



Tom Kelley:

So, I don't know if any of you have ever noticed this, but I have found that when I meet successful people, I like to ask them about their personal journeys. And when I ask them about their personal journeys, what they almost always say is they kind of zigged and zagged on the way to their success, right? That, you know, those high school, I mean, those college placement offices lay out this kind of linear thing, you do this and this and this. But if you talk to actual humans, they, it's slightly more complicated than that. And so, this next speaker, Jeffery Zeldman, is no exception to this zigzag rule. When I asked him about his background, the first thing he said was, I failed at many things before I succeeded at the web. He was a musician. He was a journalist writing for the Washington Post. He wrote three novels, none of which, I think, are available on Amazon. He worked at an ad agency, but you know, he's kind of wandering along, kind of, but he said, you know, when he found the web, it was like his spiritual home. And so, succeed he has in the web world. He has a ten year old zine, it's called A List Apart. He has his own conference, it's called An Event Apart. He has his company called Happy Cog. And he's quite the whirlwind in the world of the web. He said when he started his first website he worked on, was a commercial one, for Warner Brothers, the second one was his own, jefferyzeldman.com, I believe, and he said back then, he said there were only three million people on the web and 1.5 million were visiting my site. So think of that. Pretty good. Fifty percent market share of people visiting the web. Pretty good. So, please welcome Jeffery Zeldman.

[Applause]

Jeffrey Zeldman:

Hi. How is everyone? How many of you work on websites? How many of you have websites? How many don't have websites? See me after the show.

[Laughter]

Okay, I'm going to get my little clicker. So, usually when I give this talk, I talk at great length, and here I'm going to talk at short length, so we're going to see what happens. It's going to be as mysterious to me as it is to you. The basic thrust of the talk is trying to make websites that are actually meaningful and reach, connect with people and a lot of the involves understanding what web design is and isn't. So, one of the things you may have noticed if you ever look for ads for web designers, is that they, a lot of skills are required of them, a lot of things are required of them, but most importantly, the most important thing a web designer needs, I believe, is empathy. And I'll explain what I mean by that.

Here's an example in reverse, where it's easier to explain by showing something that's the opposite. Who recognizes this website? Or this brand? Anyone? Okay, real.com. Is anyone here from Real? Okay, good, then I can tell these terrible lies. Okay, so, this is a very famous page where the needs of the person visiting the page are not taken into account. One thing that's famous about this page, and this is the homepage from a couple of years ago. One thing that's famous about this page, everything that looks like a link, isn't a link. And everything that doesn't look like a link, is a link, with the exception of the big free download

button. That actually is a link. So, one, just in case you've figured it out, then there a little Zen, no, we got you again. No this one actually is a link. There's a reason for that. It's not because the people are incompetent, the people are very competent. It's a Seattle company. It started from nowhere. It's huge. Everyone working there is very talented, a lot of hours put in, a lot of research done. So, how could they make a site where everything was backwards? Well, there were two corporate strategies at war with each other. One corporate strategy for Real is, we make this great free player and if we don't give it away, then Microsoft is going to own that part of the web, too. So, we don't want Microsoft's player to dominate, we don't want Apple's player to dominate, we want our player to dominate, so let's make it easy to find our free real player and give it away free and everything is cool. The other part of the company says we have this great pro-player and that's the one that actually pays us money and so we want to sell the pro-player and in order to sell the pro-player, we have to make it kind of hard to find the free player. So, when you get the web content that requires the Real player, says to go to real.com, we'll keep moving the page where the free player's located so none of our, no partner that's using our content will ever link directly to that page. They'll just link to real.com and we'll make the home page difficult for those people to find. So, basically what's happening is there's these two groups internally that are at war with each other and who loses initially is the consumer because those who are looking for the pro-player can't find it. Those who are looking for the free player can't find it, and who loses ultimately is Real and indeed they have, their player doesn't dominate this space because they couldn't decide what to do.

But another example -- so that's lack of empathy. That's lack of thinking about the user for lack of a better word. This is a site called ConsumerSearch. It's going through a redesign. It may already be nothing like this. Partly what we're looking at here is the result of what happens when you have a website and have lots of people work on it for ten years and there's no one really in charge of it and different people come and go and different strategies are tried and some things sort of end up, and you know, a lot of websites are like that, a lot of pioneering websites that came on early and never changed and never got sort of organized or structured, never did any usability testing, end up like this where there's just lots of stuff and it's all confusing. And so, again, the problem is lack of empathy, lack of concern for the user. This is a website with, although you couldn't tell from looking at it, really rich, wonderful consumer content. It's got, it's essentially like Consumer Reports. It's like Consumer Reports. So, there's all kinds of equipment in it, if you're looking for, oh, I don't know, toboggan seat belts, right, you could probably find them here. You could probably find reviews of toboggan seat belts here if that's what you're looking for. So, to make it obvious that that's what they have, they have links of everything they've got on the site so you can click through the links.

Now, to some extent this works. There's a wonderful usability expert named Jared Spool, I don't know if any of you've seen Jared talk or read any of his books or anything like that, but Jared talks about the scent of information. This is the theory that people on the web are like hunters in the forest looking, going, 'Deer droppings, I'll go this way. Blood! Did someone attack the deer?' If they keep feeling the scent, if they keep, if they're like, we hunt like

animals hunt, by scent and by clues and if we feel like we keep getting fresh clues we'll keep going in that direction. And if you feel like the clue trail is getting cold, then we're going to go in a different direction, by hitting the back button, or going to a different website or closing the window. So, to some extent, there's some success in this website in that, for the person who hits command-F a lot, who uses Google and then hits command-F or control-F, to find a keyword, this website might actually work. But for anyone who looking for romance, sex appeal, editorial control, seduction, brand, anything, design, it fails and it even fails in that same kind of weird rudimentary ways, like on the right side, there are things that look like ads that are ads, but on the very next screen, the things that look like ads, aren't ads, they're some of the most important content on the site. So, we're just on the first screen, trained the user to ignore the content on the right because it's an ad, and on the second screen, we're now telling the user, this is the most important, the user has no way of knowing, and the visual treatment is the same because it's a template, and it's an old template and it was designed for one use case and not updated when the use case changed.

Okay. Now, it's very hard to become a good web designer. It takes tremendous motivation. For one thing, there's no, as yet, there's no really great educational programs specifically for web design. There are great design programs out there, we all know that. But most design programs, when they come to covering the web, kind of say, well here's Flash and Photoshop and Illustrator and have a nice day which is kind of like teaching people how to use Excel and Word and saying, alright, now you've got an MBA. Turn that company around, you know how to use Excel, right, so you should be okay. A good education is hard to find. There are some new programs starting. There's a program in interaction design that Liz Danzico has started at School of Visual Arts, that's here in New York. It's going to be pretty interesting. But there aren't a whole lot of web design interaction programs yet that really teach the fundamentals of empathetic design, which are usability, bandwidth, band, everything from usability to bandwidth matters because not every, you know, not everyone has the high speed connections we have at our office.

Okay. This is A List Apart Magazine. This is our magazine. We tried to find out something about web designers. We initially commissioned the New York Public Library's research department to tell us everything that was known about web designers and they came back and said we can't. Nothing's known. We said, what do you mean? They said there's no-- we said, well, the web's 13 years old, it generates billions in income, every company has a website, many companies have, like, moved from bricks and mortar. Surely there's some information about people whose full-time job is, or part-time job is to do work on websites. And they said no, there's ITs, is that the same? We said no, it's not really the same. So, we put out, this is the second year we've done this, we put out a survey basically stealing an idea from AIGA, we put out a salary survey. It's not exactly a salary survey, we put out a survey and 33,000 people took the survey and answered the questions, and then we hired some really smart people from MIT and Stanford to help us slice the data and find out things about, find out actual things about at least those 33,000 people. And, you know, those 33,000 people may not represent you, or they may not represent someone in a specific job in a specific country, but they give us the first glimpse of what do we know about web designers. And

some of the things we've learned is that only about half the people considered their education relevant at all. We can slice that different ways. The richer you are, the less likely you are to think that your education had any relevance to your job.

[Laughter]

Right? And that's counterintuitive. I mean, if I've got 60,000 dollars in student loans that I'm paying off, it should have gotten me some salary. But one way of looking, we then sliced it again with age, and so, one reason for this, one reason for this discrepancy is, the older you are, the less likely you are to think that your education was relevant and probably the more money you're making if we, if we see how those things line up. As you get older, you get more salary, not because you're necessarily better, but because you have more responsibilities and you demand more salary, right, and your hair's grayer so you're more impressive so you get more salary. And if you're younger, there's more chance that you actually studied something related to web design in college. And if you're older, you probably studied candle-making, and it's not relevant, so...

[Laughter]

Okay, and then another way of looking at a, we also looked by title. So, designers tended to say their education was relevant and that makes some sense, right, if your primary job on the web is as a designer, you might have gone to design school and that might be relevant. But if your primary job is editorial director, or project manager, you probably didn't study that in college, you probably studied philosophy, so again, not relevant. Another problem for web designers, it's not a field that confers tremendous respect. Even if you just say you're a designer, there's a great deal more respect that comes from that, but if you say you're a web designer, if that's what you actually do, it's not the same as like, you know, you sit down next somebody on an airplane and you say, what do you do, and they say I'm an architect and you immediately imagine they went to a very good school, they're dressed very well, they probably have an immaculately gorgeous home they designed themselves, they probably drilled 500 feet into the ground so that they could green, have green heating and cooling in their home, all that stuff. When I started web design in 1995 and I would, people would say, what do you do and I would say I'm a web designer, at first they were mystified, then they were excited and then as Razorfish rose, they became very excited because they thought I meant I was a millionaire. So they would say what do you do? And I would say, I'm a web designer. And they'd go, ooh, wow, one of those. I saw that on, Dan Rather had one of those guys, you know. And then around 2000, after the bust, someone sat down next to me and said what would you do if I said I was a web designer, and they would sort of change seats, or. And that was all kind of sad.

Another, standardization of titles may be another problem area in that there isn't any. One of the things again we found out from the survey, was that the type of organization you work for has something to do with your title, so for instance, at a more traditional organization, at a university, or at a library, a person might be called, or in a law firm, a person might be called, I'm not equating law firms and universities, I'm just saying where, where their

primary business isn't the web and where they have a more traditional business, the kind of old school title like webmaster may apply. Someone else could be doing the same exact job, or very similar job at a startup and their job there is user experience director. Same job, but webmaster kind of has this, the person who fixes the machines when the break quality to it and user experience director or user experience designer doesn't. Right, experience designer, user experience designer has, again, more start-uppy, conveys thinker, brand aware, some kind, some kind of intellectual baggage coming with the person and the other, the other title kind of conveys they know a lot of code, but it may be the same job. The ownership of the website is another area where, that creates problems where we're just trying to have good web experiences and good web gains. The, there's almost never a web department. It's changing a little bit. In fact it's changing just in the year I've been talking about this, it's begun changing. I've notice a change when I ask people to raise their hands, so I'll do it again. Who works in a web department of their company? Okay, I think there were two hands up. Okay, so mostly not. And that can be fine if you work at a corporation and you work in the design department, that probably is where you should be, but these are org charts and I like org charts because they remind me of Edgar Allen Poe and The Cask of Amontillado. That's the story where the guy get his love enemy drunk and then buries him alive, or walls him up in, anyone remember that story? That's how I feel when I look at the org charts.

[Laughter]

Okay, but there are two things you can take away from looking at an org chart. One is, your website should never be structured along the lines of your org chart. If your website's reflecting your org chart instead of what a person might want to do when encountering your web presence, then you have no empathy, you haven't thought about the user and no matter what you are going to fail. And one reason I'm talking about this today is because I'm a web designer, but another reason I'm talking about it is because people are downsizing, they're firing 10 percent of their staff, their cutting 10 percent of their benefits, and cutting other costs. This is not a very good time to throw \$50,000 or \$100,000 or \$250,000 at a website that's going to be ineffective, that's not going to connect you to the people who come to learn about your business or to interact with you. This is the time to spend every dollar wisely and that means having a website that's effective and that's well designed and that, where the user experiences start with the user, right? So, the first thing is, if you're just basing it on the org chart, you're doing something wrong right there. And the second thing about the org chart is to notice that there is never, almost never, a web division, so people from, and if I had a little light here I would point to the slides, but people from one part and people from another part, and people from another part all seem to come together from random clusters to put websites together. So maybe there's someone from graphic design on the fourth floor who does something in Photoshop and maybe knows about the web, maybe doesn't know about the web, maybe also has to do a report at the same time as five other designs assignments so they bang something out and maybe that gets taken by someone that doesn't know much about the web to let's say a developer and the developer says I can't design, I can't code that. That's a terrible design, send it back. And then there's an argument where

the person from IT and the person from design, the two bosses, are sort of arguing with each other, defending their employee and there's no one really advocating for the user or the web experience because that, that little, that little silo doesn't exist. So, instead, these little camps are having turf battles and depending on whether design or IT is up that day, or who picked up lunch last time or whatever, that's what the result you're going to have and it's almost never about the user. Okay. People don't get rich designing websites. Okay. Thanks. We did a little more research that I'll just share with you before moving on, but one of the other things that we found out was that the same prejudices that exist on the web, that exist everywhere else in life, also exist on the web, oddly enough. So, for instance, we asked people what they thought, whether there's prejudice against them because of ethnicity or age or gender and then we compared that to what they actually earned and what their titles were and we sort of evaluated title in a different way and what we found, for instance, was women who perceived there to be prejudice against women had better titles and made more money than women who perceived there not to be prejudice against women. I have 17 theories about why that is, but...

[Laughter]

Okay. So, people are, when people hire you to design a website, or when people, or when your boss walks down the stairs and says, we need to update our website, where are they getting their information? And where are they deciding what good web experiences are? Well, one place they're looking, they're looking at competitions, so, this is Communication Arts, who reads Communication Arts? Just about everybody in the room. So every year, in fact, Communication Arts has been doing an interactive annual before there were websites they were doing interactive because they were doing CD-ROMs. So they do this every year and they reward excellence, but it might be the kind of excellence that maps to good web experiences. It might be just great brand excellence, great graphic design excellence. I've been a judge of the show and usually there's like one person that's kind of got a web background or a usability background and there's usually one person that's a code background. There's a lot of people, marketing directors and brand directors, and again, I'm not criticizing any of that, but it may not, it may not be the best model understanding how to create a great web experience. So I decided to look at this year's award winners, and this one's Coca-Cola, and this was like the best in the show and this is a website, an international website, in like a billion languages, so right there a lot of work went into it. And you first get to a splash screen where you can see the entire world getting poured into a Coca-Cola bottle or maybe coming out of a Coca-Cola bottle, I'm not sure. Well, anyway, there's like the whole planet siphoned into this Coke bottle, but it's like a rainbow so it's okay, maybe there's, you know, its rainbows. Rainbows are nice and rainbows are like multi, multi, everybody's happy and unicorns and stuff. So okay, so that part works. So you have to pick your language, and I'm okay, I'm going to give these guys a break. If they made this website in 150 languages, you know, they have to let people sort of sort by continent and then by, and eventually get down to tribe and all that and then eventually experience the Coca-Cola website. But okay, so there's a lot of obstacles toward having the experience right up front. And then you get to the next page and there's a pop-up that says, 'Hi, would you like to

take a survey?' Now, I'm not against surveys since I have a web design survey, so I'm not against survey's per se and I take the AIGA surveys so I'm not against surveys per se, but I think if the winning, if the winning entry starts with a splash screen and then has a pop-up window where the marketing department got to ask you to take a survey, I'm not having a great web experience and I never went past this. I could see there was some kind of video and another Coke bottle and that probably I was missing a lot of wonderful content and I'm sure really talented people worked on this website, but I was done. As a web user, I was done. Because first you gave me a splash screen and then you asked me to take a survey and I'm done. Okay. So that didn't work for me in terms of how I would approach web design or how I would, as a client, what I would be looking for.

Another winner, this is a monkey, and it's a static monkey, and then when you click, there's a screen via JavaScript that gets as wide as whatever, if you've got like a gigantic monitor, you get a gigantic web screen, and then you got an animated monkey and basically what happens in this one, this is from Adobe and we love Adobe, but this website, I never was able to ascertain the meaning of this website. The monkey, the monkey's on this planet and it looks kind of like Roger Dean and the Yes albums. Do you remember the 70s? Okay. So this is like Roger Dean's daughter or son did this new, like, like aping dad's style, but giving it a modern edge. Did this like really nice illustration of planets with asteroids and a monkey. And when you click, there's no word, there's no words, so you click somewhere, like you click an asteroid, and the whole thing whirls around and then the monkey runs on the asteroid kind of like makes you think, oh, it must be loading because the monkey's running on the asteroid. And then when the monkey gets tired of running on the asteroid, the asteroid turns and nothing else happens, and so you go, well maybe I clicked the wrong asteroid. So you click another one and the same thing happens and like, so if you're in your office and you've got, you know, really fast access, this only takes about 14 minutes, but if you were, if you're at home or if you're like using a mobile phone to experience this, it's not going to be a very great experience. So, I'm not saying, this is not bad design and while it might be bad user experience design from a certain point of view, it's certainly not bad graphic design, it's wonderful graphic design. Won an award, but not a good model for what you want to do. These are the Webbys. Who knows the Webbys? Okay, so the Webbys were started by some people in San Francisco who thought, like I think, the web's real important, and how can we get people understanding the web better. Let's treat it like the Academy Awards and have a big, glitzy show every year. So that's what they do and that's okay. And this year they had David Bowie and if you're going to have a web judging competition, who but David Bowie would you ask. I mean look at the guy. Look at the guy. He's 60, he's had a heart attack, he looks incredible.

[Laughter]

He doesn't, and you know some of you may remember BowieNet, so he's not completely random, but basically, if I look at the things that won there, they didn't, they didn't win for graphic design excellence. And basically what they are, they're kind of like narrow cast YouTubes. Right? So this is the Meth Minute as an example. And Meth, that's a kind of

inspiring word that just kind of gets you up, and I thought that maybe that was the guy's name, but I don't think it is. So, I'm not sure what's going on here. But like in this one, John Kerry and George Bush are dancing together? And here's the thing, this is from 2008. Okay? So, I'm not sure what going on there, but basically, you watch this video, and it's like someone's animation that didn't make it onto the Cartoon Network and then, I bet it won an award there, and then so I wanted to find out, why did the Webbys give awards to cartoons that aren't on TV and these kind of odd websites and so I actually highlighted the copy, which I will blow up for edification. It says, 'If the he Web 2.0 revolution has shown us anything...' Who's been to the 'he' web?

[Laughter]

We're all friends, we can talk about this. Okay. One thing about the 'he' web is, they don't, they don't hire proofreaders on the 'he' web. Okay. Okay. The last time I heard revolution, it was like I think it was immediately after September 11th when Oliver Stone talked about the attack being part of a revolution against Time Warner. Does anyone remember that? Most of you just drank the memory away like I did? Anyway, I'm suspicious when I see revolution used anywhere except when they talk about something that happened in France, or in Russia or in 1918, okay, but anyway, I think we're done with the he web revolution, I'm going to go on.

I guess what I'm saying is, if you work for State Farm or a local church or a school district and you need to make a good website, a website that has a beautiful and inviting visual design that's appropriate, and a user experience that understands why people are coming to you and embraces them and let's them interact with you in a two way interaction if that is appropriate, you're not going to get, you're not going to get that information from them. And so where else can you go for information? You might go to the news media, and this is my favorite slide. It says the shortest route to getting it wrong and then there's Wolf Blitzer. I just love that. I could just look at those two slides all day, because a third slide appears in my head when I do that, but this is from the 2004 election when Wolf, when they just did, they were tired of the story that the web sucked because everyone lost money in 2000 and they were now excited by the story that you could blog, and so Wolf Blitzer had arranged for David Sifry of Technorati to stand there, and David Sifry is a guy kind of like me, kind of a web geek and what I'm saying, I guess is, not a photogenic person you'd want to put on television, I guess is a kind way of putting it. I'm saying this about myself and also about him. There are people that go on television and they're magnetic and they're wonderful and the camera loves them, and then there are people who should probably just be sitting in a cubicle with their computer. And so, David was sweating and Wolf was like, David, what are we hearing from the bloggers in the blogosphere? And David said, well, Wolf, the right-wing bloggers are writing some right-wing stuff and the left-wing bloggers, they're writing left-wing stuff. Fascinating, thank you from the blog-o-sphere. And so, I don't know.

[Laughter]

Mostly when journalists talk about the web, they're writing stories about money and right now with the economy, doing whatever it is doing, it kind of makes sense that we're all obsessed and fearful. You know, when Yahoo lays off 10 percent of its staff, that seems personal to me, too. But for several years now, all the journalists have been talking about really, most of the stories have been about Facebook and Twitter and how much money is made and how is Twitter making money and it doesn't make sense, and is Microsoft going to buy Yahoo now or not and all that kind of stuff. That's, you can certainly get information about the web, but you're not going to get information about empathetic web design from journalists.

Some of our own critics and thinkers, design thinkers, in my opinion, don't necessarily, they don't understand web design the same way that I do, so we had Armin Vit's talk, a very, article, I think, bookmarked by like 10 million people, responded to by like millions more, but he's talking about landmark web design and basically was why don't we have websites that are memorable, why don't we yet have websites that are as memorable as Milton Glaser's Dylan poster? My answer to that is why don't we yet have websites that are as delicious as an omelet and I mean a really good omelet. I don't know the answer to that one either. Okay. I have an answer, I believe that there's certain kind of very simple, this is Douglas Bowman's web design that he did for Blogger that had been used by something like 2 million individuals and everyone who uses it, it seems like a personal site just to them. It is called Minima. This, Doug actually had done 11 other designs for Blogger and they said, Google had just bought them, and they said, Doug can you give us one more design? He said, I really don't have time, okay. So in about an hour, he put together, you know, just using, he had a grid, like handy and he said it's going to be white and there's going to be some gray, and the links are going to be this color and it's going to be Georgia and I'm done. And it's the most successful web design, I think, in history because so many people have used it and it always feels appropriate to their content. So, I would argue that that might be a landmark web design. A design that accommodated itself to the content of whatever, that seemed authentic and real to whatever voice was put against it. I think that might be, I might call that landmark web design. I'm going to skip ahead here. Okay. So, how do we get to better web design? I think one problem for young designers is what I call the guitar solo approach to design, which is where you want to show off your chops and skills and there's nobody here like that in this room, but I meet a lot of designers like that and so, and I've also heard a lot of designers, age, I say young, but they don't have to be young, but there's a sort of looking at something and thinking it's boring because it's simple. Again, nobody in this room would make that mistake. But that's, it's kind of somewhat prevalent in the field, especially with less experienced designers. My opinion is that good designers, though it's not exactly true, I think there's always style, there's always a feeling of a kind of authority and a good design you know is a good design. When it's not, there are little details that are there or missing that make a difference. There's like exactitude with respect to a grid or type of graphic hierarchy that make a difference, but it feels just simple and authentic and that's the kind of design that we need to get to in order to, if we're doing our jobs well.

I think, for me and this could be a whole other talk too, but when we start a project at Happy Cog, we always start with the content where we work with clients to understand and evolve the content because if you don't know what you're designing for, unless you're Doug Bowman doing that one blog, you know, you can't really design. That was sort of the genius of what Doug did, is he had no idea what the content was going to be and he made a layout that worked anyway. But most of the time you need to know what the content is and that really should come first. So, usually when I talk about this, I have a series of tips, I'm just going to give one. So I have a number here, like, it makes you think, oh, he's going to give 10 tips or 12 tips, but I'm going to give one and then I'm going to wrap this.

Okay and so, I'm just going to discuss this very briefly and this is for design to work on the web, you have, there's one of two ways that it can be great. One of two places that you can start. You either start with your user or you start with your passion. What do I mean by start with your passion? Start with your passion means, create something because you want it and it doesn't exist. So, I started A List Apart 10 years ago, because there were no web magazines for, there were no web magazines for web designers that did what I thought it should do. I got very frustrated, so I started something. I'm not saying it's great, but it's still around 10 years later and we have millions of readers and I don't think there are millions of web designers so I don't know exactly how that works, but, so it's cool. If you, if you're passionate and stay passionate about something, I think that's the way to do it. 37signals, Basecamp, who uses Basecamp? A lot of people, okay. They wanted a project management tool that was simple and well designed and elegant and uncluttered. They didn't like what was offered so they created something for themselves. Eventually they realized they could just get other people using it and maybe make a little money from it and now they don't do client services work, they just design products and they got in, got moved from client services into product design by making stuff they were passionate about. And recently I saw Jason Fried, founder of the company, give a talk. He talked about the, the tiniest little details of user interface, like copy details, like when they have a submit, they never have a submit button, they have a 'sure, sign me up' button is what it says instead of submit. Because people don't talk submit. That's language, that's webmaster language, that's not human language. So lots of little details like that that all matter and start with the user, very simple. If you are doing a project, it, for your boss or your client or your company and you're mostly having meetings with yourselves in a little airless room, I mean it's good to have those meetings, they're important, but then you really got to meet, talk to, interact with users. There's lots of ways to do that. Do it informally, do it with not exactly your users, but other people. But if you don't start there, one of the classic mistakes I think people make is that they redesign a website because they're tired of it and so they're looking for freshness. Or they redesign a website because, we don't have Web 2.0 features and shouldn't we? And so that's why they, and Web 2.0 is the new black, right? But designing something because you think you should have a feature or because you're tired of it, that's not a reason to change, like that's not a reason to change an ad campaign. You don't throw out an effective ad campaign because you or the client are tired of it. In the same way, you don't throw out a design because you're tired of it. Instead, you find out what the users think and there, that's it, that's what I have to say today. Thank you.

[Applause]

Tom Kelley:

So, okay, so Jeffery's told us there are 12 things on this list and he's only told us one of them. Is anybody else feeling slightly unfulfilled about that? There was a, I went to the TED conference this year, in which this guy appeared and said that somehow breathing differently could change your whole life and he had a fair amount of time to talk about it, but he never gave us the tiniest hint of how breathing would change your life or what you should do or whatever. So, feeling slightly unfulfilled there. Can you, so you've given us one. Can you give us just two or three more of --

Jeffrey Zeldman:

Sure.

Tom Kelley:

-- the tips for designers?

Jeffrey Zeldman:

Sure. So, if you're a designer, one of the things that, that we do at Happy Cog because we found it to be very effective is, we kind of wear the client out with discussion. We have lots of meetings and we produce lots of documents, we do lots of research. That, you know, it's an accordion. Do a little of that, or do as much of that as you can. It doesn't have to be costly. It should never be a waste, but the, the, the trick is, you want to engage the person you are designing, you want to engage the stakeholders so that they know...

The problem is that a lot of people don't know how to evaluate the design and are mistrustful of designers, right? Has anyone had that experience? And so they try to do your job for you? And like, and like, why is that line so thick? Well, maybe it should be thinner, and so the discussion becomes justifying to someone who doesn't understand design, why you as a designer did a certain thing that is actually, that you know is needed but you really, they'd have to go to school with you for 5 years to understand why the line should be the way it is and that's beside the point. So, you don't want to have those discussions. Instead, what you want to talk about is their business and their problems and just keep talking about this so you understand, well, what kind of content do you, well who's going to use this? Well, what kind of tone is this? And then do research and say, you said you want to be authoritative, but users are experiencing you as friendly and family. Hmm. So you feel that you should be kind of cold and masterful, but they're saying warm and friendly. What, should we try to figure out what's causing that gap and if there is, if there is perhaps, if people are already thinking of you as warm and friendly and part of the family, maybe that's a direction we should pursue instead of trying to be something that people don't think we are. So you have discussions like that, and what they do, what they do is, by the time you show them design, they understand that you are a partner, a strategic partner. Very important. You have to have talent. You have to be able to deliver. If you don't have talent and you can't deliver, nothing else matters. But just having talent and delivering good-looking appropriate graphic design isn't enough if

you're not a strategic partner. So, you have to persuade people that you are and actually be that. Be that and that's how you persuade. So, how many meetings is right and how, what kind of deliverables are involved, all depends and everyone has their own process. But that the thing.

And another thing that I do that kind of a, along, during this whole process, I do this thing I call the Alzheimer's method. And my mom had Alzheimer and so I, when she was getting, when you could still talk to her, you'd have to remind her of what you just discussed and then remind her again and remind her again. And that was the way that you could have a conversation and keep engaging. And I, we do this with clients, or, not because there's something wrong with them biologically or even if because, but because they're busy and they have lots of other things on their mind besides your project. So if you come to them with the expectation that, well, everyone remembers. Sam, Sam told me to come back with a bigger logo, so here it is and we're done. That's not going to work. But if you say, so last time when we were talking, we, we, we thought that these parts were effective, here we weren't sure and we wanted to look at some options. Here we wanted to take, you know. You do all that and just keep reminding and reminding and reminding. It seems tiresome to you, do it in a way that doesn't act like, doesn't feel rote and doesn't feel tiresome, because if it does, you are already dead. Do it in a way that you can believe it, too. You have to have a little Alzheimer's yourself and act like it's a fresh conversation you're having. But in that way, you reengage the person who at the same time, I've been in a meeting where, with a potential client where the guy was making the decision of who he was going to hire, and it was a really important decision. He had an amazing brand, but it was in decline and he was talking to three agencies and he had to make a decision, and it was really important. But he kept checking his BlackBerry. I don't know why. Was it about his stocks? I don't know what was going on. But so, when you've got someone who might be flitting away and coming back and flitting away and coming back, it's really important to sort of hold their hand through the process. So those are two.

Tom Kelley:

Great. You know, you were talking about schools and I just want to get back to that one because, you know, your feeling is nobody's getting this quite right and yet there must be programs that are at least getting it close. Can you speak to that a little bit?

Jeffrey Zeldman:

So first I want to apologize in advance. There's probably someone here from a great school that I don't know about. Talk to me afterwards. Awesome. And I'll be happy to eat humble pie and promote your program all over the world. But, but, for the most part, design programs haven't, that I'm aware of, haven't really grasped, right. So, Liz Danzico has started an MFA program. It's starting next year at the School of Visual Arts in interaction design and it's going to have, School of Visual Arts hires working people, people who are busy and at the height of their careers and successful and only have a few hours and make use of them as the teachers. And so, that's what this program will be, it will be interaction designers, busy and successful and come in and meet with adults and teach. And it's going to

be great. On the more technical side, there's a group called WOW, and they've done what the AIGA did. So now it's AIGA, it's not the American Institute of, so in the same way, they used to be the World Organization of Webmasters, but now they're just WOW. And WOW has some educational materials they're developing, Opera has some, the Opera browser has some educational, the web standards products has some developing materials. Those are more in the nature of, download them and learn from them. There's a, there more technical. They're more the nuts and bolts. But you also, you can't be a good web designer if you don't have some mastery of the nuts and bolts. If you're just turning Photoshop documents over to someone else who's going to implement, then you've already lost control.

Tom Kelley:

Great. Thank you very much.

Jeffrey Zeldman:

Thank you.

[Applause]