



## Stanford eCorner

### Designing the Life You Really Want [Entire Talk]

Dave Evans, *Stanford Life Design Lab*

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Dave Evans, co-founder of the popular Life Design Lab at Stanford University, discusses the key concepts and exercises that guide students in their quest to figure out what they want to do in life. He underscores the importance of accepting who you are and connecting that to what you believe and do, while attacking dysfunctional notions like the one that dares you to be the “best version of yourself.” Can’t we have more than one?



#### Transcript

- So, we're here to talk about this designing, how design thinking might apply to your life. That's not starting a company, but managing your life if you're gonna start a company is a pretty challenging thing. So, what this thing is all about, first of all, Bill Burnett, my partner who is not here, he's actually doing something similar in another building on the campus right now, so 10 years ago, Bill and I got together, had lunch, started talking about this thing, and said, "Hey let's do this," in the summer of 2007, and that turned into what is now called the Life Design Lab. And at the Life Design Lab, our mission is very simple. It is to apply the innovation principles of design thinking to the wicked problem of designing your life at or after university. That's a carefully crafted elevator pitch. All the colored words, if you click on 'em, you get a white paper. Most people go, "What does that really mean?" "That sounds great. "That sounds like a VC pitch." No, we teach the classes that help you figure out what you wanna be when you grow up. And then everybody goes, "Oh, can I take the class?" So that's a better question.

Actually, it's a lousy question. The way we'd reframe that is it's not what you wanna be when you grow up. It's what you wanna be next as you continue growing. And would all the people who are done growing up please raise their hand? (audience laughs) Who hopes that never happens? Totally. Okay. So, let's just not do that. That's a bad idea. Now, we teach a bunch of courses here. We teach Designing Your Life, the signature course, to juniors and seniors, many of them. We teach Designing Your Stanford to freshmen and sophomores trying to figure out how to go to college in a certain designerly sort of a way.

We actually Designing the Professional to graduate students, masters students, PhD students, including business. Have we got any business students? No, they're too busy. We've got law students, we've got med students? I got a couple law, a couple med, okay. So anybody, come on down. It's actually just like Designing Your Life but it has a bigger word 'cause you're probably getting a PhD. And so we teach, as it turns out, on the order of 15 to 20 percent of all the students here at Stanford. That's actually a lot of people. And these are sharp people. They should know what they're doing with their lives. Why is that happening? Well, what's going on is the experience of being a person and being smart doesn't necessarily mean being clear.

So what do Stanford students sound like? Well, if you ask them how life at Stanford is going, this is what it sounds like. - Life is good. - Life's great. - Life is awesome. - Amazing. - Life is going well. - Happy Stanford students, okay. Most people on the farm are pretty happy. How many students have we here? How many of you are generally happy with (mumbles) Can't find any. It's a setup question.

Now, let's raise the bar a little bit, and now what? What are you gonna do after you leave? - Yeah, that'll be interesting. - I was gonna go to med school but some grades changed that. I think I'm gonna go to law school. - Um... - Um... - Um... - Ooh... - Uh... - Uh... - Uh...

(laughs awkwardly) - I have no idea. - I don't know yet. - I have no idea what I'm going to do after college. - Sometimes I guess I tell myself I don't really have to worry about it when I really probably should be. - Okay, now that, actually, those films were taken at a career fair. The little name tags were my name is. "I'm at a career fair. "I'm all ready to pitch myself to the world." And these are the answers we're getting. Now by the way, this was really easy film to get. Let me be very clear.

We didn't wait like for three days to get the six really clueless Stanford students and make them look bad. That was not the deal. The deal is, that's a pretty normal response. Now, why is that? What is going on? What's the problem? Well, the problem is what we call dysfunctional beliefs, ideas that are untrue or un-generative and not helping, they're getting in the way. Examples, okay. We're at Stanford. We're talking about students. There's a big student dysfunctional belief. Here we're sitting on the quad. You're having a conversation about what? Of course, what you're studying.

"So, what's your major?" "Well, I'm majoring in creative writing." The next question is? - [Audience] What are you gonna do with that? - What are you gonna do with that? Everybody knows that's the question. And if, in fact, you're majoring in creative writing, what are you going to do? Be unemployed, that's right. That's what you're gonna be. (audience laughs) No, that turns out to be a massively dysfunctional belief. It turns out within 10 years of graduation, 80% of people with a college baccalaureate or working outside their field of major study. The correlation between what you study and what you do is extremely low. How many of you over the age of 35 are still doing the thing you studied as an undergrad? (audience laughs) Are you willing to say, "I'm over 35?" (audience laughs) Okay, it's not zero. Here's the deal. So that's it. It just doesn't work.

It's just stupid. Now, dysfunctional belief number two, our personal favorite, what's your passion? What's your passion? Are you an entrepreneur? You're passionately entrepreneurial, aren't you? You are, aren't you? You know you're passionate, right? How many of you have been asked the question, "What's your passion?" in the last week? Keep your hand up if you asked somebody else that question. Okay, cut it out. The research demonstrates that eight out of 10 people answer the question either, "I don't know," or, "Which one did you want me to start with?" Now, in either case, zero or many, "What's your passion?" is lousy guidance. It may be wonderful. We're kinda getting a rap as the anti-passion guys. That's not fair. We're not anti-passion. We're anti-presuppositional singular passion as an organizing principle preceding all other behaviors. IE, you knew upfront and it was gonna work out fine.

If you happen to know that passion clearly and you are competent to do it and the world is interested in it at the same time commercially, great! You're called lucky. That's what we call that. But that's not a good place to start. For most people, passion is the outcome, not the input. It's the end of the game, not the beginning of the game. Number three, "You should know by now." In fact, if you haven't got yourself most of the way down the yellow brick road toward the city of Oz that you're pretty sure is where the cool stuff is happening, you're probably late. And you're supposed to be a smart Stanford person if you're one of our students. How many of you have ever felt late? For what? There is no such thing. You're just here. I got a call by a guy named Tim who was a sales guy at Oracle many years ago, and he calls me.

He goes, "Hi, Dave." I go, "Well hello, Tim. "How are you?" He goes, "Well, I'm late." I go, "Oh, well why did you call? "Call me later." "No, no, no, I'm three years late." He was 33, and he said he was three years late. I said, "I don't think so." He goes, "No, I really am. "Trust me, I'm really three years behind." And we argued for a year about whether or not he was behind or here, (audience laughs) at the end of which he finally concluded he was here, thank God, 'cause then he's four years late. (audience laughs) But that is not necessarily true. Everybody is figuring it out on their own merit. So it's time to think a little bit differently. Yeah, that means it's time to think like a designer. Now, to understand design thinking, how many of you have had some introduction to design thinking, boot camp or whatever? Like, you know this stuff. You've seen the caterpillar, okay.

Now, I'm gonna position design thinking in the context of other forms of thinking. Design thinking is great. It's like super hot on Stanford campus. It's great in the innovation and venture world, which is true and wonderful and appropriate, but it's not the only tool in the box. Depends on the problem set you're dealing with. In engineering, there's lots of good engineers here on campus. We're in the engineering quad. I have two engineering degrees from Stanford. You solve your way forward. You know enough information.

You know the algorithms, the equations. You can actually solve for the problem and get it right. You can actually fix things and they work. Now, in business thinking, we got business people in the room, right? When are you right in business? Never. You're never right in business. You're just winning or losing, and you're winning a little more or winning a little less. You optimize. You never have a big enough market share, a big enough profitability, high enough customer satisfaction or delight or loyalty, strong enough competitive barriers to entry. You're never done with that stuff. You just move forward in an optimizing sort of way.

And if you're smart enough, you even do it in a quantified optimizing sort of way like we do here at Stanford. Now, if you're a researcher, we do a lot of that. Any PhD candidates? Are there any PhDs or PhD candidates in the room? We've got one in the back, okay. Well, she's really good at this research stuff where we learn how to analyze, a certain kind of thinking, analytical thinking starting with a hypothesis, breaking it down in certain steps, eventually thin slicing all the way to the question

to which there is not an answer. And if you make a little progress on that, we actually give you a prize called a PhD. And that's research thinking. It's a wonderful way to go forward by analysis. And then design thinking, where we build our way forward. In certainly two if not three of these cases before these other forms of thinking, which are totally valid but not universal, you're mostly working on tame problems, tame problems like building the Brooklyn Bridge, putting an astronaut on the Moon, stabilizing cold fusion. Those are all tame problems, tame meaning well behaved, act tomorrow like they did yesterday.

The Brooklyn Bridge does not wake up on Thursday and go, "You know, it's not working for me anymore. (audience laughs) "This whole stress management thing, you know. "I'm just over it. "Not doing it anymore." That does not happen because the Brooklyn Bridge is a tame problem. Really hard tame problems remain to be solved, but they're tame because they behave well, their criteria are stable, they act the same tomorrow as they did today as they would've yesterday. Wicked problems, which are overwhelmingly human problems, are ones where the criteria are constantly moving. You won't know success until you meet it. Once you get a solution, it's not reusable. This was originally conceived, the concept, the technical term wicked problem, was conceived in the '70s by a bunch of Berkeley urban analysts and urban planners who were trying to think of how to invent cities. Well, once you get Singapore figured out, you can't just pick it up and copy it and put it in Hong Kong.

It doesn't work. Same thing is true of human lives. So design thinking is really good for these messy problems, and they're so messy that you know you don't know what you're doing. You know you don't know the answer, and you know you can't think your way out of the problem, so you have to live into it. You have to get empirical evidence. You have to build prototypes, get experience from feedback from this really cool lab called reality in this place none of us have ever been before called the future, and we're gonna try to intersect that thing through this incremental process of prototype iteration. That's what design does. And there are two elements to it, the process. Many of you have seen this before, the five classical steps as taught here at Stanford. By the way, how many of you knew that the design program at Stanford, the 55 year old this spring program at Stanford, is the eldest interdisciplinary program at this university? David Kelley is the third generation guru of design, before him Bob McKim, before him John Arnold.

It started in the '60s, and it started the way we normally start companies here in Silicon Valley. He just thought it up in printed letterhead. (audience laughs) He couldn't get approval, so he printed letterhead. "See? I exist. "I have letterhead." Now it's just a footer on Word. And so they thought that thing up, and we've been teaching it largely the same way for most of those years, originally mostly referred to as human-centered design. I'll come back to that, and rebranded by David Kelley brilliantly about a decade ago as design thinking, 'cause we can all think this way. Deeply understand what the user is all about. Have no point of view until you've really done the deep dive. Then you define where you're coming from, you define your perspective, your point of view, in fact, even what the problem you're working on is, usually by reframing somebody having given you the wrong question.

Now it's time to have a bunch of ideas 'cause we know what we're working on. From those ideas which ones are worth prototyping and really learning our way into the future. Turn those prototypes into versions that might even be implementable. Test them before you inflict them on the real world. And off you go. Then the whole implementation process starts after that. That just gets you started. Now, in life design, we iterate and we make explicit something that's always true in design thinking, which is step zero. Step zero is accept. We always say you are here.

For those of you who are on campus, you could go to the design loft where the design grad students hang out. There's a great big one of those red balls that says, "You are here," like on a map, one of those kind of things, just to remind our students at all times you have to start exactly where you are. If it comes out cool, I promise you, it goes through a place that looks just like this, 'cause you can't solve a problem you're not willing to have. Some people's problem isn't actually a problem. It's their problem with their problem. And if that's your problem, that's really a problem. So if you've got a problem with your problem, that's a problem, because the real thing is if you don't like your problem, you haven't got a chance of solving it well. So accept is really a big part of the deal. Now, in addition to that, there's a set of mindsets, cultures, there are up to 10 depending on which D school boot camp you're going to, but the five we tend to emphasize in life design are, first and foremost, curiosity. That's where the engine lies, where the pull is to be found.

Long before passion, there was curiosity. Radical collaboration doesn't necessarily mean radical in the sense of extreme. It means radical in the sense of talking to lots of people, including those people who are not like you, actually trying a different channel. Reframing, looking at something entirely differently once you've had more than one perspective. Bias toward action, when in doubt, do. We build to think. We draw to think. We don't necessarily analyze to think. We don't dump that entirely, but it's not the only thing we do. And be mindful of process.

Exactly where am I? If I'm just doing the empathy thing, hold off, defer judgment, I'm still just learning, learning how to maintain an open mind when I'm really executing rapidly. What am I doing? So neither ahead of nor behind myself. By the way, they told me you're entrepreneurial, so I was allowed to talk at normal speed. Is this okay? (audience laughs) Is this okay for you guys? Okay. 'Cause I can turn it down, but I'd really rather not. Okay. So, that's the intro, the design thinking. What's the life design thing all about? And now, because we don't have much time and you're sitting in the crumby seats where we can't

do much fun, we're gonna just have a quick preview of or flyover of five design thinking ideas as they relate to this life design stuff. Okay, number one, connect the dots. What are the dots? Who are you, what you believe, and what you do.

If you can interconnect these dots, your chance of experiencing meaning making go way up according to the research. It's really pretty simple. Can you articulate who you are, your values, what's going on, and can you translate those in a meaningful way into what you're doing? It doesn't mean you have to be perfectly aligned. You don't have to be perfectly coherent. We call this the coherency model. But, if you can articulate that, "Why am I doing this?" I've done a lot of executive coaching with startup founders over the decades. I am very old. I'm 63. I've been doing these for 40 years. Pretty common experience, about three in the morning, somewhere along the line, he or she wakes up, runs into the bathroom, flips on the light, looks in the mirror, and the person in the mirror looks back and goes, "Why the hell are we doing this?" And you really wanna be ready for that question.

You wanna be ready with a good answer. And having this figured out, what we call the compass in this book we wrote, we have you write a life view, which is your big idea of the universe and whatever cosmology zone you think is interesting, and then your work view, your manifesto about what good work is. Actually, when we started Electronic Arts way long ago, we actually wrote the manifesto before we wrote the business plan, "Who are we?" before what we're doing. That's thing one. Now, already that brings us to, actually, the last dysfunctional belief, my personal favorite, be the best version of you. Are you being your best self? Are you sure this is really it? Are you sure this is it? You're not settling, are you? You're not settling? You wouldn't wanna settle. That sucks. Settling sucks. Now, how many of you either believe or have heard this message, got this sense that you really should be becoming your best self? That's one strong meta-narrative in the modern culture. Here's the problem.

It's completely wrong. There's more than one of you. How many different ways could you possibly live? Is there only really truly one best version of you? Best implies a single criteria set that can be immutably evaluated so that one is on the same fair evaluation better than the other, in fact, best. What's better, my educator self? My startup guy self? My grandfather? I got four grandkids. They could care less about this. Just wanna know if I'd read slower. (audience laughs) So which one is better? You can't win that argument. It's undoable. So here's the thing. In business, we often say, "The good is the enemy of the better, "and the enemy is the enemy of the best.

"Are you doing your best?" Like the little halftime pitch or the post-board meeting pitch. "Let's all work 60 hours a week and loving it." "Yeah." "No, 70." "Okay." (audience laughs) "That sucks. "I'm doing 80." "100 hours a week and loving it." Have you ever actually done 100 hours in a week? It's physically incredibly hard to do. I distrust all those people. I've done a lot 80s, but 100, that's really hard. That having been said, if a best doesn't really exist, the rest of that little aphorism is, "And the false best is the enemy of the available better." If you have decided you have to be your best self and there isn't just one, you just decided to be unhappy for the rest of your life. I wouldn't go there. So, what that leads us to is, very important question, how many lives are you? We're actually gonna answer this question. Perhaps I should explain the question. It's a little rhetorical.

How many lives are you? I'm starting with our experience, anecdotally but anecdotally in the thousands, of all the people we've worked with and met along the way in these last 10 years that all of us contain more aliveness than one lifetime permits us to in fact live, IE, there are more than one of you in there. Now, if that's true, you're not gonna get to do everything you possibly could had you the time and the energy to so do. But now it turns out we're gonna do a thinking experiment, which is called a gedanken experiment, and imagine the following is true. Yes, it's a multiverse. We found out now, the astrophysicists have actually proven it is truly a multiverse. There are infinite parallel universes, angstroms apart, so to speak, in some dimension we don't understand, but they're right there. And we got the wormhole thing figured out, so we have parallel consciousness and you can actually get access to that. But the one really weird thing about the multiverse is you can be all over it, but you have to reserve ahead. It's kind of like OpenTable. You have to call ahead.

So we have to make reservations. You can be concurrently in as many life slots, occupy as many places as a human being, in as many universes as you like. You can have five. You can have 10. You think of every possible version of your life you'd like to live. Frankly, even if some of them you like a lot, you can have do-overs. First time we took my youngest daughter, Lisa, to Disneyland many years ago, she thought a really good way to spend the day was to ride Dumbo 42 times. 42 times, I mean from nine o'clock in the morning 'till about four in the afternoon. At about 3:30 like, "Honey, how was that?" "Great!" "Wanna go and maybe try a Peter Pan?" "Nope." (audience laughs) "Liking Dumbo?" "Yeah." (audience laughs) "Okay, we're doing Dumbo." So if you wanna do 42 Dumbos, you can do 42 Dumbos. That's fine.

But here's the deal, you gotta call ahead. I'm gonna go one, two, three, and when I would've said four, you're gonna say a number, and that number is how many universe slots would you like? As many as you want. You just gotta call it out. Okay? One, two, three. (audience mumbling) Oh, come on. I know you're smart educated people, but you can actually think up a number and shout it out. I'll try it again. One, two, three. (audience shouts) That's eight, seven, 15. Usually if there's somebody who very loudly says, "One!" it's an ideological position.

I'm committed to my one true life. If that person is out there, "I want to affirm the one," people, I get it, I get it. But let's say the number is, on average, seven or eight. Interestingly, by the way, when I work with a group since we're now going all over the place having talks like this, the older the group gets, the higher the number goes. (audience laughs) You think the young people have all the ideas? Not necessarily. Front row, center, New York (mumbles) Constance from the class of 1953, 87 years old, just couldn't wait to take notes. Got a lot of life to design yet. So if you've got seven lives coming your way... Okay, I lied. It's not gonna happen.

You only get one, so most of you isn't gonna happen. You're mostly not going to occur. You will overwhelmingly experience FOMO, (audience laughs) fear of missing out, right? And you're smart, bright, educated, healthy people living in a target rich environment and you probably all have access to the Internet and know how to spell Google just fine, so you're gonna see a whole lot of stuff go by that might be cool. Like, "Oh, there it goes. (audience laughs) "Was that it? Was that it? "Oh, should we have taken that? "I didn't wanna blow it." Who ever had those feelings? If you have those feelings at all, you just bought into best, like that was it. This isn't it. Who says, "It?" They is them. Pick one. You're never going to know, by the way. So, because of this, the way we do ideation, step two is, because you have more than one life within you, the reframe is look, there's lots of great yous, and it's never too late to get started because it's very interesting in front of us.

Let's get the odyssey started. The odyssey continues. Now, so it's time to actually do some design, that ideation stuff, what we're so known for. Ideation and prototype are probably the two big things design is most often known for. And so idea number two is to do what we call odyssey planning, time to ideate your future. No, actually that's a misnomer. You can't ideate your future. You can only ideate your futures because there's more than one of you. And when we do the workshop, which we haven't got time to finish here today, or if you do what the book instructs you to, we say try three, which would limit you to merely three plans. If you wanna do six, you can have two forms.

That's fine. And we actually would spend like 15 minutes on a single piece of paper and think up five year plans three different ways, three completely different versions of your future self. And there's a series of exercises we go through there. I'll give a quick taste of what that might look like. Now you might say, "Whoa, three versions of me? "Three, really three? "I'm barely coming up with one." Well, sometimes we have to help people get a template for how to come up with all three versions of themselves. My guess is that's not very necessary in this room. You all don't have that problem. The number of how many lives you were was pretty high. But if you needed help, our suggestion would be like this. And I actually developed this on behalf of a young MBA in a Midwestern state, I'll just say a Midwestern state, ranking school.

We were having a conversation about this stuff, and he said, "Oh, no, no. "I would never wanna do three." And I go, "Sure you do." He goes, "No, there's no way I have three ideas." I go, "Yes, you do. "Watch." Let me demonstrate your three ideas to you. So thing one is that thing you're already doing. Just imagine the next five years goes really cool. This is ideation. We're doing imagination. This is not project management yet. So that's great. You know how to do that.

Then thing two is just assume that thing you were working on died. I'm currently a teacher, a teacher and an author. And guess what? "It's all online now. "We don't need teachers anymore. "And that whole book thing, "AI knows how to write better than you. "Please go home." So we're not doing books anymore. We're not doing stand up teaching anymore. That's over. How many of you have lived through something going away that we don't do, used to do something that doesn't get done anymore? I've had that happen three times. Okay, so let me flip it around.

How many of you hope that 10 years from now you are doing something really interesting that you'd love to talk with us about today but you can't because nobody is doing it? How many of you hope that you are going to find that thing you did not know you were looking for? Yeah. Okay, so the whole idea is we're trying to get into a place in the future that we've never seen before. So just assume that something that you're currently doing doesn't exist, and what would you do if you had to do something, 'cause you had to drop all those ideas you currently had and reinvent yourself, what would you do? Most people can do it. And the last thing would be, and now for something completely different if neither money nor regard or any object whatsoever, and I can promise you you'd be fine financially, maybe not wealthy but you're fine, and they won't laugh, what would you do? So I'm having a conversation with Allen, the young MBA, and he goes, "Look, this is totally boring. "I don't care about this stuff "because I've already got it all figured out." "Really, Allen? "Tell me about that." "Well I'm gonna go work for," let's call it ABC Corporation, "a specialty vertical market consulting company "working in the medical industry. "I'm very, very excited about it. "It's a hugely exclusive organization, "and with my freshly minted MBA, I just can't wait. "It's fine. "I don't need any more ideas. "Quit bothering me, Dave," he says.

I say, "Okay, Allen. "That's really lovely, that's great, but guess what? "I hate to tell you, but last night, "something very dramatic occurred. "All the CEOs got together and had a conversation, "and it kinda went like this." Susan, the CEO, said, "Hey, I wanna ask everybody a question." "Are you guys all tired of this consulting thing? "How many of you, like me, are tired "of paying these huge invoices and nothing changes? "Just like really cute ideas, and then they're gone, "and there's an invoice, and you're back where you started? "I'm so tired of that." And all the other CEOs said, "Yeah, we're tired of that, too." They held hands, they sang kumbaya together, and they said, ? No more consulting, no more consulting ? Save the money

and spend it on engineering Great, okay. (audience laughs) So they woke up the next morning, they canceled all the consulting contracts, the consulting industry is over. All the Deloitte and Touche people are out on the street naked and terrified. "So consulting is over, Allen. "What are you gonna do?" He goes, "What?" He was on a conference call. He goes, "What?" I go, "Consulting is over." "I don't think that's true." "It is, Allen, trust me. "It's true. (audience laughs) "You've got five seconds and you're an unemployed MBA.

"It's embarrassing. "Come on, Allen. Come up with something." Five, four, three, and he goes, "Okay, okay. "I'll do strategy in a large corporation doing media." "Okay. "So glad you had that idea you didn't know you had, Allen. "Oh by the way, one more thing, Allen. "That thing, you know that thing you do, "that thing you really like? "Pretty sure you can't make a living at it? "Little embarrassed about it? "What is it? "Let's assume you could make a living." This is a true story. The real Allen asked me the question on the phone in front of six other people on the conference call, "Do you promise they won't laugh?" (audience laughs) I said, "Yes, Allen, I promise they won't laugh. "They don't even exist, so they won't, trust me." And he said, "I'd like to do boutique wine distribution." I've told that story a bunch, and nobody ever laughs. They say, "Oh, that's kind of interesting." But he thought it was sort of silly.

So the point being, Allen was quite convinced he did not have three ideas. Some of you might think you don't have three ideas. You absolutely have three ideas. You just haven't had permission to have them yet. If you've got plenty of ideas, you didn't need to hear any of that. Now, what does this look like when we do odyssey planning? This is kinda like the big cap stone exercise. So here's Ann, and she's partway along in her very successful career as an HR exec and thinking, "Maybe it's time for a change." Mid 30s, late 40, whatever, somewhere in there. Time for a change, and so she's thinking, "I wanna go back and do what I used to think about doing "before I went into HR. "I thought maybe I wanted to work with at risk kids. "I never did that.

"I dropped that idea back in my late teens, early 20s. "What if I resurrected that idea and tried that? "So what would that look like? "I'm just gonna let myself have those ideas." In about three, four minutes she goes, "Well, at first I'll start a 501c3. "I'm a good organizer. "I'd start organized. "I gotta raise some money, gotta recruit a staff. "I'm gonna go pick somebody else's model "for how to do this work "and I'm not gonna invent this from scratch. "That's stupid. "Why build when you can rent? "And I think I wanna work on reading comprehension. "Reading comprehension is a big impact on students' lives. "If you can get at risk kids "to raise their reading comprehension early, "huge impact and long term leverage.

"That's where I'm gonna go. "So I'm gonna develop that thing. "I gotta start working on scaling the service. "Then I'm gonna expand this thing over time. "I'm a West Coast person. "If I can expand, what the heck? "I might as well go to the East Coast, "which is where all the big foundations are anyway. "It won't impress them. "So that's what I'm gonna do. "Oh man, that's a lot of work. "I better not forget the family, "cause the mom and dad are aging a little bit.

"Let's not forget that. "And eventually, we had the family meeting "and Mom and Dad made clear to all of us kids thankfully "that they have no interest in living with us as they age, "and that's good, 'cause we didn't want them to. "But nonetheless, we gotta find "a place for them that they like "and they're the only ones who still know the family story. "We better get that thing written down before it's gone. "Which reminds me about writing things down. "I never did that graduate work in counseling. "What if I went back and did some of that? "Maybe I should be more competent "if I'm gonna be actually in the human services field, "and I better do that quickly, "because once that thing hits scaling, "I'm gonna be so busy, so I gotta get that done. "Speaking of being so busy, "if not now, when are we gonna get back to Paris? "Oh my god, we gotta get back to Paris, "cause Harry and I, we had our honeymoon in Paris "and we promised ourselves every three years "we'd come back to Paris for the rest of our lives, "and that hasn't happened yet. "So maybe we gotta get back to Paris "and on the way home stop at the Galapagos, "because it's gonna be underwater pretty soon "and I think I wanna see it dry. "So that would be interesting.

"Boy, if I pull that off, I think I'm gonna write a book. "Now how do I feel about that?" The way we do this, we've got a dashboard. We look at four dials about how you react to your own idea. What are the resources? Do you have the resources to pull off this thing? If you actually made this decision, could you do it? She thinks about halfway there. "I don't really know what I'm doing in human services "and I don't have any money, "but I know how to pull stuff together. "Do I like it? "I like it a lot. "What's my confidence I could pull this off?" Note, confidence is the emotional reaction, resources is the objective reaction to the same question. It doesn't mean it's the same answer. "My confidence is really pretty darn high." Now, my coherence, that's that connect the dots thing. By coherence we mean, is this authentic to you? Are these values consistent for you? Is this who you really are? And then she would say pretty high, not super high.

Why? She's got two problems. She's thinking deeply about, "Do I really want to be getting this busy again "at this point in my life as my parents are aging? "Do I wanna double down on those two seasons of life "at the same time?" And the really big question is, "My 20 year old self thought this was very interesting. "I can't tell if I really think this is important "or I'm just nostalgic for my 20 year old passion." 'Cause this is back to the, "Do I really wanna do this, "or do I just like remembering I used to want to do this?" It's not the same thing. She's gotta test that. So that's what an odyssey plan looks like. You do that three times. It gets you a bunch of ideas. And once you've got those ideas, you make a decision about which one to do, right?

No, we're doing design. We're not doing engineering. So we do prototyping.

The whole idea of having those ideas is to figure out which one you wanna actually start investing in. So, we jump into this prototype thing with a bias to action. Stop thinking about it. Go do stuff. And so prototyping... And first of all, there's a real big distinction between particularly late engineering prototyping in general, particularly late stage engineering prototyping, and design prototyping. They're both valid, they share the word, but they mean very different things. In engineering, often our late stage prototypes are about proving the concepts as effective. That's what a beta software tester is supposed to be, that the beta version acts just like the alpha version but with user feedback, and you do that before you release to the market. That's what a beta is supposed to be.

That's a late stage prototype. We're not proving anything in design. We're doing a very early stage prototype to learn something. We know we don't know what we're doing. We know we don't. We can't sit there and figure out how to improve this thing by drawing drawings all day long. We gotta start making up some mock ups and getting some feedback from some real people. I had literally, many years ago, I had a huge box full of mice under my desk at Apple, all different kinds of shapes, all different kind of sizes. Why talk about it when you can just try, try, try, try? So in prototypes, we ask interesting questions, we expose our assumptions, we involve others with our ideas which begins to actually create collaboration, and most importantly in life design, we sneak up on the future. That thing you're wondering, "Maybe I'd like to try this," somebody is living the life you're imagining already, and by prototyping it, you get into a time machine and go find people who are already in the future today that you're thinking about tomorrow.

Good prototyping is cheap, fast, and teaches us something. It's really about cheap and fast. The cheaper, the faster, the better, as long as we learn something. Now, in life, it's not foam core and glue guns when you're doing life design. So life design prototypes are in two very simple forms, a conversation or an experience. Talk to people. Do stuff. So, the prototype conversation, which we call the life design interview, is essentially the same thing as an informational interview. Who's heard the term informational interview or done those kind of things? Where you're asking for the story, not the job. The prototype conversation is a very simple thing to do.

It turns out, gee, what's it really like to be a DJ on a web channel as opposed to on a traditional radio station? What's it really like to be involved in the private space transport industry? What's it really like to be involved in nanotechnology? What's it really like to be working on a organic farm in Siberia? You can go talk to people to have that conversation, and the reason it's an interesting conversation is because you and they, that person you wanna talk to, have a very, very common base of experience and awareness and values. She thinks her life is really interesting. You think her life is really interesting. You have the same point of view. You should get together. It's really simple. It's like, "I've done the research. "You're the most interesting person in the world. "You think so too. "Let's get together and share that interest.

"Just tell me your story." And prototype experiences means actually trying stuff on. So keeping in mind, 'cause some things you gotta experience. That woman who's made out of about four different real people, she had lots of conversations with people who knew things about writing a book or about working in the nonprofit world. "Do I really wanna go back to grad school or not?" "Boy, I haven't been in school in a long, long time." We said, "Look, go experience it. "Just sit in on a class. "Start working on a paper. "See whether or not "the young students treat you like a leper "or they think it's cool that you came back," which she was really worried about. So just go do it. I mean, literally, four or five hours of your life invested over a week's time is a piece of cake. Now keeping in mind, all those experiences, those prototypes of conversations and experiences, come from collaborating with other people.

They're pretty much done with other people, which means to find the opportunity for those interviews and those activities, you have to have idea number four, which is it's time to network. Okay, I noticed there are not many MBAs in the room, so if this is probably like, "Oh." A lot of you are saying, "Finally, the networking section of the talk. "I'm so glad we're gonna talk about networking. "It's my favorite thing. "I love networking." So who are those people, the network? I got one. I got two. Okay, God bless you. No, most of you probably feel more like this young woman. "It's not really my thing. "I don't really like this." Networking is kinda slimy, kinda sleazy.

Who would say that? "This is not really what I do." Yeah, okay. No, that's wrong. We need a reframe. We need a big reframe on this, because all you're doing is asking for directions. Have any of you ever given someone directions? Who's ever given anybody directions? Who's done it more than once? Whoa, that's interesting. So you like it? (audience laughs) Like three times? Three times? Whoa, you guys are repeat direction givers. Okay, this is obsessive behavior. Now, I understand the reason we don't like networking is 'cause it's sleazy and you're using people, right? That's one of the most often... You're using people for self interest. The usual asking for directional help experience kinda goes like this.

So I'm walking down the campus, and somebody walks up. "Oh, could you help me?" "I'm trying to find the Huang Center. "Do you know where it is?" Now, at that moment in time, I can go like, "Hey, who are you?" "I am a busy person. (audience laughs) "Get a map. "Try a phone. "Come on." We don't usually do that. We kinda go, "Oh, I'd be so glad to help you." And

then they ask for the information. What do we do? We just tell them. We take this hard earned geographical information system and we just dump it on 'em free. And what do they do? They go, "Oh, great." And then they? - [Audience] Leave.

- Leave. They just leave. (audience laughs) Get a bottle of wine, Christmas list, card? I mean, five bucks? (audience laughs) Anything? Nothing, you got nothing. They turn, they leave. You got used. (audience laughs) You got totally used. And you liked it. (audience laughs) You did it again and again and again. That's diagnosable. No.

It's diagnosably human. The research demonstrates people like being helpful. When you're lost in Nanotechnologyville and don't know your way around, the locals will help you. When you've never been in Authortown, you never been in High-End-PhD-Research-Consulting-City, the locals will help you out. They love their town. They think it's interesting. They understand you're lost. That's the way the human community actually works. So it's really about just asking for directions, and it turns out, everybody knows a lot of people, and everybody has a lot of interests in a lot of things. So we're actually now going to do a little exercise.

I want you to think about something right now, a real thing, that if you could sit down with a person who really knew a lot about it, had some really experience in this topic, it could be a personal interest topic like Asian fusion cooking, it could be an extreme topic like jumping out of airplanes without a parachute on, just with one of those bat things, or it could be a professional interest like, "What's the difference between "product marketing and product management, anyway? "They both have an M in 'em. "What's the big deal?" Whatever your question might be that if you really could sit down with somebody who knew a lot about that and would be happy to share their experience with you and all you'd have to do is pay for the coffee, you'd go, "I would totally jump at that." Now, my guess is all of you are, if you're curious enough to come to this kind of a talk, it's not that easy a place to sleep, then you've probably got a question like that. So think of that question. And now, when the music starts, because it's all tight, we're going to have tiny little networking parties of two and three people. I want you to stand up and turn and ask the people around you, "Hey, do you know anybody "who knows anything about Asian fusion cooking? "Would you be willing to give me their name?" I'm gonna give you three minutes to try to get a referral from the people within three feet of you to see whether or not somebody knows something about the thing you're interested in. And by the way, if you're the person being asked and under no circumstances does your friend Joe wanna be connected to that, say, "I do, but I can't release his name." (audience laughs) We're not here to violate confidences, but hey, help each other out if you can. Ready? On your feet. See if people can't help you find an interesting conversation. Do it. (guitar music) (audience chattering) Now...

Hello! That was intentionally nowhere near enough time to make that work, and physically this room sucks, you can't move, and half of you said, "I don't do standing up anyway." But, did anybody actually get a hit, actually got a connection and might follow up on it? Great. Now, anybody actually ask and not get one? I got struck out. What do you wanna know about? - [Man In Audience] I wanted to know if anybody worked at Intuit. I really like the (mumbles) - Okay, that's a very precise question. Anybody know anybody at Intuit? Okay, look at their faces. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, okay. Who else got skunked, got nothing? What do you want? - [Arkaj] Does anyone know who got into Y Combinator? (audience laughs) - Okay, that is a lou... Not to pick on you. What is your name? - [Arkaj] Arkaj. - Arkaj, nothing personal.

It's a terrible question for a life design interview. It's a fact you can find. It's a piece of research. When you do a life design interview, you wanna go into the deep end of the pool, not the shallow end. I want the story. There's no stories to who got in. It's a list. It's names. Do I know who got in? Yes. Here's the list.

We're done. "Do you know anybody who recently got into Y Combinator, "and can you find out how they differentiated themselves "from the other people?" "Cause they applied three times and they finally got in." That's an interesting question. - [Arkaj] It's the same thing. - Same thing. Oh, give me a break. (audience laughs) Okay. That's what you get for picking on the audience. Yeah, what do you want? - [Woman In Audience] What would it be like to work at the UN in New York on global famine relief? - Okay, so first of all, global policy involvement, UN? UN or famine food stuff. I got a UN. I got famine food stuff right here.

Okay. Now what am I demonstrating? What I'm demonstrating is, I've done this, literally, I've done this thousands of times. I have never, ever, ever had someone raise their hand and ask a question to which nobody in the room could help. I did it once with 12 sixth grade boys from a private school in Tokyo. (audience laughs) They asked me to do this thing, and I went, "There's no way. "They're 12. "They don't know anybody. "They live in a culture where they're highly cloistered "and they're not allowed to go outdoors much "or talk to anybody." And they did fine. They could all type. The point being, the resources are all there for you.

You just have to ask. But you do have to ask. For those of you who are not wired this way, that introversion is the way you dropped out of the womb, that's fine. It's convenient to be an extrovert today is it turns out in some ways, in other ways not so much. I recognize this is hard for a lot of people. If there was a better way to do it, I would let you know, but I'm not aware. LinkedIn makes this so much easier, 'cause you can do it remotely. The world is pre-organized around being willing to talk to



each other, but go for the story, not for the job. Now, last idea really quickly is choosing well, I'm gonna fly through this to leave some Q and A time, because the problem is, how do you know when you know, you know? No matter what design we do, it all ends up with a choice. It all ends up with a decision, and that's the hard part.

Did I really do the right thing? Is this really what I want? That's a really hard thing to do. And this is where mindfulness of process comes into play, and you want a good choosing process. So the four step choosing process that we've developed, pretty much just standing on the shoulders of the world of positive psychology. This is not our original work, but again, it's human-centered design, fully understanding the whole human person. This is part of life reality. So, you gather and create options. This place is great at that. Then you gotta narrow 'em down to a manageable list. Then you gotta do the hard thing and make a choice. And then of course, agonize whether or not you blew it.

No, let's not do that. Let's let go of the options we don't choose and move on. So I'll briefly touch each of these. I mean, gonna go really fast. Gathering, you know how to do that. Narrow it down. Anybody ever feel a little overwhelmed at choice? Yeah, interesting. So you got that feeling. Why? Because you don't know what jam to buy. The research shows that we walk into some Whole Foods store somewhere, put six jams on the designer table.

There are six jams available today. Everybody is walking by. Do you think many people stop and look or not too many? A lot of people, not so lot of people? - [Woman In Audience] A lot. - A lot, about 40%. Not quite half. Of those, how many people actually buy one? A third. One in three, not bad. Okay, try it again a couple weeks later. Same store, same provider, 24 jams. Ooh.

Now, more people stop, fewer? More? Fewer? Right. 50% more. We love options. Ooh, look at all the jam. Oh my god. (audience laughs) Look at all the jam! How many people buy? Nobody. Can't deal with it. Why? Your brain freezes at four to six. You find yourself standing in front of an option list that's seven to 12, how many options do you really have? None. What do you do? Cross them off.

You have to make your list manageable. Then you gotta choose. Dan, that's Dan Goleman, whose clip we will not watch given that we have no time, that the wisdom of the emotions is a real thing. So Dan Goleman, the original author of the book Emotional Intelligence, mostly aggregating other people's work, he's still working on this EQ EI stuff, identifies neuroscientifically now, neurophysiologically, how many brain people have we got in the room? We've got Tina Seelig of the PhD neuroscience, a bunch of brain stuff going on. It's really a fascinating time to be alive. We know a lot about the soft stuff now. It turns out we know a lot of hard stuff about soft stuff, the way your brain works. And the brain works is there is what he calls the wisdom of the emotions or the wisdom center, actually located in the basal ganglia of your brain, the ancient brain, where in fact all the data on what worked for you and what did not is stored. That valences your decision making. You think it's self evidently objective truth that causes you to make a decision? Because clearly bigger is better.

'Cause you want a bigger tumor, not a smaller tumor. No, that's not true. Bigger is not always better. It depends. Bigger is good in IPO and it's bad in tumor is actually an emotional valence on something. Who has to decide that cancer is a bad thing? Now, that comes from the basal ganglia, which, as it turns out, has no connectivity whatsoever to the verbal center of the brain, the verbal cortex. It has high connectivity to the limbic system, your emotions, and your intestines. So the gut feeling is a real thing. Learning how to understand your emotional intelligence, which is a very, very important, sophisticated part of you, is a critical aspect of good decision making. Do not confuse inarticulate with unsophisticated.

This part of your consciousness is fabulously sophisticated, but it's more like Hawaiian. It uses fewer letters. So you have to learn how to speak its language. Now lastly, let go and move on, I'll just claim what Dan Gilbert and everybody over at Harvard works on. Turns out, the research shows if you want to be happy, the happiness engineers, turns out the best way to be happy is not getting what you want. It's wanting what you got. The reversible condition is not conducive to the synthesis of sustainable happiness, Dan would say. I won't detail you the research, but it shows that when somebody makes a decision and either themselves concludes or is told it's irreversible, and other people make the exact same decision, like what to buy or what to take home, and can reverse the decision, even if they don't, those people end up unhappier with the exact same outcome as these people who got it irreversibly. You're willingness to own your decision and not be distracted by the other possibilities has a huge impact on the quality of the decision long term. So it turns out, actually, it's harder than you thought.

You don't just have to make a great decision. You have to make a great decision well. A fair decision made well, meaning energetically implemented, letting go of the options, and moving on, not getting stuck in reviewing regret, a fair decision implemented well beats a great decision made badly. And that keep your options open thing is actually a disaster as a long term strategy. It's great on the front end. It's terrible on the back end. So, set yourself up to win by understanding your decision making process and employing not just cognitive knowing but emotional knowing as well. So, connect the dots. Understand how your work view and life view inform your coherence. Have more than one version of the future of your life to pick from.

Prototype it, don't just analyze it. Ask for directions. People are willing to help you. And make a good choice. So, we're

about done. So, we've had this new experience now as authors, and a bunch of people are reading the book. We were really reticent to write the book 'cause we're used to having conversation, not just dropping a tome and running away. And would it work or not? And what people have been telling us is that they're finding this experience, either the workshop or the book, as actionable and hopeful. And the reason I mention this is that's helpful to us because it's all about doing stuff. Set the bar low.

Clear it by taking actionable steps. And that doability leaves people hopeful. An awful lot of encouragements are to clear this amazing bar, be your incredible, Olympic gold self 24 by seven, and frankly, it's just not doable. So cut yourself some slack. Set the bar low. Clear it. Do it again, do it again, do it again. It'll feel better. And by the way, it actually works. And why trust this guy? Well, because, first of all, you're not the guinea pig.

Thousands of people have been experimented on before you. And then the researchers came in, 'cause at Stanford, you're actually supposed to talk about stuff that's true, not just make it up. And so two graduate School of Education analyses were done on, as they would call it, the efficacy of the intervention of our model. Sounds kinda like a proctology visit, but nonetheless, the analysis came out that sure enough, this stuff really does work. And it actually is the first time we've applied human-centered design to the surprisingly human problem of what to do with the rest of your life centered in this Stanford design program. So the whole point is, we're trying to be a little more human, which might be a little more helpful and lead people to be more hopeful. So, have you got any questions? (audience applauds) Okay. If there's no mic, I'll listen and then I'll shout it out. What do you got? - [Man In Audience] Hi. - Hi.

- [Man In Audience] That was really fascinating. As you were talking, I felt like I was making a lot of connections with these various pro tips you've been giving to how relationships or effective relationships operate. I'm specifically talking about romantic relationships. So I was wondering how often does that happen where you find, do you ever see people trying to apply this type of methodology to how they-- - How do you design your love life? Okay, yeah. (audience laughs) No. We don't do therapy, and we don't do love. But we've heard back from a whole lot of couples who are doing this stuff together and happily so. If you do that as a collaboration, not a negotiation, like, "Here's my odyssey plan. "Mine wins, yours loses." That is not helpful. The steps in terms of getting clear and experimenting, rather than sit there and talk for 14 hours on the DTR conversation, the define the relationship conversation, maybe go do stuff, so that might be helpful.

So I think there are things you can get from there, but I don't pretend to be a romance specialist by a long shot. Other questions? Yes. - [Woman In Audience] What are your alternative plans? - What are my alternative plans? That's a very interesting question. I actually am intentionally disobeying my own rule right now, so again, the exception proves the rule, because I totally committed to this book thing. I've dragged my feet viciously for two years. "Bill, no, don't make me write a book. "I don't wanna do it. "It's stupid. "They're are 400,000 books released a year. "Half of them talk about what you should do with your life.

"Even if we're right, nobody will know. "It will get lost in the noise. "It's a waste of time. "Forget it. "I'd much rather talk to people. "Why write a book?" So I pulled that off for two years, and then I was beaten with sticks and forced to write a book. And so I said, "If we're gonna write the book, "we're gonna give the book a decent thing." I'm also trying to set up my lab at Stanford with five people working full time to do this work to run in my absence, 'cause I don't wanna do this forever, 'cause I do wanna have some odyssey planning later. And so I am intentionally not thinking about my future at all. I am totally sold out to only two things. I am letting this book be as successful as it deserves to be so it can help who it can help, and I'm setting my lab up to be able to run without me, and if I think about anything other than that, I just stop it.

So I refuse to answer your question. (audience laughs) Because I'm designing my life. I'm in a season where I'm not ideating. - [Woman In Audience] How do you handle, say, failure? - How do I handle failure. Great! I'm really, really good at failing. I'm fabulous at failing. So prototyping is all about failing. We often say, "Fail early to succeed sooner." Now, there really are two kinds of failure. That's why I set the bar low. Try it a little bit, try it a little bit, try it a little bit.

Go out and see whether or not something works for you, and plan on failing at it because you know you don't know what you're doing. That's the failure design of the prototype iteration process. Let's distinguish that from, and then we finally committed and we got in the rocket and we went to the Moon and we died. Now that's failing. That's real failure. So real bonafide, I bet everything on it, I finally made the commitment and it failed, is hugely painful. It doesn't mean your life is over. It doesn't mean you're a bad person. You can do everything right and it still doesn't work. When you blow it, do notice the first question for most of the times that happens to you is, "What did I do wrong?" Soon as something doesn't work out, do you think, "What did I do wrong?" It's the most normal thing to think, particularly if you're bright.

What does it mean? It means, "Had I done everything right, "it would have worked." That's not true. You don't have anywhere near enough control over the universe for that to be true. So you have to decide when you fail what it really means. There's a section. We talk about failure. Is it just a minor thing? Is it a learning situation? Was it just a goof up? I forgot to tie my shoe, so I tripped. You have to evaluate your serious failures in an honest way. And a relatively small percentage of them have high learning value, and some are just mistakes, and forgive yourself and move on. But you wanna be smart about failure

'cause the pain of it is real, and let's not have more of it than we need. We'll take maybe one or two more.

Yes, right there. - [Man In Audience] I have trouble letting go and moving on. - Yes. - [Man In Audience] Are there any action steps you can take to do that? - Hard to let go and move on. It's really hard. And Dan Gilbert's research is pretty compelling. And the problem is, even in the experiment they put together, of course, the forcing somebody to let go was externalized. Applying that insight in a meaningful way is done on options you know darn well aren't dead yet. So I had these four options. "I could've done the Teach for America thing, "I could've gotten the MBA, "or I could've taken that startup job.

"And I'm doing the startup thing, "and the second round of funding didn't come in, "and we're all working for beans and weenies now. "Oh God, did I really blow it? "It's really a lot tougher. "I thought it was wonderful. "They told me at STVP it's just fabulous "to be an entrepreneur, and now it's really hard, "and my girlfriend left me, and what am I doing? "And I smell bad and I'm broke. "And holy shit. (audience laughs) "It was not on the brochure." And you're having that experience. Now, let go and move on. Yeah, thank you for sharing. The reality is, it's a mental discipline. And so I think it's not that you can ever have let go.

It's that you get good at doing it. So the thought comes, "It should've been TFA." "Thanks for sharing. "I understand that. "It was, in fact, the best decision available at the time. "Thank you," and move on. So I think the best way to handle let go and move on is when that sneaky little thought comes back and it wants to beat you up for having done the wrong thing, you thank it for its insight and you keep going. The old aphorism, you cannot prevent the birds from flying over your head, and the birds meaning thoughts that are gonna beat you up, but you don't have to let them make a nest in your hair. So I would apply that to this let go thing. Maybe one, yeah. - [Woman In Audience] One of the things I've heard with the circle that you were talking about is that when folks are in power, they're more likely to feel like they're authentic in certain ways because they have an ability to attain exactly what they're looking for.

So I was wondering, how does power impact it? - So if I have more power or authority, do I have a better chance of being a coherent person? Can I align who I am, my values and so on? No. No, I think the short answer is no. You have some degrees of freedom, but all positions of power come with tremendous amounts of constraint, 'cause you have power over something, and that thing is a thing. If it's a company, then it's got a certain value proposition and it's not gonna wake up and turn into something entirely different tomorrow. And so you're surprisingly bound in. Now, if what you want to adjust is within the domain of, what's called domain sovereignty, if what you wanna play with is within your power domain, then you've got some tools. You've got some flexibility. But very often, those issues of coherence and authenticity and value fulfillment operate outside of that. It's not power is more coherent and less power is less coherent. It's whether or not those elements you're trying to integrate, who I am, what I believe, what I'm doing, are in tension or not.

And that alignment in and of itself is not really power based, not power sensitive, I would argue. I know powerless people who are doing great and powerful people who really are banging their head against concrete. Yeah. - [Man In Audience] How do you mitigate risk or quantify risk in (mumbles)? - How do you quantify risk? We do not deal with risk at all. You may have noticed. That's why the question was asked. There are a bunch of things that we don't cover. This is not a comprehensive life design system. We think it's a sufficient one. We built it, but for instance, it doesn't bring up character questions.

It doesn't bring up foibles. You got the dark side you've gotta work through. You've got those things. It doesn't deal with your mother's voice in your head at all. And on the risk side, that is an important criteria. So I have to manage the risk of either my prototype, I have to manage the risk of the plan I'm playing with, but how I decide what to do with that risk is entirely up to you. Now, design might wanna help you work that through, certainly by prototyping it. One of my favorite examples is a bright executive woman who really wanted to jump out of the airplane and go become a restaurateur, totally something different. And she's a very successful person, so she went for it. She had a passion.

She went for it. She bought a restaurant, took all her assets, bought this thing, totally remodeled it, turned it into a deli with a Tuscan restaurant at the same time, opened to great fanfare. It was hugely successful! Yay! Hated it! Turns out, thinking about a restaurant and running one are totally different. So she could've mitigated the risk of having missed that whole thing by trying a little catering. If you don't like it, you just shut it down over the weekend. Maybe work in somebody else's restaurant for a while and see whether or not the brilliant bubbling conversation of refined Tuscan food and Chianti that she imagined people would be having wasn't just arguing about who should be doing the house chores, which is mostly what they talked about. So she could've mitigated risk through that experimentation process. But ultimately, the decision you make, and so now we have decided to go and try to teach lamas to dance in Afghanistan is a pretty risky play, so that's not a big opportunity. We don't wanna do that. That risk is inherent.

So you have to decide what risk you're taking and what risks you wanna manage, what risks you wanna enjoy. Design can help you qualify the risk, but not necessarily eliminate it. Risks are never eliminated. They're just managed. Are we done? Thanks for coming. (audience applauds)