Design Manifesto

A statement of my design philosophy and how I manage design teams.

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tapbots.com

Overview

1 Introduction

2 The Role of a Designer

3 Design Professionalism

4 Process & Decision Making

5 Pillars of User Experience

6 Design Fundamentals

INTRODUCTION

What’s this all about?

To communicate how I think about design, how I practice it in the expression of building an enterprise product, and what I expect from the design teams I lead.

FIRST THING FIRST

What’s the Role of a Designer?*

A designer must understand the following core principles. She must also bear in mind that they are stack-ranked in priority (as listed) and make design decisions accordingly.

Clarity Eliminate ambiguity. Enable people to see, understand, and act with confidence.

Efficiency Streamline and optimize workflows. Anticipate needs to help people work better, smarter, and faster.

Consistency Create familiarity and strengthen intuition by applying the same solution to the same problem.

Beauty Demonstrate respect for people’s time and attention with thoughtful and elegant craftsmanship.

* for purposes of this context I am referring to UX/Product Design
† Adapted from Salesforce Design Principles (link)

Being a Pro

My advice to designers for how to approach their craft and interact with those around them.

PROFESSIONALISM

Being a Design Pro

1. Be the voice of the user
2. Be an advocate for design
3. Be a problem-solver
4. Know the why
5. Be service-oriented
6. Trust but verify
7. Disagree agreeably
8. Deliver the goods

PROFESSIONALISM

1 Be the voice of the user

- Become an expert on the goals, needs and pain points of our users.
- Be sensitive to what the user needs and design solutions that solve their problems.
- Ensure their voice is heard throughout all phases of design.
- Be willing to question decisions that conflict with what the user needs.

PROFESSIONALISM

2 Be an advocate for design

- Be *politely* opinionated about UI and user experience.
- We are relied on for our expert perspective. Take it seriously.
- Strive to increase the collective Design IQ of those with whom you're working.
- Teach but don’t lecture (and avoid design jargon).

PROFESSIONALISM

3 Be a problem-solver

- Come with ideas and recommendations rather than uninformed questions.
- Ask for feedback, not permission.
- Don't just take orders.
- Be flexible, but remember the previous slide.
- Be a pixelsmith, not a pixel pusher.

PROFESSIONALISM

4 Know the why

- Why are we doing this? What is the goal?
- Don’t hesitate to question everything.
- Offer well-thought-out solutions, but only AFTER you thoroughly understand the problem at hand.
- Conversely, become an expert at explaining your design decisions. Always be able to explain why you designed it the way you did.

PROFESSIONALISM

5 Be service-oriented

- Treat internal stakeholders like clients.
- Learn the art of presenting designs.
- Communicate like your reputation depends on it. Because it does.
- Under promise. Over deliver.

PROFESSIONALISM

6 Trust but verify

- Question everything, but learn how to ask the right questions.
- Data can be deceiving. Learn how to understand and interpret it.
- Design like you know you are right. Test like you know you are wrong.

PROFESSIONALISM

7 Disagree agreeably

- We're all on the same team. Assume good intent.
- Look for the 3rd way.
- Strong beliefs, loosely held.
- "Yes, and ..."
- Disagree and then commit.

PROFESSIONALISM

8 Deliver the goods

- We always get done what we've committed to getting done.
- Upon realizing that a deadline is in jeopardy: COMMUNICATE
- We know the difference between "getting things done" and getting the right things done.
- Above and beyond. Every time. **No matter what.**

Design Process

PHASE	Discover	Organize	Design	Prototype	Handoff	Monitor
KEY THOUGHT	Users are confused by our permissions settings.	Let's organize the permissions controls so they aligns with user expectations and best practices.	Let's design an intuitive UI using our established design patterns.	Let's create a clickable walkthrough to demonstrate how the permissions will work.	We need to make sure our designs are documented well for developers to start building.	Does the new solution result in fewer support inquiries? Are we getting good feedback?
ACTIVITIES & DELIVERABLES	• User interviews • Contextual observation • Usage data analysis • Persona profiles • Best practices exploration	• Whiteboard drawings • Figjam boards • Sketches, wireframes, & process flows • Onboarding schema & flow State diagrams	• Hi-fi mockups • Scenario states • Onboarding artifacts • Zero states • Packaging scenarios • Illustrations & iconography	• Interactive prototypes • Usability testing	• Figma file sharing • Project kickoff • Collaboration with engineers	• Performance summaries • Usage metrics • User interviews

⇄ Feedback & Iteration with PM & ENG

Decision Styles

How are design decisions made?

- Generally, the style of design decision should depend on the importance of the project and the time available
- Ideally, in a mature design org, decisions are never made below the Pro Design level
- In practice, there will always be some flux between Pro and User-Centered
- ✶ Sweet spot

TIME & RESOURCES REQUIRED

UNDESIGN

Think Craigslist or Wikipedia

UNINTENTIONAL DESIGN

Design that just happens

Inconsistent & unfocused

SELF DESIGN

Designing for yourself

Driven by a high degree of personal preference

Personal sites & presentations, internal projects

Works for now

PRO DESIGN

High quality

Influenced by what has proven to work in the past

Informed by best practices and known patterns

USER-CENTERED DESIGN

Data-driven

Persona-based

Iterative design informed by customer feedback and pain points

EXPERIENCE DESIGN

Designing for an overall experience

Cross-discipline approach for improving experience with entire brand

Requires collaboration across all parts of the business

Many mediums

UX Pillars

An expanded set of core principles that guide product design and user interactions.

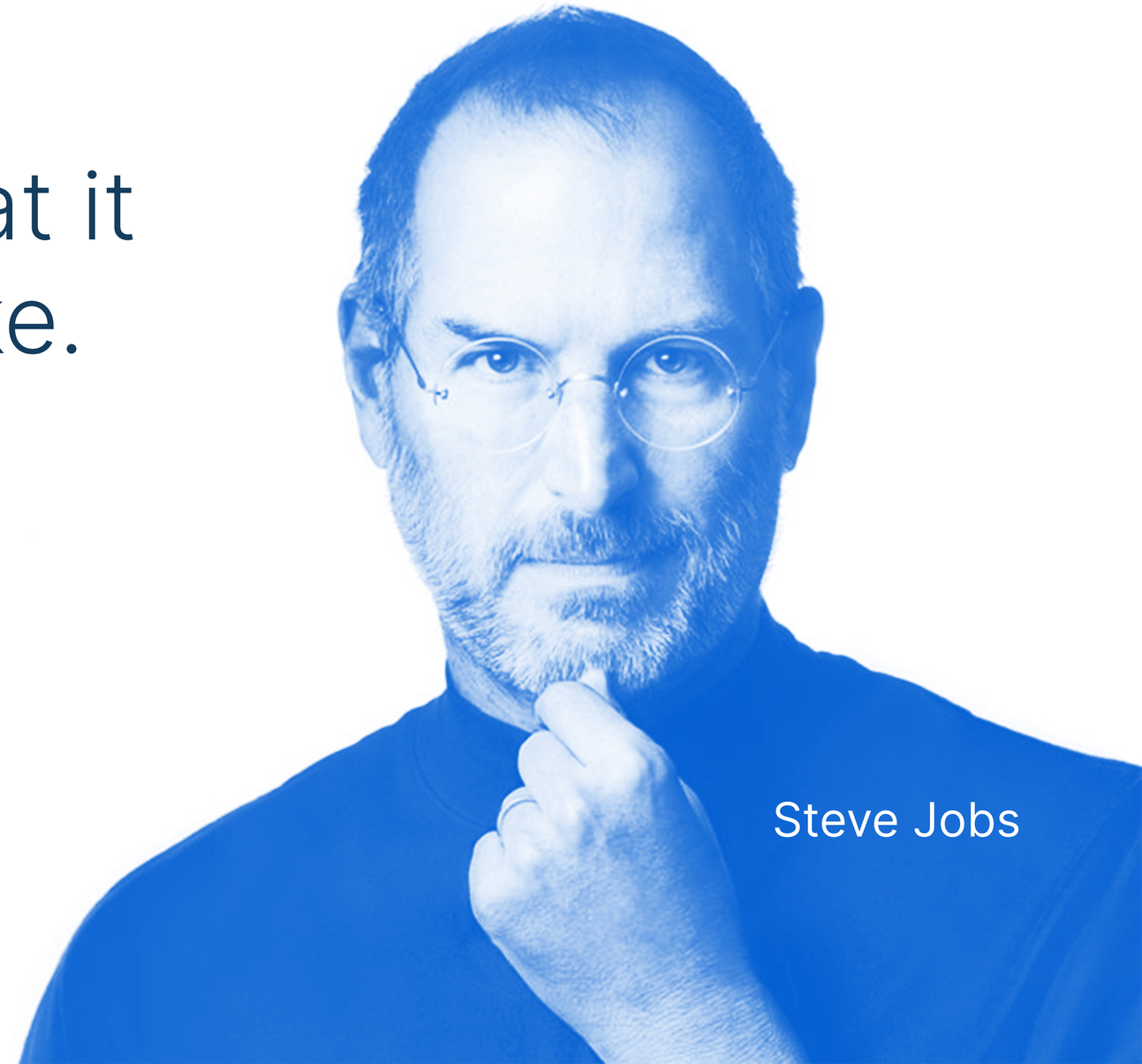
UX DESIGN PILLARS

Core principles to drive decisions

- Intuitive
- Uniform
- Delight
- Content & Copywriting
- Personalization
- Reciprocal Association
- Onboarding & Guidance
- Accessibility

Design is not just what it looks like and feels like.

Design is how it works.



Steve Jobs

Content precedes design. Design in the absence of content is not design.

It’s decoration.

Jeffrey Zeldman

Less, but better.

Good design is as little design as possible.

Dieter Rams

No matter how beautiful the interface is, it would be better if there were

less of it.

Edward Tufte

Fundamentals

The basics — the key tenets of UI design that I teach designers to master.

FUNDAMENTALS

Design 101

- Color
- Whitespace
- Simplicity
- Precision
- Subtlety
- Typography
- Consistency
- Form v. Function
- Always ask “What if ...?”
- Process

FUNDAMENTALS

Color

- We never use pure black - for background or text color.*
- We default to neutral colors that allow the design to support the text.
- We emphasize readability and contrast.
- We reserve primary use of color for emphasis and calls-to-action.

* Except for when using transparency.

FUNDAMENTALS

Whitespace

- Don’t be afraid of it — whitespace is a designer’s best friend.
- Ample whitespace gives a UI a modern, clean, simple vibe.
- We’re not designing newspapers, where every bit of space is filled.
- There is no fold.
- But be cognizant of the edges.

FUNDAMENTALS

Simplicity

- Less is more.
- Reduce and/or remove unnecessary elements.
- Organize elements and information.
- Look for ways to hide complexity.
- Simple is not easy. Or plain. Or boring. Or default.

FUNDAMENTALS

Precision

- Craftsmanship matters.
- Design on a grid.
- No fuzzy pixels (avoid random or partial pixel values).
- Math is your friend.
- Vectors over bitmaps as much as possible.

FUNDAMENTALS

Subtlety

- This intersects with previous points about color and simplicity.
- Achieve just enough contrast for elements like:

  — border width
  — border color
  — background shading
  — gradients
  — shadows

Tufte's Principle of Least Effectual Difference

Make all visual distinctions as subtle as possible, but still clear and effective.

FUNDAMENTALS

Aa Typography

- Establish a clear typographical hierarchy.
- Take advantage of multiple weights.
- Pay attention to line-height AND line-length. **Readability!**
- Use italics for *emphasis only*.
- Never use small-caps or capital italics. Ever. For any reason.

FUNDAMENTALS

Consistency

- Design on a grid (it’s worth saying again).
- Only use icons from a robust set, not combinations of different sets.
- Illustrations (spot and otherwise) should look like the belong to the same family.
- Use components and variants whenever possible.
- Be intentional about spacing and padding.

FUNDAMENTALS

Form v. Function

- You don’t have to choose one; use both in concert.
- Functionality & content informs design. Design informs the experience.
- We’re problem solvers, not decorators.
- We are not in the business of making it pretty.

FUNDAMENTALS

What if?

- Realize that interfaces are fluid.
- Build for flexibility and scalability.
- What if this text length doubles?
- What if this line wraps?
- What if there are 1, 000 of these? What if there’s only 2?

FUNDAMENTALS

Process

- Have a process.
- Follow a repeatable series of actions to achieve consistent results.
- Make it appropriate to the project size, scope, and constraints.

Questions?

Let’s talk. chuck@mallott.me