How to Practice a Six-Step Design Thinking Process

According to the authors of [Solving Problems with Design Thinking](#), most leaders harbor a deep, dark secret: They believe in their hearts that they are not creative, and find themselves short on delivering innovation ideas to their organizations.

In today's seemingly rampant innovation mania, managers and leaders cannot appear unimaginative, let alone fail to come up with brilliant solutions to vexing problems on a whim.

> *For most of us there will be no Moses-like parting of the waters of the status quo that we might safely cross the Red Sea of innovation. Drowning is more likely our fate.*

> *– from Solving Design Problems*

There is hope.

Instead of trying to part the waters, leaders need to build a bridge to take us from the current reality to a new future.

In other words, we must manufacture our own miracles.

The technology for better bridge building already exists, right under our noses. It's called *design thinking*.

This approach to problem solving is distinguished by the following attributes:

- It emphasizes the importance of discovery in advance of solution generation using market research approaches that are empathetic and user driven
- It expands the boundaries of both our problem definition and our solutions
- It is enthusiastic about engaging partners in co-creation
- It is committed to conducting real-world experiments rather than just running analyses using historical data

And it works.

Design thinking is capable of reliably producing new and better ways of creatively solving a host of organizational problems.

THE QUICK SUMMARY - [Design for Strengths](#) *by John K. Coyle*

Are you on the cusp of greatness? Do you have untapped potential and talents just waiting to be released? Read this book to learn the same creative problem-solving methodology (Design Thinking) used extensively at Stanford, Google, IDEO, and Apple. This guide will unlock your personal potential, and that of your team and your business.

By exploring the intersection of Design Thinking and strengths-finding, innovation expert John K. Coyle demonstrates what most high achievers intuitively know-that each one of us possesses a unique combination of strengths, talents, skills and capabilities to achieve breakthrough performance-but may need a code to unlock them.

Design for Strengths delivers the process, tools and mindsets required to find and maximize your hidden potential. Illuminated by a captivating narrative of Olympic training and competition, Coyle demonstrates how he used the Design Thinking process and mindset to hack the sport of speed skating and win an Olympic silver medal. This book contains real-life examples of how individuals and organizations can use Design Thinking to define the right problem, and to ask and answer a better question. Instead of "how do I fix my weaknesses?" ask, "how can I design for my strengths?"

A SIMPLE SOLUTION

Design is all about action, and churches too often get stuck at the talking stage.

Face it - despite all our planning and analyzing and controlling, the typical church's track record at translating its rhetoric into results is not impressive.

In the business world, researchers estimate that only somewhere between 10% and 60% of the promised returns for new strategies are actually delivered. Having been around ChurchWorld for over 38 years, my observation is the reality would be between 10% and 30% - tops.

Practices that consume enormous amounts of time and attention produce discouraging results. All the empty talk is making it harder and harder to get anything to actually happen. Churches expect the staff to be member-focused while the majority watches. When a staff or volunteer actually takes a risk, they are punished if it doesn't succeed. Ambitious growth goals aren't worth the spreadsheets they are computed on.

Getting new results requires new tools - and design thinking has real tools to help move from talk to action.

Design thinking is a simple framework and process to guide creative problem solving – a way to leverage the designer's mindset to "solve old problems" in new ways.

Here are quick snapshots of each of the six Design Thinking steps.

Accept: Like so many problem-solving methodologies, the first step in the Design Thinking process is to admit there is a problem. Corollary to this is the idea that you don't want to accept or work on problems that are completely intractable. There is a fine line between giving up too early and taking on the impossible.

Define: Often the "obvious" fix to a problem is the wrong one. The define stage is all about framing and reframing the problem in meaningful and solvable ways.

Empathize: This is perhaps the most important element of Design Thinking and probably also the hardest. Empathy doesn't mean sympathy or agreeing with a particular viewpoint. Empathy means being able to shift your own thinking to emulate the thought patterns of someone else, to understand why something can make sense to someone possessing a particular mindset in a particular context.

Ideate: Probably the simplest step in Design Thinking – and yet the one with a methodology most quickly abandoned. Generating ideas without judgment is vastly superior to the simultaneous divergent/convergent process that almost every meeting in the world manages to evoke.

Prototype: Critical to this step is a "learn-by-doing" action bias and mindset. It is less about feedback and much more about the willingness to produce a less-than-perfect artifact or process that we could learn from.

Test: This phase is a decision point; either A) we have confidence to launch through quantitative data, or B) we need to return to Define, Empathy, or Prototype to tweak our problem statement, understanding, or approach. In this phase, you take a prototype – a new way of doing something – and try it in "real life."

John K. Coyle, *Design for Strengths*

A NEXT STEP

It may be simplistic, but when it comes to problem solving, there are basically two kinds of problems: the simple and the complex. Simple problems really aren't "simple" – it's just that their solutions are often obvious, and require specific types of action to solve. Think of building a house – it's a complicated process, but the "solutions" have been honed and refined over hundreds of years until they become somewhat formulaic.

On the other hands, complex problems do not have easy answers, and may even appear to be unsolvable at first glance. Reframing stubborn and complex challenges as design problems allows new ideas and solutions to emerge.

With this in mind, schedule a team meeting to tackle a complex problem that either exists or you see on the horizon.

On the top of six chart tablets, write the key word for each of the steps listed above. Copy and distribute this SUMS Remix to use as a guide for your team in discussing and listing actions that correspond to the six steps.

Excerpt taken from SUMS Remix 111-1, released January 2019.

*This is part of a weekly series posting excerpts from one of the most innovative content sources in the church world: **SUMS Remix** book excerpts for church leaders.*

SUMS Remix takes a practical problem in the church and looks at it with three solutions; each solution is taken from a different book. Additionally, a practical action step is included with each solution.

As a church leader you get to scan relevant books based on practical tools and solutions to real ministry problems, not just by the cover of the book. Each post will have the edition number which shows the year and what number it is in the overall sequence. (SUMS Remix provides 26 issues per year, delivered every other week to your inbox).

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