

Kellogg Insight Podcast Transcript:

Unleash Your Inner Designer

Jessica LOVE: You've probably heard of "design thinking," a process for solving problems using the out-of-the-box methods that designers use. But the thought of trying to be a "designer"—it scares a lot of people. Which is why when David Schonthal gives presentations about design thinking, he likes to start off with an exercise called "sketch your neighbor."

David SCHONTHAL: It's exactly what you think it's going to be. And I want you to make super-awkward eye contact with someone sitting next to you. Then in exactly 60 seconds, exactly one minute, I want you to draw as accurate of a sketch of that person's face as you can. Ready? Begin.

LOVE: This is audio from last year's Kellogg Reunion, where Schonthal did the exercise with a room full of alumni.

SCHONTHAL: And time is up. Now go ahead and share the sketch of the person that you drew it of.

LOVE: As Schonthal told the crowd, whenever he does this little experiment, it pretty much goes the same way.

SCHONTHAL: Usually like half of the people in the room will put their heads down, slide the picture over and usually utter some version of the phrase, "I'm sorry." *[audience laughter]*

LOVE: Schonthal teaches design thinking at Kellogg. And to him, the embarrassment that people feel in this silly exercise, it's the same thing that keeps them from using design thinking in their careers.

SCHONTHAL: We wind up lumping ourselves into categories. "I'm either their creative or I'm not." "I'm right brained or I'm left brained." "I'm a design thinker or I'm not." The truth is that all of you, learning a couple of tricks and techniques, will be able to draw a really accurate looking human face once you learn the steps.

LOVE: And in just the same way, *you* can learn to think like a designer.

[musical interlude]

LOVE: Welcome to the *Kellogg Insight* podcast. I'm your host, Jessica Love. What does it mean to think like a designer? And how can it help you create better products, better services, better solutions? David Schonthal is eager to tell you. He's a clinical associate professor at Kellogg, and a senior director at IDEO, a consulting firm focused on innovation through design. Today on the podcast, we'll hear more of that presentation Schonthal gave last year. He'll share three basic steps that can empower anybody to harness their inner designer and get results.

Step number one to being a design thinker: start by thinking about your end users. All too often, Schonthal says, people do this backwards. They come up with a product, or a new technology...

SCHONTHAL: And then they systematically go out and hunt for a problem for that technology to solve. In the world of design we intentionally start somewhere else. We start with looking at people.

LOVE: One of Schonthal's favorite examples of this is a story about Doug Dietz. He worked for General Electric. Dietz helped design things like MRI machines for kids, which have historically presented a big challenge. As many as 80 percent of kids need anesthetized in order to get an MRI.

SCHONTHAL: And being a product manager, Doug's first instinct was, "Well, we need to change the product." But smartly, what Doug decided to do before he changed the product was take a look at the experience. And so, what he did is, he followed families from the moment they showed up at the clinic to the moment they left the clinic. And what he found was that the product itself had almost nothing to do with the problem. It was pretty much every single thing that led up to the moment where the kid was put into the MRI machine that created this agitation. From the moment they show up to the clinic, and they're taken away from their parent by a stranger. They're brought into this room with the MRI machine. And those of you who have been in an MRI machine, you know what those rooms sound like, right? It's just crazy, like a horror movie set. And then they get strapped to a table, and shoved in a tube, and then they're like, "Lay perfectly still!"

LOVE: So Dietz had taken the first step in thinking like a designer: learn what your customers really need. If at all possible, Schonthal says, try to interact with them in their natural environment. And for Dietz, this discovery process led to a very different result than he had originally expected. The clinics actually kept using the same MRI machine. What they changed was the experience leading up to that moment.

SCHONTHAL: Now, when you are a pediatric patient and you arrive in an imaging center, you're going to be a stowaway on a pirate ship. And while you're on this voyage, you're going to have to lay perfectly still so the pirates don't discover you. In those same clinics, satisfaction scores went up to as much as 90%. And those of you that know a bit about healthcare know that these days, satisfaction scores have a direct implication on how hospitals are reimbursed for these procedures.

[musical interlude]

LOVE: Once you've figured out the real problem that needs solving, you're ready for step two: come up with some ideas for how to solve that problem. And that means, brainstorming session. Now, you might have heard the phrase "there are no bad ideas in brainstorming." Schonthal says, that's not just a cliché—to designers, it's actually crucial to getting a great final product. For instance, he was once helping develop a more comfortable way for diabetics to inject their insulin. After all, no one likes sticking a needle into their own skin.

SCHONTHAL: And so, in a brainstorm, one of our designers came up with this really ridiculous idea: “Well, what if we genetically modify a mosquito and fill it with insulin, and then train it to fly around with diabetic patients? And every time diabetic patients sugar level dipped it would just land on you and deliver you exactly the amount of insulin that you needed and then fly away,” right? And in most organizations, Nick would be politely asked to leave the room. But, we realized that this idea, in and of itself, was obviously not a feasible idea, but we left it in the room because that even though itself was not a feasible idea, the closer we could get to that experience, the better.

LOVE: Ultimately, they came up with a sort of plunger contraption. It wasn’t quite a mosquito—but it had some familiar characteristics.

SCHONTHAL: It’s a very small needle, it’s about the same diameter as a mosquito’s proboscis. But you as the patient, when that plunger hits your skin and retracts back into the handle, never actually see the needle. And simply not seeing the injection happen completely changes your relationship to the experience. So, again, it had nothing to do with that original idea in and of itself being feasible, but it was a wild idea that if it were tamed to quickly, may not have gotten us to the place we ultimately wanted to be.

LOVE: Once you’ve figured out your idea, it’s onto the final step: Make that idea real, so that you can start evaluating it. And at this point, it usually helps to design a prototype. Now, when you hear the word “prototype,” what comes to mind may be a sleek, viable model of your product or service, something pretty close to your final product. But Schonthal says that’s the wrong way to do it.

SCHONTHAL: Prototyping is much more like this: “I’ve got an idea, I put it out into the world, I find out what people think about it, I learn what sucks, I redesign it, I go to put it back out in the world.” It is very nonlinear—very, very improvised.

LOVE: In reality, a prototype is just anything that can help you get feedback. For example, once Schonthal’s team was talking with a bunch of surgeons about what they wanted in a new surgical tool. One of his designers ran out of the room and strung together a quick and dirty prototype made out of office supplies, like tape and dry erase markers.

SCHONTHAL: And he put it in one of the physician’s hands and he said, “Like this?” And the physician said, “Well, I’d like this to be a little longer, I’d like this handle to be a little bit more angled.” But now with a very low fidelity prototype, we were actually having a pretty high fidelity conversation. One of the surgeons put their hand at the end of the dry-erase marker cap and started twisting it around and said, “Well, what happens when I twist the cap?” We’re like, “What *should* happen when you twist the cap?” “Well, maybe when I twist the cap it will change the tolerances of the device around during the surgical procedures.” And lo and behold, that very same concept wound up making it into the final design. People will overcome the crudeness to give you the type of input they’re looking to give you.

LOVE: So, three steps to thinking like a designer. Learn about your users; come up with some ideas; and make those ideas real, however you can. And the more you go through this process, Schonthal says, the better, more creative designer you’ll become.

SCHONTHAL: You don't do this once and you're done. You do it, and by learning about the world, having ideas and making those ideas real, you learn more, you have more ideas, you make those real. The goal is to try to do these things as quickly, and as cheaply, and as tightly as possible.

[musical interlude]

LOVE: This program was produced by Kevin Bailey, Jessica Love, Fred Schmalz, Jake Smith, Michael Spikes, and Emily Stone. It was written by Jake Smith, and edited by Michael Spikes.

Special thanks to David Schonthal.

As a reminder, you can find us on iTunes, Google Play, or our website. If you like this show, please leave us a review or rating. That helps new listeners find us. And visit us at insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu, where you can learn more about design thinking.

We'll be back in a couple weeks with another episode of the *Kellogg Insight* podcast.