



Thou shall think of the idea before the visual

Commentary What do you do when you first sit down with a fresh design brief and a blank piece of paper (or perhaps a blank screen—more on this later)? Do you get stuck in with designing the grid and thinking about what typeface to use, or do you scribble away in a layout pad for a while to get the ideas flowing? I would strongly urge you to go for the latter option every time. All too often, it seems, designers sit in front of a computer and start on a visual straight out of

the blocks without spending any time thinking about the *idea*. This isn't a great way to work because all your creative energy is immediately going to be focused on creating a visual around something which might not be the best solution to that brief, and an idea isn't about typefaces and grids. The visual exists to present and support the idea and if the idea isn't the best, the visual won't be the best either, despite all your efforts. Reclaim the humble pencil and get sketching. **ts**

Thou shall not automatically turn to design annuals for creative inspiration



Commentary I have to be careful here as I don't want anyone to think I'm out to dismiss design annuals. I love design annuals and as I type this I'm sitting with my back to a groaning shelf-full of the said items. However, the last thing I do when I'm trying to come up with a new idea to answer a design brief is reach for one of them. The problem with design annuals is they're full of great ideas that other people have already had. Everything you look at will immediately discount any ideas you

come up with that remotely resemble the annual's content. That's a pretty frustrating position to find yourself in because there's no shame in coming up with a good idea under your own steam, then finding something similar after the event. It's a common adage that there are no new ideas left, which I don't believe is totally true but the saying does carry some weight. Try to look elsewhere first for your inspiration before checking out the ideas that have gone before. **TS**

Thou shall read books that are not about design



Commentary The dullest people are those who can only discuss one subject. Sitting next to the person who talks about her doll collection all evening is never pleasant. Dull people tend to have limited life experience, or they are genetically predisposed to being boring. Designers who only read design books and publications may be well versed in multiple design ideas and noted designers, but like the doll collector, dull. Design is about ideas. Almost any subject aside from design can be

informative. A book on quantum physics may inspire a new way to envision information. Books about history can help us rethink proportional systems. A fiction book may be written in a minimal way and teach us to communicate more succinctly. Most importantly, books force us to question, have introspection, and reconsider our lives. If we are true creative people, this is not a simple, nice addition to our process; it is the core of a good process. **SA**

Thou shall not rely solely on Google



Commentary Google is a wonderful tool to search for a good local Chinese restaurant, 18th-century Virginia history, and software tips. Google is a poor substitute for actual scholarly research. Libraries are a better resource. A well-trained librarian is a human Google. He or she can help direct a designer to the correct area of interest. Searching for information on Google is like wearing horse-blinders. For example, a search for Cecil Beaton will lead to multiple sites about Beaton.

Some of these may be well researched and correct, others may be completely fictional. This search, however, will lead only to Beaton. Scanning books on the shelf of the library will result in accidentally stumbling on Irving Penn, Ansel Adams, or a multitude of other photographers previously unknown. Research is compiling verifiable data from multiple credible sources. A website about Beaton created by a fifteen year old for a high school project is none of these things. **SA**



Thou shall not
knowingly plagiarize

Commentary The term “what goes around, comes around” can often be applied to our industry. Visual trends are created and followed, only to be replaced with a new theme a short time later. When these trends arise there is a chance that, with designers taking the same approach, work of a similar concept or appearance will occur. It stands to reason. On a few occasions I’ve had my ideas and work copied; while flattering (for a brief moment), it is also frustrating because all the effort you undertook to get to

that end result has been “lifted” in a moment. So design for the brief and create your own ideas—that’s the challenge of what we do and where the enjoyment comes from. It’s being original that counts and this is what makes the successful designers stand out from the pack. Be honest and you will take greater satisfaction in what you do—your work will be appreciated more because it is original! **PD**

Thou shalt insist on a written brief for every project



Commentary John the designer is looking forward to working with his new client and arrives in good time for the briefing. "Good to meet you," says Trevor the client. "I've looked at your website and love your work—it's so our kind of thing." "What do you have in mind for your brochure?" asks John. "Oh, we want you to decide as your work is so our kind of thing," says Trevor. "I'd really prefer some direction from you first so I know I'm on the right track," says John. "No need," says Trevor. "We love everything on your website." "Well—OK," says John.

Two weeks later John arrives to present his concept for the brochure. Trevor looks over the visuals, turns to John and says, "Oh dear, this approach really isn't what we had in mind. Sorry, John, but I'm afraid you'll have to start all over again and not get paid any extra money." "But..." says John. "No buts, John. It's that or we'll have to look elsewhere," says Trevor. The moral of this sad tale—always get a written brief. The end. **TS**

Thou shall ask clients questions in addition to the brief

Commentary That written brief is a real plus at the start of any project, but more often than not it can throw up more questions than answers. These can be many and varied but don't be afraid to ask them—just don't ask questions that are answered in the written brief already! What you will achieve by asking questions is to tighten up the brief, which will invariably help focus the client's mind and allow them to make decisions about the design, management, and production of the product. I often receive briefs verbally and take notes but again, there is always a need to ask further questions of the client. The obvious is usually stated, such as schedules and budgets (or sometimes not) but questions that often arise may include assignment of responsibilities between client and designer, budget structure, and billing terms. **PD**

Thou shall confirm all deliverables in writing

Commentary If you are working for a client who has commissioned graphic designers before, the protocols and division of responsibilities are likely to be well understood. But when you receive a new brief, it is vital that you put in writing what you will deliver and by when. I've often gone into a briefing meeting with clients who discuss the project with me as if I have a prior knowledge of what's needed. Of course, they have been discussing and planning the brief for weeks, maybe months, so a key task is to "go back to the start" and establish exactly what they require. Get the deliverables established and confirm with them in writing what they will receive so their expectations are met and there is no disappointment or frustration in the relationship. **PD**

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Thou shall agree on costs in writing before beginning each project

Commentary If there is one subject that is going to cause disagreement between a client and a designer, it's money. Clients do not like "surprises," especially those of the "project has gone up in cost" kind! So, to avoid dispute, confirm the crucial question of how much a project will cost. Whether working to a fixed fee or a day rate, make sure you have it in writing and get the client's explicit acknowledgment of the sum. In addition, if you are preparing a quotation, make sure that all elements of the prospective job are included: corrections; print management, meetings, commissioning of photography and illustrations, and so on. If you can't, then declare on your quotation that certain aspects of the project are to be confirmed. If the client understands what they are paying for from the outset, then all will be well. **PD**

Thou shall question a budget if it is clearly not enough to answer the brief

Commentary Despite the fact that designers possess a creative side, and we all enjoy our vocation, it is our job and we have to make a living from our efforts. As such, there is no point in working on a project and not getting paid enough (or worse, making a loss). There will be occasions when a client comes to you with what promises to be an exciting project but with little in the way of budget and, as you read the brief or discuss with the client what needs to be done, it becomes clear that their expectations exceed their bank balance. Don't be afraid or unwilling to raise the issue with them—you are entering into a business arrangement and they are buying your skills and experience in order to achieve the desired results. I find discussing options and differing formats will often deliver a solution that works for both parties. **PD**

Thou shall not try to do everything yourself at the expense of a project



Commentary If you're a freelancer working for yourself, this rule doesn't really apply to you so please skip to the next page. If you work in a design management role or indeed as any part of a team, then please read on. This rule shouldn't be confused with Rule #245, which concerns commissioning. This one is more about being prepared to relinquish control over aspects of a project that other people can handle as well as or better than you. Delegation of responsibility can be a lot harder than you might think, probably because in the back of your mind the

troublesome little thought that someone else's mistake might come back to bite you compels you to try to take responsibility for everything yourself. This attitude can do far more harm than good to a project and is unlikely to produce a better result. It's more likely to produce weaknesses in the areas you couldn't give 100% to and make you look like an idiot. If you learn to put your trust in others, they'll respond positively and generously. **TS**

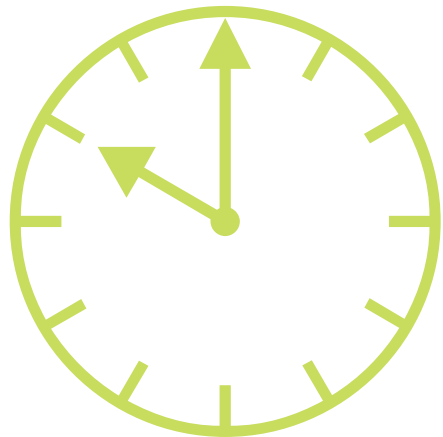
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Thou shall accept that every project will probably be more difficult than you expected

Commentary Designers have a tendency to challenge themselves. We don't want to do the same project repeatedly and once we become proficient in one area, we want to venture into new territory. Therefore, almost every project will be more challenging than expected. Even the simplest projects tempt us to rethink and reimagine possibilities. If a person wanted to repeat projects without challenging themselves it would be preferable to take on a career in a poultry factory. The downside of the designer's need to challenge himself is time. Rarely does a project have too much time. A designer will work on something until it is dragged from his or her hands. A good rule of thumb is to honestly calculate how long it will take to do a project, then triple it. **SA**

Thou shall accept that every project will take longer than you expected

Commentary I would really like to write more about why every project you ever work on will take longer than you think, but unfortunately my deadline for the submission of this text has passed and I've run out of time. I was sure I had another week to go before I had to hand this in. Oh well—just goes to show, doesn't it! **TS**



Thou shall dress for work according to your client's or your employer's expectations



Commentary It is a mistake to believe you are dressing to express your creativity and that these choices only reflect on you. We dress to show our respect for those around us. If we are meeting with a group of friends at the local tiki bar, it is reasonable to dress for the occasion to fit in with the group. Wearing a giant teddy bear suit will make most friends uncomfortable. The same is true when meeting clients, or working at the studio. The clothes reflect the respect shown to the client or employer. This works in both

directions. If a client is formal, and it is traditional in his office to wear something less casual, follow suit. Shorts and flip flop sandals are a not-so-subtle way of saying, "F*%# you." But if a client is casual and takes pride in her relaxed atmosphere, it is a mistake to wear a suit. The questions to be asked when confused are these, "What will make my client feel that I took the time to present myself in the best way? And what will create a comfortable situation for myself and others?" **SA**

Thou shall not present an option you don't want your client to choose because they'll choose it

A. **Univers**

C. **Bauer Bodoni**

B. **Clarendon**

D. **Hobo**

Commentary It is an old maxim to never show a client a design you dislike. They will choose it, and you will be unhappy. It is a designer's job to solve the problem and create the best possible solution. Showing an unsuccessful solution is a disservice to the client and to you. Alternatively, if a client asks for a specific solution, do not ignore this. There is a reason for the request. Few people are simply mad and willy-nilly asking for wild ideas. Stop and ask, not how to visually solve the problem, but why he or she wants

the specific solution. The answer may be extremely valid. You, as a designer, will have a better solution. But, never ignore the client and refuse to explore their solution. Everyone wants to feel important and valued. Nobody wants to be ignored and treated as an idiot because they "don't understand design." Explore the suggested solution, and return with this and a better option. Explain why one solution is more successful, not in design terms, but with an eye on the desired result of the project. **SA**

Thou shall be nice to colleagues working above



and below you as things can change

Commentary In Hollywood, there is a long-standing saying, "The ass you kick on the way up, is the one you kiss on the way down." If you are selfish, self-centered, and a sociopath, this saying alone should appeal to your sense of survival. If you are not a sociopath, you probably believe that most people should be treated with respect and kindness. It is easier to work with others when there is a feeling of common congeniality. Others are more likely to offer help and support when

needed if you haven't abused them, or threatened to harm them in their sleep. This is especially true for well-known designers. If you find yourself courted by the design media, and climbing the ladder of fame, never believe your own press. You are not the best thing since sliced bread was invented. The people you look down upon and treat badly will remember these slights. They will tell their friends, who will tell their friends, and soon you will be a global pariah. **SA**

Thou shall not present reams of written research with a proposal just to impress the client



Commentary The teenager paces the kitchen, telling her parents all about the new safety studies, referencing quotes from other neighborhood parents, citing peer considerations, pulling out charts on mileage and fuel economy. Soon reams of information seems to be flying at them as she piles high automotive magazines and consumer publications; it is getting to be a bit much to take in. The plot seems to be firmly lost when

15 minutes are taken up with a bold discourse on how the color of an automobile reflects on its owner. By the time the kid is going on about how "if this car were an animal, it would be . . ." the couple finally raise their hands and plead for mercy. "If you want us to buy you this car, just ask," they sputter out. A solid idea only requires a little bit of explanation. You are not impressing your client, only boring them. **JF**