

DISCUSSING DESIGN

The Art of Critique

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So, what is critique?



The new Spotify design is perhaps even worse than the old Spotify design. The visual hierarchy and underlying IA are terrible.

We should make that a dropdown instead of radio buttons.

I would never use this. I don't like the layout.

This is terrible. I have no idea what the lines mean.

We're disappointed in this solution. We're going to have our own designers come up with one.

Looks ugly. Make it pretty.

I like the paper form better.

What. The hell. Is this?

None of this is what I asked for.

Make it look more like SharePoint.

Here is a rewrite. My intention is to sharpen the language, make it more precise.

What kind of company shuts down a much-loved service like Google Reader but keeps the vegetative Google Plus?

I'm just not feeling it. I don't know what, but it isn't right yet. Just needs to be more innovative.

It doesn't have enough spunk.

The wireframes are still not answering our problem and are not providing enough an easier solution for the page.

Change the order of the screens so that the 3rd and first one are switched.

It needs more flululululuh!!

No. That won't work. What if we do it this way...

It's laid out too much like [popular service]. We should be different.

Critique is about critical thinking.

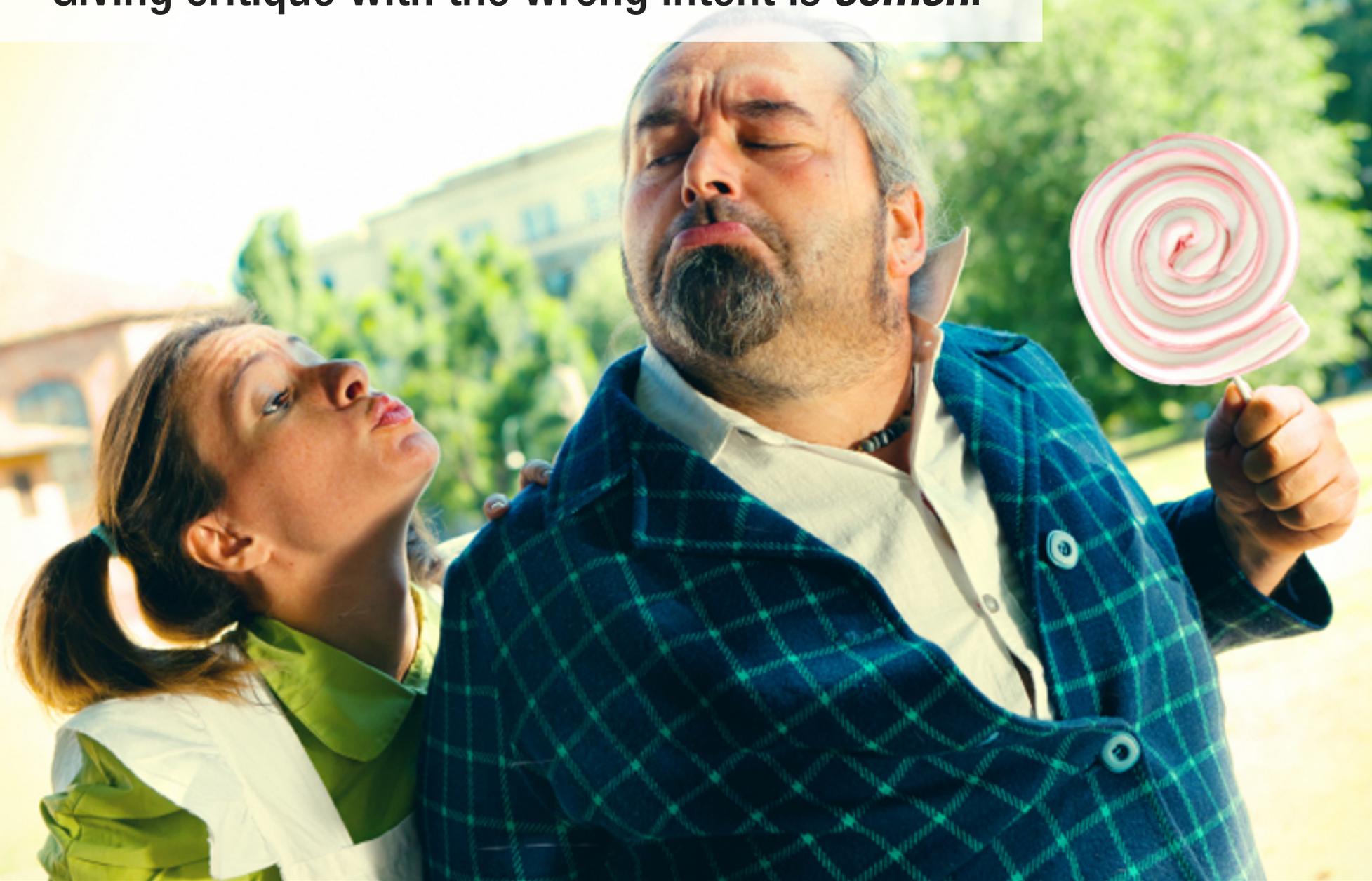


There are two facets to critique: giving and receiving.



At their foundation is intent.

Giving critique with the wrong intent is *selfish*.



Giving critique with the right intent is *selfless*.



Tips for giving critique

Use a filter.

Gather initial thoughts and reactions. Revisit them in the right context.

Don't assume.

Find out the reason behind thinking, constraints or other variables.

Don't invite yourself.

Get in touch and ask to chat about the design.

Lead with questions.

Show an interest in their process.

Talk about strengths.

Critique isn't just about the things that aren't working.

Receiving critique with the right intent takes humility and a bit of restraint.



Tips for receiving critique

Remember the purpose.

Critique is about understanding and improvement, not judgement.

Listen and think before you talk back.

Do you understand what the critics are saying?

Participate.

Analyze your proposed solution with everyone else.

Set the right foundation.

Use knowledge and prior agreements to get everyone on the same page.

Questions to ask yourself

What problem was the designer trying to solve or what goal were they trying to achieve?

How did the designer try to solve that problem or achieve that goal?

How effective is what the designer did at solving the problem or achieving the goal?

Why is or isn't what the designer did effective?

More things to think about

Are there any problems the designer could or should have solved, but didn't?

Do any new problems arise as a result of the choices the designer made?

These kinds of questions can be important to think about and ask, but be prepared for them to be beyond the scope of the designer's work, and therefore not something to focus the remainder your critique on.

A few things to keep in mind

Critique is a skill. You only get better with practice.

Start small.

Think before you speak.

Choose who you critique with carefully.



The rules of critique



**Avoid problem solving
and design decisions.**

Everyone is a critic.

Everyone is equal.

**The designer is
responsible for follow
up and decisions.**

A black and white photograph of a tuxedo waiter. The waiter is wearing a black tuxedo jacket, a white ruffled shirt, and a black bow tie. He is holding a silver tray with both hands, which are wearing white gloves. On the tray is a white rectangular sign with the text "Who should you invite?" written in a black, elegant script font.

*Who should
you invite?*

Set the right foundation for good critique

Scenarios

Short narratives that describe the desired behaviors, thoughts, reactions, emotions, etc. of the user. Describes what happens, but not how.

Personas

User Archetypes that describe their average behaviors, goals, expectations, knowledge, etc.

Goals

Desired, measurable outcomes of the user interacting with the product or service. Can be user oriented, business oriented or both.

Principles

Desired qualities or characteristics of the solution. Describe what happens, but not how.

The Mini-Brief

A Mini-Creative Brief is a short writeup of a project

About 1/2 - 1 page that recaps the foundation and context for why something is being created.

It includes...

A brief summary of the problem statement and business goals.

The key users (personas) of the solution.

The main scenarios in which the solution will be used.

The design principles to be followed.

Note: This isn't necessarily the full documentation for these individual elements.

Review this at the start of a meeting or discussion.

Doing this helps to ground the conversation and ensure everyone is working toward the same goals.

Preparation & kickoff



Facilitating critique

Critique Goals

Active listening, question for clarity

Round Robin

Direct Inquiry

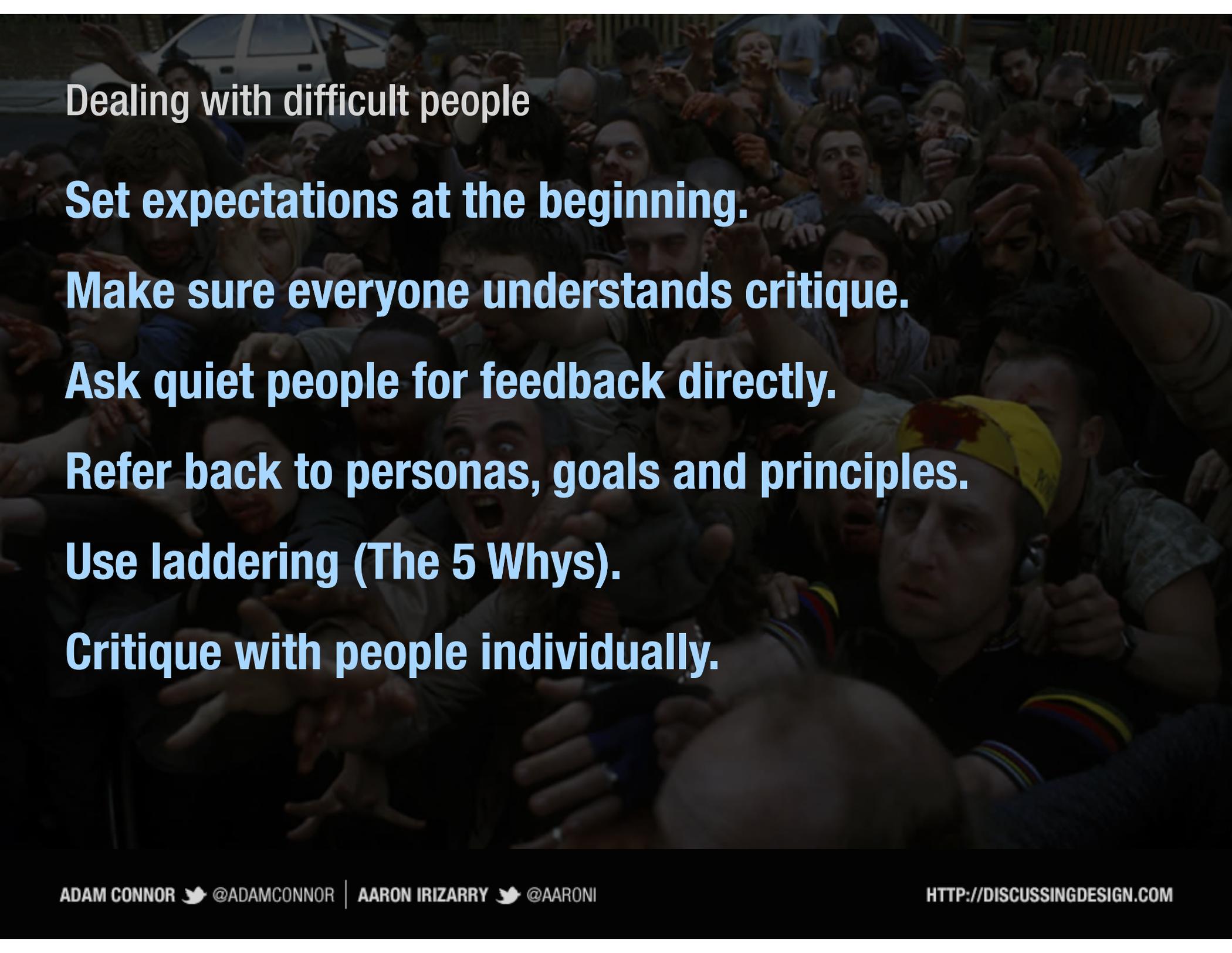
Quotas

Six Thinking Hats

Facilitators

Dealing with difficult people





Dealing with difficult people

Set expectations at the beginning.

Make sure everyone understands critique.

Ask quiet people for feedback directly.

Refer back to personas, goals and principles.

Use laddering (The 5 Whys).

Critique with people individually.

What comes next?

To do list

1.

2.

3.

Making critique part of your process

Standalone Critiques

Design Reviews

Brainstorms and Collaborative Activities

Standalone critiques are awesome because they can...

Provide an introduction to people unfamiliar with critique.

Provide a safe(r) place to practice giving and receiving feedback.

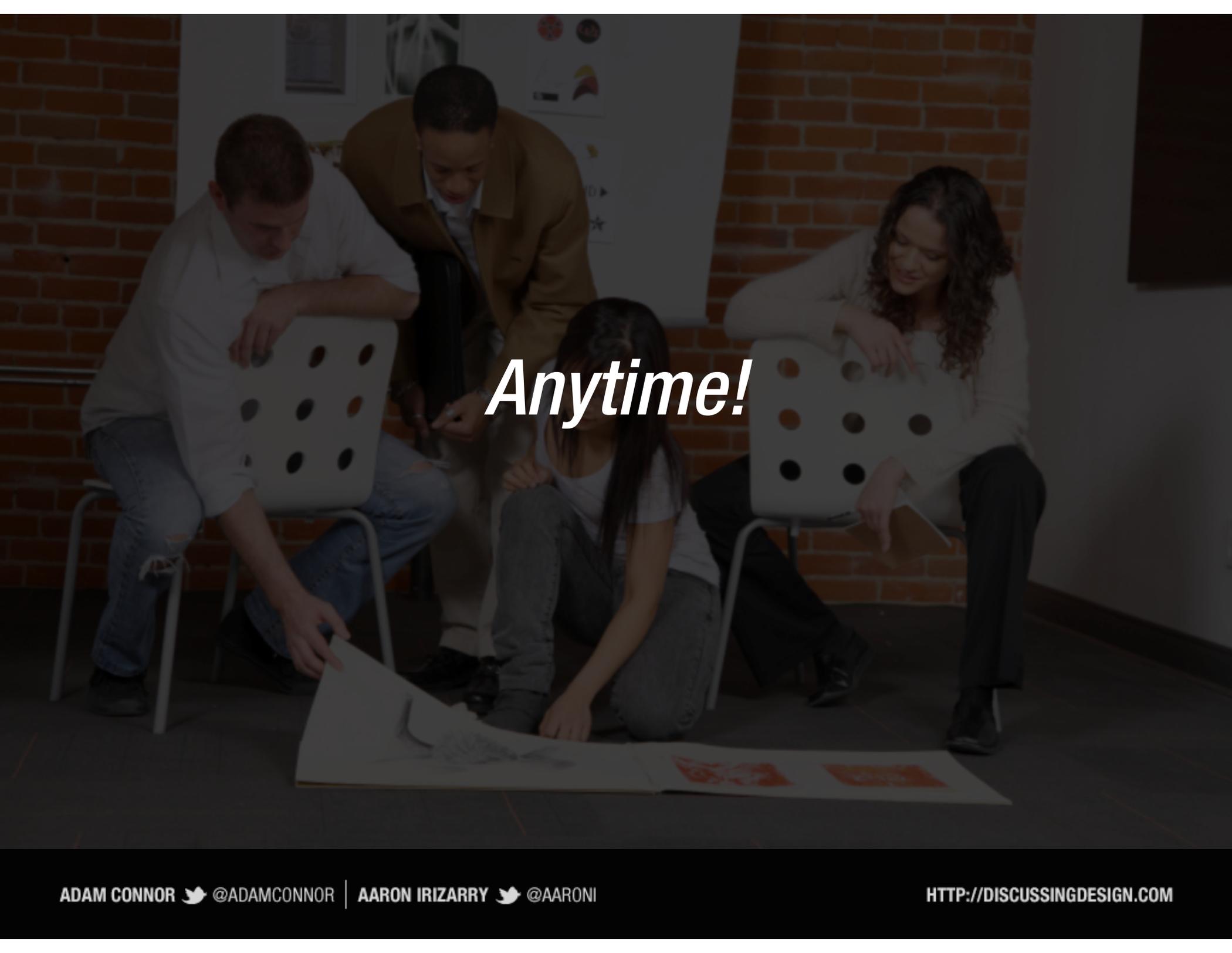
Allow teams to focus feedback on specific goals, topics, etc.

Increase the sense of collaboration in team members.

Two approaches: Impromptu and Scheduled

When can you have critiques?

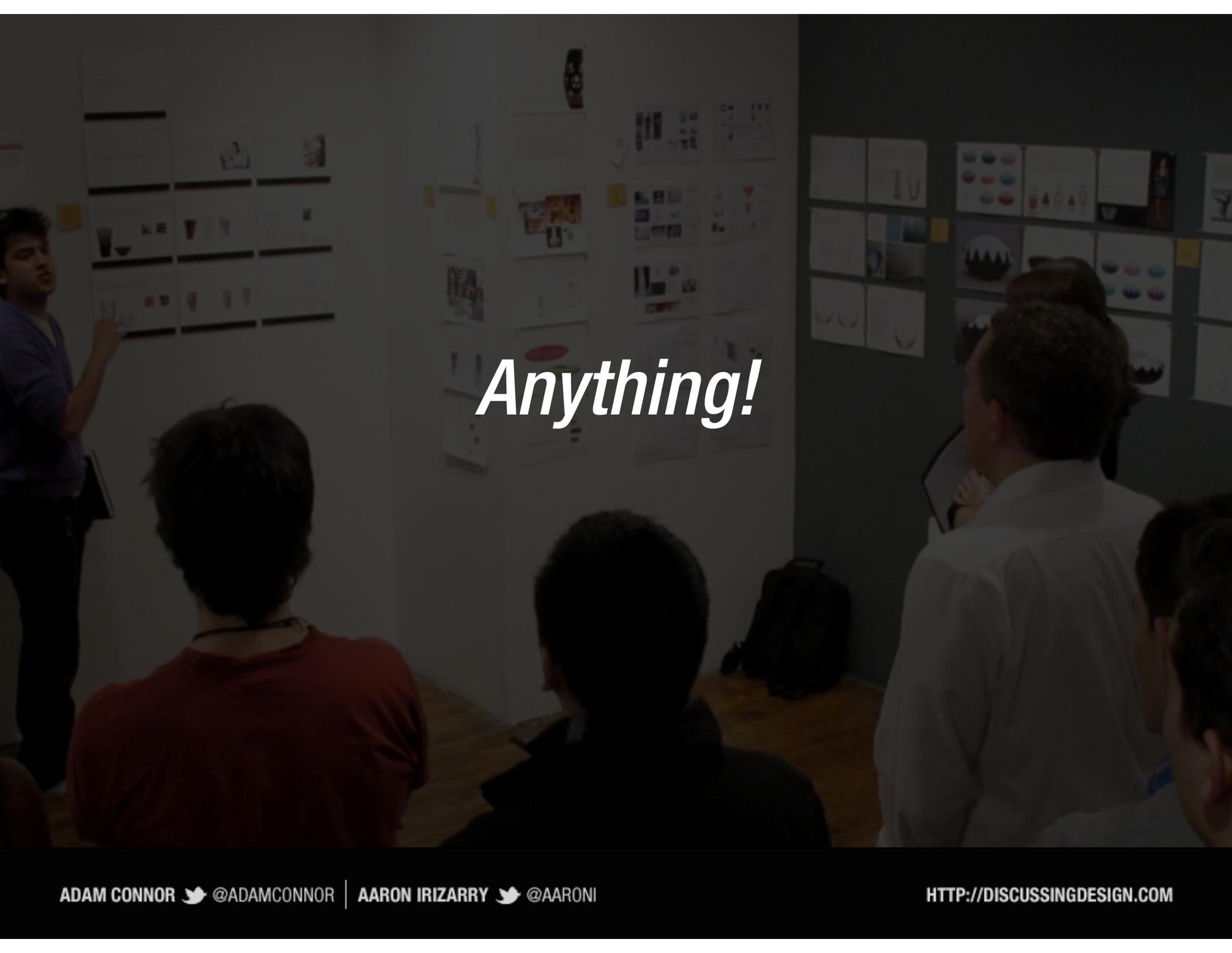




Anytime!

What can you critique?





Anything!



Critique is about iteration and improvement. So long as you're looking to improve on whatever it is you're doing, you've got an opportunity for critique.

Making critique part of your process

Standalone Critiques

Design Reviews

Brainstorms and Collaborative Activities

Design Reviews and their challenging for critique because...

They're used to get approval or some kind of blessing.

Their timing is driven by project timeline.

They often have too large of an audience and many attendees have the wrong intent.

Their output, if not approval, is typically a list of specified changes.

Making the most of a Design Review

Take control as much as possible.

Recap the goals and principles of the design.

Use the same tools as you would for dealing with difficult people.

Don't rely on them for critique. Be prepared to schedule a more focused session.

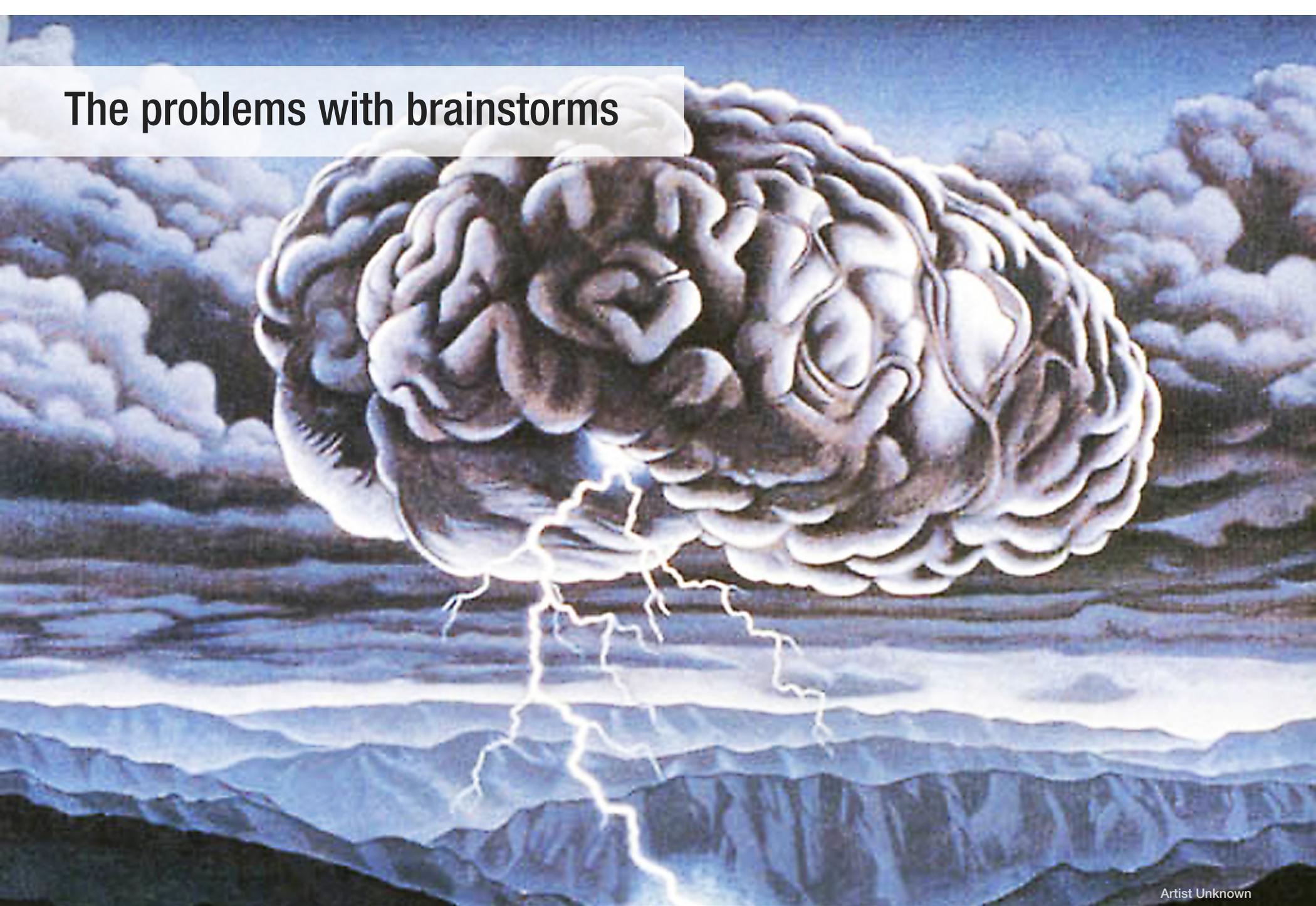
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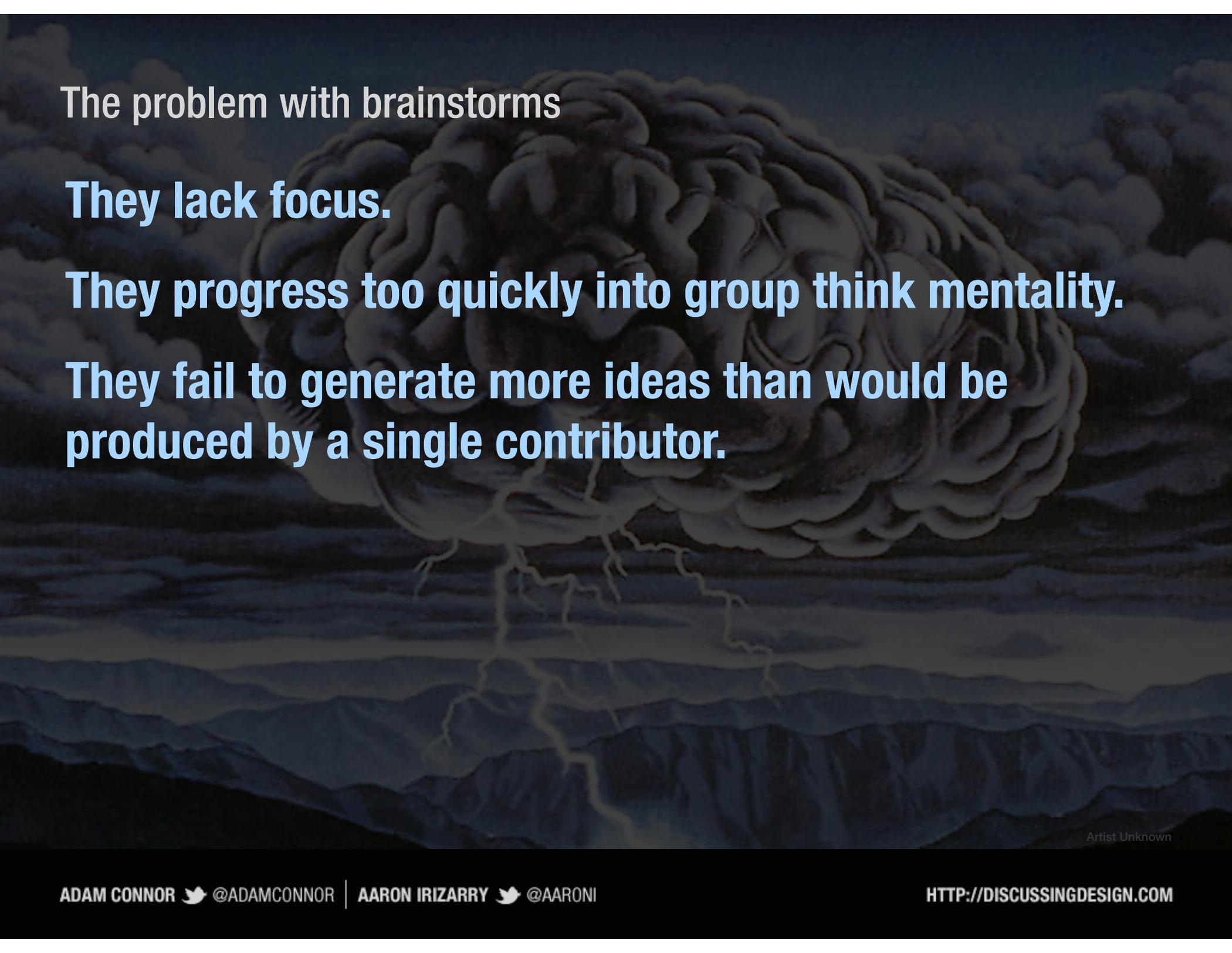
Design Reviews

Brainstorms and Collaborative Activities

The problems with brainstorming



Artist Unknown



The problem with brainstorming

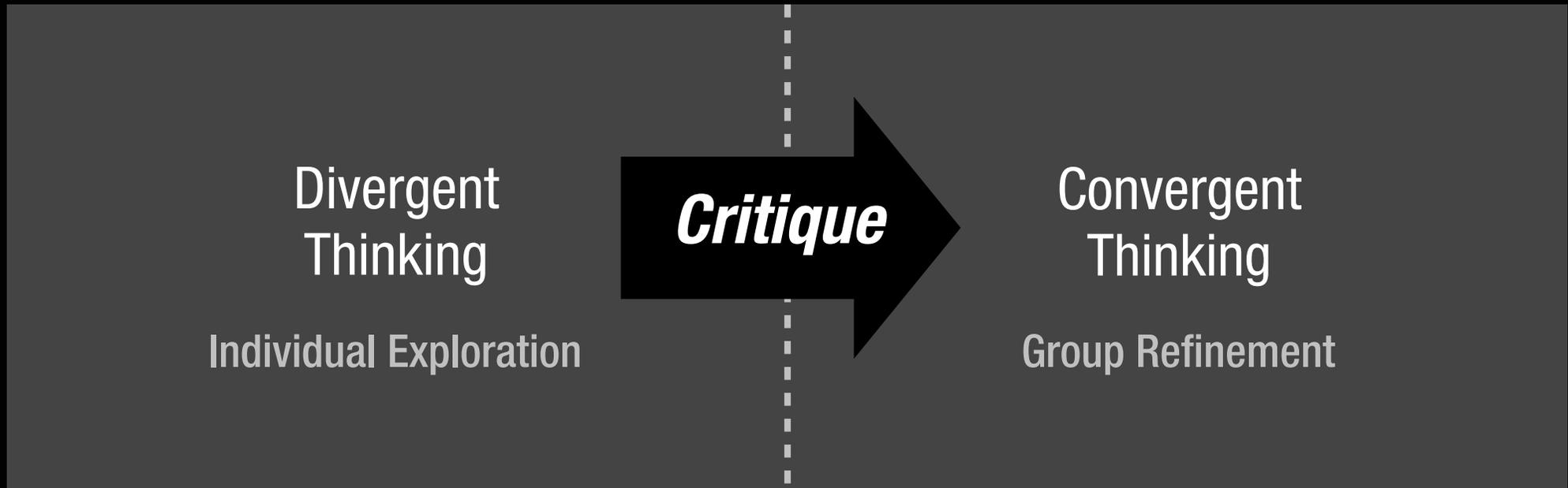
They lack focus.

They progress too quickly into group think mentality.

They fail to generate more ideas than would be produced by a single contributor.

Artist Unknown

A loose framework for collaboration



Your Super Innovative Brainstorm Session

To sum it all up

There are 2 sides to critique: giving & receiving.

The right intent (on both sides) is to try to understand the decisions made so far and their impact toward meeting goals and objectives.

Critique is a skill. It takes practice to improve.

There are basic rules that should be followed to help ensure good critique.

Mutually understood and agreed upon goals are critical both when asking for and giving critique.

To sum it all up

Learning to facilitate critique by asking the right questions is key to introducing and fostering a culture of critique.

Critique can be done both internally and with clients. Use up to 6 people for about 1 hour.

Be prepared to deal with difficult people. You will encounter them.

Critique can be incorporated into the design process both as an activity and as part of other activities.

THANK YOU

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