

Chapter 1: A Maturing Industry

User experience design (UX) is a fairly new career that describes a designer who “creates an entire end-to-end experience using a user-centered design philosophy”. After companies realized that the key to a successful website is its design, the industry exploded in popularity. Companies are now not only asking employees to make websites to look “cool,” but make sense as well.

Today, users ask for great design in websites that are associated with social media, politics, business, and culture. As a result of great design, users are able to navigate and understand information easier.

Chapter 2: Great Designers are Great Communicators

Because UX jobs have become so popular, the amount of people who know little or nothing about design and also have the authority to dictate changes, has increased. These individuals usually admit to not having any experience in UX, but still insist their ideas and opinions are correct. UX designers may find this to be problematic because they may consider these ideas to be detrimental to the overall user experience.

Teamwork can also prove to be difficult if one disagrees with the other. Disagreement causes each party to become defensive and unable to collaborate. The issue at hand will then never be accomplished and the end result is nothing more than a crippled user experience. As a result, the CEO button and home page syndrome may occur.

The CEO button is an unusual or otherwise unexpected request from an executive to add a feature that destroys the balance of a project. It usually undermines and discourages UX designers from continue working.

Home page syndrome “is a condition whereby the home screen of an application or website becomes a catchall for everything, creating a garage sale of links, buttons, and banner ads that unravels the fabric of usability.” This occurs when multiple persons ask UX designers to have their businesses represented on the homepage.

All these disturbances can be avoided with good communication. In fact, the majority of issues or concerns a person with authority brings to attention are often just a matter of misunderstanding or miscommunication. The way UX designers talk to those with power about design is key to ensuring the best possible user experience.

However, it’s more than just communication, UX designers must be articulate when describing their work to their stakeholders or team. Being articulate is defined as the ability to use words and tone in a way that communicates a specific message and elicits a specific response. The key to being articulate is to understand both the message that needs to be communicated, and the response that is wanted in return.

Being articulate about design imparts intelligence, demonstrates intentionality, expresses confidence, and shows respect. As a result, it may impress enough to garner a UX designer career opportunities and understanding from others in regards to the project. Before UX designers express and articulate their designs, they must be certain that their project has the ability to:

- Solve a problem
- Be easy for users to understand
- Be supported by everyone

To solve a problem, UX designers must be aware of every decision they make and ask themselves “What problem am I trying to solve with this?” One of the best ways UX designers can practice being aware of their own decisions is by writing them down.

To make designs easy to understand, UX designers must not only be focused on usability, but also aware of every decision they make and ask themselves, “How does this affect the user?” Without an easy interface, users will be confused and the design will fail at what it was intended to do.

To receive support from their team, a UX designer’s explanation for how their design accomplishes its goals must be simple and straight forward. Failure to gain support will cause individuals to disagree with their design and/or not understand it. Without support, the same conversations will occur (“why did you do this again?”) and the project will not go as smoothly or as fast as it could.

Chapter 3: Understanding Relationships

In order to improve communication with stakeholders, UX designers must improve their relationship with them. Good relationships can help UX designers gain trust, a job, and good status. To improve relations with their stakeholders, it’s important for UX designers to see the world through their eyes. This is accomplished by:

- Seeing them as human
- Creating shared experiences
- Developing empathy
- Asking good questions

When UX designers realize that their stakeholders are only human, they understand that they have a life outside of work and multiple things can affect their behavior. So the way stakeholders react to a UX designer’s project may not have anything to do with them or their design at all.

Creating shared experiences helps each individual build something in common with one another. It can be created by going to a conference together, talking about work, life, TV, and asking for advice. Lack of shared experiences will cause conversations with stakeholders to be difficult, perhaps even impossible.

Empathy is the ability to actually share in someone's feelings and experience emotions from their point of view. Once a UX designer develops empathy for their stakeholders, they become better prepared to talk to them about their design choices.

Asking a stakeholder questions simply makes it easier to understand them. These questions should be simple, open ended, not personal, general enough to be safe with any audience, and can create conversation. For example, a UX designer may ask about a stakeholder's pets or kids.

Chapter 4: Reducing Cognitive Load

In order to improve usability, it's important to reduce a user's available brain space, or their cognitive load. The more culture, options, and roadblocks placed in front of them, the more difficult it is to complete a task. Because of this, a UX designer's goal is to remove as much distractions as possible so that a user's brain can focus on the primary task with no difficulties.

Each person has different opinions on what a distraction is, as such, UX designers should think carefully about what they are adding to their design when presenting it to their team or stakeholders. Distractions may include lorem ipsum, visual placeholders, and legacy UI elements. If a designer fails to reduce cognitive load for their audience, confusion will most occur and the topic may be changed several times. For example, stakeholders may ask, "Why did you place Latin in the design?" or "Why does this icon look generic and incomplete?"

UX designers must also anticipate how both their team and stakeholders will react to their designs. Learning how a person will react is usually easy to accomplish because people in general are fairly predictable: most individuals tend to obsess over and react to the same kinds of things every single time. UX designers may know how a person will react to their designs if they are able to answer questions such as:

- "Will they agree with my choice?"
- "Will they understand my explanation?"
- "What do they care about the most?"
- "What are their personal goals for this design?"
- "What do I already know they want?"
- "What do I already know they don't want?"

Chapter 5: Listening is Understanding

Communication begins at listening. Listening is an important skill for every relationship, and it's no different when discussing design decisions. It's more than just waiting for the other person to stop speaking, it requires several implicit skills that every UX designer should have, including:

- Listening without interrupting
- Hearing what the other person is not saying
- Uncovering the actual problem they're trying to solve
- Pausing before moving on

An implicit listener is one who can quickly organize what's being said and derive meaning without any other external clues or further information. UX designers must also use explicit skills, such as:

- Taking notes
- Asking questions
- Repeating or rephrasing what was said

A UX designers who explicitly listens verbally demonstrates that they are listening and are interested in the conversation. Both Implicit and explicit skills help UX designers create a proper and articulate response.

Chapter 6: The Right Frame of Mind

After listening to their stakeholders, UX designers must get in the right frame of mind. They need to "put on an altitude that will help them be articulate and get what they want." It requires them to:

- Give up control
- Check their ego at the door
- Always lead with a 'yes'
- Be charming

Although UX designers have a significant amount of impact in their designs, they usually don't have the final say. Because of this, it's important for them to realize that they aren't in control. Recognizing this makes receiving feedback, working together, and creating better user experiences easier.

Checking their ego at the door "creates the space needed to form a response based on reality and logic instead of opinion and stereotypes." As a result, UX designers become less defensive and better at responding.

Leading with a yes means always staying positive and never refusing someone, regardless of the implications their suggestions might have on the project. "It's about stating directly that you value the other person's perspective. It's about being open to new, innovative ideas even if you're not sure they will work. It's a positive, life-giving word that will change the way you communicate about your designs to people."

Being charming is defined as the ability to communicate to others in a way that appeals to their needs and compels them to agree. A UX designer who uses charm is presented in a light that reflects their best qualities and makes them likeable.

Chapter 7: The Response: Strategy and Tactics

Once UX designers are in the right frame of mind, they must be prepared to respond to their stakeholders. "Responding to stakeholder feedback is a matter of forming words in a way that will yield the best results by staying focused on the goal of the meeting: to get agreement from them." Before responding back to stakeholders, UX designers must:

- Define their strategy for responding
- Employ tactics that will help them get there
- Identify common, relevant responses
- Apply a common framework and ask for agreement

There are a number of different Strategies UX designers can use to get agreement from their stakeholders, as such, they may want to:

- Appeal to a nobler motive
- Represent the user
- Demonstrate effectiveness

After a UX designer defines their strategy, they should employ tactics, such as:

- Showing a comparison
- Proposing an alternative
- Giving them a choice
- Asking others to weigh in
- Postponing the decision

When a UX designer shows a comparison, they take both the proposed design and the suggested changes and show them side by side to their stakeholder. Having the two designs side by side provides a visual reference that makes the difference between the two clear and easy to see.

Proposing an alternative is offering another solution that meets the stakeholder's needs in a different way. Because having alternative choices is a necessity in almost every situation, they may vary in difference.

Giving stakeholders a choice between their design and a UX designer's design helps them clearly see what will be sacrificed. It works especially well if the thing they will lose is more important than what they proposed.

Before asking others to weigh in, UX designers should have a network of individuals that they can rely on. Sometimes, however, persons outside of the network may agree with their opinion and be interested in helping. UX designers could simply ask these individuals to speak up and ask them to become a part of their network.

If these tactics fail, a UX designer's only choice would be to postpone the decision. After postponing, UX designers would then need to wrap their minds around the problem and come back with a better solution. This can be accomplished by leading with a yes, "Yes, I see your point and we really need to find the right solution. How about I take the next few hours to work on it and then we can touch base again before the end of the day?"

Chapter 8: The Reponses: Common Messages

After contemplating what strategies and tactics they can use, UX designers have to identify common messages, which will help employ those tactics in their context. A UX designer can state that their design:

- Helps achieve a goal
- Facilitates a primary use case
- Establishes branding
- Uses a common design pattern
- Draws the user's attention
- Creates a flow for the user
- Is validated by data
- Is Revealed in user testing
- Is supported by other research

Chapter 9: The Ideal Reponses: Getting Agreement

Next, UX designers must create the ideal response. In order to create the ideal response, it's essential for UX designers to:

- Identify the problem
- Describe the solution
- Empathize with the user
- Appeal to the business
- Lock in agreement

To receive agreement from their stakeholders, it's important to be direct as possible. Simply asking stakeholders if they agree puts them in a position of needing to respond before they move on.

UX designers should phrase their question in a way that highlights either the positive or negative effects, for example, "Do you agree that we should improve conversion by removing these fields?"

Lastly, UX designers should phrase their question to emphasize the affect it has on the user experience, such as, "Do you agree that we should improve usability?"

Chapter 10: Meeting Adjourned: The After-Party

After the meeting, it's important for UX designers to:

- Stick around to chat with people
- Follow up quickly with your notes
- Apply filters and remove the fluff
- Seek out individuals who can help
- Make decisions when there is ambiguity

UX designers should stick around after the meeting because co-workers generally stay themselves and discuss how they really feel about the project with one another. Because of this, "the meeting after the meeting" is usually more important than the meeting itself because more work gets done.

Once the "meeting after the meeting" is finished, UX designers should follow up with their team as soon as possible. A quick follow-up via email demonstrates that UX designers saw the meeting as a priority, valued the participants, and were listening. It also gets everyone on the same page about what was decided, making it unlikely for confusion to occur in the future. The follow up should include a thank you message, a recap of what was discussed, and expectations for the future.

In the follow-letter, UX designers should use their best judgement to filter out all the unnecessary information that isn't worth repeating to their team. Although figuring out what information is not needed can be difficult, it's necessary because it reduces clutter and distractions, which impact user usability.

If a UX designers believes a person may be able to help them in their efforts to receive agreement from their stakeholders, then they may want to seek them out. It's important to talk to these individuals right after the meeting is over, otherwise they won't be in the right mood and thinking about the project. The purpose of these "one-to-ones is to give people an opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions outside the constraints of a meeting where other people are listening." These small meetings can be used to gather insight, information on the team and project, and build new relationships.

Finally, if a UX designer feels that a decision may come off as ambiguous to their team, then they should clarify it in the follow-up letter or in separate email. If they find themselves unable to expand on the decision, then they may need to give a new decision instead.

Articulating Design Decisions

A Summary of Tom Greever's Book

Christopher Navarrete

About *Articulating Design Decisions*

Articulating Design Decisions by Tom Greever is informative to only those who are in the user experience (UX) design profession. Although it does summarize the basics of what a UX designer is and how to improve user usability, it does not revolve around those concepts. Rather, the text book assumes the reader has no issues in accomplishing their duties and goes straight into a completely different problem that many UX designers face.

It discusses how a UX designer can effectively communicate with their teammates and stakeholders about their designs. Greever explains how they can communicate effectively by listing several strategies and tactics, such as showing comparisons and proposing alternatives.

One must also be able to build and maintain relationships through certain actions to communicate effectively. This includes listening explicitly and implicitly, being in the right frame of mind, and creating a good response. However before creating a relationship, UX designers must understand them. Greever states that in order to build a relationship, one must gain trust, identify influencers, and share experiences among others.

Without a good relationship, UX designers will find it be difficult to overcome issues that are associated with communication. *Articulating Design Decisions* explains these possible complications, which include disagreements and the CEO button.

Finally, in order to keep communication with their teammates, Greever strongly encourages UX designers to stay after meetings. This can help UX designers work more efficiently and build stronger relationships with them.

Chapter 1: A Maturing Industry

User experience design (UX) describes the tools and ideas used by a designer who “creates an entire end-to-end experience using a user-centered design philosophy.” Although UX is a career that is still young, its focus on improving usability through design has helped it explode in popularity. Companies are now not only asking employees to make websites look “cool,” but to make sense as well. Today, users expect to see great design in websites that are associated with social media, politics, business, and culture. As a result of great design, users are able to navigate and understand information easier.

Chapter 2: Great Designers are Great Communicators

To become an effective UX designer, one must understand how important good communication is to design. Without good communication, UX designers will find it difficult to overcome matters such as disagreements, the CEO button, and home page syndrome with their team and stakeholders.

Disagreements cause team members and/or stakeholders to become defensive and unable to collaborate. The issue at hand will then never be accomplished, and the end result is nothing more than a crippled user experience. Disagreements usually occur because of different ideas and opinions, the CEO button, and home page syndrome.

The CEO button is an unusual or otherwise unexpected request from an executive to add a feature that destroys the balance of a project. It usually undermines and discourages UX designers from continue working.

Home page syndrome is a “condition whereby the home screen of an application or website becomes a catchall for everything, creating a garage sale of links, buttons, and banner ads that unravels the fabric of usability.” This occurs when multiple persons ask UX designers to have their businesses represented on the homepage.

As part of being good communicators, UX designers must also be articulate when describing their work. Being articulate is defined as the ability to use words and tone in a way that communicates a specific message and elicits a specific response.

The key to being articulate is to understand both the message that needs to be communicated, and the response that is wanted in return. Being articulate about design imparts intelligence, demonstrates intentionality, and expresses confidence. As a result, it may impress enough to garner a UX designer career opportunities and understanding from others in regards to the project.

Before UX designers express and articulate their designs, they must be certain that it has the ability to solve a problem, be easy for users to understand, and be supported by their team.

To solve a problem, UX designers must be aware of every decision they make and ask themselves, “What problem am I trying to solve with this?” One of the best ways UX designers can practice being aware of their own decisions is by writing them down.

To make designs easy to understand, UX designers must not only be focused on user usability, but also aware of every decision they make and ask themselves, “How does this affect the user?” Without an easy interface, users will be confused and the design will fail at what it was intended to do.

To receive support, a UX designer’s team must understand and agree with how the design accomplishes its goals. Understanding can be achieved by being simple and straight forward. Without support, the same conversations will occur (“why did you do this again?”) and the project will not go as smoothly or as fast as it could.

A UX designer’s ability to be thoughtful about a problem and articulate any solution is more important than the ability to design the perfect solution every time. Once their teammates and stakeholders understand how thoughtful and intentional they are about their designs, they’re more willing to trust them, even if they disagree with their opinions.

Chapter 3: Understanding Relationships

To communicate effectively to their stakeholders and teammates, UX designers must improve their relationship with them. Good relationships can help UX designers gain trust, a job, and good status.

To improve relations with a person, it’s important for UX designers to see the world through their eyes. This is accomplished by seeing them as human, creating shared experiences, developing empathy, asking good questions, and identifying influencers.

Seeing their stakeholders and teammates as human allows UX designers to understand that multiple things can affect their behavior outside of work. Their mood might have nothing to do with a UX designer or their project at all

Creating shared experiences helps each individual build something in common with one another. It can be created by going to a conference together, talking about work, life, TV, and asking for advice. Lack of shared experiences will cause conversations with stakeholders to be difficult and possibly awkward.

Developing empathy is more than just understanding another person or seeing things in their perspective, it’s the ability to actually share in someone’s feelings and experience things from their point of view. Once a UX designer develops empathy for their stakeholders, they become better prepared to talk to them about their choices.

Asking questions simply makes it easier to understand stakeholders and teammates. Questions that UX designer may ask should be simple, open ended, not personal, general enough to be safe with any audience, and can create a conversation. For example, a UX designer may ask about a stakeholder’s pets or kids.

Identifying influencers means understanding the individuals who influence a project. This includes team influencers (people in a UX designers direct team), executive influencers (people who oversee a UX designers project), and external influencers (people outside the team). Once a UX designer recognizes what these individuals value, they can tailor the approaches described above to them.

Chapter 4: Reducing Cognitive Load

In order to improve usability, UX designers must reduce a user's available brain space, or their cognitive load. The more options and roadblocks placed in front of them, the more difficult it is to complete a task. Because of this, a UX designer's goal is to remove as much distractions as possible so that a user's brain is freed to focus on the primary task.

Avoiding distractions is especially important when one presents their design to their team or stakeholder for feedback. Distractions may include lorem ipsum, visual placeholders, and legacy UI elements. Failure to remove distractions may cause confusion, for example, stakeholders may ask, "Why did you place Latin in the design?" or "Why does this icon look so generic?"

Before UX designers present their design to teammates and stakeholders, however, they must first anticipate the reactions it may yield. Thankfully, this process is relatively straightforward because "people in general are fairly predictable: most individuals tend to obsess over and react to the same kinds of things every single time." If UX designers aren't confident in their ability to determine reactions, they should think about what questions they may have to help them advance, such as:

- "What do they care about the most?"
- "What are their personal goals for this design?"
- "What do I already know they want or don't want?"

Chapter 5: Listening is Understanding

Communication begins at listening. Listening is an important skill for every relationship, and it's no different when discussing design decisions. It's more than just waiting for the other person to stop speaking, it requires implicit listening. An implicit listener is one who can quickly organize what's being said and derive meaning without any other external clues or further information. To become an implicit listener, UX designers must be able to:

- Listen without interrupting
- Hear what the other person is not saying
- Uncover the actual problem they're trying to solve
- Pause before moving on.

Listening also requires one to become an explicit listener. An Explicit listener is one who verbally demonstrates interest and participation. Once UX designers master implicit and explicit listening, they are able to create a proper and articulate response. Explicit listening requires a person to:

- Maintain eye contact
- Take notes
- Ask questions
- Repeat or rephrase what was said

Chapter 6: The Right Frame of Mind

After understanding their stakeholders, UX designers must get in the right frame of mind. They need to put on an altitude that will help them be articulate and get them what they want. It requires them to check their ego at the door, lose control, lead with a 'yes,' and be charming.

Checking their ego at the door "creates the space needed to form a response based on reality and logic instead of opinion and stereotypes." As a result, UX designers seem less defensive and become better at responding.

Losing control means recognizing that you don't have the final say in your designs. Once UX designers accept this, they are able to receive feedback, work together, and create user experiences more efficiently.

Leading with a yes means always staying positive and never refusing someone, regardless of the implications their suggestions might have on the project. "It's about stating directly that you value the other person's perspective. It's about being open to new, innovative ideas even if you're not sure they will work. It's a positive, life-giving word that will change the way you communicate about your designs to people."

Being charming is defined as the ability to communicate to other people in a way that appeals to their needs and compels them to agree. As a result, a charming person is presented in a light that reflects their best qualities and makes them likeable. While charm takes a significant amount of time to learn, it is considered to be one of the most valuable skills in the workplace, especially when used on stakeholders.

Chapter 7: The Response: Strategy and Tactics

After UX designers get in the right frame of mind, they must be prepared to respond to their stakeholders. "Responding to stakeholder feedback is a matter of forming words in a way that will yield the best results by staying focused on the goal of the meeting: to get agreement from them." To create a good response, UX designers must define their strategy for responding. Strategies that UX designers should use when responding to stakeholders include appealing to a nobler motive (attaching decisions to a goal or other problems that need to be solved), representing the user (in a way that is tangible and real), and demonstrating effectiveness.

Once UX designers have their strategies well defined, they should employ tactics to help them respond. Depending on the situation, some tactics may be more useful than others. As a result, UX designers should think carefully about what tactic will help them reach agreement with their stakeholders. Tactics include showing a comparison, proposing an alternative, giving them a choice, asking others to weigh in, and postponing the decision.

When showing a comparison, UX designers take their proposed design and suggested changes and show them side by side so that the differences between the two are clear. The purpose is to provide a visual reference that makes it clear which approach is best.

Proposing an alternative is simply offering another solution that meets their needs in a different way. It may be completely different or barely different. Whatever the case, proposing an alternative is a necessity in almost every situation.

Giving stakeholders a choice between something they want and the new thing UX designers are suggesting is another great tactic. This lets stakeholders see what they may lose and realize if the sacrifice is worth it. It works especially well if the thing they will lose is more important than what they proposed

Before asking others to weight in, UX designers need to have a network of people that they can rely on. Sometimes, however, there may be individuals outside of the network that may agree with their designs. UX designers could simply ask these individuals to speak up. Creating a feeling of consensus around their designs will bolster a UX designer's case and help stakeholders see that other experts agree with them.

Postponing the decision should be a UX designer's last choice if all tactics failed to move the conversation in a positive direction. After postponing the decision, UX designers should warp their minds around the problem and come back with a better solution. This can be accomplished by leading with a yes, "Yes, I see your point and we really need to find the right solution. How about I take the next few hours to work on it and then we can touch base again before the end of the day?"

Chapter 8: The Responses: Common Messages

Once they know what strategies and tactics they will use on their stakeholders, UX designers have to "identify the important messages that will help them employ those tactics in their context." Despite the fact that every project is different and every client has unique needs, they can usually be given the same explanations that was said in other projects.

In regards to business documents, one of the best ways to appeal to a stakeholder is to directly connect to the needs of the business. UX designers will most likely say that their project:

- "Helps achieve a goal"
- "Facilitates a primary use case"
- "Establishes branding"

When creating documents with have a strong focus on design, it's important to explain how the design helps users understand the document. UX designers will probably be able to say it:

- "Uses a common design pattern"
- "Draws the user's attention"
- "Creates a flow for the user"

As for documents that use research, UX designers may want to give responses that demonstrate the importance of using such data. Projects may be:

- "Validated by data"
- "Revealed in user testing"
- "Supported by other research"

Chapter 9: The Ideal Responses: Getting Agreement

After learning how to speak to their stakeholders, UX designers must now create the ideal response. To create the ideal response, UX designers should identify the problem, describe the solution, emphasize the solution, appeal to the business, and lock in agreement.

Identifying the problem means stating the issue the design is addressing. This gets everyone on the same page and helps reduce confusion as it emphasizes clarity.

Describing the solution makes a clear connection between what a UX designer did in their project and how it addresses the issue.

Empathizing with the user is stating how a solution solves the problem for a specific user. UX designers must remember that the user is the main priority.

Appealing to the business is describing how their decisions are meant to affect goals, metrics, or key performance indicators.

Locking in agreement means asking for agreement after clearly making their case.

To receive agreement from their stakeholders, it's important to be very direct. Simply asking stakeholders if they agree puts them in a position of needing to respond before they move on. UX designers should also phrase their question in a way that highlights either the positive or negative effects, for example, "Do you agree that we should improve conversion by removing these fields?" UX designers should also phrase their question to emphasize the affect it has on the user experience.

Chapter 10: Meeting Adjourned: The After-Party

After meeting up with their stakeholders, UX designers should stick around to chat with their team, follow up with their team, apply filters to remove the fluff, and make decisions when there is ambiguity in order to keep efficiently keep communication.

Sticking around to chat with the team is usually more important than the meeting itself because everyone gets to discuss how they really feel about the project. As a result, more work gets done after the meeting than during the meeting.

Following up with their team on what happened in the meeting demonstrates they saw the meeting as a priority, valued the participants, and were listening. A follow-up also gets everyone on the same page about what was decided so that there is no confusion going forward. The follow-up is usually written as an email and should include a thank you message, a recap of what was discussed, and expectations for the future.

Applying filters to remove the fluff means removing information that isn't worth repeating to the team in the follow-ups. Although labeling information as unnecessary can be difficult, it's necessary because it reduces clutter and distractions.