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Resourceful Designer Episode 341: Engage More, Talk Less.

Engage more, talk less. That was the gem of wisdom that I was told by a friend of ours who is an elementary school teacher. She spends her day shaping the young minds of 4th graders. Engage more, talk less.

The context was about the importance of truly listening to what the kids she's teaching have to say. It's all about peeling back the layers to understand her pupils unique needs and elevating their learning experience. She told me that it's more than just teaching. It involves listening, interacting, and adjusting. It's about creating dialogue, not a monologue. She told me that when you truly engage, when you let the kids articulate their thoughts and their concerns, that's when the breakthroughs happen. You not only understand if they're grappling the lesson that you're trying to teach them, but also why they might not be. It's about adapting to the individual child, not just delivering the curriculum.

And hearing her talk about this got me thinking. There's a parallel here with running a graphic design business and dealing with clients. Are we, as designers, truly connecting with our clients, or are we too caught up in showcasing our skills and portfolio? As graphic designers, we take pride in our creative prowess, the range of services we offer, and our knack for bringing visual identities to life. And why not? What we do is truly amazing. I think so, and I'm sure you do as well. However, it's crucial to remember that clients are more interested in how we can bring their vision to life than in hearing about our technical abilities or the latest design softwares that we've mastered. In other words, they care about themselves more than they care about us, and rightfully so. I mean, it's their business on the line after all.

For us, it's just a portfolio piece. If we fail to engage our clients in meaningful conversations, we risk not only losing their attention, but also missing out on vital insights into their needs and preferences. That's why design platforms like Fiverr often produce, subpar work. No matter how pretty the designs are, they often don't hit the mark. The art of communication in design is not about a monologue on our experiences, but initiating a dialogue that brings client's thoughts and ideas to the forefront. By asking pointed questions and genuinely listening to our clients' responses, we uncover what they truly need. That's our superpower. But to get there, you have to listen to what they are saying.

Only after understanding their perspective, can we effectively showcase how our design solutions align with their goals, even if the client isn't sure what those goals are, which is often the case. Too often do designers just pitch their solutions without first identifying the actual problem or opportunity at hand. Sure. You need a flyer? I can design you a flyer. I can design you a poster. I can design a website for you. Now these solutions may be the right ones for this client, but then again, they might not be. You can't know for sure without talking and listening to them, which is the problem, like I mentioned earlier, with places like Fiverr.

You can't have this conversation. You see, the golden moments in design, like in teaching, happens when there is a genuine exchange of ideas. Picture this. You're sitting down with a client, asking about their brand story, their mission, and the passion that drives their business. You engage, you listen, and then you dive deeper. It's only after you fully embrace their vision that then you can introduce your expertise, demonstrating how your skills can breathe life into their aspirations. Suddenly, the conversation that you're having with your client shifts from transactional to transformational, and that is powerful. That's when the client knows this is the right person to work with.

But you can't get there if you don't listen to what the client has to say. When prospecting for new clients, it's essential to

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recognize those who are unsatisfied with their current design partners or lack a complete design solution. Maybe they don't already have a designer. Maybe they're doing the stuff themselves. This landscape of clients out there is ripe for the picking if you're willing to listen to them. There's an entire niche out there for designers who can uncover the silent frustrations and the unmet needs of these clients. And identifying those who face challenges that haven't been adequately addressed, either by their current design partner or, as I mentioned, from a lack of any design option can lead to very meaningful partnerships with these people and transformative design outcomes. Now, of course, finding these clients and drawing them out requires patience, it requires empathy, and it requires the kind of probing questions that come from experience.

The more you do this, the better you will become. But I know you can do it. It's all about finding the client's pain point, and without dismissing them, offering a visionary solution to that pain. Again, it's about getting the client to talk and listening to what they have to say. However, uncovering these opportunities, it demands you not only allow your prospective clients to share their experiences, but you also encourage them to delve deeper. This might mean asking some very thought provoking questions, and patiently waiting for responses that shed light on unexplored areas of need or of areas of dissatisfaction. My older brother is a great salesperson. He's been doing this his whole life.

And he once shared with me his greatest sales tactic, the magic of silence. He told me that in many of his most successful deals, the turning point came from who spoke next. He told me that he would ask a question and then just wait. After his client was done answering, he would just sit there, and that pause, that silence often brought out the most honest, unguarded responses from his customers. Great interviewers use this trick. David Letterman is a master of it. Go watch some of his old interviews. He would ask his guest a question, and after they answer, he would just look at them, nodding in silence.

Unsure what to do, the guest often would just expand on their answer in a much more meaningful way. Using silence, Letterman would draw out these answers. It's all about listening and understanding. In Letterman's case, it's his guest. In your case, it's your clients. Now this life lesson of listening and hearing applies to both the classroom and the design studio. But the core message is clear. Whether you're nurturing young minds or cultivating client relationships, you have to ensure it's about them, their needs, their visions, their stories.

Engaging the clients with genuine interest and listening more than we speak, creates the foundation for growth, for learning, and potentially, some great design projects. So before you rush to showcase your skills and your portfolio to your next potential client, take a moment to truly listen to what they have to say. What you discover may just be the key to unlocking your greatest work yet. Engage more, talk less. And that's what I wanted to talk about today.

Before I sign off, I just wanna give a quick shout out to Eddie, a fellow Canadian who left a review for the podcast on Apple Podcasts. It's been a long time since I received a review for the podcast. So thank you very much, Eddie.

He gave the show a 5 star review along with a great title that says, great podcast for beginner designers all the way to experienced designers, followed by a great little write up. So thank you very much for that, Eddie. And if you wanna leave a review for the podcast, please do so. Just look for resourceful designer on Apple Podcasts, on Podchaser, or Goodpods. You can leave a review at any of those places for me. So thank you very much for that. And if you enjoyed today's episode and you wanna continue this conversation or discuss any other matter that has to do with growing and running a design busi-

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ness, the best place to do that is by joining the Resourceful Designer community. For just \$15 a month, you can be part of an amazing community of like minded designers who all have one goal in mind, to prosper.

And we do that by helping each other, by sharing ideas, by critiquing each other, by offering advice, and so much more. I've been told over and over by members of the community that it's one of the best investments that they've made for their design business, all for just \$15 a month. If you're interested? Please visit resourcefuldesigner.com/community and join today. So that's it for me. I wanna thank you very much for tuning in. Until next time, I am Mark Des Cotes, wishing you all the best with your design business and reminding you to stay creative.