

why

do you design?

Progress is the great human ambition—
it binds us together, it connects us to history,
it is the stepping stone to a more
promising future.

As designers, when we point our own
ambitions at solving the problems
that stand in the way of progress, we can
play a vital catalyzing role.

True power as a designer comes
when we realize that to solve any problem
we will work with many partners,
collaborators, even co-conspirators.

In some of these cases,
we'll be the lead, the ultimate shepherd
of the problem-solving effort.

In other cases, we'll follow the lead of...

a **visionary** designing an inventive new
product,

a **CEO** designing a new company,

a **mayor** designing a new downtown,

a **government official** designing a clearer
ballot,

an **eco-environmentalist** designing a better
way to transport people,

a **teacher** designing a better way to learn
math,

a **not-for-profit** designing a better process
for funding meaningful works.

Once we start to see our role as catalysts
in the process of designing,
entirely new opportunities open up
in front of us.

Not only opportunities where we can
design objects—products, brochures, logos,
books, posters and the like.
But where our approach to thinking
can also play a huge role.

That's because from the most intimate causes to the largest worldstage events, the process of designing—its overall approach—is consistent. The most successful organizations and individuals follow a common pattern of success in their work when tackling tough problems.

Defining the problem



Innovating



Generating value



1

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Successful teams first define the problem they are trying to solve—they articulate it and give it boundaries (*what's part of the problem, what's outside our control*).

They call upon designers to help cull, visualize, express that problem in human terms—looking at it from many different views.

2

ENVISIONING THE DESIRED END STATE (KNOWING WHAT VICTORY LOOKS LIKE)

(If you've ever been part of a team that seemed lost, it's likely this step got skipped.)

Knowing what victory is becomes vital when embarking on the journey of solving the problem.

As designers, we can help prototype the end state (*through scenarios, models, journey maps, et cetera*).

3

DEFINING THE APPROACH BY WHICH VICTORY CAN BE ACHIEVED

Once you know where you want to go
(*as defined in #2*), you need to create a map
to get there. That map must be imprinted in
the minds of every participant along the way.
Designers can literally make the map real.

4

INCITING SUPPORT—AND THEN ACTION

In some cases, not everyone will want
to make the journey. They'll need to be
inspired. Convinced. Cajoled. Educated.

As designers, we call on our skills
as communicators to help them see why
they should come along.

5

SEEKING INSIGHT TO INFORM THE PROTOTYPING OF THE SOLUTION

Once a band of gypsies, so to speak, is assembled, the next task is to look at the work ahead and be smart about it. Often it pays to take pause and seek insight that will enable the team to prototype a solution. That means research. Designers can help structure that research, especially in reporting its findings.

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PROTOTYPING POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Then comes prototyping a solution. That might mean physically prototyping it: building it in miniature, or as a one-off, to see if it will work. Or, it might mean prototyping a new customer experience—a collection of moments that make up an experience. In either case, designers play a critical role.

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DELINEATING THE TOUGH CHOICES

A good prototype (*or prototypes*) unearths all sorts of unexpected data and insight.

And from that, tough choices emerge.

Should we include this feature, or that?

What if the solution costs more than people can afford? What if there are downsides?

Designers can make the choices evident.

8

ENABLING THE TEAM TO WORK AS A TEAM

And, when integral to the project, designers can help the team work as a team.

Helping them make choices.

Envisioning different outcomes.

Seeing the “whitespace” that connects divergent views and approaches.

9

CHOOSING THE BEST SOLUTION, THEN ACTIVATING IT

This is the culmination of many steps of hard work. If we do our jobs right, we can often be the pivotal voice in this step, helping argue for the best overall solution—we can visualize the case, see different sides of the problem and lay out a path for making a commitment to a given solution.

10

MAKING SURE PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT YOUR SOLUTION

Once a solution is chosen, the task becomes to ensure that people—customers, constituents, employees—know about it. In a traditional sense, this is about marketing the idea. In a deeper sense, it's about enabling people to support the solution—be it a product, ballot initiative or service.

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SELLING THE SOLUTION

In most cases, an exchange of money or time will be involved—between seller and buyer, creator and participant, sponsor and beneficiary. That process is greatly helped by design, so that people know “what they’re buying,” and what it’s worth.

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RAPIDLY LEARNING AND “TACKING” BASED ON YOUR SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

The most effective teams are those who constantly learn. Strive. Improve. Designers can help take the team back through the journey, recounting the steps where good decisions were made and where the team could act differently next time.

*"It used to be that designers made an object
and walked away. Today the emphasis must shift
to designing the entire life cycle."*

—Paul Saffo

*"If I'm going to talk about design, that purely arbitrary and
immensely human construct, I should say that
by design I mean the process both physical and mental
by which people give an order to objects, community,
environments and behavior."*

—Bill Stumpf

"Everything is design. Everything!"

—Paul Rand

*AIGA is committed to advancing the understanding of
the value of design and the process of designing
through advocacy, education, publications,
conferences and spirited conversations.
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professional designers in the United States.*

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