had developed a new technology around sugars and they wanted to become a major pharmaceutical company not just a company associated with just sugars; they wanted “big”.

CMN’s naming process consists of two separate brainstorming sessions. The first encompasses thinking where all ideas are possibilities. There is no judgment; anything goes, allowing people to build off of one another. A large trunk full of books, thesaurus, dictionary, cross word puzzles etc, is brought into the room to facilitate ideas. Initial development begins with making associations. In this case, associations are made with things that are big: mountains, Greek Gods, geographic features, and planets – whatever is big. Paper is plastered over the walls of the room for people to write their ideas down. At the end of the brainstorm, everyone votes using a different colored marker. This goes on for approximately three to four hours.

In between sessions, CMN will tally the votes. Any idea receiving more than three to four marks is a potential solution and will be checked for availability within the existing marketplace.

At the second meeting, a large list will be presented of the “winners” from the first brainstorm and further development will continue building off of this initial list. This is a focused,

analytical process. The ideas are then narrowed to five or six choices. Exploration will begin from a legal standpoint at this time to make sure the name doesn't already exist. Focus groups will look at the potential solution and the name will be tested to ensure the name is not offensive in another language.

Participation is an essential component for success of the project and the relationship. McPherson will not work with people who will not participate in the process. If we take the information and go off on our own, come up with a bunch of ideas and then present it to the client it is very difficult to achieve buy in. Specifically with messaging, naming and tag line development, the interaction is essential. If the client is not present during development, they will not understand the process that was engaged in to get to the solution. They have no attachment. If the client is present and involved in the process of coming up with the name then they understand what it took. Embracing the outcome will be much more likely.

### On Being Challenged

In the situation where a client challenges a design decision, CMN refers back to the creative brief to review the objectives of the project. Instead of saying, "I don't like that" CMN focuses the client's feedback to provide specific information to what is not working for them. Ultimately CMN wants to achieve success. If the client is not able to articulate, his or her own thoughts or give direction then it makes it very difficult to achieve the success that is expected. We do our best to negotiate and figure out what the problem is and ninety percent of the time, the problem is resolved. There are times where we just cannot get them to articulate or agree. They have a structure set up where they cannot possibly reach an accord within the company. Sometimes CMN will go the extra mile and sometimes we will part ways.



## Andrew Maydoney, Sametz Blackstone Associates

I sat down with Andrew Maydoney of Sametz Blackstone Associates to discuss the design process and his perceptions of the design profession. Andrew's view on the word creative and how it is used in client discussions was unique to previous insight I had received. His approach consisted of shifting the focus from artifact creation to "How do we best communicate". The discussion that follows, confirmed the positive effects of a clear two-way dialogue and a clear understanding the problem, first and foremost.

Sametz Blackstone was founded as a design firm. Today the practice works hard to define itself as communications consultants—no longer referring to itself as a "design firm". Maydoney views the word design as a problem, because Sametz Blackstone does much more than design. Due to misconceptions by society, the word design takes on extraneous associations that simplify its definition to an "artifact". Maydoney deals with this inaccurate portrayal by being mindful as to how and when he uses the word design. Breaking down design firms into "Big D" and "Little D" design, further clarifies his explanation. Big D design: an answer to a problem, strategic thinking, Little D design: an object, graphic design. Most organizations look at themselves as Little D design and therefore contribute to the misconceptions that exist in society.

Regardless of Maydoney's views on the word design, Sametz Blackstone is a successful and respected communications practice. The organization's ability to guide their clients through the process of uncovering what it is they need is at the forefront of their methodology. This focus comes from the notion that while there is an important creative component to what designer's do, the inevitable solution is always in response and in context to business issues. Sametz Blackstone Associates clearly believes that it is important for their staff to consider themselves "business people" as much as they consider themselves "designers". They work hard to put themselves in

their client's shoes and understand the depth and breadth of the issues the client struggles with daily. They then apply their relatively unique—that is, relative to the client's daily discourse — expertise to help the client address the issues at hand.

### Distillation and Analysis

The process with a client begins with research, distillation and analysis. This includes getting all the facts, figures and information. Sorting it out, analyzing it and coming up with a strategy of how they are going to get the client from where they are at the start of an engagement to where they aspire to ultimately be. It is a big challenge to get people to think about their customer needs before their own organizational concerns.

When a client comes to Sametz Blackstone and pronounces, “We need a brochure”, the firm's immediate response is “How do you know”? This question always begins an in-depth discussion. Often the client's response is that, “the other guy has one”. In this scenario, all the client is looking for is someone to “make X”. While most clients of Sametz Blackstone have an urgent desire to complete their project, convincing them to slow down and thoroughly think through what they really need to communicate, results in a better-quality solution. Further inquiry of how and why the client believes they need “X” uncovers the issues and information that lead to further insight. This process also tends to add depth to the relationship between Sametz Blackstone and it's client.

An example of this process can be shown in their partnership — Sametz Blackstone commonly refers to their client engagements as “partnerships”— with a small travel consultancy. The client needed to respond to significant changes happening within their industry. During the initial meetings, the conversation did not focus on designing brochures and websites. Rather the

focus was on gaining a clear insight to the real problem; understanding the travel discipline and how relevant and competitive organizations were reacting or responding to these changing conditions. Initiating and maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the client on their terms regarding their issues provided knowledge and insight enabling educated decisions to be made.

The initial dialogue does not consist of how many brochures, how many pages or what colors are to be used. Eliminating “formal” design discussions from early conversations prevents preconceived ideas of what the client needs from “formal” design disciplines. It serves as a clean slate to determine the best direction to move forward. It is essential to answer the questions and thoroughly have a discussion before the solution to the problem can be decided. Maydoney encourages the client to speak about the intimate details of their organization and what they foresee their problems are, openly and without judgment. This initial conversation and knowledge sharing, serves as a basis to establish rapport, trust, and confidence.

Understanding the problem should be the principal objective and using verbal skills is the best way for this to occur. If we as designers can refrain from speaking about the creative component of design until the problem is made clear, we can more effectively support the visual solutions presented. Setting the overall tone is essential to establish the projects direction and how the goals will be achieved. Using the word creative in a client meeting has its place and Maydoney does not believe in beginning a conversation about solving a business problem with the word creative. He does not believe that business people want to know that you are going to “get creative” when solving their business concerns — and that design, at its best, is a strategy for addressing business issues. He believes that the term creative is too soft around the edges, too vague and unknown. Business people want to know that the solutions that are presented to them are strategic at the core, rather than purely creative. If we, the designers, overemphasize the visual

components, clients will not understand or feel comfortable with how these words relate to their own business needs. The way the designer engages with the client initially sets the tone and quality of interaction throughout the process.

### The Visual and Verbal Language

In response to the research, distillation and analysis stage, Sametz Blackstone begins to work with words, text and visual building blocks. It is important to lead the visual process with a verbal component. An equally focused effort needs to be made to define what kind of language is going to be used. Enabling the client to have a clear understanding of their objectives makes it easier for them to understand and articulate their thoughts when evaluating a visual and / or verbal solution. The minute someone says, “I like” or “don’t like”, Sametz Blackstone sees “red flags” that a good job was not done during research, distillation, and analysis.

The client inevitably wants to understand and know how the solution is going to help their cause. They are not necessarily interested in hearing about formal design issues familiar to designers—“scale”, “color”, “typography”, “imagery” or worse, designers using explanations such as “cool”, “fresh”, or “feels good.” If the discussion begins to focus on formal design elements like color and image, then the conversation will refocus to likes and dislikes of the visual solution rather than whether the solution fulfills the clients business or organizational objectives.

One-way Sametz Blackstone prevents this scenario, is to educate the client to the preferred ways to respond to visual solutions rather than using “likes and dislikes”. Using language that speaks specifically to the established objectives facilitates better feedback. Good research, distillation, and analysis inspires trust in the visual / verbal solution. This switch in communication refocuses the

client to speak toward the goals of the project and not the visual elements. If this methodology becomes commonplace, Sametz Blackstone believes it would ultimately change the mentality of how clients respond to design.

If someone does respond with “I like that”, the first question that needs to be asked is, “Why do you like that?” If they come back and say “my kitchen is that color” then Sametz Blackstone knows they have really screwed up. Maydoney explains that this typically happens because someone has not participated in the entire process or read the findings and recommendations of their research, distillation, and analysis. It is essential that all decision makers are involved in the entire process on some level. When someone is coming into the process late in the game, when they have not been through previous development nor have any prior knowledge, they tend to cause confusion. Design work gets reduced to purely aesthetic decision-making and is seen as subjective. If this scenario takes place, it is essential to refocus the team towards the initial business goals.

Sametz Blackstone has built education into their process. Education is a key component to establish an understanding of the relationship. Sametz Blackstone does not want to make designers out of the client and likewise they will not become experts in their client’s field. Both client and designer do however, need to be mutually versed enough to make good decisions. They want to work with people who appreciate the design solution. If the conversation starts with questions about their business, it becomes apparent that they are interested in truly knowing about their real business issues.

Ultimately, Sametz Blackstone Associates believes strongly that design is an effective organizational strategy to affect thinking and behavior both within their client organizations and thinking and behaviors of the clients’ customers. To do this in a way that produces optimal

results, Sametz Blackstone works hard to assure that there exists a mutual understanding and respect between their team and the client team members. They use empathy building tools to construct bridges between the disciplines of art and business—they consider this bridge to be design itself—Big “D” design.

The interviews I conducted enabled insight to current design processes within the profession and could serve as a model to students, educators, entry level and mid-level designers. In Chapter 4, I will elaborate on the themes of engagement, dialogue, language and value, as mentioned in the interviews and further explore their significance in the design process.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGEMENT, DIALOGUE, LANGUAGE, AND RECOGNIZING VALUE AS PART OF THE DESIGN PROCESS

IDEO, Corey McPherson Nash (CMN) and Sametz Blackstone are all design firms that use the themes of engagement, dialogue, language and recognizing value as an integral part of their design process. Their success with their clients comes from recognizing that it is not enough to decide on layout, images and colors. Each firm uses various traditional and non-traditional approaches to engage their clients to begin the design process. Whether it is IDEO's Deep Dive, CMN's brainstorming sessions or Sametz Blackstone's distillation and analysis, each firm's approach integrates the client as part of the process. This approach enables a dialogue to occur among the participants. The dialogue encourages further conversation and establishes trust and rapport. Through the conversations, company values and language are revealed. This knowledge contributes to the designer's understanding of the client and their problem. With this information, the designer is able to develop an appropriate solution. Buy-in will be more likely due to the involvement and understanding between the client and the designer.

Each firm approaches the design process using the themes to reach success. Elaborating on these themes will provide added insight to developing the relationship between the designer and client.

#### Engaging the Designer and Client

Involving people in the design process is essential for buy-in. It is also vital to determine how the building blocks of communication are expressed and interact with one another. It is about designing a dialogue and the interaction that comes along with that dialogue. (Sametz, R.,

Maydoney, A. 11). The designed experience needs to consist of engagement, the use of a clear language and focus. “Clients need to feel they are thoroughly involved in the relationship, not like they are being plugged into a wall socket” (Shapiro 272). Clients want to work with partners who truly understand the demands placed upon them. This type of involvement becomes a trust builder in which the designer acknowledges the beliefs of the client. This acknowledgement facilitates the development of the relationship.

“In developing visual tools and interactive exercises for such activities, it is important to consider the style, format, language and comprehensiveness of the ideas communicated. Compared with more static decision making methods, the tools used in the context became a common foundation for better-informed discussion and debate” (Weiss 35). As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the personal experience I had engaging the client in a managed interaction proved a productive means to uncovering the necessary information for the project. “Managing awareness allows a progression of moving people and organizations closer to a community” (Sametz, R., Maydoney, A.16). Meeting with the necessary people to enable success is a starting point to establishing the relationship and community. The appropriate people ensure that the most relevant and appropriate information is being passed along to the design team.

### Beginning with a Dialogue

The ideal scenario in a community would be for the people involved to have conversations with one another that lead to increased understanding. Similar to designing an experience, designing a dialogue can be an effective means to facilitate a relationship. The purpose of a dialogue is to understand and connect in a group. “Dialogue is a conversation in which people think together in a relationship”(Isaacs 19). It is something you do *with* people, not *to* another



person (Isaacs 9). In a dialogue, listening is empathetic and judgment is suspended. People do not speak over one another, but one at a time with space in between each person's response. Slowing down the conversation allows participants to absorb what the previous person has said. This technique is extremely effective with groups of people as it allows each member to reflect on what one another have to contribute. With this reflection come new possibilities.

Thinking together implies that you no longer take your own position as final. You relax your grip on certainty and listen to the possibilities that result simply from being in a relationship with others – possibilities that might not otherwise have occurred...And we seek to uncover a base of shared meaning that can greatly help coordinate and align our actions with our values (Isaacs 19).

The significance of a dialogue as it relates to the discovery phase of design is that it will allow the voice of the client to be heard. Discussion will release concerns. When people know they are being heard, they are much more likely to be an open and willing participant. Conversation and participation assists in the discovery phase and further establishes the relationship.

The knowledge gained from a dialogue enables the designer to uncover existing beliefs, ideas, values and objectives. Current approaches to solving a design problem use a design brief to initiate answers to questions regarding the project. The design brief contains specific questions that help the client vocalize the necessary information and for the designer to begin the creative process. Frequently the questions on the design brief are specific to the project. While this resource is greatly beneficial, it is static and linear. A dialogue would be a resource to facilitate interaction and knowledge sharing. While the design brief is an essential component to gather information, the vocal aspect of a dialogue would enable the client to articulate their beliefs and

business goals. Articulating this information verbally first, will enable the answers on the design brief to be more precise.

Understanding the appropriate information will enable the designer to make better-informed decisions. It will allow the designer to communicate a solution that addresses the client's needs and values.

### Acknowledging Value(s)

Value is acknowledged in two different ways. During the initial stages of the design process, it is important to begin to understand the organizational values of the client. This information is the essence of a company and provides insight to philosophies and perceptions. Acknowledging organizational values is important to the design process. It confirms that the solution and the spirit of the solution is in line with the organizations beliefs.

The other aspect of value has to do with how design adds value to a company. In other words, how the company directly benefits from the design solution. The design of literature or a product can directly contribute to company growth through profits, market share and customer recognition.

Understanding the organizational belief system of a company assists the designer in making decisions that will increase the company's bottom line. Referring to this belief system when presenting a solution will assist with buy-in needed from the client. If the design is conveyed inappropriately by aesthetic decisions, then the solution will not be correct. Hearing and acknowledging what the client values greatly contributes to the decisions made by the designer.

The following design solution is an excellent example of incorporating the values of an organization into a design solution. Design firm Sametz Blackstone addressed a project assisting a

sales force of a global provider of enterprise-wide information. This organization had created printed sales materials that were not responsive to the needs of the sales force or its customers. Due to the inadequacy of the forms, the salespeople left the documents in unopened boxes. Alternatively, individual sales offices began to customize the forms to adapt to the cultural differences among offices. This stood to give the sales force control over the information, but created inconsistency for the company's overall brand (Sametz, R., Maydoney, A. 15).

The solution took into consideration two main goals of the sales teams; developing culturally appropriate materials and the ability to customize the forms.

A newly designed marketing collateral system, designed and configured from an understanding of the organization's strategic and operational needs (and history), provided not only new materials, but new ways to think about, create, and use collateral materials.... The value delivered a more effective, culturally appropriate product; a more involved sales force; materials produced in less time for less money and the ability to send out updates, globally, for almost no money. It created flexibility to respond to changes in offerings quickly...All this from a design solution – favorable results in six areas (Sametz, R., Maydoney, A. 15).

As with the above example, the strategy behind the solution added value to a business problem rather than just satisfying a temporary need. This would not have been created if the designer did not recognize the needs of the sales force. Designers who provide service and value to their clients enable a longer and more involved relationship. This solution would not have been successful if Sametz Blackstone simply went in and reconfigured the existing business form. It took a clear understanding of what the sales force valued in order to develop a successful solution.

A designer's familiarity with the client's mission improves collaboration and understanding of communication concerns that need to be resolved. The core internal process and objectives of a company defines the client's thinking and language. The views of the client should be the basis upon which the designer's translate the design solutions. Understanding how the client thinks is yet another essential component in developing a working relationship.

### Understanding Language

In order to articulate the most appropriate solution to the client, designers need to know their client and the project completely. Being aware of the client's goals in detail will allow the designer to speak in a language that the client will recognize and appreciate.

When presenting a design solution, the designer is taught to speak toward the aesthetic of the design as it relates to the goals of the client. While doing this however, if the designer uses technical terminology such as visual hierarchy, focal point, and breathing room the client may not understand, not only these words, but how the these words relate to their business goals. In order for design solutions to be appreciated, it is essential that the client understand the language used as it relates to their own values and the objectives of the project.

The manner in which a designer presents a solution is significant to recognize. During the initial phase of the design process, it is important that the designer pays attention to the language used by the client. Incorporating the client's language into the presentation of the design solution will bring a clear understanding of how solution relates to business values and goals. If a client understands the basis for design decisions, they will be less likely to make changes to proposed solutions. There should be no reason to prevent buy-in due to the level of involvement throughout the entire process.

Boston based interactive media firm, BigBad, Inc., reiterates the strategy of the project before showing the design solution to the client. This technique reminds the client of the initial objectives established and reintroduces appropriate language for the client to use when giving feedback. This method also allows for productive feedback. Stating that “I do/don’t like “X” does not clearly communicate. Obtaining objective and specific feedback is needed both for the success of the project but also for the success of the relationship.

“How language is used and leveraged has always been in the communication designer’s toolbox, but may not always be fully utilized” (Sametz, R., Maydoney, A.12). Designers tend to be more visually articulate. While inevitably this is what we are hired to do, we also need to verbalize the meanings behind the visual we create. This is what enables the client to understand, rationalize and be comfortable with solutions. How we vocalize ourselves, our overall attitude, our body language all contribute to the level of understanding and a clear approach to communication.

## CHAPTER 5

### TOOLS THAT FACILITATE BRAINSTORMING AND RELATIONSHIPS

As discussed in chapter 4, engaging people in a dialogue, using language that is understood as well as acknowledging value(s) are essential components to the success of a relationship between a designer and their client. This type of engagement allows people to become more comfortable with one another therefore enabling a meaningful and informative dialogue to emerge. “Designers always search for tools that add breadth and value to their endeavors” (Walton 9).

One very popular tool to facilitate ideas and relationships is brainstorming. Brainstorming engages people. When people share ideas and knowledge, they feel more comfortable with one another, the process and let their guard down. In order to begin to brainstorm, the problem needs to be clearly articulated. “ A brainstormer without a clear problem statement is like a company without a clear strategy: You’ll wander aimlessly and need a lot of luck or talent to succeed” (Kelly 57).

“Success depends on both *what* you do and *how* you do it” (Kelly 5). While there are a countless number of books and tools available for engaging people, I propose the following as a beginning for designers to assemble their own handbook of tools for use in client meetings. These tools will begin the dialogue and further establish the relationship needed for success.

#### Make a Complaint List

Making a complaint list is particularly helpful when a client is unsure of their problem. Participants brainstorm a list of complaints that would be made by those who could be affected by the situation (Greenwald 28). It has been found that the best topic statements focus outward on a

specific customer need rather than focusing inward on the organizational goal (Kelly 57).

It is sometimes difficult for an organization to see this perspective however inevitably; it is the customer's requests that need to be satisfied to increase the bottom line of business. The complaint list will seek to look at what the customer may not be satisfied with and uncover what changes need to be addressed.

### Storytelling

Storytelling creates associations between a problem and common scenarios that people are able to relate to in "their own world". Stories stick in people's minds and help to understand complexities "In client relationships storytelling can break down barriers, nurture interaction and translate statistics and abstract facts into realities that engage people and their thinking" (Walton 9). Connecting a company's problem with traditions, heroes, and physical objects can serve to give a personal connection to a rather abstract scenario (DeLarge 76). Additionally, storytelling could be an approach to enable clients to understand the design process. Whether it is at the beginning or at the end of a project, designers could use storytelling to help reinforce their decisions. "Stories give life, context, and order to facts" (DeLarge 76).

### K-N-F Diagram

The K-N-F diagram, initiates thinking by asking three questions: what do you know, need to know and how do you find out? This technique can be implemented by dividing a piece of paper into three vertical columns and listing the questions, in column form, followed by the responses (Greenwald Appendix A). Seeing this information visually will prompt action and or alternative ways to solve the problem at hand

### Asking a Better Question

Asking questions such as “what if” or “what else” allows a person to suspend assumptions and get into an imaginative frame of mind (van Oech 74)“What if” questions are not specific and can take on any form that is appropriate for the task. These types of questions help to generate original ideas that have no correlation to any previous experiences. This makes it easier to unleash unique perspectives on existing problems.

### Prototypes

Prototypes are typically used in three-dimensional disciplines but can also be adapted to a two-dimensional discipline as well. The prototype is a physical response to the information gathered during the design process and is a generalized idea. These incremental reviews throughout the process reduce any anxiety of the unknown for the client. The goal is to get a reaction from the client, make mistakes and discoveries early. Prototyping helps to resolve critical problems one by one (Kelly 106). Interacting with a physical object prompts the client to verbalize their thoughts. “Quick prototyping is about acting before you’ve got the answers, about taking chances, stumbling a little, but then making it right” (Kelly 107). If the client views a physical entity throughout the process then there are no “surprises” at the final presentation. Buy-in is not necessary.

### Being Playful

The worst scenario in a brainstorming session would be to start with critiquing the ideas that are mentioned. The purpose of the brainstorming session is to come up with as many ideas as possible, eliminating nothing initially. The more ideas there are, the more possibilities that exist. Judgment should be suspended at all times during this process.



Incorporating physical objects, to “play” with also encourage ideas during the brainstorming process. These objects can be just about anything from silly putty, to play-dough, to a stress ball or building blocks. The sense of touch distracts participants just enough so they do not focus too intently on the problem. A relaxed atmosphere allows more ideas to be generated.

### Brainwriting – Building Upon Others Ideas

The basic brainstorming rules apply: strive for many ideas; encourage silly or impractical ideas; combine and piggyback ideas, withhold judgment (Greenwald 34). Plaster the walls of a room with paper, and hand out markers to the entire group. Each participant rapidly writes down ideas based on the problem. Visually seeing ideas will prompt more ideas to generate.

This technique used by CMN Design in Chapter 3 of this paper, was a way to generate names for a new pharmaceutical company. Once all ideas are exhausted, the participants go back and “vote” for ideas that appear to be worth looking at further.

### Image Lists

The previous technique used words to brainstorm. A visual component can also be added to brainwriting. Illustration skills aside, drawing a small representation of the ideas and or words can be a source for generating additional ideas. The visual component allows for associations and connections to be made that may not have been recognized without actually seeing a representation of what is being referred to.

### 100mph Thinking

The premise behind 100mph thinking is that speed does not kill. Participants come up with lots of ideas in a short amount of time (Monahan 90). Speed silences the judge. There is no time to be critical if the focus is on writing down ideas rather than the results. The goal should be the number of ideas, not the quality of ideas. The more ideas you come up with the greater chance for

a great idea. “If you come up with more ideas, you’ll have more ideas...Speed give you momentum of thought, which silences the judge, circumvents fear, and makes failure less painful (Monahan 91).”

### Metaphorically Speaking

Similar to storytelling, metaphors take a complex idea and make it easier to understand. “Metaphors help us to understand one idea by means of another” (von Oech 48). Listing specific characteristics of the elements that are being compared will allow the problem solver to make comparisons and connections that may not have been seen previously. These new connections could potentially serve as a means to the creation of new ideas.

### Client Brief

The client brief includes answers to question specifically about the client and their organization. Questions would elicit knowledge about expectations, company values, project goals and information about their customers. Conclusions on the client brief should comprise the necessary information to clearly understand the client and their organization’s mindset and the problem that needs to be resolved.

### Design Brief

The design brief seeks to acquire a detailed account of the project; including the problem, objectives, audience, spirit, message and strategy. This is a vital component to the success of the project as it seeks to answer the questions that are necessary to make the best decisions for the solution.

The tools mentioned are used to engage the client in the design process. Based upon the knowledge from these brainstorming sessions, the designer would then fill out the client and design brief reiterating this information. The client would then read over these documents for

accuracy. These documents are the culmination of the brainstorming sessions and are vital to the design direction to be taken. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Michael McPherson of CMN Design has his clients sign the design brief. This reiterates the importance of the information.

### Using Problem Solving Tools in a Design Curriculum

The abovementioned information is implemented into scenarios involving clients who may or may not know what they need. These techniques can also be implemented into a design curriculum to assist students with design projects.

In the Concept Development course that I teach, I have students implement these tools for creative thinking to solve projects. Once the project is handed out and reviewed, a design brief is distributed. Answering the questions on the design brief before the brainstorming process begins, focuses the students on the goals of the project. An alternative to the design brief would be for the students to write an objective statement. This would simply be the design brief consolidated into paragraph form. Either way, having students articulating the goals of the project before embarking on idea generation keeps them focused. Additionally, when it is time to present their work, they will have a clear vision to speak of both the verbal and visual solution. This teaching style can apply to any design class. If students begin to recognize and articulate project goals beginning in their freshman year, by the time they graduate, the skill will become a part of their design repertoire.

To further a student's knowledge of engaging the client in a dialogue, concept development skills, such as brainstorming tools, can also be incorporated into the design curriculum. Currently the way concept development is presently structured is to go over a technique, such as 100mph thinking, and then have the students use this technique as part of their

own development process. By the end of the semester, they have several tools that they are familiar with to implement to further their own thinking. The development process consists of using tools in addition to creating thumbnails and roughs that are typical of the design process. Placing emphasis on this skill set will not only improve their own creative thinking, but it will also furnish them with a set of tools to engage other people with when necessary.

## CHAPTER 6

### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This synthesis spoke to the themes of engagement, dialogue, language and value as they contribute to improved communication between a designers and clients. Placing emphasis on these themes will enable clients to understand how design solutions evolve. This will aid in helping to eliminate current misconceptions. “These discussions keep the client-designer relationship vital and demonstrate that the designer is aware of the bigger picture and truly concerned about the “success” of the product as a function of the design” (Hoffman 2).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the approach that I had taken to work with a client contributed to the success of the project. This new approach applied the themes of engagement, language, dialogue and value. If the skill set of nurturing relationships is emphasized as a part of the design process in design school, then verbalizing the visual will be a natural skill for designers as they embark on their career.

Part of the responsibility lies with design schools. If design schools only emphasize the aesthetic, then we get a lot of pretty designs that may or may be viewed as irrelevant to business goals. While becoming passionate and having a thorough understanding of design is necessary, students need to understand that a large component of the design profession is business. Incorporating communication emphasizing problem solving and how to speak to clients and their business goals, in their own language, is an essential component to the future of the design profession.

I suggest that more emphasis is placed on establishing a rapport and communicating the information before a solution can be developed. A focus needs to be placed on the verbal and

visual dialogue equally in a well-rounded design education. Design students need to learn how to speak to the reasoning behind their ideas and past the aesthetic. Public speaking courses should be a requirement for all design students to help to build the confidence needed to clearly articulate solutions to a problem. While a design education teaches students how to critique work, the wording used during those critiques primarily emphasizes the principles and elements of design. Not enough emphasis is placed upon how design solutions relate to the objectives. “Students have to learn to tell the story of design in contrast to the prevalent view of visual design as something which ought to speak for itself” (Tomes, A., Oates, C., Armstrong, P. 127). Repetition of this lesson in the classroom will reiterate the importance of the skill and give students experience using the language in context before entering the professional world. This change would stand to increase the credibility of design by producing designers who speak towards business goals when presenting design solutions.

### Professional Development

Development of problem solving and communication techniques within a design firm is one way to further develop the repertoire of the design profession. This type of education places ownership onto the design firms to further educate their employees. Development of these skills will empower employees by continuously adding value for their clientele, and foster their own intrinsic motivation that is needed to remain a productive.

Organizations who want their people to maintain a certain rapport with their clients thereby furthering their own business goals should be responsible for that education. Design Continuum, a product design firm in Newton, Massachusetts, realized this and developed a training program with this practice in mind. “These training sessions help our designers place

their projects in a business context and create a common language for communicating about them with clients” (Finiw 79).

Marketing 101 - Covers the basic marketing P’s: people, product, price, place, promotion and positioning. The goal of this course is to recognize that the center of our universe is not necessarily the center of the client’s universe. Understanding what pressures and priorities the client is facing is vital to a productive working relationship (Finiw 79).

Market Research 101 - Offers common tools for making business decisions. For instance, it teaches designers how to intelligently analyze research provided by clients and builds their skills in advising clients on what types of research might be most appropriate at different stages of the design development process (Finiw 79).

Clientopia – The concept of clientopia (a fictitious word) involves speaking with a former client to get feedback on their experience working with Design Continuum. Specifically it describes how the project fit into the client’s other initiatives, compared with other job responsibilities and what aspects of our project process and deliverables were valuable to them and why (Finiw 79).

The training resulted in behavioral changes and will ultimately benefit the entire team.

The experience enables employees to be thoroughly integrated into the process and this experience will enrich the design firm as well as the client experience. It will make the designers more aware of additional roles they need to add to their expertise. These additional skills will make them more valuable in the long run to clients and their employers in solving business problems.

## Personal Development

Through my experiences as a designer, working with clients and colleagues and the knowledge acquired through the CCT program, I have a newfound appreciation for establishing relationships and working with people both in the design process and on a personal level. As I wrote in the introduction of this paper, recognizing and implementing a dialogue with one of my clients enabled that relationship to be extremely effective. Reflecting on client relationships that were not productive, I now understand and recognize the problem. There was never any level of trust or rapport established, and in turn, prohibiting any type of productive dialogue to occur.

The main issues touched upon in this synthesis spoke about the misconceptions of design, participating in a dialogue, recognizing value, cultivating relationships and speaking in a common language. While these characteristics appear obvious to me now as components of success, I do not believe that these would have been as obvious had I not embarked on this experience of improving myself with knowledge and reflection. When I look back as to the purpose of choosing the CCT program over an MFA program, I concluded that what I needed to progress in my career was a means to articulate my creativity. As my career evolves and I interact with clients more frequently, I now have the understanding to confidently engage clients in fostering a relationship that would far surpass being considered a “vendor”.

Currently as an educator of design at The New England Institute of Art, I feel inspired to initiate change in the way I teach my students to speak about their work. Due to my personal experiences with clients, I can speak from example. Business is a substantial component to the design profession. I now have the opportunity to initiate those philosophies into a design curriculum. Recently I have begun to do so with the courses that I teach (see Chapter 5).



I believe the students understand and appreciate these lessons as well. My goal would be to enable students to speak fluidly about their work and the reasoning behind their decisions.

Designing a curriculum that teaches students to speak to a design solution as it relates to a client's goals and values would be one initiative well worth its time. If the design profession would like to continue to move forward as an integrated component to business success, then personal and professional change needs be initiated. Change does not occur by itself and we can change each other. "We all need to contribute, maintain integrity. Make a positive impact and develop a sense of mastery in our work. These are all outcomes that no one can give us" (Block, 1983).

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