
What is Your Design Philosophy? – RE: Write

by Jesse Weaver • Dec. 21, 2015 • 2 min read • [original](#)



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What is your design philosophy?—I was asked this question by a candidate during a recent job interview. Oddly, it was the first time I'd ever been asked that question. As I fumbled through an answer I realized I didn't really have an articulated design philosophy, or at least not one that easily came to mind. So I decided remedy that.

1: There is art in design, but design is not art

There is a practiced art to creating great design, but the final output of the design process is not art. Art is creative expression intended to provoke questions and individual interpretation. Art is inspiring, emotional and important, but does not fill a specific need beyond humanities' desire to express itself. Design, on the other hand, is a creative process intended to solve a problem, to fill a need for the people that will ultimately interact with it. Design should not be open to interpretation, but instead should define how it is to be engaged with and should guide a user at each stage of that engagement. Art creates questions, design creates answers.

2: Design must be rooted in reality

As Dieter Rams says, “Indifference towards people and the reality in which they live is actually the one and only cardinal sin in design”. Empathy is the conduit to great design and *the* critical skill for great designers. Without a deep understanding of the end user and the reality in which a design will be used, any decision a designer makes is a shot in the dark. To fill a real need, design must be rooted in reality.

3: Design is never perfect

Design is about creating elegant solutions to address user needs. The tricky thing is that most often we are designing for humans, and humans are complicated. People's expectations and desires evolve over time. Sometimes design evolves to meet these changes, sometimes design is the driver of the change. Regardless, a designer's work is never done. This does not mean that design needs to be trendy, design can be timeless, but a great designer has a bent toward iteration and always has their ear to ground.

4: Design is a set of tools, not a standardized process

Every problem presents its own unique set of characteristics, as such there is no one-size-fits-all process for coming to the best solution. The art of design is about having a diverse set of tools and approaches, and determining when to apply each. To quote Maslow, “...it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail” — so always carry a hammer, a screw driver, a pair of pliers and a hex wrench.

5: Design communicates obvious function

For something to be “well designed” it could be simple, or it could be complex. It could be considered aesthetically pleasing, or it could be considered gaudy. Aesthetics and simplicity are not requirements. For something to be well designed, the key requirement is that its function must be obvious. A person should be able to easily determine how to use and interact with it.

6: Design should delight

A design should create moments of delight for the people who encounter it. There is no steadfast rule as to what is delightful. Delight can come in different forms for different people, this is where empathy comes in, but most likely it is a mix of form, function and value that creates that often intangible emotional connection to a well designed thing.

That’s my first attempt at articulating a design philosophy. I’d love to hear how you’d answer the question — *What is your design philosophy?*

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