



Surrounded by design

I have always been surrounded by color, pattern, juxtaposition of ideas and texture, and constantly emerging design. My wife is a fabric artist who also teaches sewing design, my seven children all work in the creative arts, and my mother created scrapbooks, paintings, and crafts from as early as I can remember. Bolts of fabric and shelves full of art supplies have taken over the house, room by room, a relentless attack of motley, vibrant color and texture. I live and I will die with design.

Design is also what I do for a living. I love design. Like all consultants, I design and deliver new experience. I often engage in what I call a Design-Redesign Conversation – to reveal to people how they are currently perfectly designed to perfectly produce the results they are currently producing, whether they like the results or not. Through conversation, the client and I then create a new process.



*supporting the mastery of
leadership, change and teamwork
around the world*

The seven elements of great design

Design is the one of the most important things leaders do; it is both the essence of vision, and the creative energy that brings people together to new and positive outcomes. That being the case, I thought it worthwhile to share what I and the artists surrounding me hold to be the seven elements of great design:

- 1. Combining traditional and new** – an intelligent blend of the traditional and the unexpected (as in "I was standing in a familiar place, but I didn't see that coming!"). The consultant or trainer looks for what is startling, for what grabs the attention, all the while being careful not to wander so far off the beaten path that the learner is permanently lost.
- 2. Messy and unpredictable...but that's OK** – as Hemingway said about great work, at some point, "the thing comes alive on you and you have to fight like bloody hell" to keep things together. Penicillin was discovered through an unpredictable accident. Design progresses by fits and starts, and more than once you are sorely tempted to quit- usually just before the breakthrough.
- 3. Repetition** – communications research tells us that the message must be communicated seven or eight times before it "lands", with some variation each time to get past the tuning-out self-protection habit.
- 4. Contrast** – what it is, what it is not—for example, leadership vs. management, conflict vs. contention, contrasting approaches to time management placed in a four-part grid, etc. Put another way, first this, then this, compared to that. Right way, wrong way, compromise.
- 5. Juxtaposed** – different elements intermixed: First, pick any topic. Then, hear a lecture on the topic, then look at data from your "back-home" workplace, then compare your style to others, then watch a good model, then practice a new behavior, then interact with a leadership panel who has already mastered the new skill, then commit to doing something different.
- 6. Vibrant** – impinging on all the senses – visual, auditory, kinesthetic, intellectual, with room given for intuition as well. Allow room for hunches, explore areas of passion and commitment, let people draw some flipchart pictures or make some (literal) group noise.
- 7. Radiation** – to quote from one of my artist-wife's design texts, "radiation is a feeling of movement steadily bursting outward in all directions from a visible or suggested central point. It suggests spokes in a wheel or umbrella, petals in a flower, a sunburst or a cathedral rose window. A simple crossing of lines [of reasoning] would converge at one point which must be clearly suggested through invisible layers and builds one thing upon another". In other words, less can be more. Pick your one or three central principles and radiate your design around that.

So what does this mean for leaders?

If you are designing a workshop, a leadership program, a vision, an approach to improvement, or whatever, and are feeling stuck, take a look at the principles of design described above. Try applying one or more, see if you start to feel a nudge or even a landslide in a positive direction.