

SECOND BOOK IN THE 'THIS HUMAN' SERIES



this human

design character

Know who you are as a designer.

MELIS SENOVA, PhD

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www.bispublishers.com

ISBN 978-90-6369-652-8

Category: Design / Personal Development / Leadership

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Design and Layout by Karina Northover and Tayla Farrugia

Reviewed by Annie Clarke and Cyndi Dawes

Illustrated by Melis Senova

All web references were correct at the time of going to press.

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*To those,
mostly unseen,
who shape
the experience
of this world.*

*Who know
to design
is a moral act.*

*Who are ready to embrace
the responsibility that comes
with designing our future.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
FOREWORD	vi
PREFACE	x
INTRODUCTION	xiv

CHAPTER 1 VALUES

CHAPTER SUMMARY	2
WHAT ARE VALUES?	4
THE SCHWARTZ VALUES CIRCUMPLEX	8
WHY ARE VALUES IMPORTANT?	14
EXERCISE	
1.1 Getting to know your own values	18
TO SUM UP	24

CHAPTER 2 ATTENTION

CHAPTER SUMMARY	28
ATTENTION AND ENERGY	31
TYPES OF ATTENTION	32
TYPES OF ENERGY	40
HOW IS THIS RELEVANT TO DESIGN?	44
EXERCISES	
2.1 Attention direction	46
2.2 Attention and values exercise	49
TO SUM UP	50

CHAPTER 3 ETHICS

1	53
CHAPTER SUMMARY	54
WHAT IS ETHICS?	56
TYPES OF ETHICS	58
WHY WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT ETHICS	66
EXERCISE	
3.1 How to create your own ethical framework	72
WHAT HAPPENS WITHOUT ETHICS?	76
EXERCISE	
3.2 Acceptance in design	79
TO SUM UP	80

CHAPTER 4 COMMUNICATION & SELF-CARE

CHAPTER SUMMARY	84
WHAT CLARITY AND CONFIDENCE PROVIDE	86
EXERCISE	
4.1 How to have better difficult conversations	104
CARE OF SELF	106
MY SELF-CARE PRACTICE	111
WELLNESS WHEEL	114
EXERCISE	
4.2 Self check-in- Emotional health	116
CARE FOR OTHERS	118
EXERCISE	
4.3 Design support framework	120
TO SUM UP	122

CHAPTER 5**POWER, BOUNDARIES
& SAFETY**

	125
CHAPTER SUMMARY	126
WHY WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT POWER	128
TYPES OF POWER	130
EXERCISE	
5.1 Power literacy framework	136
BOUNDARIES	138
TYPES OF BOUNDARIES	142
EXERCISES	
5.2 Boundary setting	144
5.3 Visualising your boundaries	146
SAFETY	148
EXERCISE	
5.4 Assessing for safety	150
TO SUM UP	154

CHAPTER 6**REFLEXIVITY**

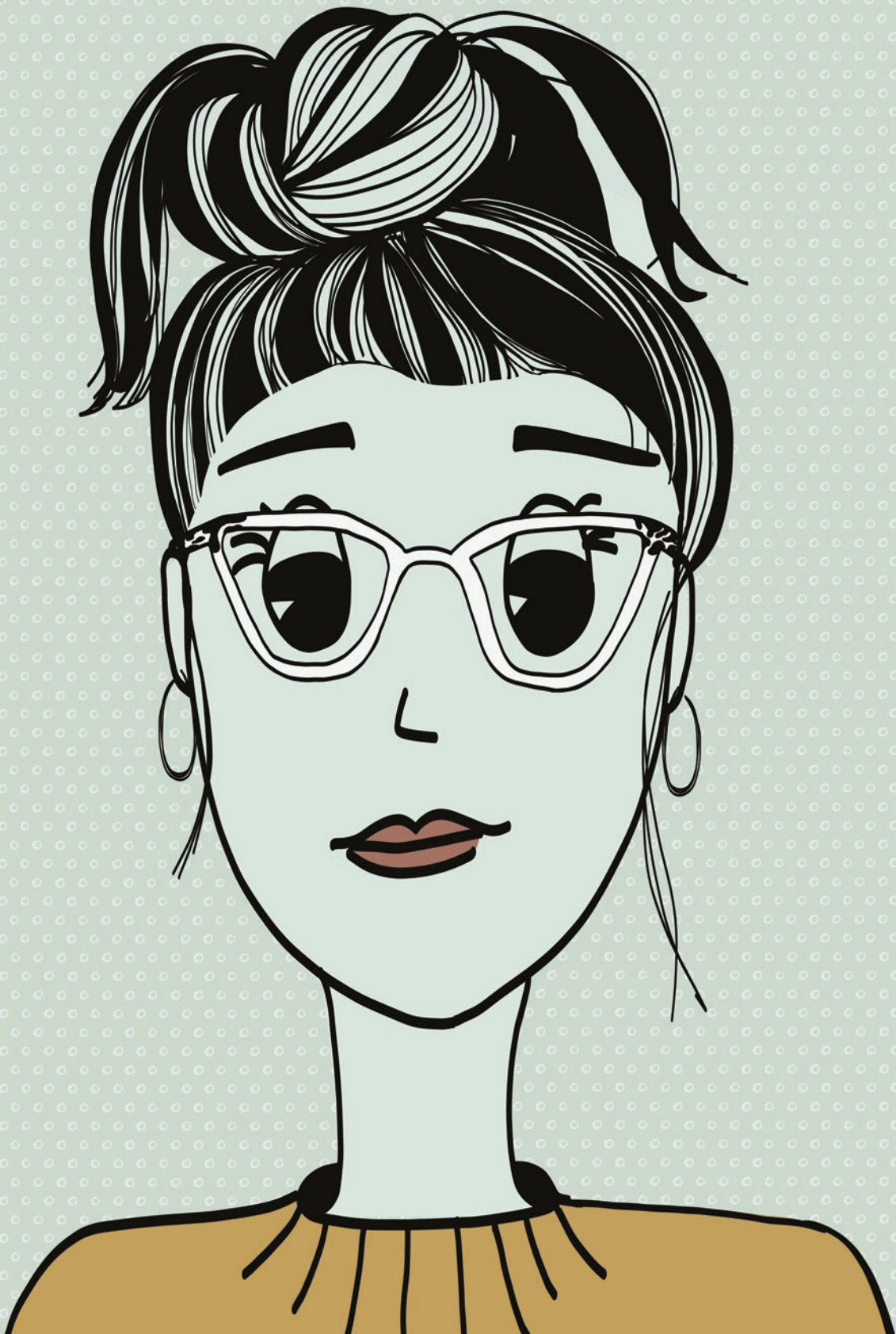
	157
CHAPTER SUMMARY	158
WHAT IS REFLEXIVITY?	160
CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY	162
WHY IS REFLEXIVITY IMPORTANT TO DESIGN?	168
EXERCISE	
6.1 How to establish a reflexive practice for yourself	170
THE DESIGN CHARACTER FRAMEWORK	172
EXERCISE	
6.2 How to use the Design Character framework	176
TO SUM UP	178

CHAPTER 7**A WORD ON
THIS HUMAN**

	181
CHAPTER SUMMARY	182
THE WORK	184
DESIGN CHARACTER: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL	185
WHAT INFORMS AND DIRECTS ME	188
HOW I ENGAGE WITH THE WORLD	192
HOW I STAY STRONG AND PERFORM WELL	196

EXTRAS

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES	200
INDEX	202
THIS HUMAN UNIVERSE	206



01



VALUES

Our values direct our attention and motivate our behaviour. Knowing yours will help you understand what you are naturally drawn towards (*and away from*) in your work.

01

This chapter is a guided encounter with your own values and the part they play in how you design.

WE START WITH VALUES.

We start with values because they sit in the background and direct your attention, influence the meaning you make and the actions you take. Knowing them helps you understand why you like certain types of design, contexts for design and specific methods and tools. Knowing them also gives you pointers as to where else you might need to more actively direct attention.

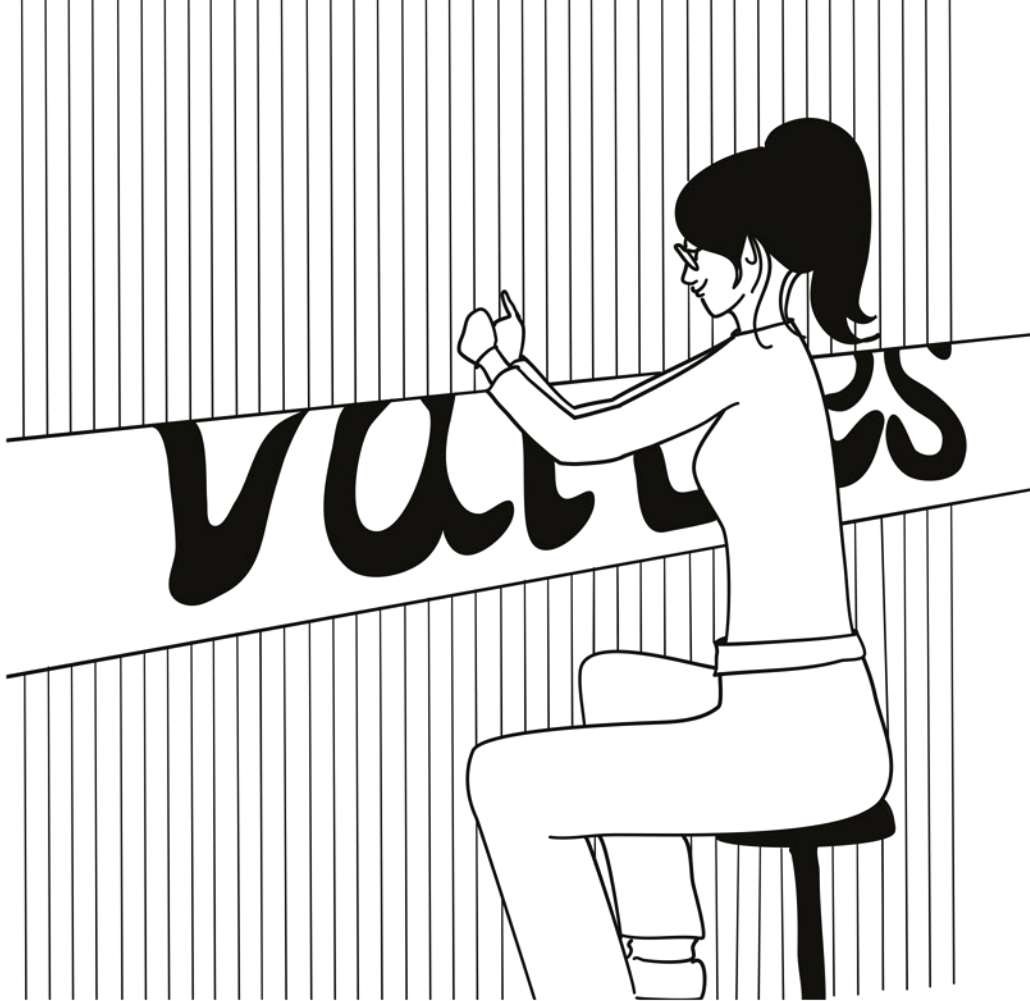
What are values?

My fascination and love for the human condition, in all its muck and glory, is deep and long-standing. I am interested in what is under the surface, what is really driving our thoughts, emotions and behaviours. Because I'm a designer and a neuroscientist, I've always stepped humbly in the field of psychology and it is with that humility that I present my research on values.

When researching this chapter and the content for my course, Design Character, I looked for a framework that was applicable to many contexts, one that was universal. I wanted to create a space for us all to discuss values in general, using common language, and to gain insight into our own values and the way they play out in our work.

Design Character is about understanding who you are as a designer and how you show up in your design work.

*Your values
are the
background
upon which
your design
character
tapestry
is woven.*



Your values influence where your attention is naturally drawn, and the meaning you make from the experiences you have.

One of the challenges I've faced in my career was how to situate myself within what I was doing and where I was doing it. Let me explain. When I use that word 'situate', what I'm really talking about is being able to discern whether what I am doing is aligned with who I know myself to be. I've always experienced this as a

feeling. If there was alignment, it felt good; if there wasn't alignment, it didn't. And most of the time this was enough for me to listen to and act upon, but to be honest it felt more intuitive than well thought out.

What I'd been doing was checking in with my values. It took reflection and work to realise that's what was happening and it's why I'm so passionate about sharing this learning with you.

MY VALUES SUMMARY.

THIS IS MY VALUES SUMMARY. I'VE GROUPED MY RESULTS IN THREE COLUMNS BASED ON THEIR IMPORTANCE, YOU MIGHT LIKE TO DO THE SAME.

MOST IMPORTANT

SELF-DIRECTION

Self-direction values are about thinking and acting independently. For people who value self-direction highly, it is very important to be free to choose their own goals and actions and to rely upon themselves. They want to learn and explore different topics and ways of thinking and to be original and creative.

UNIVERSALISM-NATURE

Universalism-nature values are about caring for the natural environment and for all animals. For people who value universalism-nature highly, it is critical to protect the environment from pollution and destruction. It is important for them to preserve the water, land, air, plants and animals for future generations.

UNIVERSALISM-SOCIETAL

Universalism-societal values are about wanting everyone to have equal opportunities in life. For people who value universalism-societal highly, the welfare of all the people in the world is very important. They want to understand and accept people who are different from themselves and to help people who have less than themselves.

BENEVOLENCE

Benevolence values are about caring for people you are close to, your family and friends. For people who value benevolence highly, it is very important to put the welfare of their family and friends ahead of their own. It is important for them to be helpful, responsible and dependable.







02



ATTENTION

RELATIONAL

I pay a lot of attention to relational aspects of design and so this is where a lot of my energy flows. This is also because of my values, as you'll see from Chapter 1, I have strong universalism-societal and benevolence values. So naturally, this is where my attention likes to rest. *Relational energy is that which exists between things.* Whether it is between people, or between concepts or between journey steps. Understanding and paying attention to how things are related to each other is its own unique energy.

Remember, paying attention to the interconnectivity between those in your team, those you are designing with or in some circumstances on behalf of, and those who are overseeing the work, all have their own form of relational energy. Building your awareness of this form of energy, and directing your attention toward it, helps you **deliberately design these relationships** to be in best support of the people doing the work.

PHYSICAL

The form of energy we are the most familiar with. The energy we use when we are moving our bodies. Perhaps what we are not that familiar with is the self-awareness that is required to connect with your own body to check in and get curious about its current energetic state. *Your body and how it is feeling carries a lot of information about your work.* Whether it is during ideation, or facilitating a workshop, or reading through a draft report, our body is always talking to us. Becoming attuned to the signals that are present in your body provides you with greater access to your energetic and emotional state. Emotional and physical energy are very tightly coupled in this regard.

Paying attention to this form of energy, which is more aligned with mindful attention than the others, helps you access the practices you need to keep yourself fit and healthy to do the work. Often we don't pay attention to what our body feels like, so it is often neglected.

Establishing good practices to attend to and provide energy for your body is just as important as honing your intellectual skills.

STRONG
DESIGN
CHARACTER
REQUIRES
A STRONG
BODY TO
GO WITH IT.

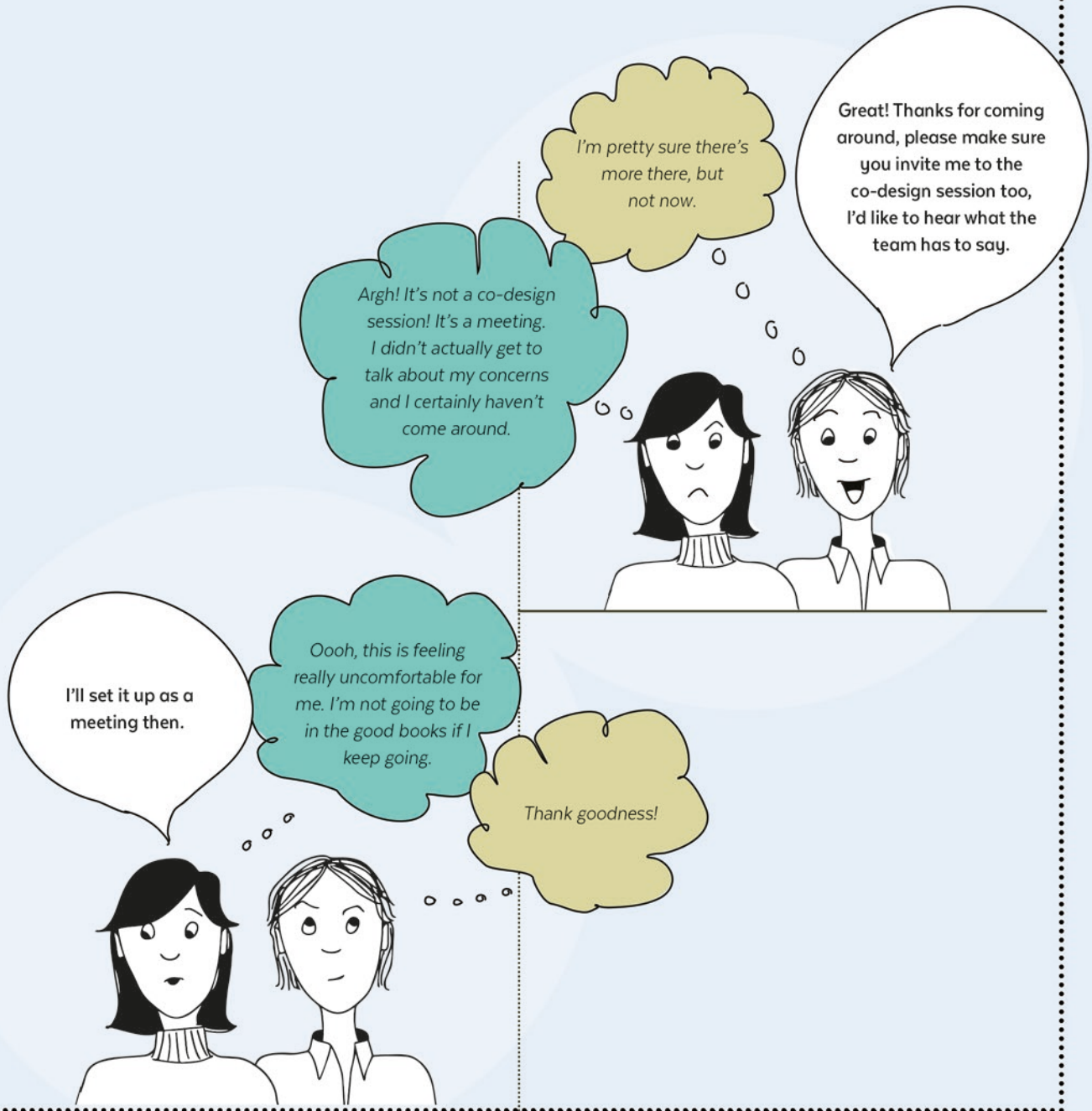


*There is no need for temples;
no need for complicated philosophy.
Our own brain, our own heart is our temple;
philosophy is kindness.”*

Dalai Lama

“NOTHING
will work
unless
YOU DO.”

Maya Angelou



Great! Thanks for coming around, please make sure you invite me to the co-design session too, I'd like to hear what the team has to say.

I'm pretty sure there's more there, but not now.

Argh! It's not a co-design session! It's a meeting. I didn't actually get to talk about my concerns and I certainly haven't come around.

I'll set it up as a meeting then.

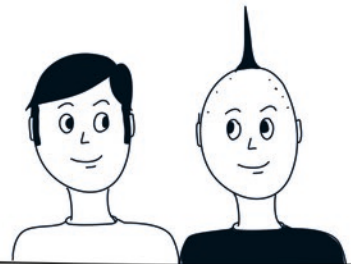
Oooh, this is feeling really uncomfortable for me. I'm not going to be in the good books if I keep going.

Thank goodness!

HOW TO HAVE BETTER DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Useful frameworks can be found in Chapter 3 (pages 79–105) in my first book, *this human*, that provide guidance on how to listen and how to give feedback. Later in that book, there is also a whole chapter on Connection (pages 107–123).

In this book, I want to talk about what you can develop within yourself to have more effective conversations in design.



01

USE ASSUMPTIONS FOR GOOD, NOT EVIL

For conversations to be effective, we must assume there is information we don't have and things to learn. We can create assumptions to help us in conversation as readily as we create assumptions that hinder us.

For example, you might assume the person is holding back information to protect you from further complexity or you may assume they are doing this to inhibit your progress. As you will see in the next point, you want to put yourself in the best position to have an effective, confident conversation rather than 'be right' about your assumptions. So work on getting yourself in the right space to do that.

02

SOLIDARITY OVER SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

Co-operation comes from solidarity rather than being right. Recognise what binds you rather than divides you.

Spend time preparing in this way before the conversation, so the energy you bring stems from a collegiate place rather than an adversarial one.

Commit to finding common ground rather than being validated and right.

Care of Self

As I embark on this section of this chapter, I find myself needing to share a little about my personal journey with self-care. It will give you context as to why I believe it is so critical and so vital to look after yourself, in order to perform well as a designer, and within life.

A few years ago, I was struggling with my energy levels and there were a few complicated health challenges popping up. I had been pushing pretty hard for many years, trying to ensure I was turning up in all aspects of my life in high definition. I slowly realised without downtime, without a deliberate practice around self-care (beyond what I was already doing with my morning meditation practice) I was in a cycle with diminishing returns.

This is when I started to ask myself why I put so much pressure on myself and what it was all in aid of. I guess the detail of that journey is for another day, but during this exploration I uncovered a few things I'd like to talk about in this section.

SELF-CARE
IS NOT
SELFISH.

Namely, our Western cultural understanding of the word 'productive' and the associated judgements that come with 'self-care'. These topics need to be addressed first before we can fully explore what self-care looks like in the context of this work.

HOW TO USE THE DESIGN CHARACTER FRAMEWORK

There are many tools out there like the business model canvas, or the value proposition canvas, or the how to tie your shoelace canvas. Well, this looks similar... but it's a framework. This is how you work with it.

01

DOWNLOAD THE FRAMEWORK

Head to the this human community and download the framework from the worksheets section. The link to this can be found in the Resources section.

02

START WITH VALUES

Using the exercises and resources described in Chapter 1, work through the values survey and answer the questions in the framework. Listing the values you align with most and least serves to remind you what you will tend to be motivated by, and what you might overlook.

03

COMPLETE ATTENTION SECTION

The attention section is contextual, so when you are thinking about the answers to these questions, think about the current project you are working on or the organisation you are working within. I like to do this at a detailed level, it could even be the phase of a project so you can create an action experiment around how you might pay attention to the blind spots you've realised you might have.

04

COMMUNICATION

There were a couple of communication approaches that were introduced in this book and plenty of others in the first book. Have a think about what type of approach you might need (again, in your context) to be able to communicate your practice. It might be useful to review the 'it', 'relationship', 'me' approach, or the one outlined in Exercise 4.1.

Use this section to list the conversation types you need to improve. For example, it might be when you need to advocate for an unpopular view point, or negotiate for more time or money. Use this as a way to create action experiments to try new ways to improve, feel comfortable and get the results.

05

POWER

Completing this section will help build your own power literacy and also, that of others. When you are clear about the role power plays in your work, then you are able to talk about it with clarity and confidence. This then helps others build the same form of literacy and a shared awareness and language and so, action can happen.



