BURN YOUR PORTFOLIO

STUFF THEY DON'T TEACH YOU IN DESIGN SCHOOL, BUT SHOULD

MICHAEL JANDA

POLISHING TURDS

DESIGN LIKE THE WIND

THE BIG FAT SECRET

NO MORE FLYING SOLO

BE A WALL PAINTER

HOW TO EAT AN ELEPHANT

FORGIVENESS POINTS

TOOT YOUR OWN HORN

HAIRY MOLES

THE EXTRA MILE

DON'T WORRY DATE

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The best designers take "luck" out of the equation. Smart processes, strategies, and techniques will help you create a masterpiece every time.

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Sometimes a creative professional will actually have to take off their headphones and interact with another human being.

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Everyone has to answer to someone. It might be a boss. It might be a client. It might even be your mom. Learning how to handle superiors tactfully will open the doors of success.

SECTION 5: MIND YOUR BUSINESS

Working as a designer without any business training is like jumping from an airplane without parachute training. Something bad is going to happen.

BURN YOUR PORTFOLIO...REALLY?

With my diploma still warm from Indiana University, I grabbed my enormous, faux-leather student portfolio and hit the streets. I knew my destiny would land me at a hoity-toity agency where I would be a star designer, dazzling clients on high-profile campaigns for the most recognized brands in the world.

One tearful month later, after the humbling task of job hunting—applying to agencies, getting a few interviews, and landing nowhere—I accepted my first job in the industry: prepress coordinator for the local AlphaGraphics copy center. At nine dollars per hour, I was the star designer all right. Nobody could center text on a perforated sheet of business cards and feed them into a photocopier better than me.

With a Midwest work ethic and a motto of "OCD Is an Attribute," it took me four short years to progress from my illustrious copy center job to a senior creative director position at Fox Studios. At Fox, I managed the design, development, and editorial elements of the Fox Kids and Fox Family websites.

The dot bomb and the dismantling of our division at Fox launched me into a four-year freelance stint that would provide me with an income level well beyond any expectations I had upon finishing my college degree and that afforded me all of my "wants" as well as my "needs." When the freelance load became too much to handle on my own, my wife forced me to hire people. Seventeen salaried employees later and over a decade of history, my acclaimed agency, Riser, boasts clients like Google, Disney, NBC, National Geographic, and Warner Bros.

I have been privileged to interview, manage, and hire hundreds of designers and programmers throughout the course of my career. One thing I know for certain is that your graphic design portfolio is a critical element to get you in the door of prospective employers and clients. Design schools know it and spend 90 percent of their efforts teaching students the skills they need to put together an awesome portfolio prior to graduation.

The other thing I know for certain is that, while a design school spends 90 percent of their effort making students capable of creating a killer portfolio, once you're in the door your portfolio is not 90 percent of what will make you actually successful in a creative career. In fact, it isn't even close to the only thing that will lead you to success.

Teamwork, client skills, communication, social aptitude, production speed, and business savvy all play a GIGANTIC part in what will make you successful as a graphic designer, whether your aspirations include freelancing, working for an agency, or managing your own firm. This book is dedicated to teaching those types of skills…the stuff they don't teach you in design school, but should.

Burn your portfolio? OK, so maybe that statement is a tad extreme. However, the lessons I've learned that are contained in this book are every bit as critical as your ability to create award-winning design. Learn them. Apply them. Couple these techniques with your killer portfolio, and find a new level of success in the real business of graphic design.

4 YOU ARE NOT YOUR WORK

Graphic designers can be a sensitive lot. Or perhaps it is artists in general who have thin skin. Either way, there is something about right-brained people that reads like a prescription drug bottle: "Caution: Do not mix with sleeplessness, constructive criticism, subpar coffee, or well-meaning advice." In order to succeed in the design industry, however, it is imperative that you remember that you are not merely the sum of your work. If you interpret design critique as a character critique, you are setting yourself up in a defensive position that will impede your ability to improve your design skills and adapt to different creative environments.

Some time ago I walked past one of our designer's desks and glanced at the design she was working on. It was pretty rough and headed down the wrong path. I knew this designer was a little sensitive, so I tried to choose my words carefully. "So, you're getting started on X project? Be sure to review the example designs the client sent over that illustrate what they are hoping to achieve." That was all I said. I walked away, confident that I had handled the exchange tastefully. Later that day, a few of my employees who sat near her told me that after I left she went into the restroom and sobbed. She didn't just "cry," she "sobbed."

I wish that she had taken what I meant as a gentle nudge in a better direction as a good thing rather than a bad thing. If I did not know without a doubt that she was a skilled and capable designer, I would not have hired her in the first place!

In order to grow in your design skills, you have to hunger for critique and advice from wherever you can get it. Feedback is critical when it comes to being able to push your design to higher levels. If a colleague were to say to you, "Why don't you try reducing the size of the logo a little bit," you shouldn't interpret it as them saying to you, "You call yourself a designer? You suck, you're ugly, you smell like the back of a 747, and your momma wears combat boots!" You have to

realize that your work does not define you as a person and find it inside yourself to say, "Thank you. That is a great suggestion. I'll give it a try and see how it looks." Then you must work to truly feel grateful that your design is being pushed and that your colleague felt comfortable enough with you to be able to offer caring, professional advice to help you look better in the long run.

Give the feedback you receive a try; if the new work looks better, keep it. If it doesn't, then go back to what you had. One of the keys to growing in your skills is to learn not only to welcome feedback but to desire it from anyone who will give it to you. The greatest designers surround themselves with people whom they trust both as individuals and as creative advisors.