

Book Noted

By David Siedzik



David Siedzik is director of digital experiences at Essential. He and the team translate design strategy into novel interactions involving embedded interfaces, mobile devices, web-based product experiences, and whatever the future might hold. The challenges and opportunities presented when developing a growing team have made him particularly appreciative of insight into both design management and design leadership.



Design Leadership: Securing the Strategic Value of Design

By Raymond Turner
Gower Publishing, 2013

255 pages, \$99.95.

TO HEAR RAYMOND TURNER tell it, we design leaders have an awful lot on our plates. Not only do we frequently find ourselves as the sole interpreters between disciplines that rarely communicate if we are not involved, but we also manage budgets that can be “the largest single sum that the board of most companies knows the least about.” But our work has the unique power to cut vertically across executive strategy, management, and delivery “to provide a clear, practical link between the strategic discussions of the boardroom and the daily activities of business.” And that thought drives Turner’s insightful,

provocative, and practical book on design leadership.

The real heroes of design are those who think and act as designers to connect the layers and silos at an organization in the name of a unified culture of business vision and customer experience. Not all of these individuals have formal design training, however, and many may be found outside traditional design departments. Design leadership, Turner believes, is a mental posture and persuasive ability as much as it is a vision to connect, manifest strategic intent, and identify opportunities to enhance the top-to-bottom experience that an organization provides.

Turner frames “design” as a complex issue that is rarely understood by boards in substance and scope, despite good intentions to embrace design as a key part of corporate missions. This is due in many cases to the lack of tangibility and insight into design work from the highest levels. Indeed, this lack of visibility is due not to the lack of broad value to an organization but instead to the distributed and multi-channel nature of cohesive design strategy. To assist with navigating these complex dynamics, Turner provides concise but insightful checklists of the people, stages, and deliverables that must be considered part of a successful design

ecosystem. But these are not typical checklists, as they read with the tone of genuine conversation and coaching. Any design leader can use the checklists in *Design Leadership* to serve as a framework for addressing the challenges specific to their environment, whether diagnosing if design is “in crisis,” “in context,” “in place,” or “in management;” determining which key questions to ask and answer; or defining which types of people to engage and hire.

One of the most refreshing aspects of Turner’s writing is its clear roots in his years of experience as a design leader in both consultancy and client environments. Turner’s straightforward guidelines and longer-term advice on managing the holistic investment in design comes with the authority of someone who truly has spent time in the trenches. *Design Leadership* demonstrates this experience by deftly transitioning among issues of design management (defining and delivering the “bricks” in the wall of a company’s operations) and design leadership (the unique ability to see patterns in how the bricks are arranged to support an organization’s “central business idea” and ultimately deliver the entire customer experience).

Many of Turner’s examples are from the transportation industry, which helps to reinforce

thinking in broad, system-based ways. His stories about British Airports Authority, Transport For London, and Eurotunnel show the impact of activities ranging from changing pop-rivets on airport seats to using design as a process to create a corporate vision and to unify operational activities in the creation of the Channel Tunnel. Short-form case highlights provide glimpses into real-world situations that ground the higher-level themes Turner outlines throughout the book, and long-form case studies provide examples on how to knit together these themes into practice.

Design Leadership is the sort of book that can be both an inspiring and grounding read for a design leader seeking perspective across the entire process of design: “Preparing the Ground,” “The How, What, and Why of Delivery,” and “Looking Back to Look Forward.” But unlike other books of this sort, Turner uses conversational patterns in his argument rather than heavy-handed and gimmicky “summary” checklists to make this happen. The result is both an engaging read and a reference that earns its position on the bookshelf of any leader looking to navigate the tricky landscapes we face in the vision and practice of design. ■