why

do you design?

Because, inherently, you like to solve problems.

Perhaps because you refuse to yield
to those who say it can't be done.

Because you believe that progress is required.

In our towns.

In our schools.

In America's largest companies.

In small and medium businesses.

In government.

In the arts.

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.

<<< Here is a model to make visible
the process of designing solutions.

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Defining the problem

1	2	3	4
DEFINING THE PROBLEM	ENVISIONING THE DESIRED END STATE (KNOWING WHAT VICTORY LOOKS LIKE)	DEFINING THE APPROACH BY WHICH VICTORY CAN BE ACHIEVED	INCITING SUPPORT AND THEN ACTION

Innovating

5	6	7	8
SEEKING INSIGHT TO INFORM THE PROTOTYPING OF THE SOLUTION	PROTOTYPING POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS	DELINEATING THE TOUGH CHOICES	ENABLING THE TEAM TO WORK AS A TEAM

Generating value

9	10	11	12
CHOOSING THE BEST SOLUTION, THEN ACTIVATING IT	MAKING SURE PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT YOUR SOLUTION	SELLING THE SOLUTION	RAPIDLY LEARNING AND "TACKING" BASED ON YOUR SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

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

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

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

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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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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

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

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.

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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.

The act of designing is an inherently powerful act. In that act, we share a stage with CEOs, government officials, civic leaders, passionate activists and fellow citizens.

When we become articulate champions of the process of designing, we help teams perform better. When we become active participants in the process of designing, we can drive new value— economic, social and aesthetic.

When we achieve progress through our participation, we make a new reputation for designers as deep and valuable members of any process of change. And the cycle repeats itself.

Thank you for all your ambitions in this regard.

The next generation of designers depends on it.

*"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.
We are the largest and oldest association of
professional designers in the United States.*

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