

This transcript was created with the help of AI and transcription tools. It has not been edited for errors or accuracy.

Resourceful Designer Episode 319 The Curse Of Knowledge

According to Wikipedia, the curse of knowledge is a cognitive bias that occurs when an individual who is communicating with other individuals assumes that these other individuals have a similar background and depth of knowledge to understand. Some people also call this the curse of expertise. And the example given is a teacher teaching something to his students, maybe not realizing that some of the stuff he's teaching the students don't actually know. So it's hard for him to comprehend not knowing the stuff that he's teaching because it's difficult for the teacher to put himself or herself in the shoes of their students with not knowing the knowledge that they're trying to impart. That's the curse of knowledge. Now I was reminded of this just earlier this week when I was meeting with a new client. This client hired me to redesign their current website and like I do with all clients, I wanted to have a really deep discussion on not just why they have a website, but what the purpose is of the website. And in this case, we're going to be changing some of the stuff on the website based on her business goals because her current website wasn't meeting the direction she wanted to be taking.

But that's a completely other conversation. So this client named her business based on her initials. Now her initials are Sao and let's just call her business Sao Consulting. That's not the name of the business, but that's what I'll use for this example. Similar to the way I originally considered naming my business MDC Design for Mark Dakote. Because in case you didn't know Dakote, my last name, my family name is actually two words. So I actually considered naming my business MDC Design before going with Marksman Design. But now I'm starting to drift.

So back to my client. Her company is Sao Consulting and during the conversation discussing her new website that I'll be designing for, the name of the company came up several times and I ended up saying Sao Consulting. Sao Consulting. And at one point during our meeting I made just a comment saying, I'm having a hard time saying Sao consulting because I'm so used to saying SEO, and that's what my brain wants to say. And then I kind of laughed as a little joke, and my client laughed along with me, but I could see in her eyes that she had no idea what I was talking about. And that is a very small example of the curse of knowledge. Being a web designer, somebody who works regularly in the web space, I just presume that everybody knows what SEO is. But she didn't have a clue.

She had never heard the term before, had no idea what I was talking about, and I had to stop our conversation just to explain it, just in order to explain the joke that I did. Although later in the conversation, SEO did come up with regards to the website, but at that point, it wasn't required. Now, I did do an episode back in episode 217 that was called Cutting Through the Jargon, where I talked about using Jargon in your conversations, or should I say, try to avoid using Jargon in your conversations. Now, if you're not sure what jargon means, jargon is the insider speak. It's the words that we use that are common in the industry, but people outside the industry may not understand. Like a mechanic telling you that you need to replace your catalytic converter on your car, just presuming that since you drive a car, you must know what a catalytic converter is. But not everybody does. And if you don't, it's not a big deal.

But to a mechanic, it's hard to fathom that somebody doesn't know what that is. Well, that's using both cursive knowledge, but it's also jargon. It's the words and terms you use. For example, when talking about laying out a book formatting, book type, I will say that whenever I format a book, I always keep an eye out for widows, orphans and rivers. Now, if you are not somebody who does typography, lays out books or formats text, large bodies of text, you may not have any idea what an orphan, a widow, or a river is. Now, this is not a design instruction that I'm doing right now. So if you don't know what those terms are, just go look up orphan, widow river in regards to typography and design layouts and you'll learn

This transcript was created with the help of AI and transcription tools. It has not been edited for errors or accuracy.

what those are. But having a background in laying out large books like novels and large format books, it's just second nature that I'm going to look for those things and talking about them.

I just presume that other people know, even though deep down I realize that it's a term that there's really no reason for the majority of the population to know what an orphan, a widow in a river is when it comes to laying out texts. So that is the curse of knowledge. It's presuming that whoever you're talking to knows the terms, the words and everything that you are using because they're second nature to you. Well, that's what I wanted to talk about today. I wanted to say that you have to be careful whenever you're communicating with clients, whether it's for designing a logo, to designing a poster, to designing a trade show booth, to designing a car wrap, to designing a website, to designing an app. Just because the client is coming to you with this problem, this thing that they want you to work on, this thing they need you to solve, doesn't necessarily mean that they understand it. A client may know they need a website, but they don't know all the ins and outs. Like if you start talking about CSS or PHP or even plugins and that sort of stuff, the client may not have a clue what you're talking about.

So the best bet, my best advice to you in this instance is to treat everybody that you're talking to as if they don't know anything. Treat them almost like they were, say, a fifth grader or something like that. Don't talk down to them, but make sure that everything you say, you explain to them as if they don't know. Let them tell you that they know about it. So if you're a web designer and you're talking to a client, ask them, do you know what SEO is? And even if the client says yes, they do know what SEO is. It may be a good idea to just lay it out a little bit for them, because somebody may say, sure, I know what SEO is, but maybe they've just heard of it and they don't really know how it works. Case in point, I'm in a group of designers. This is on Facebook.

This is not my resourceful designer community. And one of my fellow designers from that group shared a story of an interaction with a client she had this week where she had been doing SEO work for several months. And when she presented her report to the client, that how well the website was doing and how much more traction it was getting. The client thought that they had done the work themselves because the client had been searching. They had devoted 1 hour every day to just go on google and search for terms to bring up their website. So they were going in, typing in whatever was relevant to their business, finding their website in the search results, and clicking on it. The client thought that they were doing SEO and actually told the designer that if everything's working, what do we really need you for? We can just get more people. Everybody can devote some time every morning to doing this, and it'll help our website rank.

So this client had heard of SEO before, but had no idea how SEO actually worked. And this designer friend of mine had to try to explain to the client that what they were doing was a waste of time. It doesn't help in any way to rank the website as far as SEO goes. So even though a client may know what a term is, that doesn't necessarily mean that they understand it. I know what a catalytic converter is on a car. Don't ask me what it does, I don't have a clue. And the same principle applies to your design clients, whether you're designing an app, a website, a logo, a trade show booth. As I mentioned earlier, anything you're designing, the client may not know by the terms that you use.

And it could be simple things, kerning. In our industry, most people know what kerning is. That's adjusting the space between individual letters. In a word, well, a client may not know what that is. So sending something to the client saying, here, can you take a look at this, but please ignore the kerning issues, I'll take care of that later. That might not mean anything to the client. Now, why you would send something for a client to see that isn't kerned? I don't know, but maybe

This transcript was created with the help of AI and transcription tools. It has not been edited for errors or accuracy.

there's something and you just want them to maybe it's an example where you just want them to approve the font. Choice and just in case they want a different font there is no sense going in and kerning it properly if it's a big body of text or something like that.

So maybe there is some instances. So anytime you communicate with a client via, by email, on the phone, in person, video, whatever, anytime you're communicating with a client, make sure that you I was going to say spell out, but explain things that could be in your proposal, it could be in your contract, it could be in just casual conversation. It's best to explain it thoroughly and then let the client tell you that they know or they understand, and the client will actually appreciate this. Most people will not be offended if somebody explains something to them they already know. In fact, some of them may be grateful because some clients, as the example, as I said, this design friend, the client thought she knew what SEO was. She thought she was helping. But it took the designer to explain that, no, what you're doing doesn't actually help for the client to understand a little bit more about SEO. So they will actually be grateful, and they're learning in the process.

So all of this just to say, be aware of the terminology, the jargon that you're using with your clients when you're communicating with them in any form or fashion, make sure that you're not saying anything that may be confusing or misunderstood, because that can just lead to more complications down the line. You don't want to come to the end of a project and the client asks you about something, and you say, Well, I told you about that way back. And the clients say, at that point, oh, I didn't understand what that meant, but I was too afraid to ask about it. So it's best to spell it out at the beginning. Once you've done that, then at that point, you can go on. Like if you explain to a client, for example, what SEO is and tell them that it's search engine optimization, explain a little bit on how it works, but say people often refer to it as SEO. After that, then you can use SEO in your conversations because you've already explained it to the client. But until you've explained it to the client, try to lay out every detail.

Not just the word, the term, but the definition, what it means. I've laid out your book, but I haven't gone through to eliminate any of the orphans, widows, or to check for rivers. If you understand, you understand. If you don't, you have no idea what I just said. So lay it out. Explain it to the client. What you still need to do, plus the added benefit to this is it shows your expertise. If you're explaining something to the client, then the client realizes, wow, you're really smart.

You really know what you're talking about. And the fact that you're explaining it to them proves that, and they will come to trust and respect you more for it. So it's a win win in both directions. So that's what I wanted to talk about today. Be careful of the curse of knowledge. Every industry suffers from it. Every individual suffers from it. Don't presume or assume that whoever you're talking to understands the same things that you do.

Lay it out for them, explain it for them, and then let them tell you whether or not they understand it or not. And that's what I wanted to share with you today.