IxDA Sydney Mentoring Program Podcast

05 - Paul Blake

Audio Transcript

Molly Lewis

Hello and welcome to the i IxDA Sydney MP podcast, a show that guides you through the stages of design mentorship, whether you're just starting out and looking, or you're a seasoned designer. I'm Molly Lewis. And in this episode salmon for Nina talking to Paul Blake about imposter syndrome. Why it is rife within designers and ways to approach overcoming this inner critic. Paul Blake is a human centered designer. With over 25 years of industry experience, a journalist by training, he put away his typewriter and an embrace design, building his first website in 1995. He has worked internationally in a range of corporate government and agency environments. He made it in strategic and service design and is an enthusiastic mentor for younger designers. And ever curious traveler music fan and craft beer nerd. Paul is also a spontaneous read designer of every product and service he encounters. Let's get started.

Sam Hancock

Hi, Paul. Nice to have you with us today. How are you going?

Paul Blake

Yeah, I'm doing very well. Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Sam Hancock

Good. Awesome. One question that we ask all of our guests before we get started is how was your 2021? And are there any new habits that you'll be looking to roll into 2022?

Paul Blake

Surreal, I reckon if I was going to do it in one word, weird sort of elasticity of time, you know, some things that happen really, recently feel like they were ages ago and vice versa. And it's, it's just just been a very strange, strange time. I think as for everyone, largely, I've been been working from home. Well, actually, for the best part of two years apart from a few weeks between Melbourne lockdowns in terms of 2022 it's important, I think, to make that as enjoyable as possible. And also on a kinda personal level as well, or I'm just making space for for things that make me smile, you know, it's been it's, it's become real, so self evident that like, life's short and life's transient, and things can change at a moment's notice. So make make the most of the time

Sam Hancock

And you've just recently transitioned into a new role. Is that correct?

Paul Blake

That's correct. Yeah, I've six weeks ago now became associate director at Frog in, in Melbourne, after a number of years of mainly doing my own thing in in different guises.

Sam Hancock

Awesome stuff. And I guess as this podcasts about mentoring, what does it mean to you?

Paul Blake

I think, I mean, in terms of what I get out of it, I think it's being able to kind of help someone through a career problem, or even just a more narrow kind of design problem in a particular project. Genuinely, there's nothing that gives me greater pleasure than seeing that kind of moment where it all comes together, whether it's kind of landing the job that someone wants, or as a side cracking open a new

1

technique, or probably shouldn't say this out loud, particularly not to my new employers, but I probably gain more joy from that than delivering client work these days. But I think it can mean different things in different in different contexts. I mean, I kind of play a mentor role in a work everyday kind of work context in terms of leading projects or leading teams, but also in outside of a formal work responsibility in kind of my own time, and just like helping people break into design or further that design career, so I think it can have a number of different contexts.

Vinita Israni
It sounds like you always kind of had a leg, foot arm finger in mentoring. So how, what kinds of experiences have you had, and how have mentors had an impact on you?

Paul Blake
Well, I guess more broadly, in terms of like more formal instruction, right back into the sort of late 90s, I used to do some work around sans really quite now, which is why I kind of hesitate, but helping businesses understand what the internet was all about, and how they and how like enhanced the internet, right, so and also some stuff around like software related training in things like Dreamweaver, again, that gives away my age. And then I think I kind of edged out of that for a while and then came back in about four or five years ago, more around formal training around user experience and human centered design. And then that's kind of led me probably more than the last two to three years in what what you probably call mentoring in terms of open ended conversations about sort of career choices and cracking open sort of techniques and things like that. So quite quite varied experience, only more laterally, something that I would kind of call my mentoring previous Too much more around kind of more formal instruction. Weirdly, I've never, I've never formally sought out a particular mentor or mentors of my own. But I have been heavily influenced by people that I've worked with think learning a lot about things like team management, communication, and just handling difficult situations. I've learned massively from being around from just watching how other people do it. So try it and my whole career a bit like a long contextual inquiry, right. So it's like, Who have I seen do that? And who's done it well. And I've often asked them for informal catch up some conversations and going, Hey, I really liked how you did x, walk me through it a little bit. But weirdly, yeah, despite the fact I do quite a lot of mentoring myself, don't I don't have any formal mentors at present.

Vinita Israni
So speaking of kind of formal mentoring, a little birdie has told us that you are quite active on ADP list. I'm so curious kind of what your experiences have been. From a mentoring perspective. And yeah, what are your thoughts there?

Paul Blake
I've met some awesome people actually is my is my number one takeaway, the real pleasure in, in, in catching up with people from from literally all over the world. I've spoken people in, in Europe, India, USA, as well as Australia. So that that that's been that's been fascinating to get everyone else's perspective and open myself up to some different challenges and new ways of thinking, because everyone brings a different kind of question to the table, I've been heartened by the amount of sort of talent there is out there. I've been trying to encode a lot of people that I've spoken to seen under confident or worried that they're not good enough or have imposter syndrome, or really feel like they need to add to what they're already doing. And a lot of what I've done has been around, I think reassuring people that were at where they are at the moment is perfectly good. And given them a sense of comfort that they are doing okay. But yeah, it's just been overwhelmingly positive experience. I've massively enjoyed it. So far,

Sam Hancock
he touched on a couple of things that the first of which was imposter syndrome. And then also looked into some of the T key topics that are brought to you within ADP list. One area that I see quite a lot is people who are just starting out in their careers to get into get into design, what are some of the key

advice that you would give to someone who's looking to start out to use some of their experiences that isn't necessarily across design into design?

Paul Blake
Yeah, I've kind of developed a bit of a of a checklist that I that I run those folks through, I try and like mix it up a little bit, right, I shouldn't I shouldn't give my house secrets away, or otherwise, I'm gonna my sense of mystery when I speak to everyone, but I'm always interested in people often kick off the sessions with quite a zoomed in view on things, and I was in the mat and go, so why design what's your passion for design, if I'm in a position where I'm hiring folks into their first position, I'm much more interested in what motivates them to be in the design industry, rather than how good they are at a particular tool. So and often that takes them by surprise, and they have to go and think about well, why is it that I'm really into design and it's like, well, kind of capture what that passion is and be able to articulate that passion and like in a non non cynical way your elevator pitches, it really leads with what motivates you about design and then particularly for folks that are transitioning in from other disciplines a lot about what what what's your unique value proposition so you so you're you're bringing some things from outside of design into into a design discipline? So what rather than looking upon that that as a barrier because you haven't done design look upon it as positive around what other things are you are you bringing to the table from from other industries that might give you a head start or you know, what makes you uniquely you, you know, your passion for design multiplied by your other experience is a great start point. And then start to think about where that places you in terms of what's your shortest path to that first job in the industry because we all know that's if that's the hardest one once you're in you're in getting in is the problem. So thinking about your passion and thinking about your other experience, what are your shortlist pathways into into the industry so if you come from visual and graphic design background, probably your shortest pathway is is something more UI related. If you're from a more sort of social sciences type background or like myself from the journalism background, you possibly have a shorter pathway to entry through through something like research based bass roll. So so it's like number one, passion number two, what makes you uniquely you? Number three, what's your shortest pathway in I think Only then nailing those and then thinking about okay, so who are the organizations in house teams, agencies, whatever that are doing that type of work that that aligns with where I'm at, and then actively proactively approaching and trying to have a conversation with those folks, rather than waiting for a vacancy to appear?

Sam Hancock
Nice. So it sounds almost like if you're coming from a different background other than design, you may be more likely to feel that imposter syndrome.

Paul Blake
Yeah, I Yes, absolutely. I mean, speaking from personal experience, I didn't feel it. At the beginning of my career, because I fell into, I fell into building websites in the mid 90s, at the same time as everyone else was falling into it. So it felt it was like the Wild West, you know, it's like everyone was just kind of feeling their way through it. They didn't appear to be any rules. It didn't appear to be any frameworks. But I think a lot of that was, was possibly a lack of self awareness on my part, because the longer I was in the industry, then I suddenly started to discover that people have been doing like human factors and ergonomics, and all of these things, since Lord knows when. And then as I got more into a human centered design, user experience type role, then people from disciplines like sociology, and psychology, and then all of a sudden, like the dawning realization that I'm surrounded by people who have university education in subjects like that, let alone the people who formerly learn visual designer, we're in the mix as well. And then it's like eyeing on a minute, maybe on the odd one out here. And then so I think that might actually be a reflection be why I kind of did formal instruction and then fell out of it for a while, because it's like, actually, maybe I'm not qualified to say these things out loud. And maybe I go away and be quiet for a while. So it hit me mid period of my career onwards, and even to today, I still have little flashes of it, there's always that voice in your ear going, maybe you just need to not do this. Maybe there's maybe

someone's going to call you out on this. And it's and you're going to be end up being embarrassed about it. So maybe you should stop.

Vinita Israni
That's quite interesting. So it sounds like for you, imposter syndrome developed kind of midway through, versus maybe for other designers, it starts at different points. Do you see common areas where imposter syndrome is really playing a role specifically with designers? I know we mentioned a little bit, it was maybe for designers coming from a different field and domain. Are there other areas, you see them really kind of struggling with this?

Paul Blake
Yeah, I've had a couple of conversations recently with fairly new designers who feel that while they fall into the trap of comparing themselves to the folks that they work with, and there's that whole thing about you need to be running your own race, really not comparing yourself to anyone else, because everyone's got a different start point. And everyone has a different end point. So if you've constantly compare yourself to everyone else, it's just just a recipe for madness, that's manifested itself in a lot of recent conversations with with younger designers feeling that they need to augment their skills. So they may have, for instance, a passion for an affinity with doing design research, and they think I really need to learn figma or they're doing wireframing. They think, well, I don't know how to facilitate design sessions with clients. And I really need to do all of this stuff, because I really need to do all of it. And I think that I try and give them a sense of reassurance that yeah, you can be generalists, but you can also be specialist I know people who've spent their whole career just doing research says Paul, thereby SEC making it sound like that's less valuable, or concentrating on doing on being really good with UI. And it's perfectly reasonable to be an absolute specialist with maybe then just minoring in one other design aspect. You don't no one's a hot shot, everything from stakeholder engagement through to delivering pixel perfect design, anyone that tells you that they that they are probably exhibits the same lack of self awareness that I evidently did at the beginning of my career. So it's okay to be good at one aspect of design, particularly in the early part of your career. And don't don't feel that you have to add in all of these other components of the of the industry. It's it's perfectly good to take your time and work out where you sit. Yeah, I think that comes from this kind of, oh, well, person X can do better wireframes and me, therefore, I need to be as good as that. And it's like no, actually, you don't necessarily.

Vinita Israni
I think that's a pretty awesome design philosophy to live by both professionally and personally. Are there other design philosophies that you've kind of picked up along the way that you could share with us,

Paul Blake
I find partly around imposter syndrome and partly just around design generally. I also find The whole notion of like in embracing ambiguity, I find that a lot of even quite seasoned designers have a heightened sense of anxiety when they don't know what the answer is. And the notion that I've learned for myself and try and impart into others around so it's okay not to know what the answer is right? Well know, one of my former students reminded me the other day, or one of my signs that that I apparently say a lot, which is you will know when you get there, right? So there's, there's a moment, there's obviously a moment in your project where you will know the answer. But that's not the beginning. untangling all of that as part of the methodology. There's something around being comfortable with ambiguity, and working your way through that and embracing it and celebrating it. And then I also think there's something around just being naturally curious, I think on both personal and professional level, and understand, because that then leads you into probably the third thing, which is about understanding we all have the mantra about you are not the user, I've come to realize over, over more recent years about unconscious bias and privilege and all of the things that come with that I grew up seeing myself as not growing up someone with privilege as someone that wore red coat and rode around on a horse hunting foxes and lived in a manor house, right. And that wasn't me. So therefore I wasn't privileged. And I've

obviously I've come to realize that as a, as a white English speaking, middle aged male, I'm pretty much holding all of the privilege cards. So therefore, when I'm in a design context, I need to work really, really hard to understand everyone else's point of view, and not unconsciously steer it in a particular direction because of my of my worldview, or assuming everyone is like me, and I think we all talk about not being the user. But there's several layers to that, and probably both in a professional and personal level. That's and that's another thing that I think it's very, very important to be hyper vigilant about.

Sam Hancock
You mentioned just a second ago, that ambiguity is quite a big thing with not knowing. But isn't there a bit of a fine line between ambiguity and imposter syndrome? And as a designer? How could you potentially kind of get around those areas?

Paul Blake
Yeah, there is because like, if you're old enough to not know the answer, then there's a danger that that you could be perceived as not not knowing what you're doing. Classic anecdote from early in my career, the first time when I've recently discovered the power of a human centered design approach and doing the research upfront, rather than just doing usability testing. At the end, I went to a senior, very senior person within the organization that I worked for at the time and said, I need a 30 grand budget, because we really need to do some research. And he said to me, why would I want to give you a research budget, I pay you to have all of the answers, probably illustrative of viewpoint. They're saying, so it's like, well, if I'm if I'm saying, I don't know what the answer is, how can I be perceived as competent? My obviously don't know the answer, then I, I think the kind of answer to that, or my approach to that, at least is I'm confident in the methodology I trust in them. I know the methodology, obviously, always learning and always obviously, always augmenting that but but I'm comfortable with a human centered design methodology, I know, the framework to go through to arrive at the answer. So what you're getting when you work with any good step of human centered design, as you're you're you're investing in a pathway to get to the answer. And that's where the that's where the skill and the talent lies. You're not You're not investing in someone who's going to give you the answer straight off the off the bat start a difference between an advertising agency in a human centered design agency, right? We work in the advertising in the advertising, world following comes to you with a business problem, and you are immediately on the hook to give them three potential solutions. And they pick one and they run with it. Whereas if you've come to a human centered design team, they'll go, here's the framework will work, we'll we'll step through that phase by phase and at the end of it will absolutely have something worth for you.

Vinita Israni
So chatting about ambiguity, curious to hear your thoughts. So just read Mike Monteros ruined by design book, then I know one of the things that he really kind of drilled into you is that the most confident answer a designer can give is I don't know, right? And so as we're talking about ambiguity and imposter syndrome, how do you how do you empower designers to be upfront and say that to say, I don't know, alongside some of the things that might be happening in the background, such as politics and funding and all that good stuff.

Paul Blake
Yeah. I think because is the leader of any design team, it's on that person to really instill in the client team, what the process is. So what we will know at what point in the process. So I think it's the, it's the, the design leads role to protect, to a degree, those less experienced designers, so they aren't in the firing line from from those types of questions from from senior stakeholders. And I also think the other key thing is to always let your clients and stakeholders into the process, obviously, formally by ensuring that they're part of kind of CO design activities along alongside end users at those particular points, but, but also having very open dialogue. And like if you're working remotely having a having a virtual design room that that the clients can duck into. And if you're working on client site, literally having everything up on the wall, that they can come in at any point and see where you're at and what you're doing, I think not to

5

continually criticize the advertising industry. But here I go again, there's that notion of, of like the magic happens, they're behind the curtain, they go, when they do something, they step, step out from behind the curtain with a big Tada. And here it is, I think, we need to do the opposite of that, which is give a running commentary at every point on where we're at, and what we're thinking, what we know what we don't know what the next activity is what that's going to unlock, and give a very clear illustration of what that pathway looks like. And what we bet down at each each point. And I think then that gives everyone within the project the license to go wrong, I don't know that yet. Actually, we're going to know this thing in a week or two weeks. And we might know that thing in a month. But that that's around I think being really transparent about your framework, and also really transparent about about what your day to day is and where you're at and what you're thinking and letting everyone into that world.

Sam Hancock
It sounds like what you just said there, you're really valuing frameworks over tools. Are there any kind of strategies, which you would suggest to, to really kind of hammer those for?

Paul Blake
Yeah, I know, I know. It's old hat and everyone, everyone's still, everyone's still references. It's like classic sort of Design Council Double Diamond approach, and being really clear on convergent and divergent thinking. So where are you? Where Where do you have jumping off points? Where you're breaking it apart? And exploring every possible avenue? And where are you Where where are you reaching the limits of that, and then making sense of things and bringing it back into into findings points of view. And being having a laser guided focus about not trying to do both those things at once, because that's where everything comes unraveled. You can't, you can't generate ideas and critique all of those ideas simultaneously. So having everyone having a clear understanding, and when you're blowing something apart, and having a clear understanding of where you're assembling it and bringing it back together, and the fact that you do that, several points during any project. I think that's I think that's key. That's my sort of key framework, I was trying to be agile in the broadest sense of the word in terms of an avid, it's got to be this activity followed by this activity followed by this activity, it's much more around having a toolkit of, of techniques that that you can pick from the appropriate moment in a project. So I guess to give practical example, you're always going to want to do some looking into the clients world at the beginning. So there's going to be some kind of desk research. And there's going to be some kind of engagement with the key stakeholders that might be workshops that might be abused, that that might be something else. And then you're obviously going to want to understand that customer, some user landscape. So that might be interviews, that might be observation, that might be diary study, and then you're going to want to play back those findings in some way. Which again, might be finding documents or personas or journey maps or empathy maps or, or mental models or whatever. So So I think, being very clear about when you're breaking something apart, and when you're bringing something together in terms of divergent and convergent thinking, and being flexible around picking the best tools in the toolkit to do each of those steps right the way through the process, right the way through to know are you doing a service walkthrough to as a prototype or is it something That's a digital prototype or is it both? Are you doing an alpha and a beta release? Are you, you know, doing some form of experimentation? And another way, there's a set of tools at each point. So, yeah, they're my two kind of done if you call them frameworks, but like, yeah, being very clear about when you're thinking broadly, and when you bring it back together, and, and picking the right tools from the toolkit for each, each phase. And then it's, it's, and having the confidence to swap something out and swap something in, I guess, if, during the course of the project, you're thinking, You know what, I thought we were going to do this, but actually, I think something might give us a better outcome.

Sam Hancock
Okay, and you're obviously kind of preaching to the choir here, as we were all designers, and these frameworks are fantastic for designers. But how would you break this down when speaking to people have in the business?

Paul Blake

Yeah, really good question. Something that where design fails, is where it's not got a really close relationship with meaningful business metrics. So you've got something that I've tried to get a lot better on in the last maybe five to 10 years is absolutely talking the language of business. So practical examples would be around having a high level understanding of things like, you know, customer acquisition, customer retention, customer lifetime value, customer serve. And so what what is the direct business benefit of the design that work looking forward? Is it is it? Is the business benefit in in the rain driving efficiency? Is it is it going to acquire more customers? Is it going to give a bigger share of the wallet, whatever, whatever it might be having a real having a real focus on talking, talking the language of business, and appending really rigorous metrics. And then I think the other the other thing to really bridge that gap, is, I've had numerous opportunities, thankfully, not where I was responsible for this deliverable. But but but numerous, numerous times, I should say, where I've worked inside organizations, and they've got some enormous service blueprint or customer journey map on the wall, that looks awesome. But the client has literally no idea how to operationalize any of that there's no framework, there's no horizons. And so essentially, they probably spent, you know, half a million dollars on a piece of artwork, right? Which might be okay, if it's a bank, see, but if it's a, if it's a, if it's a customer journey map, done by agency x, it's probably never going to realize its value. So the roadmap to go with the, you know, the practical roadmap, implementation execution on how to operationalize it. So make sure your design lives in the real world and make sure that that, that your design decisions are related to hard and fast business metrics, that I think bridges the gap.

Vinita Israni

That's quite interesting. So you kind of mentioned previously how design has a way of making sure there's diverse perspectives taken into it to make sure that you're designing for the user. You've also talked about how, you know, we're, we're designing for reality, essentially. So, you know, as designers, we try to not be in an echo chamber, but we also have to speak the business language, and sometimes the business side of things is, is in an echo chamber. So how do you kind of start to merge those things together? I know, you talked a little bit about how design might have business metrics around that. So can you speak a little bit about that? And like, what about things that aren't measurable? as well.

Paul Blake

Some of that is around. Some of that is around making sure you have a cross disciplinary team. So design is a is a very broad, broad field. So making sure there are folks on the team that maybe bring that business rigor to bear and and keep the team accountable. So the design team is is like size, pretty broad. So that's part of it. And then equally, making sure you interface and actively engage broadly across the business. So if you're, like we generally get engaged by the either marketing related folks or IT related folks, depending on on who holds the budget in large organizations, right. So that's great, but you've got to you've got to make sure that you that you engage widely across the business I mean, there's the classic, classic example. Right? The legal team always gets criticized by designers because they swoop in at the last minute and put the handbrake on the wonderful design just before it's going live, there's a really good reason for that, because no one else in their opinion early on in the pace, and obviously they're their job is to mitigate risk. And if they turn up the day before something goes live, and they've got no idea what it's about, they can pull handbrake on, it's their job. So making sure your own team has a broad range of skills and making sure that your project consults broadly and deeply with within the client space to make sure everyone has an input, and then practically involving those folks in in activities. Through co design and through ideation, you co design and given them a window into the into the iterative design. I think that that that will helps.

Vinita Israni

So to kind of avoid the what I call the scooping poop. How do you bring everyone along on that journey? But then also balance it with not ideally not doing a design by committee?

Paul Blake

Mm hmm. Yeah. Yeah, classic one on classic one on that I remember years ago, when most usability testing was done in the lab, I had, like the senior stakeholder came in for one session and watched it on the other side of the glass. And it was the one session out of 20, where the person actually liked the product. And, and so when I went back and delivered the bad news around well, you know what, this one, this thing just just failed terribly. He's like, What do you mean, it was work? It was, it was working perfectly well, when I was there. And and I said, Why only one out of 20 People like to? And they said, well, obviously the other 19 weren't our customers, you need to go back and retest some people who are actually our customers, you know, so. So yeah, that that unhelpful intervention by very senior stakeholders is real and does does happen. I think, part of that is always being clear on who's got sign off. And often, those people are extremely senior, and therefore can't or won't devote the time to be hands on on the project that they need to be able to make an informed decision. So like, depending on how much leverage you've got, you either go, Well, you know, we can't proceed unless you can devote X number of hours per week to this project, right, which very occasionally, you get, but most of the time you've done so then I think it's around having candid conversations upfront around well, who's got delegated side who, who are you comfortable with freeing up to be part of this project, who you trust to give sign off. So again, you're not coming in at the end. And suddenly, you see makes you nervous, so therefore, you won't give signing off on it because you can't have an informed decision. That's where most of this comes from. People don't I'm sure people don't want to wreck things at the end of projects just because just just the sake of it, it's because they're worried right there. Their reputation within the businesses on the line. and all their metrics are on the line or their, their bonuses on the line or whatever it might be. Right? So, so Okay, well, if they can't devote the time, who do they trust? Who are they going to devolve sign off to where those folks are able to free up time to be part of the of the process, but also senior enough, or have the trust of those very, very senior people that are with put an exit it was okay, then that's no problem, we can go with it. So I think that's the, that's how you avoid that, that design. Partly, well, partly that that that covers off the kind of single senior stakeholders swooping in and wrecking it, the committee part of it is, is around well, if there are, if there are multiple people that need to sign it off, then that goes back to just involving them in the process and making while ensuring that they are part of that design process and have ownership in the solution. And people are much more comfortable fulfilled that they've contributed to, and had and therefore have real ownership of it. Ownership then then gives people a sense of comfort, and they kind of let the handbrake off a little bit. So I think it's like, really all of that is is set at the beginning of the project. So who's got sign off? Are those people going to be available? If not, who are you going to devolve sign off to because we don't want to get ourselves in a situation where you post an ex come in at the end, don't have clear sight of what we've done, feel nervous, and so we can't release it. So it's like having that kind of conversation head on beginning.

Sam Hancock

Okay, so from what you're saying seems that design is the enabler, but the communication across all parties and business units is really the kind of key cog in the wheel. Yeah. What resources would you recommend for that? Is it just working within an agile manner, having working within kind of God's work streams and working with those engagement leads to make sure everything's on in progress?

Paul Blake

Yeah, I kind of see it as an account management type role. But traditionally, the account management as I've been adding slagged off the advertising industry, I'm now going to slag off the business development industry. No one will be my friend after this. So account management traditionally, has often been a sales orientated role, understandably, people in sales orientated roles with targets and much more interested in getting the pieces of work signed off than they are necessarily in how that work is going to be delivered. So that's where I think traditionally, the divergence on that on of account management has come about and I think they're absolutely has to be some of that ahead. You know, in pre sales, and when

you're setting sail, but I think there is a there is absolutely a role within that design and delivery team for someone to to to have real focus on on your stakeholder group, and making sure that they are comfortable all the way through. And that's those the communicating the nuts and bolts, you know, the the classic project management role of, this is what we said we do this week, and we either are doing it or we're behind, we're ahead. But there's also that, that that broader, and also, as I've said around involving those folks in design activity, so if they have the sense of ownership, but there is also that relationship stuff around just taking a temperature check on how people are feeling through through the course of the project. Again, I think that probably sits with the design lead, and a sense of awareness or among for that design lead to understand that part of their job, just making sure everyone's on board and feels comfortable and doesn't have a sense of anxiety over anything. And again, part of that is around like contextual inquiry around unofficially around how everyone's acting and behaving, but also it's around proactively making sure that you're asking those questions like, Are you comfortable? Are you this is going where you expected it to go? The answer was no, of course because we don't know what we don't know. But when it does go to those places, like how are you feeling about that? You still you still okay, is there anything that's making you nervous and and really proactively doing that count management through the through the process, as distinct from just making sure that the project is on track and just making sure that everyone within the design team is doing their thing?

Sam Hancock
In sounds like taking the stakeholder or the client along the way in the journeys is vital. How important is change management? When delivering big stole program for, for those stakeholders to eventually adopt what you're designing has as a final outcome?

Paul Blake
Yeah, I think that's absolutely vital. And I, I do change management in the broadest sense of I understand what the gap is between where, where the organization is now and where it needs to be. But I'm having an ongoing sort of personal thought process and also a good dialogue with design teams around the role of a change management person on the design team, when it when it gets into the, into the ideation and then test and, and, and implementation around. Well, shouldn't overlook that. That's a specialist role. Because obviously change makes people this is saying the game change makes people uncomfortable. So whether that's your stakeholders around, I'm not sure I can release this because I'm not sure what's going to happen to you know, my bonus, my, my metrics, etc, obviously impacts a whole bunch of other folks within within the business, particularly if your challenges quite radical. So you wouldn't dream of doing a project where you shouldn't dream of doing a project without having some technical expertise on in terms of what does the tech stack look like? So if service design operates a people process and technology layer, then you need to have folks on your team, who were experts in people in process and technology and change management is very much around well, what does that mean for the people going forward? So whether that's something around as designers having more of a change management toolkit, or whether that means having a specialist change management person on the project, that's open to some debate, but certainly having that as something which is absolutely covered off with just as much rigor is understanding the tech stack, I think is vital.

Vinita Israni
That's pretty awesome. I think change management is something that a lot of designers do as their side jobs in addition to their normal, all of the other things that they have to do. So what recommendations do you have for designers may be looking to go into change management, and then kind of on the other side, change management is usually a long term role. You know, you're really embedded potentially in the program or project of work. How do you keep them motivated and inspired?

Paul Blake
Yeah, well, I think I'm taking the last part first, I think some in my experience, I've I've had members, members of the design team, who are really interested in that change management function so that

they're proactively interested in doing more of it. And so they're motivated just by curiosity and interest. Anyway, in terms of designers getting closer to that, I have found that certainly thinking about interim teams, most larger organizations have suite, a suite of learning opportunities for you as employees, so they can be the standard things like Word and PowerPoint, and whatnot. But most organizations also have some stuff around lean and stuff around agile and some stuff around change management as well. So there's often there's often opportunity, particularly if you work in an internal team to to put your hand up for those types of training. I've done recent previous roles where I've been overseeing teams I've had on those occasions. Yeah, people people have an interest in, does it people within the design team having an active interest in going you know what? We should be looking after this change management stuff? Yeah, we absolutely should. Do you fancy doing a bit more of that and then then doing internal courses. For those folks that are on an agency side? Again, most most agencies will have some kind of training budget. And there are heaps of publicly available courses on on change management. So if it floats your boat, then I say grab your grab your training budget and dive into into some of that publicly available stuff. And then same way as if the sort of language of business interests you as well as it shows then then game there are opportunities to get sort of full more training and exposure to those disciplines?

Sam Hancock
And what areas? Can someone go into broaden their outlook? And do you know any resources, which you kind of hang your hat on?

Paul Blake
Though there are a couple of sort of, from the business side of things there, the MBA design MBA that they do, like, they do a really cool free sort of seven day email related course, where they just email you every day with some business basics, I find that one very useful when I tried that. I know they do more formal training as well. And I know, I haven't experienced it personally. But I know other designers who have found that great change management I'm I'm less across. I know some of the frameworks but who is great at training the my, I wouldn't feel necessarily qualified to, to give you an opinion on. But I certainly out there. I know people who know people, right, so I can always point people in the right direction, but wouldn't have a particular training course to hand that I would recommend.

Sam Hancock
No worries at all.

Vinita Israni
So as we are starting the new year of 2022, what recommendations do you have for habits or things for inspiration to keep designers going?

Paul Blake
Yeah, I think, really, it's around understanding, like, this will this will change from each individual's perspective, but understanding the things about working remotely that have that you want to hold on to? And the bits that you never want to see again? I mean, I know personally, I went through a bit of a roller coaster to begin with this like awesome i can i particulars I do a lot of my work for clients in Melbourne, I live about an hour and 20 minutes train ride outside of Melbourne, it's not awesome, I can, I can sit here in my spare room, in my jog in, in my jogging pants, as long as I've got smart shirt on and don't stand up at any point. And like, do my job. And that's great. And I don't have to get on the train. And I don't have to go anywhere, and I'm so much more productive. And then I kind of dipped into, that's great. And I'm lucky enough to live in the countryside and plenty of fresh air and everything. But then it's starting to get a little bit lonely, you know, not hanging out with people. And it's like, I wish I could. So it's like, there's a balance to be struck there either. So my my personal takeaway is around well, what bits what bits of that do I want to hold on to, which would be probably not traveling in every day, and not not feeling like I've gotten going to an office where all I am doing then is being in a meeting from meetings from nine to five, because I can do that from here. But also, what are the things that really resonate to be done in person

and also making those making those times really memorable and really fun. So if we are all coming together, everyone is is is all coming into the office and we are going to assemble what are the things that that that might that really fun and really meaningful and, and really worthwhile. And I think that will vary from person to person and team to team. But I think going into it. We've been through such a roller coaster, it's very easy to just trash everything that's happened in the previous year or previous two years. But I think I think it's worth sort of taking a moment to think about what are the things that I want to hold on to what are the things that I don't want to do again and use it use those two things collectively to kind of fashion out what your what your toolkit and your ways of working look like for the new year and beyond.

Sam Hancock
Thank you very much Paul. That was really good session and really loved some of the answers that you that you provided. I've been kind of writing stuff down and we'll definitely be listening to this bap

Molly Lewis
and that concludes the latest episode of The IxDA Sydney MP podcast. If you want to learn more about IxDA Sydney's events and their mentorship programs, please visit I IxDA sydney.org See you next time everyone.

Paul Blake
I'm Paul Blake, and you've been listening to the Sydney IxDA MP pod

Transcribed by https://otter.ai