



Design Revolution **The Toolkit**

Think design will change the world?

It just might. But first, we've got to change the way we design.

Welcome to the Design Revolution. This toolkit provides values and tactics for how each of us—design practitioners, students, and educators—can design better solutions for the greater good: for people instead of clients, for change instead of consumption. Consider it a blueprint, a field guide, a user manual. It's not the be-all or end-all, but it's a start. Use it wisely; use it daily. Design just might change the world . . . Ready, set, go.



Go beyond doing no harm

I will engage only in design activities that improve life, both environmental and human. I will recognize that design that does not improve life is a form of apathy and that “doing no harm” is not enough. I will engage only in design processes that are respectful, generative, catalytic, and productive.

“Going for ‘the lesser of many evils’ is not good design—we can’t measure success by how lightly we tread. Rather, we have to lead with the big ideas and maximize positive impact, not just minimize negative impact.” —Emily Pilloton, Project H Design

students

Know the difference between doing no harm (working deductively to minimize negative impact) and going *beyond* doing no harm (working productively to maximize positive impact). Seek out projects that have such positive impact, not just projects that have a zero-sum outcome. Steer clear of the “less bad,” and go for the “proactively good.”

We all know what it means to measure an environmental footprint, but ask yourself how you might also measure your ethical footprint as a designer, then work on projects that improve that personal ethical footprint. Your designs are a reflection of your character.

Before beginning a project, ask yourself what the worst case scenario might be if you designed a mediocre solution. Without a great design, would a specific demographic not have access to health care? Would a public school down the street not have healthy food in their cafeteria? Define the urgency, and be sure that your project is filling a critical need rather than simply a personal desire.

Go beyond
doing no

teachers

When teaching basic design skills, theory, and history, set a precedent by showing examples of humanitarian products and solutions. Instead of limiting your examples of great design to iPods and stylized accessories, show appropriate technologies, life-improving tools, medical devices, and enabling solutions, and qualify these as good design by showing their social impact.

Make community participation (not just class participation) a part of your grading structure. Reward students whose projects make social engagement a priority (i.e. 20 percent of a student's grade will be determined by direct involvement with local or underserved communities).

Be sure that every one of your studio syllabi includes a relevant social issue as a design challenge, and make sure you have a local partner to serve as the client and collaborator throughout the process (i.e. a homeless shelter or inner-city elementary school).

on
harm

Listen, learn, & understand



I recognize that every client, partner, or stranger is someone to learn from. I will listen before assuming. I will seek to understand the historical, geographical, social, cultural, and economic contexts and precedents before beginning the design process.

"As Mark Twain once said, 'It's not what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that ain't so.' If we want to create breakthrough innovations, we'll need to set aside preconceived notions about 'the way things are,' learning instead to watch and listen carefully for clues on how we might design a better future." —Tom Kelley, IDEO

students

Get out of the studio, away from the computer, and interview people in *their* comfort zones instead of over the phone or via email. Listen to their words, and observe the surrounding context. Talk to at least five people who participate in an activity or an action that is related to your project. Listen attentively, take notes, look people in the eye, and shake their hands after talking to them.

Approach the project like an anthropologist rather than a designer. Don't overuse the words "design" and "designer;" do not enter into new situations or contexts announcing your role as a "designer." Instead, approach these new situations with humility, ready to learn, as a "creative problem solver." Ask the *hows* and *whys* rather than the *whats* and *whens*.

Present your projects to your friends and family. Be sure that your ideas are meaningful (and presentable) to those who are not as immersed in the design process, or who may know little about design at all. Those outside of the "design bubble" are the ultimate resource. Work to produce solutions that "just make sense" for everyday people, without highfalutin' design speak.

teachers

Create a minimum requirement for qualitative research, front-loaded at the beginning of studio terms. Require at least ten hours (five hours traditional academic research, five hours "on the streets," in-person research) before allowing students to consider proposing initial design concepts.

Encourage students to study "abroad." "Abroad," however, need not mean oceans away. Whether in a remote village in Thailand or a crippled manufacturing town a few counties away, unfamiliar experiences will help students develop empathy and work efficiently outside of their comfort zones.

Listen to your students! You work for them, not the other way around. While you are the facilitator of their educational experience, listen to their needs and wants. When students are excited, the work will excel. If students are asking for more humanitarian studios, ask them to help you in creating new curricula, then work to get those studios onto the school's list of course offerings.

Listen, learn, &
understand

Measure, share, & teach

The background of the image is a wall covered with various anatomical diagrams of the human skeleton. The most prominent diagram is a full-body outline of a human skeleton with labels for various parts. Other diagrams include a detailed view of the skull and a view of the hand and wrist bones. The text 'THE HUMAN SKELETON' is visible at the top of the main diagram.

I will measure results quantitatively and qualitatively. I will, as appropriate, make my best practices, successes, tools, and failures available to colleagues for community-based learning.

"Understanding the world requires observation in several forms—specifically, things that are easily measured (such as environmental and financial performance) and those that are not (such as social and cultural impacts like emotions, values, meanings). Designers need to become comfortable investigating and blending both quantitative and qualitative data in order to create solutions that make change." —Nathan Shedroff, California College of the Arts, Chair of MBA in Design Strategy program

students

Don't view your classmates as competition. Approach your studio with a "cupped hand" philosophy—you are there to offer and contribute to the discussion rather than to solely take away ideas. Think of two people in your class that you see as competitors. Use these two people as "consultants" throughout your design process.

Create your own metrics. At the beginning of a project, define three or four things that would make this project a success. Along the way, be sure that you are working towards those goals.

Create a "user empowerment" metric. Ask users to evaluate your design on a scale of one to ten, assigning a higher number to solutions with greater efficiency and functionality in their everyday lives. Collect this data at multiple points throughout the process. Establish strong relationships and feedback loops with your user group so that at every step you are relying on constant feedback to improve the design.

Become an obsessive documentarian. Take pictures of everything and write at least 500 words about your design process and progress on a daily basis. Use these "journal entries" as storytelling devices for your partners, clients, and critics. Use multiple media (video, photography, drawings, prose, mind-maps, and more) to create an archive of design documentation that tells the story.

teachers

Encourage your former students to volunteer as mentors to your current students. Bring in one guest to every class session who might offer feedback, or with whom your students can share their challenges.

Set up a weekly meeting with your fellow instructors. Meet up for happy hour at a bar or for coffee at a cafe and share student work from the week. Use this group as a community and as a sounding board for new lesson plans.

Ask your students to grade themselves at the end of every term and at specific points throughout their design process. Ask them to evaluate their progress around the following: Are their designs responses to direct user feedback and pressing social issues? Do they have wide-scale adaptability? Are they good business ventures or just provocative concepts? Has the impact of their design decisions been measured, and if so, is that impact positive and wide-scale?

Ask students to blog through their projects, both individually and as a studio. This creates an informal breeding ground for discussion within the studio group and pushes their processes and ideas into the public eye for critique.

Measure, share,
& teach

Empower, heal & catalyze

I will use design as a tool to empower people, to make life better, to bring health and improve life, and to enable users to help themselves. I will seek out systemic solutions over quick fixes.

"I've grown tired of pushing widgets, climbing the corporate ladder, and stroking the egos. We're seeing the design profession growing up. This is the first time we're being asked to come to the 'big kids' table' to truly determine the outcome of what we do. As designers, we now have an incredible opportunity and responsibility to affect change. We're no longer designing for widgets, we're designing for people." —Arvi Raquel-Santos, Nexus, Weymouth Design

students

Apply the “object vs. tool” test—make sure that the solutions you propose are not dead-ends, but catalysts that enable something else to happen. Are your designs tools for user engagement or merely objects or accessories? What does your design make possible?

Ask people and users to be designers too. Give them cameras to photograph their environments, ask them to pose solutions. Put the power in the hands of your end users and allow that to drive the process.

Prototype, prototype, prototype, then give your prototypes directly to your users. Record how they are used. Are there unforeseen consequences, unplanned benefits, or unexpected opportunities? Your users will provide fresh eyes that shed light on your design’s existence in the real world.

teachers

Inform students that you will issue automatic F’s for useless bjects (even if this is an empty threat, it will reinforce that “dead-end objects” are not acceptable). Begin your courses by stressing the importance of developing tools rather than stuff, and show examples that articulate the difference.

Look at student work and ask: Is the solution merely another product to be purchased, or is it a tool for empowerment? Does the solution only solve the visible symptoms, or does it contribute to lasting, systemic change?

Take students on a Life-Cycle Analysis Field Trip. Show them the material sources, the factory where products are made, stores where the products are sold, homes in which the products reside, then the landfills in which the products rest. When students become aware of the many stages of a product’s lifecycle, they will look at their own projects through a longer-range, critical lens.

Empower,
heal, & catalyze

Be optimistic, but critical

I will employ perpetual optimism as a design and business strategy but will apply the same critical evaluation toward social and humanitarian design work that I would any other product. Just because it's "for the greater good" doesn't make it good design.

"We don't need do-gooders; we need people who are really good at what they do."
—Architecture for Humanity

students

See the big picture. Take the time to read and discuss a breadth of design theories that you have never heard of or might not agree with. Develop a personal thesis for how you define “good design,” and be prepared to both defend your thesis and challenge opposition.

Ask people to rip apart your design projects, and develop a thick skin. Ask people to look beyond the fact that your projects have “social good” components and give you critiques that are realistic, even harsh. Ask your end users “Would you use this? Or is this ridiculous? Is it too designed?” View criticism as the best motivation.

Hold your teachers to a high standard. If you think their practices are irresponsible or could be improved, talk to them about it, and offer to help your instructors revisit and improve their lesson plans.

teachers

Encourage your students to take on social impact projects, but let them know that you will critique them just as hard, if not harder. Social impact projects often have even higher stakes as the solutions must be life-improving, even life-saving.

Host “free-thinking” debates. Create a classroom environment in which “there are no wrong answers,” and allow students to freely discuss big issues (“When is a consumer society a good thing? Should health care be free to all?”). By beginning with an open and broad debate, students might better identify where their passions lie and which issues are worth tackling as designers.

Give writing assignments. By asking your students to articulate their thinking or process in written form, they will become more critical and thoughtful about their work.

Be optimistic,
but critical

Think big & have no fear



I will take calculated risks and not be afraid to use design as a tool for change. I will explore new models for how design can have the greatest impact for the greatest number.

"Samuel Mockbee, Rural Studio founder, said something similar with his mantra 'Proceed and be Bold!' Or, as marketing guru Chris Lochhead says, 'It takes courage to do legendary work.' The things we do with the highest impact always take guts." —John Bielenberg, Project M

students

Send one good email per day to a person whose input might be valuable, even if they are famous, live an ocean away, or you think they are untouchable. If they don't reply, don't take it personally, but do send another email.

Write down your loftiest goal on the back of your business cards (i.e. "Using design, I want to improve access to high-quality education in the U.S."). When you hand people your business card, they will have a handwritten reminder of who you are beyond your email address.

Go to every party, and talk to anyone who will listen.

teachers

Take your students on "big-picture" field trips. Bring them to public rallies, webcast UN congresses during studio time, and ask them to think beyond the studio walls.

Reward bravery.

Face off against the "Old Guard" of design educators. Ask the administration to support you in creating new programs and new classes for the new design imperatives.

Think big &
have no fear



Serve the underserved

I will look first to demographics underserved by design and propose viable solutions for such groups as the homeless, the sick, the ailing, the young and old, the handicapped, poor, and incapacitated.

"Designing for the underserved means putting solutions in places that need it most. The design industry has focused on making luxury-based objects for so long. This is our opportunity to use our creativity for something meaningful —something we can stand behind." —Kim Karlsrud and Danny Phillips, Project H Design, Los Angeles

students

Find an overlooked demographic that is personal to you. Who in your life lacks access to creative solutions? A friend's sister who has learning disabilities? Your grandmother, who struggles with daily mobility? Start with those who are close to you and investigate the ways you could use design to improve their lives.

Find at least two local organizations that are related to your project and show up to volunteer. Through service and immersion, you are likely to see opportunities you wouldn't otherwise see through traditional design research.

Start in your own backyard. Don't look to the developing world oceans away when there are homeless communities in your own city. Start locally, but keep global scalability in mind, and try to develop local solutions that have the potential for wider application.

teachers

Choose a local, urgent issue and run a "quick-fire" exercise with your students. Play the role of the public policy maker, and ask them to pitch design-based ideas as solutions. For example, has your town recently seen a huge economic decline? Ask students to generate quick ideas and present them to you over the course of one studio class.

Go on "citizen field trips." Spend a studio session volunteering at a senior citizen's facility, YMCA after school program, or soup kitchen.

Challenge your students to spend a night in a shelter or to work out at the gym in a wheelchair. Personal experience as part of an underserved demographic helps establish empathy and deep understanding of the need.

Serve the
underserved

Don't reinvent the wheel



When something works well, I will not assume I can or should start from scratch. I will use what is available to me and look to local resources, skill sets, and materials.

"Not reinventing the wheel means acknowledging the efforts of those who have come before. We're not here to knock them over and stand in their place, we're here to work with them and stand on their shoulders." —Ryan Duke, Project H Design, San Francisco

students

Weigh the costs and benefits of implementing a new system versus building on top of existing infrastructure. What already exists? Could your time be better spent improving existing solutions? Do not discount the power of incremental improvements over brand-new solutions. Are there ways to leverage the ubiquity or popularity of everyday objects into a life-improving design solutions?

Ask yourself, "What am I up against?" If you are designing a better farmer's market stand, know that your "competition" is an \$8 folding table from WalMart. Can you really pose a better solution, and if so, how will you make the case to your target market that your design is better?

Think like a business person. Come to terms with the fact that new ideas can be hard sells. How will you convince people that your solution is worthy of their behavior change?

Consult nature for age-old design solutions. Draw from biomimicry principles.

teachers

Write a project brief that calls for a design improvement rather than creation. Give students an existing product, and ask them to develop an incremental improvement that enhances that product and elevates its use through new functionality or new markets.

Use constraints to your advantage. For example, challenge your students to design with materials from within a 100-mile radius or using only off-the-shelf components.

Don't reinvent
the wheel

Do good business with good people

I will be honorable in business and partnerships. I will build distribution into my design and employ businesses that maximize social impact. I will align myself and work with individuals and groups who have the same values as I do.

"There's one value that trumps all others, predetermines your success with design or any other undertaking: authenticity. People see straight through any design and any person that isn't authentic." —John Cary, Public Architecture

students

Develop a business plan for distribution, manufacturing, and marketing into all of your school projects.

Write thank-you notes to your teachers, partners, and those who have helped develop your project along the way.

Reach out to your heroes and try to work with them.

Work alongside your classmates whenever possible. Stop every hour or so and give each other informal evaluations.

teachers

Set a good example. Teach the value of good business, and help students learn how to present their ideas, collaborate, and meet new partners in the most respectful way.

Ask students to work within a budget and present their business cases.

Engage local businesses in your community as studio project clients.

Ask your students to submit a rough business plan or “systems-based strategy” to accompany their designs. This will encourage them to think about how the design fits into the real world, and where it might be overlapping with previous solutions.

Do good
business with
good people

Own up and repair



I will take responsibility for any failures or mistakes I may make and take measures to repair and understand my errors.

"My role is not to serve myself, but to work towards the greater good. As a designer, I work to create new choices that benefit people and the planet. Through my work with low-income communities worldwide, I design systems that benefit society and build the capacity of individuals to innovate within their own environments." —Jocelyn Wyatt, IDEO

students

Look through your portfolio and ask yourself, “Do my design projects pose solutions to big problems? Do they make life better for the target audience or user group?” If you’re unhappy with the answer, not to worry—there is plenty of time to improve. To get started, pick out your weakest project and commit the next school term to reworking it into something that meets this “life-improvement” requirement.

Ask yourself, “What mistakes have I made while in design school?” Did you approach a project with a heavy hand and offend users in the process? Did you specify an environmentally irresponsible material because it was the easy choice? Look back and identify where you could have made better choices. Write each of these moments on a Post-it as a reminder for how you can improve in the future.

teachers

Share your personal stories of failure, along with your successes. Create a culture of “productive failure.” Encourage students to be brave, try new things, and to “fail with purpose,” learning from their mistakes as a way to hone in on a better design process.

Give a “what not to do” lecture. Present examples of designs that have gone wrong and resulted in negative impact. Have students identify where the design process may have gone wrong and how the solution could be improved.

Ask students, at the end of the term, what they would have done differently, and give them an opportunity in the following term to rectify those points.

Own up and
repair

Don't do what you don't know

I will acknowledge the limits of my expertise and will not hesitate to say "no" or to pass projects to another designer who may do a better job.

"One of the most important characteristics of a designer is humility—an appreciation that designers are part of a continuum of past and future practitioners. Sometimes the best answer is 'I don't know; that's a great question.'" —Allan Chochinov, Core77



students

Take a business or economics class to understand different scales of distribution, or an anthropology class to learn alternative research techniques. This cross-pollination will bring new insights to your design process.

Design requires trust. Invest time with your clients and users to build long-term relationships.

When it comes to human-centered design, humility comes first; everything else will follow.

teachers

Establish relationships with other universities, public school districts, local organizations, or international agencies.

Invite professors from the economics, business, and social science departments to be guest lecturers in your studio or jurors on your final critiques.

Set up cross-disciplinary studios that are listed in multiple departments (for example, a studio developing more user-friendly blood glucose monitors for diabetics, cross listed with the pre-med program). Ask your students to partner with someone outside of the design school throughout a project.

Encourage your design students to double major in something outside of design.

Don't do what
you don't know



Always put the user first

I will always place need over consumption and the human being over the market. I will consider human value, experience, and consequence above all else.

"Design is how you treat your customers. If you treat them well from an environmental, emotional, ergonomic, and aesthetic standpoint, you're probably doing good design."
—Yves Behar, fuseproject

students

Design *with*, not *for*. Don't view your projects as "design for clients," but rather "solutions for people." Give partners and users a stake in the process by making them co-designers. Bring them into your design process from the start.

Go to the user. If you're working on a project for a homeless shelter, work from the homeless shelter. Be there, in person, as much as possible.

Give design credit to your users. Credit your projects as collaborations *with* the homeless shelter or any individuals who helped shape the solution. Give your clients and users the tools they need to tell the story. Invite your partners to your final critique.

teachers

Challenge your students to understand their users without using the computer or statistics. Help them to build trust with partners, and encourage them to interview people face to face.

Practice interview skills in class, and provide tips for how students can harvest more useful information while in the field.

Show the difference between user-centered design and consumer-centered design. Pick 20 projects or products and ask students to place them on a continuum with user-centered at one end, and consumer-centered at the other; then justify their answer.

Always
the user

put
first



Be part of a greater whole

I will remember that I am a part of a system and a community of designers, users, clients, and global citizens. I will recognize that my individual decisions affect this greater group, and that I have a responsibility to contribute productively.

"First we are human beings. Then we are designers. If successful design can come from empathizing with other human beings, then designers should see themselves first as a member of the human race. For all the differences we all have, we have as many similarities."
—Randy Hunt, Supercorp

students

Join the student chapter of your local professional organization (ex: IDSA, AIGA, AIA), go to each and every meeting, and speak up. If big groups aren't your thing, organize your own small group of like-minded students (not just designers), and meet on a regular basis.

Go to one big design conference every year, and listen closely. Then, after all the talk, commit to turning what you have learned into real action.

Show your work online, in every avenue; share it with others and don't be territorial. Accept the criticism and praise with grace.

Be part
greater

teachers

Become a student again. Go out in the field and interview people with your class. Help your students prototype, source material, and user test. If they can get their hands dirty, you can too.

Take pride in your students. Present student work at a local event. Promote and represent your school, and ask for feedback. Encourage your school to adopt responsible design principles like the Designers Accord.

of a
whole

credits

The 13 values in this book represent an expanded version of the *Designer's Handshake*, a “personal design commitment” from the book *Design Revolution: 100 Products that Empower People* by Project H Design founder Emily Pilloton. The Design Revolution Toolkit has been produced by Project H Design, a nonprofit that connects the power of design to the people who need it most, and the places where it can make a real and lasting difference.

For more information, please visit www.projecthdesign.org

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