



# Stanford eCorner

## Start Where You Are

Dave Evans, *Stanford Life Design Lab*

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Dave Evans, co-founder of the Life Design Lab at the Stanford d.school, summarizes how the steps of the design-thinking process can be applied to the unique and messy problems in life, starting with “step zero,” which is accepting the problem exists. Evans co-authored the 2016 bestseller “Designing Your Life: How to Build a Well-Lived, Joyful Life” with Bill Burnett, also co-founder of the Stanford Life Design Lab.



### Transcript

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 70's by a bunch of Berkeley urban analysts and urban planners who were trying to think of how to invent cities. Well once you've got 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 going to 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 fifty-five-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 60's, and it started the way we normally start companies here in Silicon Valley. He just thought it up and printed letterhead. (laughter) He couldn't get approval so he printed letterhead. "See? I exist; I have letterhead!" Now it's just a footer on Word. 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 because we can all think this way. Deeply understand what the user is all about.

To 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 a reframing, somebody having given you the wrong question now it's time to have a bunch of ideas because 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 if you 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 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.

Because you can't solve a problem you're not willing to have.