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teaching philosophy

I have ridden and shown horses on the English hunter-jumper circuit for almost 25 years. During those years I have learned many lessons from working with and training horses that I believe are applicable to teaching design. In both competitive riding and in teaching, the rider/teacher is essentially a single unit working with and responsible for another living creature that has its own psychology. Horses are wise teachers of humility and patience. Riders cannot impose their will on them, but must employ problem-solving methodologies in order to find ways to gain their cooperation. Horses require quiet wisdom, gentle understanding, and respect. When riders encounter training problems with their horses, they must first search for the cause within their own actions and make the appropriate adjustments in their methods.

The same is true of educators working with their students. As teachers, we are constantly in a process of critical self-examination and reassessment of our habitual responses. If we need to focus on a problem area, students will help us do so by reminding us if our vigilance falters. Our students teach us to be compassionate, empathetic, and to have a keen awareness of the consequences of our actions. They teach us to understand the concepts of teamwork, commitment and responsibility. Riding, like education, is very much an iterative, lifelong process of seeking mastery of qualities that are not absolute. The mental training and problem-solving skills I have gained from my many years of riding has laid the foundation for my passion as an educator.

In addition to teaching all the theory, tools, and hand-skills needed to be successful in the design profession, I believe that the purpose of design education should be to teach students how to think critically and to become effective problem-solvers and communicators of ideas. We should teach them to ask not just how to solve a problem, but, more importantly, why we are solving it and furthermore, whether the right questions are being asked and why the questions are important in the first place. The universality of learning problem-solving skills will serve students well in all facets of their lives, professionally and otherwise. Education with depth as well as breadth of content makes students adaptable. Allow me to explain.

A broad-based liberal arts education with a strong, relevant foundational core as its base is essential for communication designers because we require a wide-ranging, diversified left and right-brained skill set in order to be successful in our field. In the process of finding creative design solutions, we must be able to understand and bridge the gap between many disciplines. The communication design profession is ever-changing and the ability to apply creative problem-solving methodologies to a wide variety of issues is crucial for designers. A wealth of intelligent, well thought out creative solutions can be drawn from an education that provides not only depth but also breadth of knowledge and experience. For these reasons, I think interdisciplinary study can be especially valuable in developing smart, creative-thinking designers. By "interdisciplinary study," I mean subjects such as psychology, philosophy, and anthropology that will broaden students' understanding of the human psyche and ultimately help them to become more effective communicators, storytellers, and message-makers. For example, the study of anthropology would influence students'

understanding of cultural uses of color and help them to make informed color choices in their own design work.

Design that lacks ideas and depends entirely on form for its realization may possess a certain kind of mysterious charm; at the same time it may be uncommunicative. On the other hand, design that depends entirely on content will most likely be so tiresome that it will not compel viewing. "Idea and the form...are the needle and thread, and I have never heard of a guild of tailors who recommended the use of thread without the needle or the needle without the thread." Good design satisfies both idea and form, the needle and the thread.

—Paul Rand

In order to produce our ideas effectively in today's world, knowledge of software applicable to one's area of expertise is a necessary, real-world skill and the computer is a valuable tool. However, proficiency with current technology does not guarantee that a student will develop good design skills. If a university chooses to teach only software, technology, or to teach only popular design trends, its educational product has a real potential to expire because technological advances and vocational shifts make many areas of the profession obsolete. If, on the other hand, a university chooses to teach essential skills such as design problem-solving methodologies, its educational product has timeless value and the potential to transcend specific courses of study. My view of the relationship between education and technology is that technology should be used as one of many tools with which to complete thoughtful assignments that are developed through the use of sound educational principles and methodologies. Technology should not be an end unto itself, but should be thoughtfully integrated into the curricula.

After twelve years as a working design professional, I have chosen to become an educator because it provides me with an important opportunity to be a part of the shaping of the next generation of design professionals, a chance to influence the future of design through the teaching of values, ethics and ideals so critical to our profession. I find great fulfillment in guiding students in their learning process. I believe in providing valuable learning experiences in an environment of respect and commitment. We can promote the teaching of meaningful design by developing effective, well-prepared educators. I believe we should teach subjects that embody timeless values like critical thinking, problem-solving methodologies and ethical conduct. By doing these things we can help to develop a generation of men and women who are independent thinkers with the wisdom, strength, and leadership skills to promote change when needed. Our students can develop into leaders who, like equine athletes with proper training, can successfully clear all the hurdles set before them in life.

I look forward to finding my place in a collegial community of design educators where I can grow to become an important contributor to the University, the community and to the future of design education.