

Relighting the *Spark*: Powering Up Your Creative Process

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by **Lisa Schneller**

This past Thursday I attended my very first D. Talks held by AIGA San Francisco, titled “Power-Up Your Creative Process.” This particular discussion provided invaluable advice from three of today’s most talented design professionals: Maria Giudice of Hot Studio, Ji Lee of Facebook and Rick Byrne of CBS Interactive. The event was moderated by Josh Levine of Great Monday.

Two very important questions were posed at the beginning of the session: How do we think outside the box? How do we generate new ideas? Levine quoted Hugh Dubberly, of Dubberly Design, saying the creative process is comprised of three elements: observing, reflecting and making.

Observing requires looking at your surroundings, looking for insight in the white spaces and trying to identify patterns. Reflecting involves processing what you have learned and observed. This may manifest in word lists and sketches. Others choose to step away for a period of time and let their ideas ruminate. It is when you are not thinking about the problem that a potential solution surfaces. Making is the culmination of extensive hard work, involving experimentation and the willingness to make mistakes. Sometimes it is necessary to repeat these steps in order to reach the right solution.

Giudice described what it was like building her firm from the ground up, and balancing work and motherhood. In the preliminary stages of a project, she recommends only presenting ideas to the client you can stand by. Present three solutions with a wide range of approaches: a conservative approach (which the client will expect), an extreme approach (to push boundaries) and an approach that meets halfway between the two.

Lee compared ideas to being like fragile babies that have to nurtured and cared for. He also spoke of how personal projects helped foster his creativity, especially when the company he worked for left little room for creative freedom.

It was these projects that landed him jobs at companies like Google and Facebook.

Byrne talked about working for a company that requires fast project turnarounds. While the creative process may be accelerated, the essential steps are the same. He also emphasized that if an idea cannot be explained in thirty seconds, the idea needs to be reworked.

As the moderator, Levine was able to both move the discussion along and distill what was being said down to its essence: In order to execute a project successfully, it is essential to understand and define the design problem. It is only after achieving this that you can move forward. Clients should be addressed as design partners, co-creators and collaborators. This opens up a creative dialogue and ensures that everyone can be honest and engaged. Other takeaways from the event: keep your eyes and ears open; inspiration is everywhere. Limitations and deadlines are your friend, whether they are ones imposed by the client or self-imposed. And last but not least, NEVER settle for mediocrity.

After an hour and a half of sharing insights, by both the panel and the audience, I left feeling reenergized and ready to create new ideas of my own.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR :

Lisa is a designer and illustrator living in the California Bay Area. She has been drawing ever since she could hold a crayon (although she uses much better art supplies nowadays).

Lisa received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Illustration from California College of the Arts and is working towards her second BFA in Graphic Design from Academy of Art University.

Most recently, her work has been featured on The Dieline, in Volume 13 of Gallery Magazine, and in the upcoming How Design book, Mastering Type: The Essential Guide to Typography for Print and Web Design, by Denise Bosler.