



# Becoming a Design Leader

DAVID SHERWIN | IVMG CONFERENCE | THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2012  
T: @CHANGEORDER / B: CHANGEORDERBLOG.COM

1. What does it mean to be a design leader?
2. What traits does a design leader need to succeed?
3. Ok, how can I become a design leader?
4. Now I'm a design leader, what should I watch out for?

Design leaders make  
**awesome s\*@% happen.**



A cultural focus on making awesome happen, since 1969.



Apple



Apple





Intel



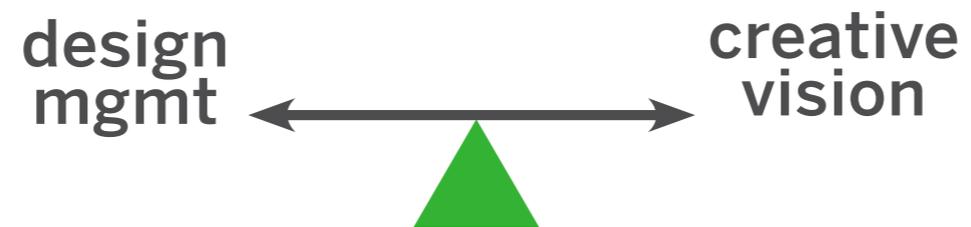
# Girl Effect

“When we have a ‘concept’ and people smile, we take the next step. When there are questions, we go back and try harder.”

—Hartmut Esslinger, founder, frog

# design leadership

# design leadership

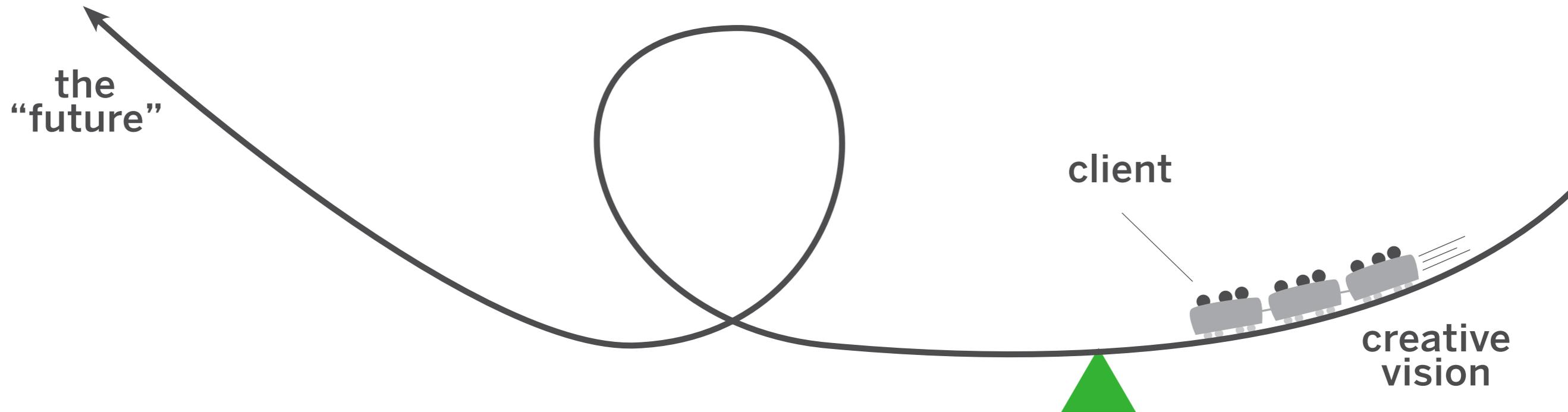


Just managing  
**designers** may not be  
design leadership.

design  
mgmt



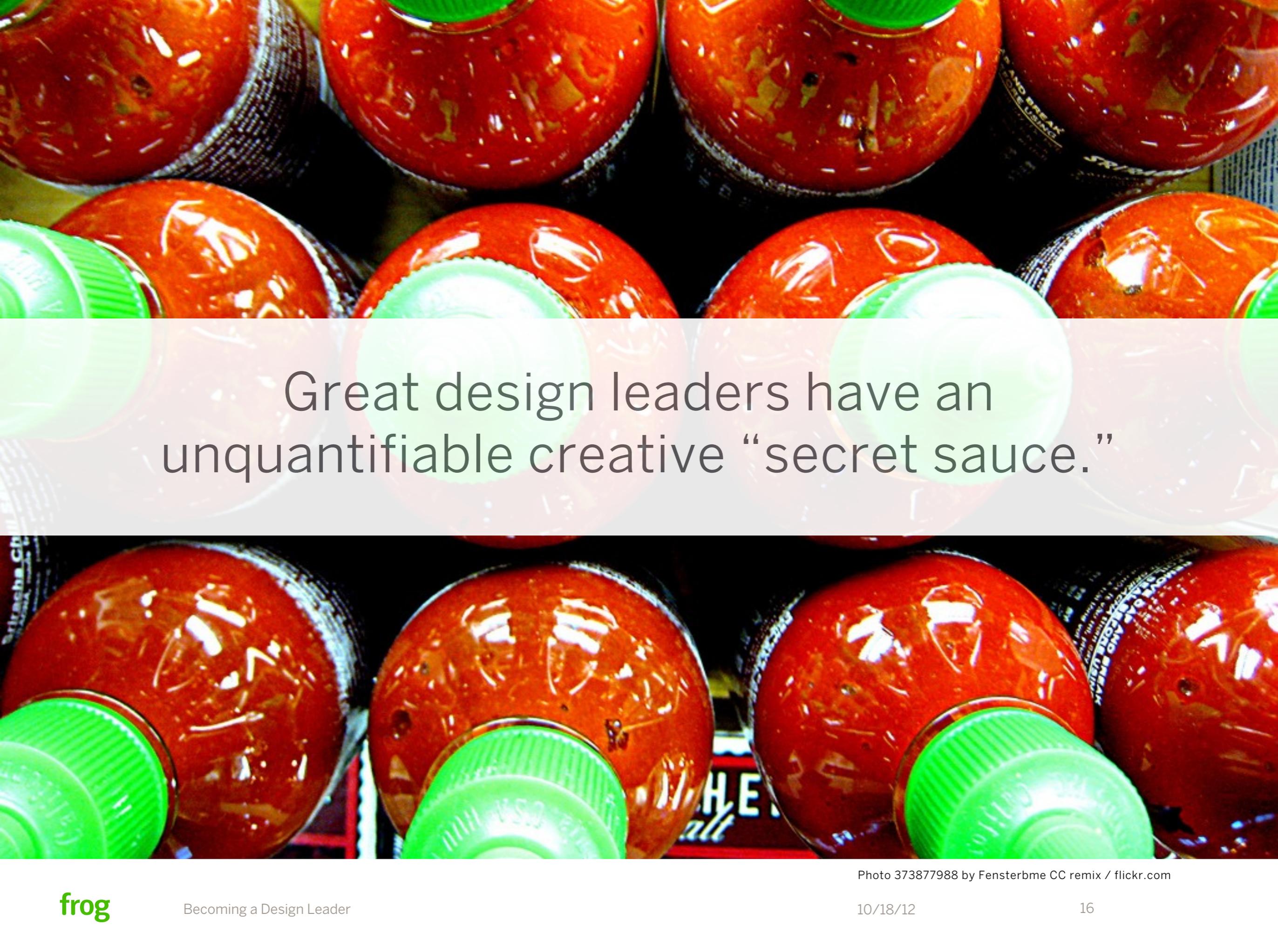
creative  
vision



**Being a creative visionary** doesn't always equal design leadership.

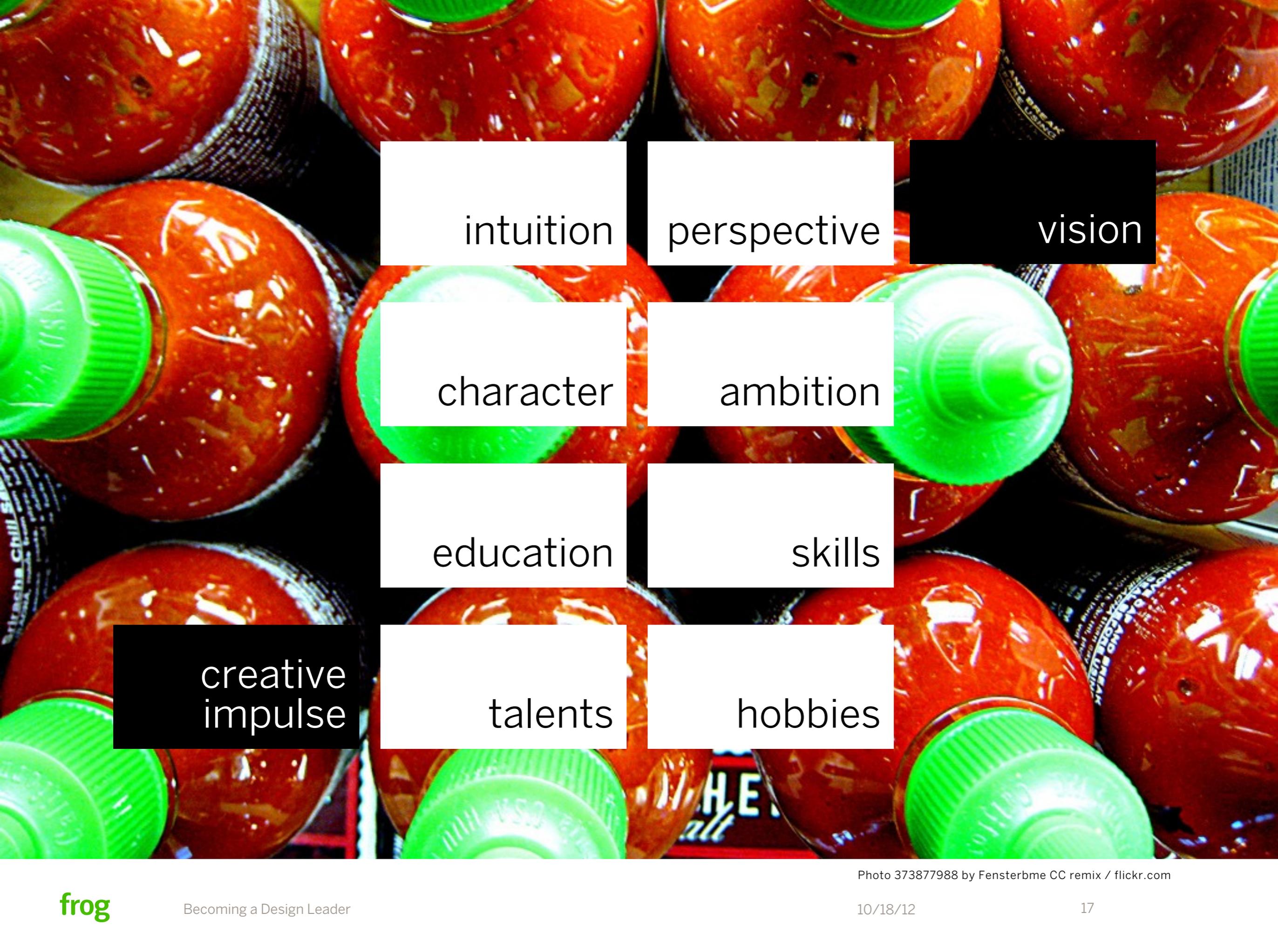
(But it helps.)

1. What does it mean to be a design leader?
2. What traits does a design leader need to succeed?
3. Ok, how can I become a design leader?
4. Now I'm a design leader, what should I watch out for?



Great design leaders have an unquantifiable creative “secret sauce.”

Photo 373877988 by Fensterbme CC remix / flickr.com



intuition

perspective

vision

character

ambition

education

skills

creative  
impulse

talents

hobbies

It takes more than  
“secret sauce” to make  
awesome happen...

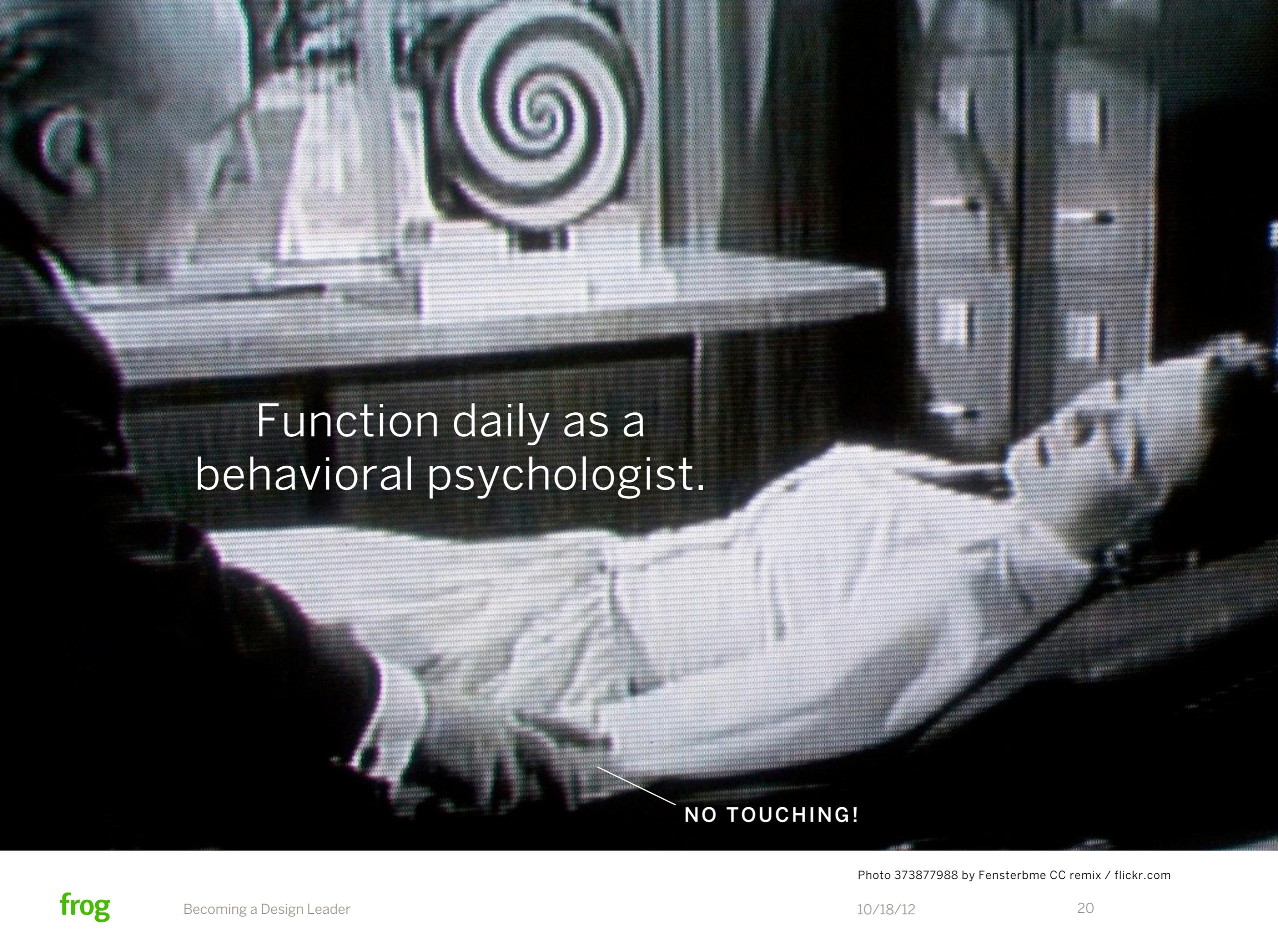
Here are some traits  
you’ll need.

articulate  
brave  
craft-focused  
creative  
connected  
curious  
engaged  
directed  
insightful  
motivated  
oversight  
passionate  
productive  
professional  
strategic  
visionary  
witty

Enjoy working with designers  
and clients—as **people**.



Photo 373877988 by Fensterbme CC remix / flickr.com

A black and white photograph of a person lying on a hospital gurney in a room. The person is lying on their back, and their head is resting on a pillow. The room has a window with a spiral pattern, and there is a table in the foreground. The text "Function daily as a behavioral psychologist." is overlaid on the image.

Function daily as a  
behavioral psychologist.

NO TOUCHING!

Photo 373877988 by Fensterbme CC remix / flickr.com

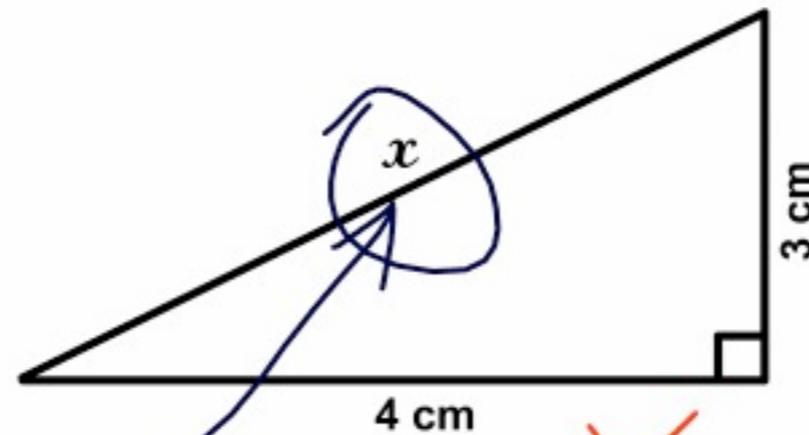
Understand  
people's creative  
dispositions—  
as well as  
your own.



Photo 144448750 by David M\* CC remix / flickr.com

Answer the question “Why?”

3. Find  $x$ .



Here it is ~~X~~ O

See from miles to microns.







Collaborate around  
shared interests.

Photo 37085152 by CarbonNYC CC share & remix / flickr.com



Apply steady,  
constant pressure.

Photo 3309219331 by Paolo Camera CC share & remix / flickr.com



Keep your perspective when taking risks.  
(Even in the fog of war.)

Photo 94326793 by ambrown CC remix / flickr.com

1. What does it mean to be a design leader?
2. What traits does a design leader need to succeed?
3. Ok, how can I become a design leader?
4. Now I'm a design leader, what should I watch out for?

## **Project leadership**

- Planning, methodology and approach/direction setting
- Ideation & innovation, measured in the quality of ideas and designs
- Creative/art direction
- Hands-on design, when necessary
- Storytelling and presentation/communication—to client and internally within your organization
- Ability to articulate complex solutions clearly
- An understanding of delivery technologies
- Strategic perspective applied to the work
- Project management, planning, ownership and delegation
- Oversight and reviews of direct reports
- Project resource management
- Confident client communication
- Quality of end results leading to client happiness

# If you work at a place like **frog**...

## **Client service skills**

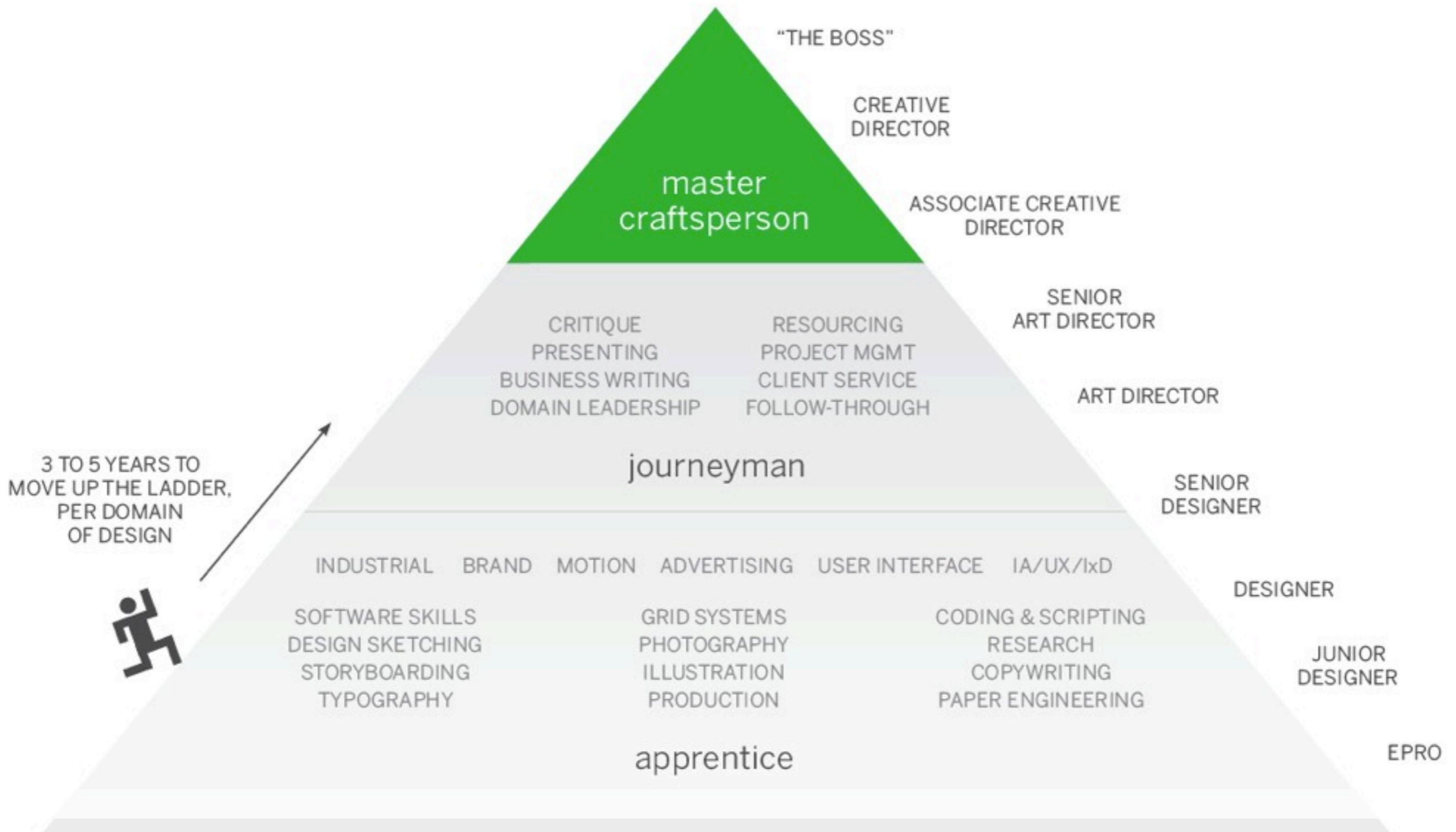
- New business generation: talking to leads on a daily basis
- Proposal and approach definition; process, resource allocation, and budget assessment
- Leadership in pitching and client-facing presentations
- Vision, strategy and opportunity articulation
- Design advocacy

## **People management, organizational planning, and studio management**

- One-on-ones, career development, goals, reviews, feedback articulation, motivation
- Stability, trust, and professional confidence as experienced by the org
- Visible and mature leadership, recognized by reports and teams
- Coordination, communication and collaboration
- Organization design, org planning, recruiting, interviewing and hiring
- Design and development process (understanding, communication, optimization)
- Managing and communicating up (incl. escalation, presentations, reviews, transparency, proactive communication, etc.)
- Humor, character, inspirational strength, special sauce, emotional connection to creative organization

It's not just about learning all this.

It's about the **journey**  
you want to take as a leader.



design leader

BUSINESS STRATEGY  
ORGANIZATIONAL SAVVY  
STORYTELLING  
STRONG AT GENERATING INSIGHT  
MULTI-DOMAIN DESIGN EXPERTISE

master craftsman / design manager

INDUSTRIAL BRAND MOTION ADVERTISING USER INTERFACE IA/UX/IxD

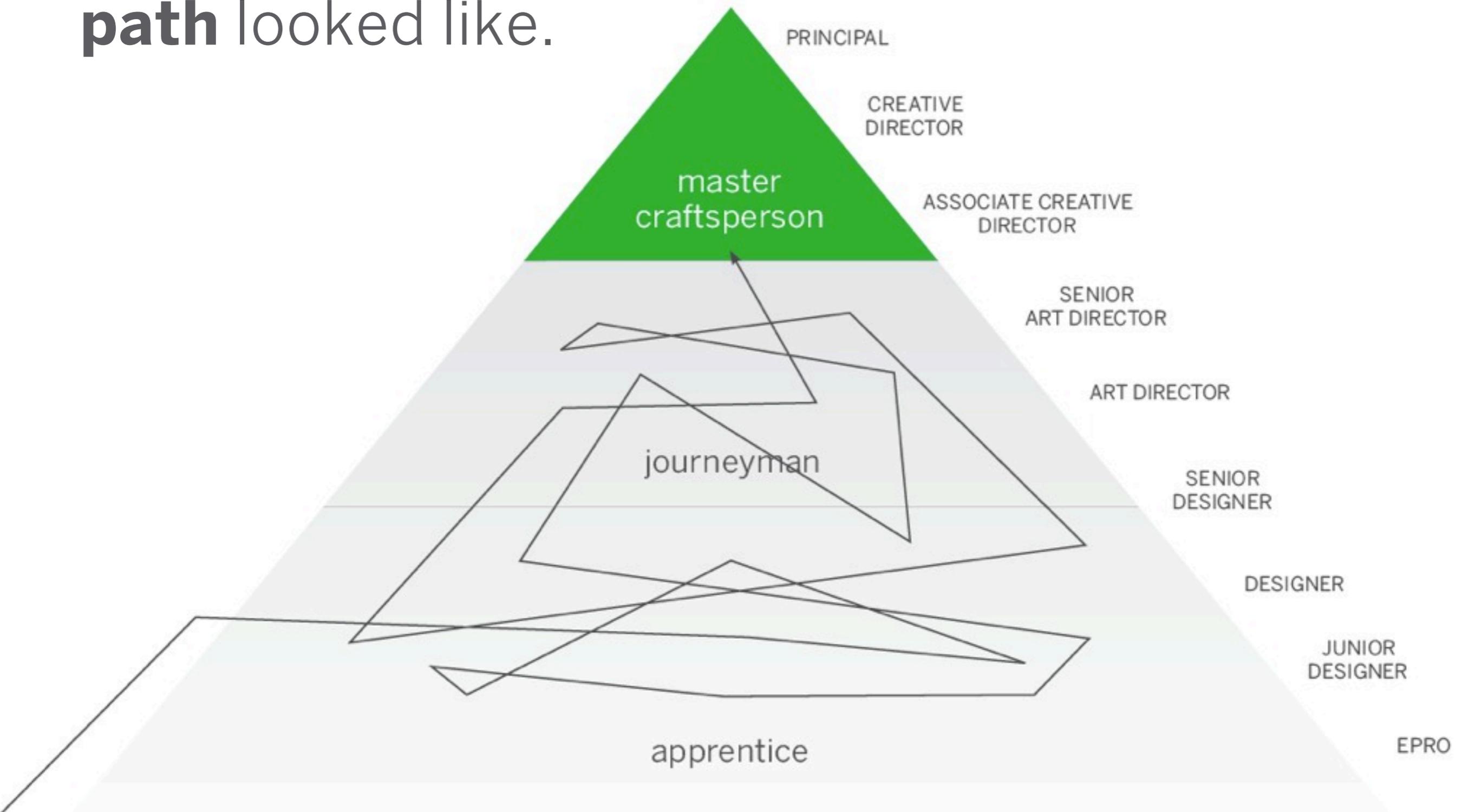
YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING!



## Questions to ask yourself:

- What “hard skills” do I still need to learn?
- What domains of design do I want to add to my portfolio?
- What “soft skills” do I need to acquire to progress towards a leadership role?
- What ingrained behaviors might stand in my way?

# What **my career path** looked like.



Ok, that's nice.

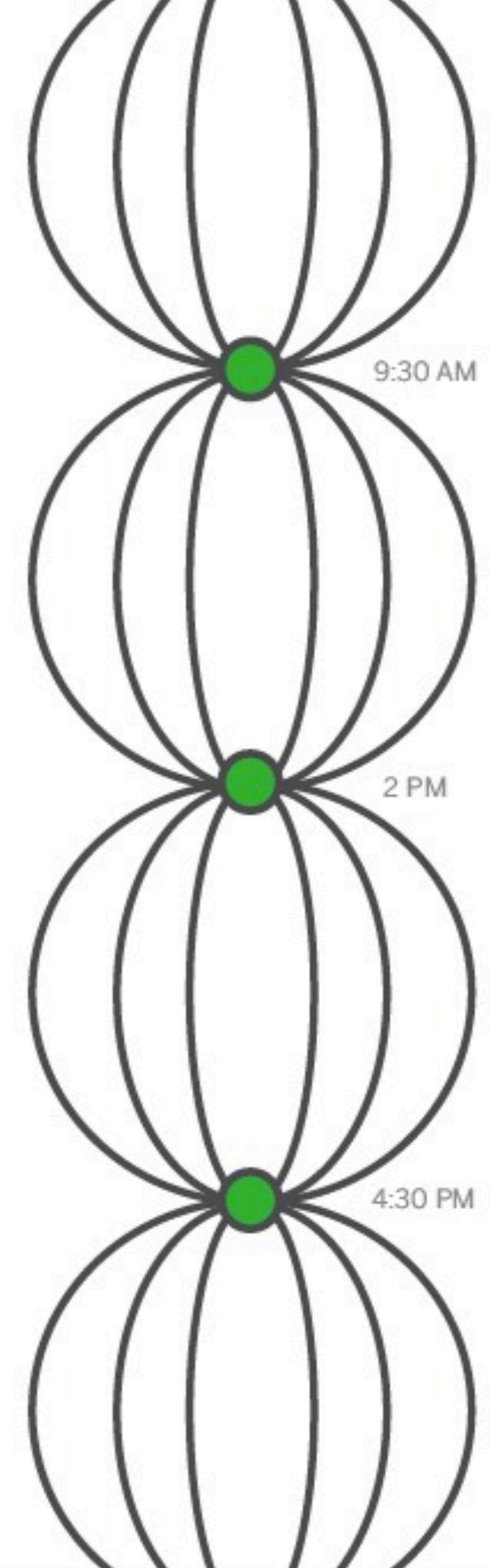
What do I really need to learn to become a design leader?

Here are the first 3 steps you should take on your journey:

- How to **direct** a team of creatives
- How to **frame** big, gnarly problems
- How to **present** effectively

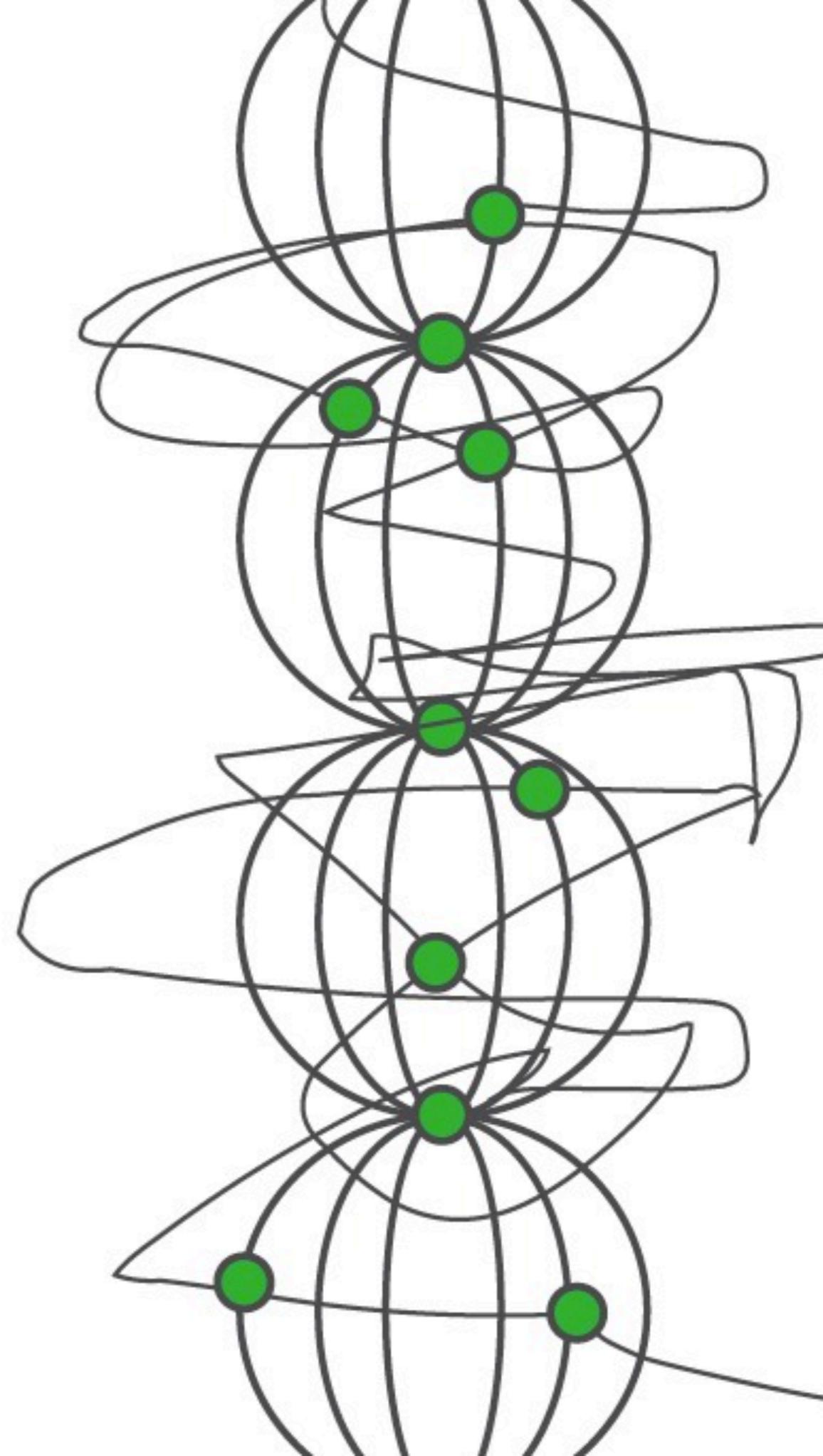
# Work with your team to form a braid.

These are NOT drawn-out meetings or critique sessions. Think 2–3 minutes. Quickly share work in progress across all disciplines, then get back to it.



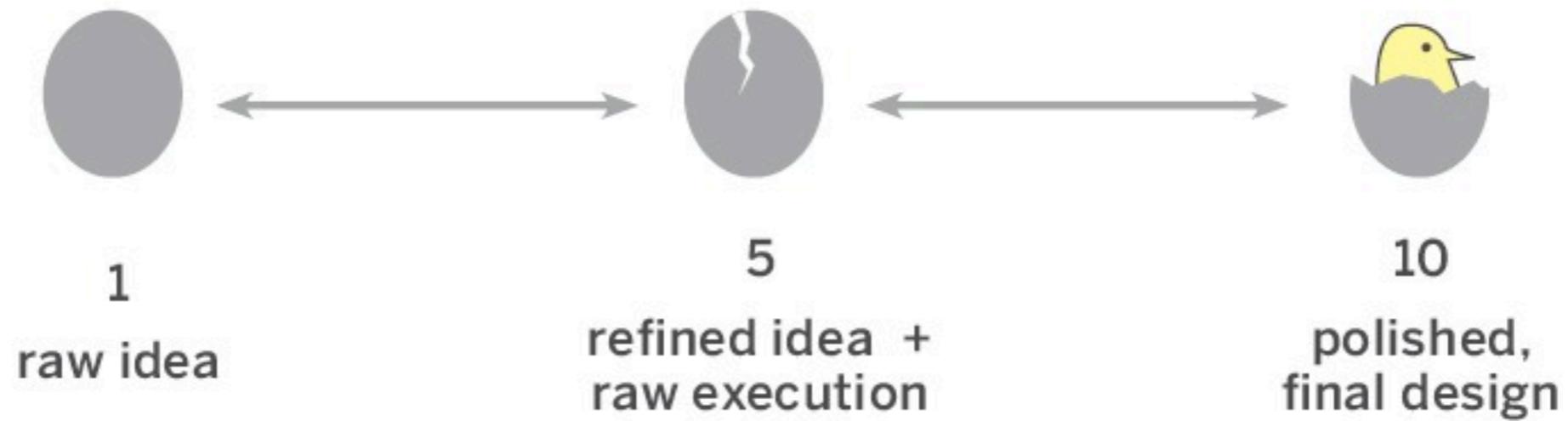
# This can help manage “swoop and poop.”

That is only a symptom of a key leader being out of the loop. Critique should be scheduled or requested as part of your project schedule.



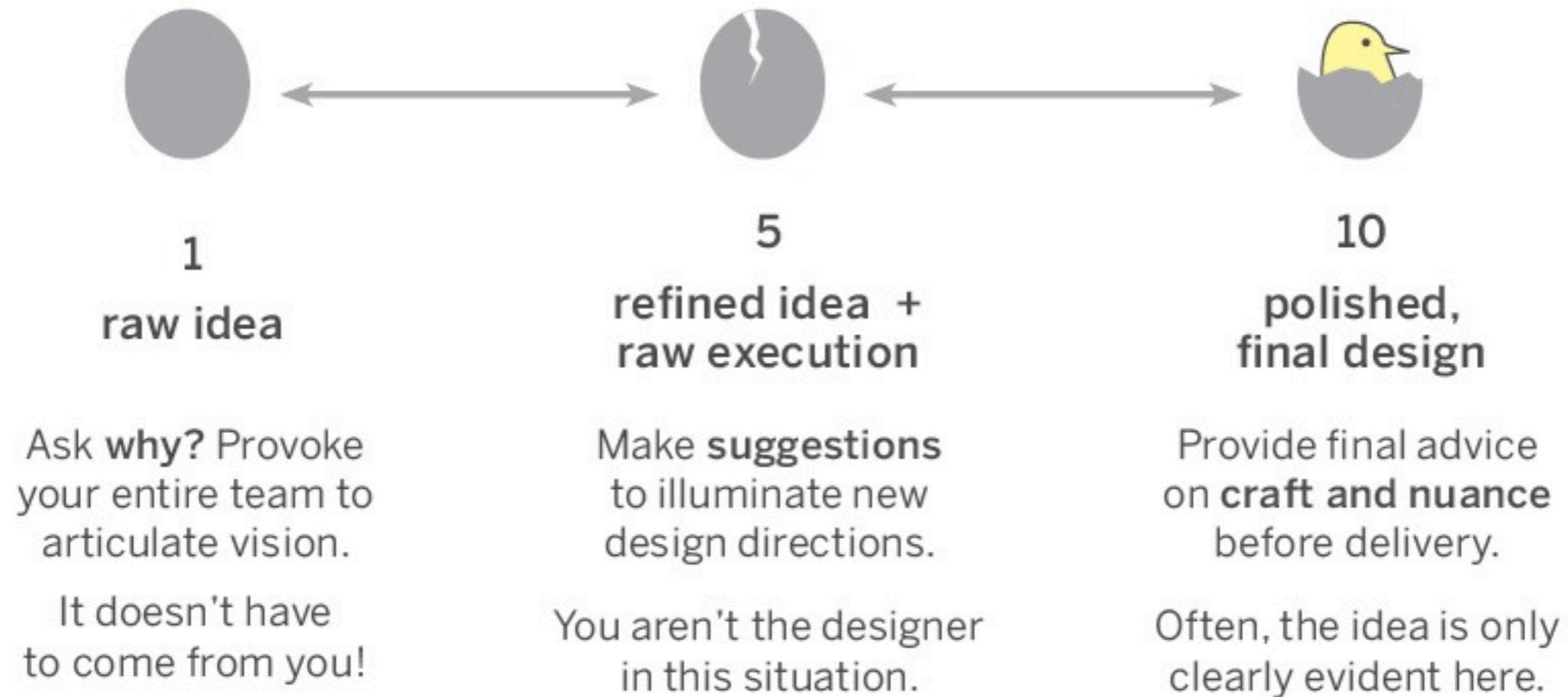
# Publicly post work in progress.

If it's in the computer, it's invisible.  
If your workspace doesn't allow it,  
hack the space with moveable boards.

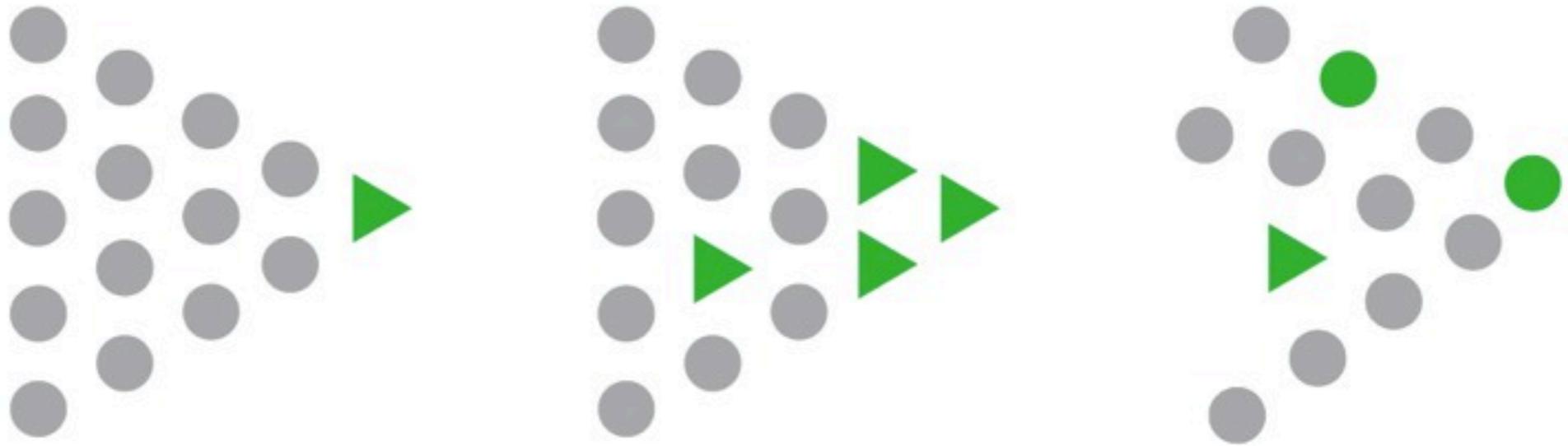


# Know how to critique.

Consider using the “egg system.”



(P.S. Shut up and listen. Then count to ten before offering an opinion.)



## Be deliberate in how you structure teams.

Shepherd leadership from within your team as much as possible.

If you do this, you'll need to invest your time in mentorship more than minute-by-minute team management.

# Draw insight from everything.

Immerse yourself. Take a holistic view outside the client's space.

customers

competitors

complementers

sales & retail

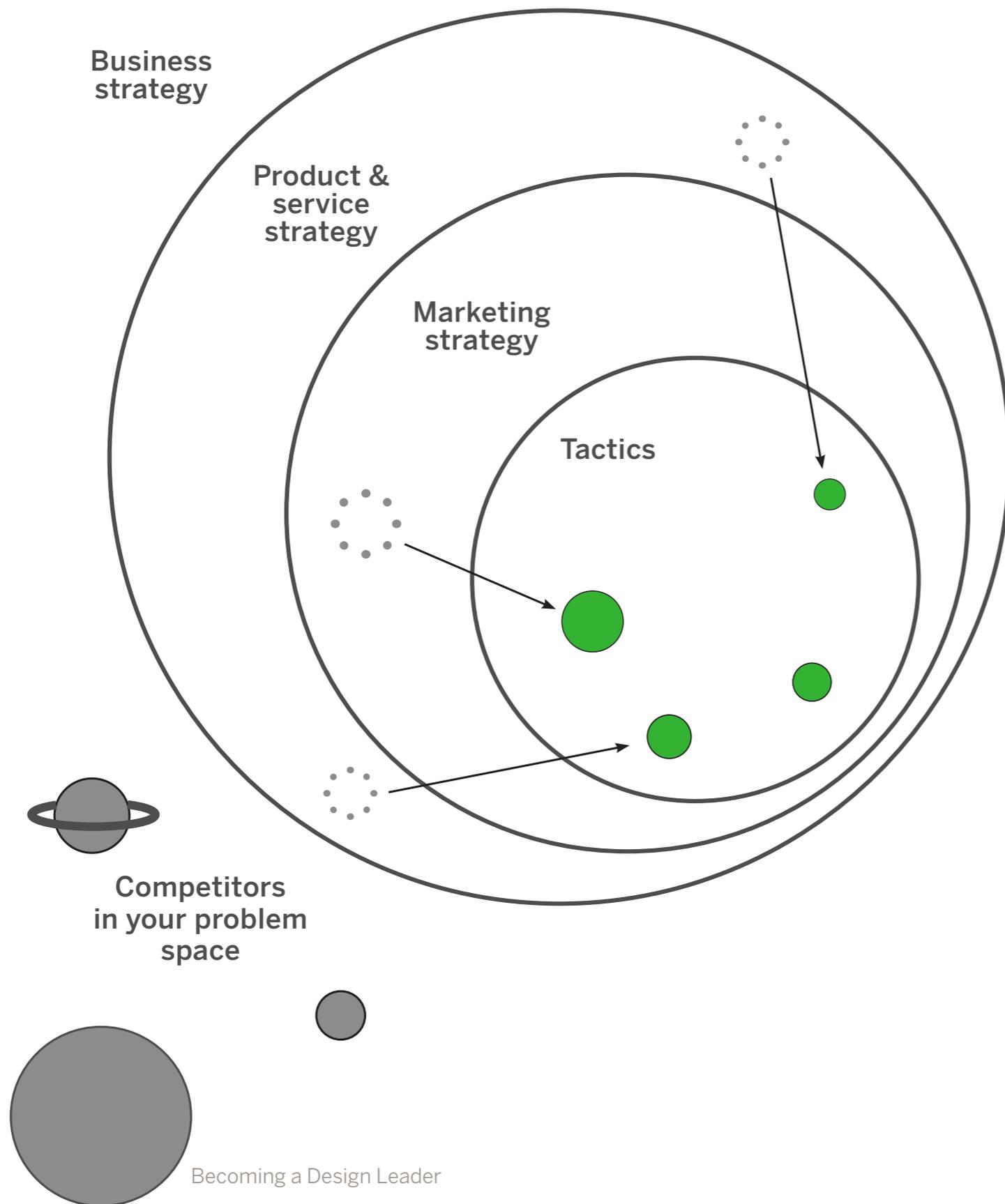
trends

technology

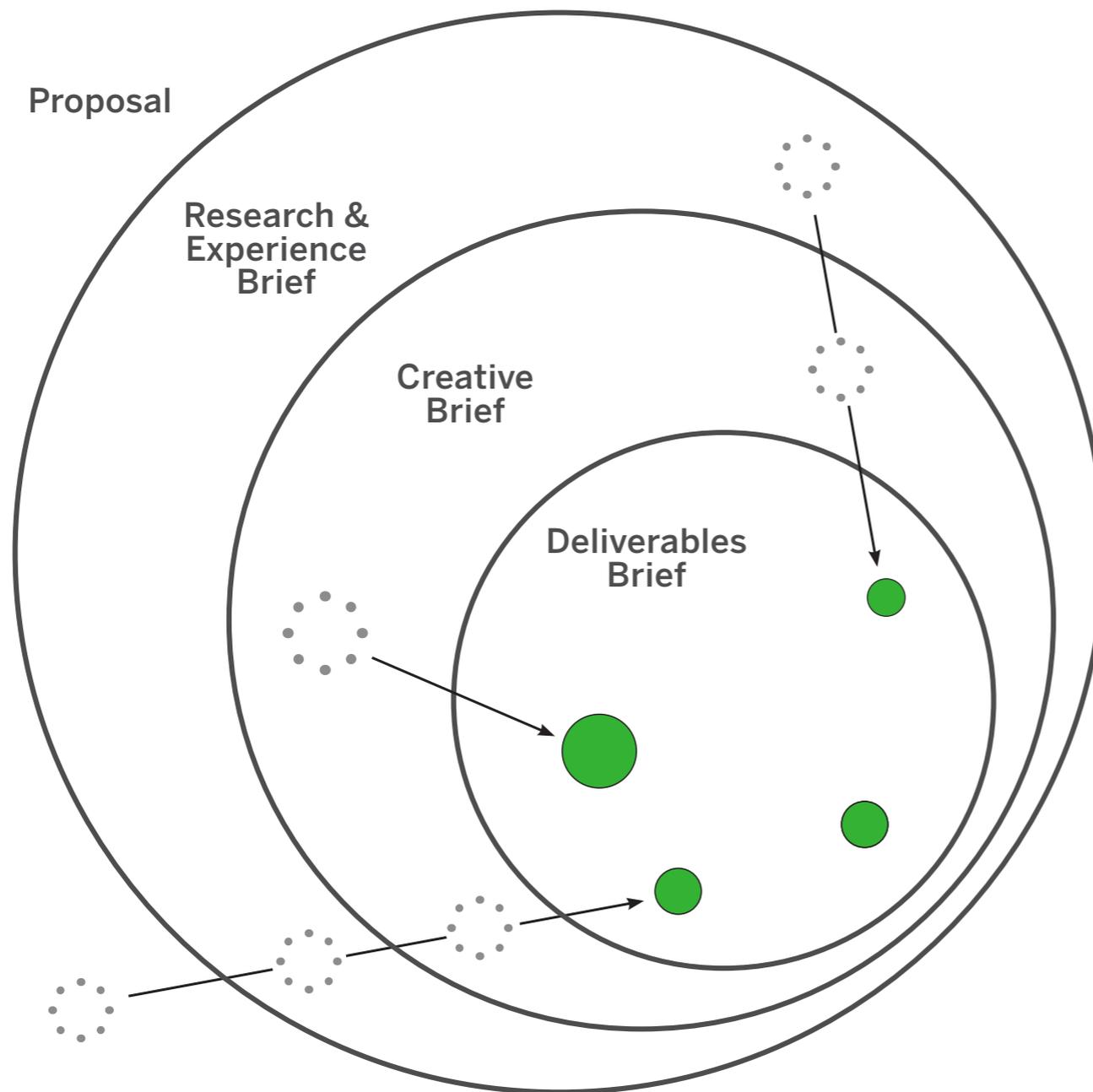
comparatives

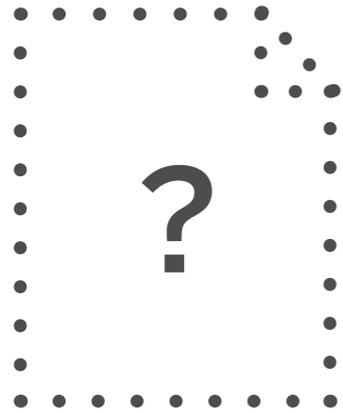
organizational  
toolbox

# Learn to see like a strategist.



Use the right tools  
to get to tactics.





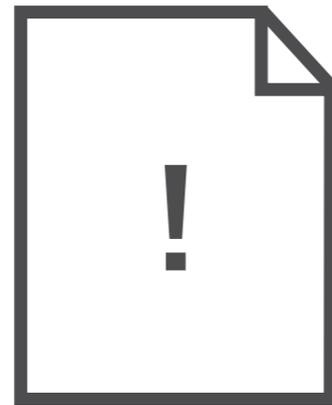
### research brief

State business problem as it is understood

Create objectives for your research

List the inputs

Qualify the audience



### experience brief

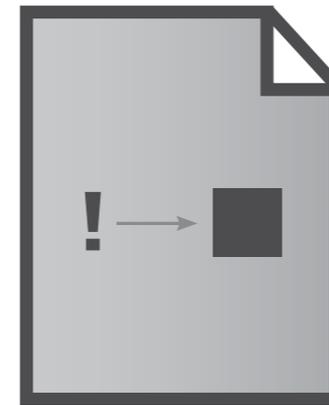
Reframe business problem with new data & insight

Create a “parti”

Describe story arcs

Convey story concepts and themes

Describe activities & emotions to evoke



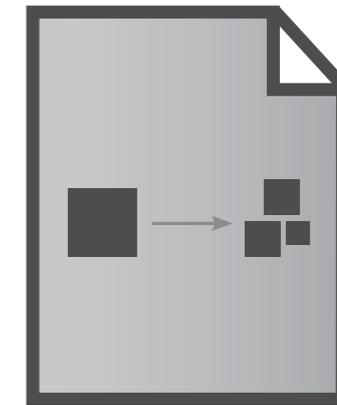
### creative brief

State the agreed-upon strategy  
Focus on the “parti”

Set boundaries on brand voice and visual expression

Articulate emotional impact

Provide high-level specification



### deliverables brief

State the agreed-upon strategy  
Restate the “parti”

Describe relationship between previous project and new work

Provide in-depth specification

# A brief should be... brief.

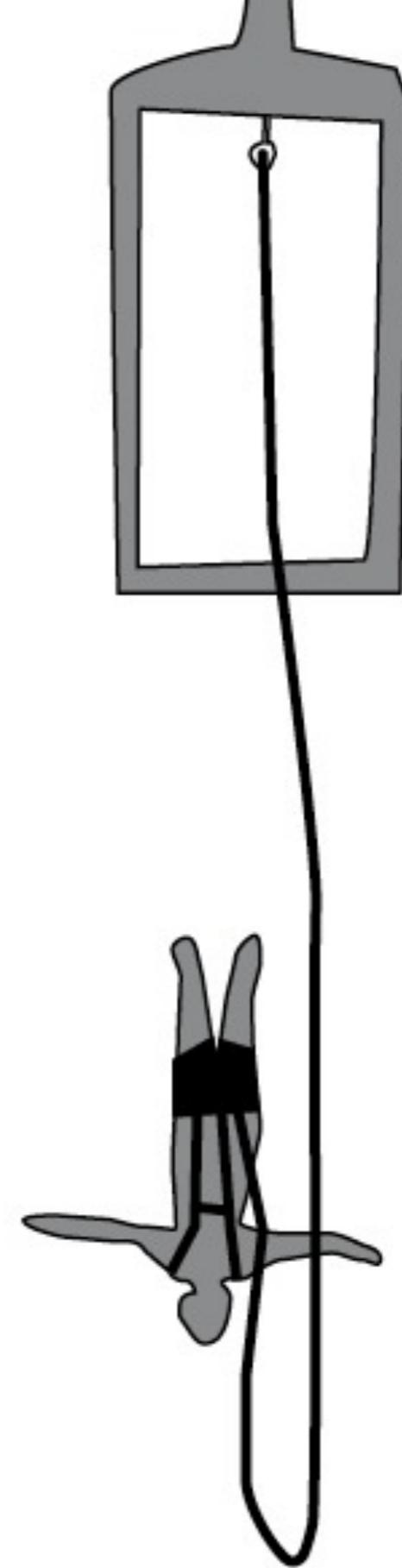
Killer creative thinking comes from focus.  
You need a bull's eye to aim at, not a dartboard.

1. What does it mean to be a design leader?
2. What traits does a design leader need to succeed?
3. Ok, how can I become a design leader?
4. Now I'm a design leader, what should I watch out for?

# Addiction to being in control.

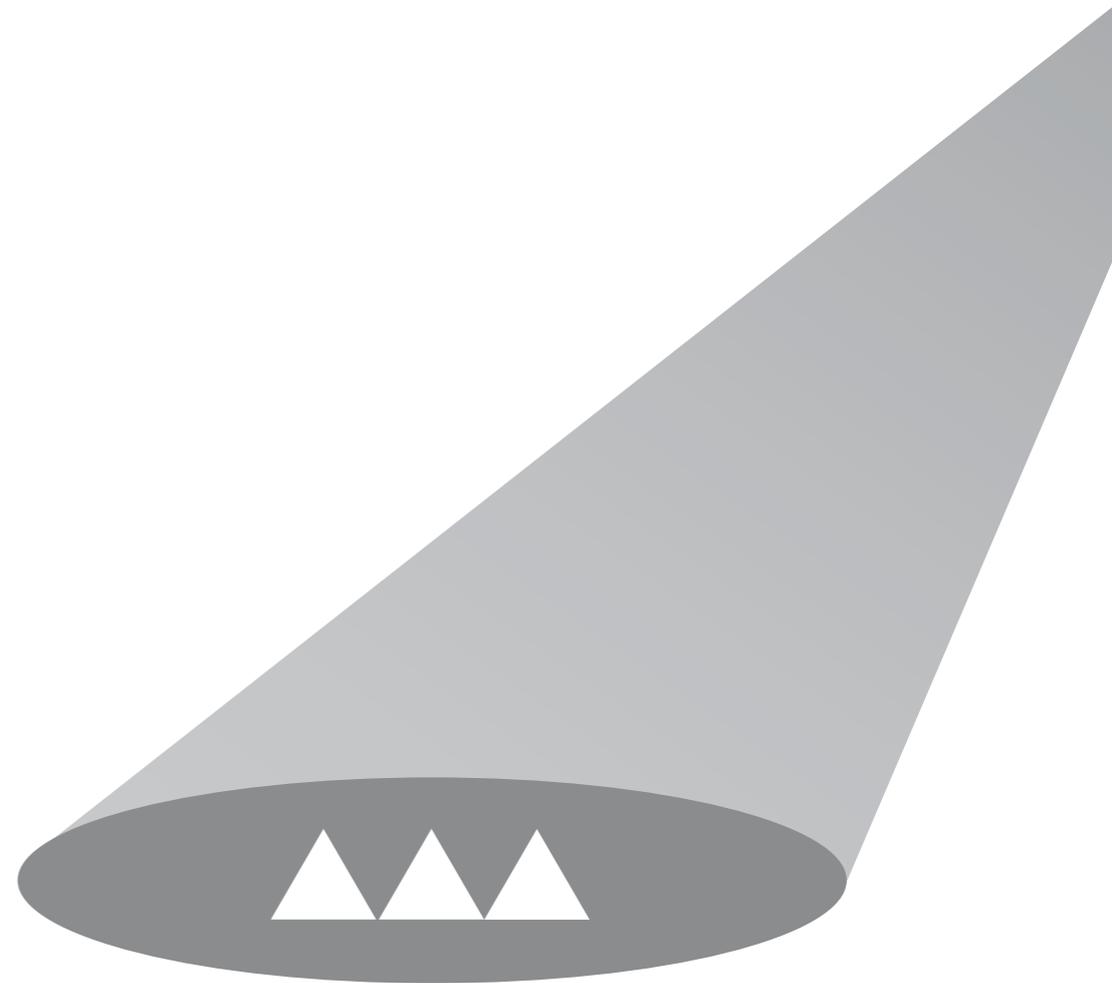


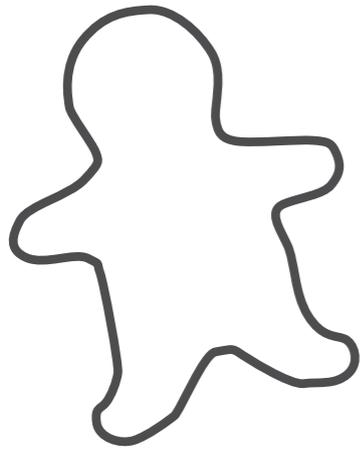
Being a flow junkie.



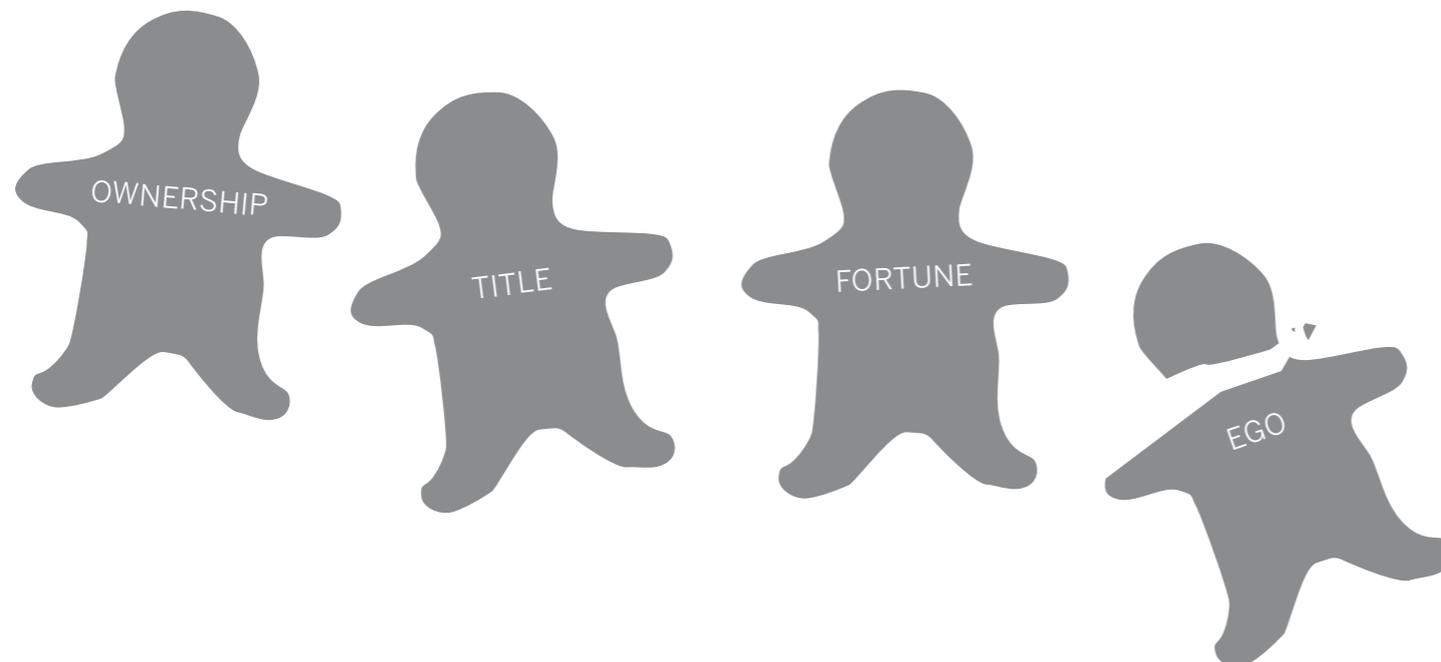


Focusing the spotlight  
on your team.

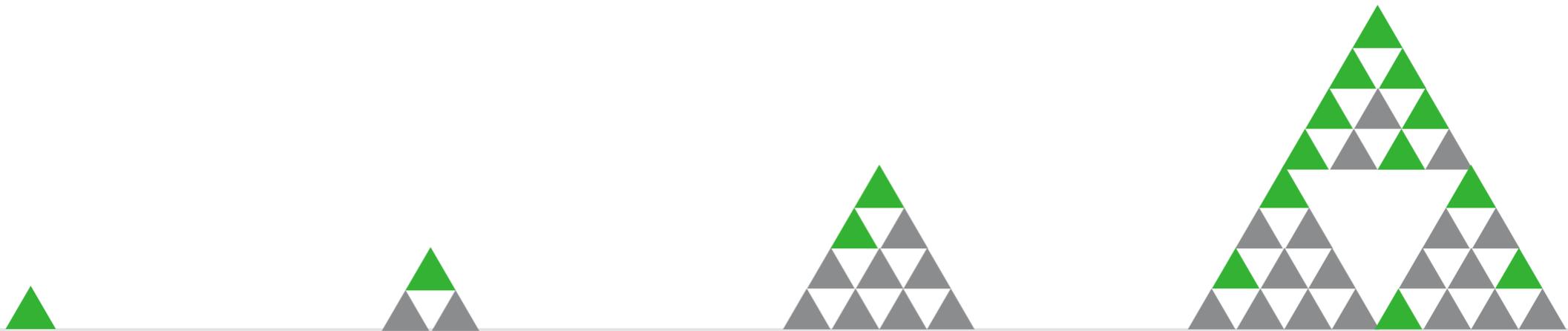




Hiring people that think  
just like you.



Envisioning the growth  
of your organization over time.



Making the time  
to be available,  
to mentor, and  
to teach.



1. What does it mean to be a design leader?
2. What traits does a design leader need to succeed?
3. Ok, how can I become a design leader?
4. Now I'm a design leader, what should I watch out for?

## The 6 C's of design leadership:

**Communicate** actively, with both IQ and EQ

**Coax** stellar work from your team

**Compel** the team towards a shared vision

**Cajole** by asking open-ended questions

**Cheer** your team on with gusto

**Conjure** great work out of yourself, too!

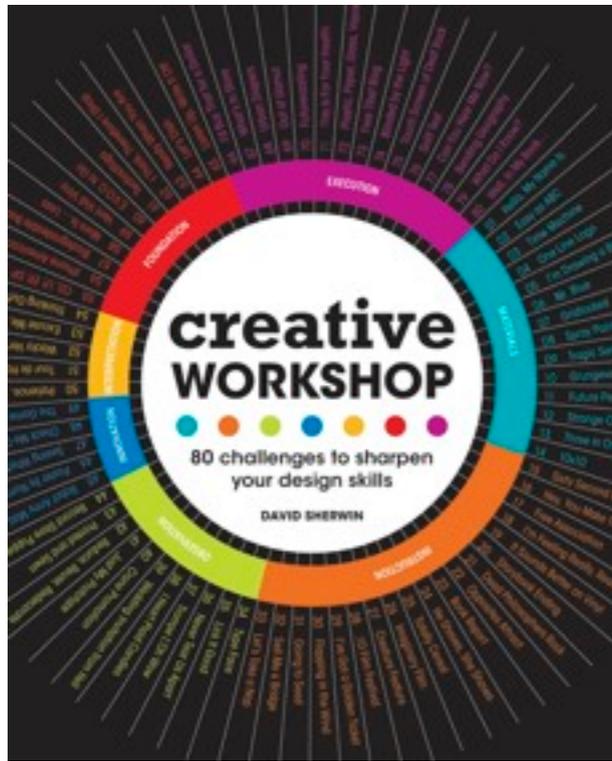
You can make  
**awesome s\*@% happen...**  
and have a big impact  
on the world.

You can make  
**awesome s\*@%** happen...  
without undue suffering  
and sacrifice.

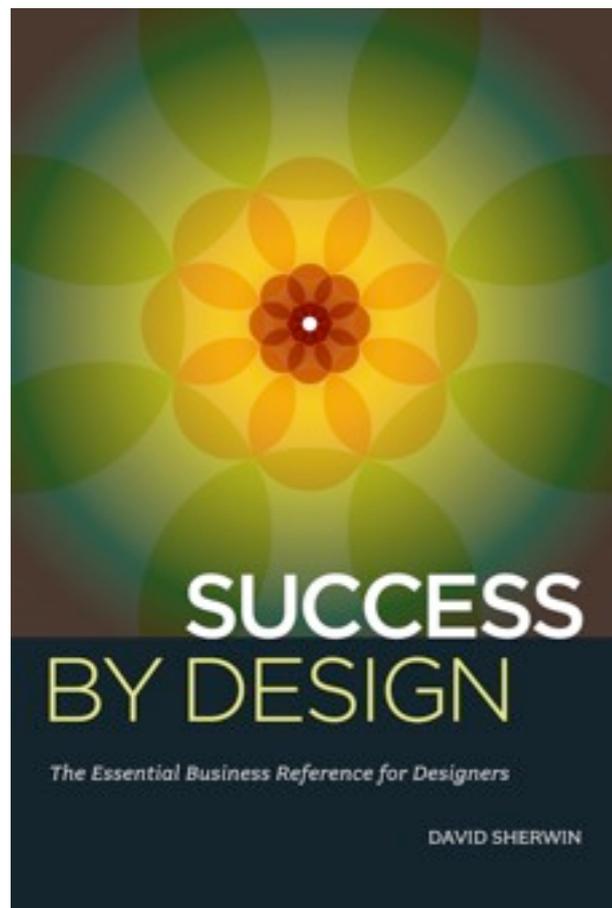
You can make  
**awesome s\*@%** happen...  
while having a lot of fun  
along the way.

A person is silhouetted against a vast sea of clouds at sunrise or sunset. The person is standing on a dark, elevated surface, looking through binoculars. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, golden glow that illuminates the clouds from below. The clouds are thick and layered, creating a textured, undulating surface. The overall scene is serene and contemplative.

THE FIRST STEP:  
DESIGNING THE JOURNEY.



Email: [david.sherwin@frogdesign.com](mailto:david.sherwin@frogdesign.com)  
Twitter: @changeorder  
Blog: [changeorderblog.com](http://changeorderblog.com)



Available December 2012  
from HOW Books:  
[amzn.to/successbydesign](http://amzn.to/successbydesign)

Thanks

