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Resourceful Designer Episode 318 you can't read the label from inside the jar.

In this week's episode, I want to reflect a little on what we do for our clients, what we do for a living, what we do for our business, and how we can't really do any of this stuff alone. I mean, we can try, but if you truly want to succeed in this career, you need to get other people involved. And that's the point of today's episode.

So let's get right to it. Have you ever heard the phrase you can't read the label from inside the jar? I've been thinking about this a lot lately. It's a metaphor that means that sometimes you're too close to something to really understand what it is you're seeing. And this metaphor applies to so many levels of our lives. And thinking about it reminds me that whatever it is we set out to do, whether it's designing something like a logo or a pamphlet or it's starting your own design business, we can't do these things alone. And what I mean by that is we need honest feedback along our journey, feedback from people who will give us an honest opinion. And that usually means somebody who isn't named mom. You need somebody that'll tell you if you're doing something wrong or if you're doing something right.

It works both ways. But there's only so much you can do whenever you're not seeking feedback. There's only so much you can do when you're working on your own and you're looking at your own stuff. I'm sure you've experienced this with your own work. Have you ever looked at a design that you created a month ago, a year ago, several years ago? You look at it now and you go, oh, what was I thinking? Or, Man, I could have done this to make it so much better. Or Why did I decide to do it that way? And yet you think back. And at the time you created it, maybe it was something you were really proud of. You thought it was wonderful.

But now, looking back, you know the way they say 2020 hindsight? Well, looking back at it, you see all the flaws. Well, what if you had people that could point out some of those flaws to you in the moment as you're creating them? That can help you leap to that next level to make it that much better. And that's what I mean by feedback. If you are a creative person, which you're listening to this podcast, so I know that you are, you need to surround yourself with other creative people. But people that have your best interest at heart and that are willing to give you an honest opinion on what you're doing, what you're showing them. This is a crucial way to help you grow as a designer, because that phrase you can't read the label from inside the jar can apply to all parts of your business, from your design to running your business. You can't see the flaws and you can't see the benefits, the successes, the things you're doing right from the inside. So it works both ways, both the negatives and the positives.

But you need to know these negatives and positives if you want to become better. I have a philosophy that I've always followed in my design journey, and that is that if I don't learn something new on each design project I make, then I'm not putting a hard enough effort into the project. And when I say something new, that doesn't necessarily mean a brand new technique or a new tool, or a new way of doing something. It may just mean improving something that I've done over and over. Finding a way to make it 1% better. That's all it takes. But every project I do, I have to become that little bit better. But sometimes when you're looking at your own work, it's hard to pinpoint, where can I make that 1% adjustment? And that's where having a group, a team, or even an individual that you can bounce ideas off to show to have your work critiqued, is invaluable.

In our line of work. Now, I'm lucky. I have the members of the resourceful designer community that do this. We actually have a slack channel dedicated to critiquing each other's work. And I know it's hard sometimes to put yourself out there

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and get critiques, especially from people who are going to be very honest with you, because nobody likes to hear that something you've done, something you may be feeling proud of, and have somebody tear it down or point out flaws. Nobody likes that. But that's how we grow as designers. When people point stuff out to us and we take note of what they're saying, we can improve that one 2310 percent of ourselves and become a better designer.

The other thing I think of when you say you can't read the label from inside the jar is when you're looking at, say, a design, say you're designing a logo, maybe you're not a logo designer, but bear with me, you're designing a logo. It has an icon, and it has the typography. Well, you're working on that icon. You know it's almost there. There's something about it that's nagging you. You can't quite figure it out. So you are focusing 100% of your effort to try to figure out what's wrong with that icon, when all along you show it to somebody and say that there's something wrong with this, I can't figure it out, what it is. And the person points out something not with the icon, but with the typography that's going with it.

Maybe they point out that the font you're using is a little bit too bold for the delicacy of the icon that you created. Or maybe the serifs on the font are competing too much with the angles from the icon or so forth. Maybe you should try a sans serif font. You were focusing so much on the icon itself that you forgot to look at the entire thing. And sometimes it just takes showing that to another set of eyes for them to see it. Now, the client may point this out to you, but you don't want that to happen with the client. You want to be able to present the client with the best piece that you can. So that's why you should have as I said, it could be an individual, it could be a group.

Anything that you can show stuff to. That's one of the things I missed the most when I left the print shop, because we were four or five designers there at 1.6 designers, and we would often every time we would design something, we would ask the others, what do you think of this? Or just as we're walking around, we would see the other people's computer, and you'd just go up and you'd make comments on something, oh, I really like what you're doing here, but have you thought about this? And that helped me grow as a designer, working in that environment. But when you're working from home and you're by yourself, it gets very easy to forget that aspect of our industry. For years, I was just designing stuff on my own and presenting it to clients. I wasn't showing it to people. But then as I grew as a designer, I realized the value of showing my work to other people first before presenting it to the clients. And now I'm thankful that I have this resourceful designer community that I can do this in, because I know the people within the community. It's one thing to show something in a Facebook group that has thousands of people in it, and you get critiques from who knows who.

You don't know if these people know what they're talking about, at least in the resourceful designer community, I know when somebody gives me a critique that I can trust their opinion, because I've gotten to know these people over time. We're a very tight knit group, and it's great this way, and everybody will have their own little opinion, and it is entirely up to you as the designer whether or not you want to accept those opinions or follow those suggestions. Some people will make suggestions because, you know the design is very subjective. You give the same design brief to ten different designers, and you're going to come up with ten drastically different designs. So you don't have to listen to every piece of feedback, but every piece of feedback will help you grow as a designer, like, somebody may say, you need to tighten up the letter spacing a little bit. Well, you may not want to do that, but thinking about that may trigger something on a future design you're doing. And you'll think, you know, maybe I should tighten this up a bit. Maybe it's something you wouldn't have thought of.

Not being able to see the label from within the jar is a real thing. And as I said, it works in not just the negative context

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where people are critiquing your work and telling you the things that should be improved. It could work the other way as well. Sometimes you doubt yourself. You doubt your abilities. You're not sure. Some people will call this it's all part of Impostor Syndrome, but sometimes you're shooting yourself down when there's really no need to. You may say, there's something wrong with this.

I don't see it. There's something nagging me about it. And then you show it to people, and everybody says, I love this. I wouldn't change a thing. It's perfect. And what you could have spent hours nagging, nagging yourself, what's wrong with this? What can I change? When really nothing needed to be changed. And that is one of the curses of Impostor Syndrome, is you start to second doubt yourself. You start to wonder, am I really capable of doing this? I experienced this just recently.

We had a get together of designers, and one of the designers did a presentation of their work, and they were underselling their capabilities. During their presentation, they made several comments on how they're learning and their work isn't as good as it should be and that sort of stuff. But looking at the presentation, there was nothing wrong with the work presented. It showed a lot of thought of techniques, of design knowledge. It was very well designed work. But this designer was second guessing themselves. They didn't think that they were at the right level yet. And it took several of us to point it out that, yes, they are.

So there was a little bit of Impostor Syndrome going on there, but also they couldn't see the label from within the jar. From inside, they were viewing their work as subpar, as not good enough. It took another set of eyes, somebody outside that jar, to point out that, no, what they are doing is very, very good design. So what I'm getting at is, if you don't have somebody or a group of people that you can share your designs, your concepts with, get ideas, and it doesn't have to be a completed design that you show for critique. Sometimes it can be your sketches. You can talk it out with other people. I've got a client that is asking me to do this, or this is the type of client that I have, and I have to come up with a design about this topic or in this industry. Here are some ideas I have what do you think? Which direction should I take? And different people will have different ideas.

And sometimes what happens when you do these sort of conversations? Somebody may come up with an idea that you never thought of yourself and it may be the winning idea. It may take you in a completely different direction because no one person could think of every possible solution. Remember, that's what we are as designers, we're problem solvers. Clients cotes to us with a problem and we have to find a solution. But as I mentioned earlier, you give a design brief to ten different designers, you're going to get ten drastically different solutions or designs from them. The same goes for the solutions we give our clients. We are giving them a solution to a problem. It doesn't necessarily mean that our solution is the ultimate solution, because if they had gone to a different designer, that designer would have solved their problem as well by giving them something completely different.

So when you are presented with a problem from a client and you are brainstorming the initial stages of a design, whether it's a logo, some other design piece, a website, whatever, you're coming up with all your different ideas. Maybe you're sketching stuff out, maybe experimenting with different things for a web, a layout for a website and all that. Well, when you present this idea to a group of people, say, hey, I've got a client, I'm doing this, these are the directions I'm thinking of. Which one do you prefer? What do you think? Somebody may come up to you and say, hey, have you thought of this? Or maybe they have experience in that industry saying, I've worked with a client in that industry before, and here are

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some of the ideas I came up with. Maybe you can use one of these and it may take you off in a whole new direction. No, it may not. You may decide to stick with the direction you're on, but it opens your mind to the possibilities. And maybe while you're sticking to the design that you're on, something from one of these other ideas may influence what you're doing.

And you would not have gotten that if you hadn't talked to other people. And that is the benefit of having a group, a team, an individual, just somebody that you can share, bounce ideas off of and get critiques from. Now, as I said, I'm lucky because I have the resourceful designer community to share and ask for help and to offer help in to all these members. And over time, as I've mentioned, we've come to know and trust each other. Now, I would love for you to join the community, you can do so @resourcefuldesigner.com community, but this is not a pitch for you to join. This is me telling you that you can't do this on your own. Yes, this is your own business. Maybe you're running the thing solo.

You have no partners nobody else but even a solopreneur can't do it on their own. You need people helping you, people advising you. And these people in the resourceful designer community, it's not just critiquing work. We give each other advice on clients, we give each other advice on contracts, we give each other advice on business direction. Sometimes a whole new avenue will open up. I know one designer in the community who kind of pivoted his business a little bit after joining the community and learning from some of the other people in the community, decided to implement things now. And the new direction he's taking his business in is much more profitable than the direction he was in previously. So sharing with other people, whether it's other designers in your local area, whether it's a group of designers online, whether it's your old college friends from class or in a community like the resourceful designer community, the value that you get from interacting, from getting critiques, from getting advice, from getting opinions, from just sharing and receiving from these people can help you become a better designer and a better business person.

So if you don't have a group like that, I suggest you go out and find one. Just make sure that whoever you use to get advice from is somebody that will give you an honest opinion. And that's why I said mom is never that person, because mom doesn't want to hurt your feelings and mom thinks that everything you do is perfect. And although we love you, mom, that'll never help us grow. So I want you to remember that you can't read the label from inside the jar and take a few minutes today to think about that statement and how it's affecting what you're doing right now. And that's what I wanted to talk about.