

**EPISODE 33**

[INTRO MESSAGE]

**[0:00:01.0] SS:** Hello hackers, thanks a lot for joining us for another episode of the Hacking UI Podcast where we talk about design, development and entrepreneurship. I'm Sagi Shrieber

**[0:00:08.9] DT:** I'm David Tintner.

**[0:00:11.3] SS:** Just before we begin, we would like to thank Launch School for sponsoring this episode.

**[0:00:15.3] DT:** Launch School is an online school for developers but what makes it so special is their programs are perfect for designers because they take a slow path for serious beginners to be able to master software development and product companies.

**[0:00:26.1] SS:** Yeah, thanks a lot Launch School and by the way, all of their prep courses are free and have great videos and several books that you can start with. Now, we got some exciting news for you, we'll be in San Francisco next week and we're hosting two meetups on Wednesday August 24<sup>th</sup> and Thursday August 25<sup>th</sup> 2016, worth adding.

**[0:00:45.3] DT:** Yeah, so our first meetup will be a micro workshop to start off your personal brand. The stuff we'll talk about is taken from our Side Project Accelerator. This will be a part lecture, part hands on experience in which we'll discuss our philosophy of audience driven product development, the giver versus taker theory and the techniques we use to create our continent hacking UI. This session will be interactive and by the end of the night you'll be on your way and have the tools to publish your first article and build your personal brand as a side project.

**[0:01:10.5] SS:** Yeah, the second meetup is about scaling a design team so if you've been listening to this podcast, you're going to want to be part of it, we're going to go into all the insights that we've learned from interviewing the world's top design leaders and also talk about what work for us with our team in Similar Web.

**[0:01:27.1] DT:** We'll have all the details in our show notes so simply visit [Hackingui.com](http://Hackingui.com) for details.

[INTRODUCTION]

**[0:01:32.6] DT:** Okay, today, we have another great guest for you for the Scaling A Design Team series.

**[0:01:39.4] SS:** Most of you already know him from his role as a founder of the super successful studio, the studio does put out amazing free IOS and android UI kits that you probably used, published amazing long form case studies that we all drooled upon and took amazing projects, one of them being [medium.com](http://medium.com).

**[0:01:55.1] DT:** That studio is the legendary Teehan+Lax, which was eventually acquired by Facebook where he is now in the role of director of product design, managing multiple teams at up to almost 100 designers.

**[0:02:07.4] SS:** That's a lot of designers.

**[0:02:07.9] DT:** In this insightful and brutally honest conversation, he shares with us the lessons he learned while scaling Teehan+Lax to almost 50 employees. We talked about his personal story and his partnership with Geoff Teehan and he also shared with us the questions that he asks every designer at Facebook and some tips for aspiring design managers.

**[0:02:23.9] SS:** We're super excited about this too because we're so fortunate to meet them and have this talk face to face in a Facebook headquarters here in Tel Aviv.

**[0:02:33.0] DT:** Ladies and gents, it's our pleasure to introduce Jon Lax, director of product design at Facebook.

**[0:02:40.0] SS:** Let's get hacking.

[INTERVIEW]

**[0:02:51.0] SS:** Everyone, welcome to another episode of the Hacking UI Podcast, Scaling A Design Team and I'm Sagi.

**[0:02:59.5] DT:** I'm David. With us today is Jon Lax. Jon, what's up?

**[0:03:02.8] JL:** Hey, how are you? Nice to be in Tel Aviv.

**[0:03:05.8] SS:** Welcome to Tel Aviv.

**[0:03:09.7] JL:** I guess I realized it will be hot but I didn't realize how hot it would be.

**[0:03:12.2] SS:** Yeah, it's super hot and humid.

**[0:03:15.7] DT:** It's only getting hotter. This is the beginning.

**[0:03:20.1] JL:** Since I moved to the Bay area, let's see, it was a year ago February, so February 2015 and I come from Toronto Canada originally. So I'm used to summers being sort of hot and humid, not quite this hot and humid, but hot and humid as hell. I grew up with summers and then moving to the Bay Area where there's not really a summer, the weather kind of stays between like 12 and 22 degrees, doesn't really get either colder than that or hotter than that. When I come to a place where there's — what was it yesterday? 38 or something like that? It's quite a shock to my system but it's nice, this is what summer feels like to me.

**[0:03:57.4] DT:** I remember the craziest thing about when we were living in San Francisco, it would be like a cool and comfortable in San Francisco and right in Oakland you'd be burning your ass off like just across the bay.

**[0:04:08.6] JL:** The weather is not understandable in the bay area. When I first moved in I was looking for a place to live, people you'd say, "Well where should I live in the city?" And the first question people say is, "Well, is weather important to you?" I said, "What do you mean is weather important to me?" And they'd say, "Well the weather changes, neighborhood to neighborhood." I didn't understand it but now having lived there for over a year, literally the

weather on my block, if I go eight blocks another way it will be different and it's so hard to comprehend but the weather changes neighborhood to neighborhood in San Francisco.

**[0:04:48.4] SS:** That's a mazing. Here, it's just hot everywhere I guess. It gets fine once you go to the beach and understand that this is a place to be. Have you been to the beach in Tel Aviv yet?

**[0:05:00.6] JL:** So I arrived last night and I walked form my hotel room, which was right on the beach at the Sheraton, I walked up to Jafa, the old city. So I walked all along the beach. I saw people playing some crazy version of volleyball with their feet, I don't quite know what that was but then I definitely walked back on the beach. I think tonight I may try to, if I have time, jump in and go in the ocean, I will go in the ocean regardless before I leave here. Yeah, I got a little bit of beach time.

**[0:05:26.7] SS:** Cool, cool. It's like, try to get some beach time because it's amazing, you got the weekend as well right?

**[0:05:33.0] JL:** I wish I did, I was supposed to originally and I had to change my plans, I have to leave on Thursday. So I have a very short period of time here. I'm only here for three days but it will give me an excuse to come back.

**[0:05:43.5] SS:** Wow, so thanks a lot for doing this and meeting with us in such a short notice and also taking the time out of your short period here. We have tons to talk about with you.

**[0:05:53.3] JL:** Let's do it.

**[0:05:54.3] DT:** I think, yeah, first one just give us just a little bit of a background, your story, quick recap.

**[0:05:59.5] JL:** Sure. If you want to go back to the very beginning, I graduated university in 1995 and that's an important date because I come in to the industry right as the internet is, really the web is starting. The internet, it predates that but I actually graduate university as a journalist. Actually, that's pretty common, there's a lot of people who today are designers and

working in the creative field of digital who came out of journalism as a background. Which actually, if you go back far enough, it makes sense because what we were creating in terms of websites in 1995, '96, '97, were primarily text based, right?

So if you have writing skills and then you could combine that with a little bit of layout, you were really well positioned to work in this industry, there wasn't a, until really the late 90's, there wasn't a ton of visual control. Really, only until the early 2000's do you get CSS and more precise control over your layouts. So really what you're dealing with is a lot of content layout and content creation. So I started, I came out, I worked for a magazine, my job at that magazine, my primary job at the magazine was writing, editing, laying out, coding the website.

On top of that, it was a small startup magazine, I was doing layout. I had been taught QuarkXPress in journalism school, they taught us Quark and I loved in journalism school doing layout, even though I didn't really know what I was doing, I understood the tool well enough to layout magazines and articles and things like that.

When I got to the magazine, there was an art director there, a guy named Malcolm Brown who was a fantastic print art director and since I knew Quark and he had no one to help him, he literally grabbed me and said, "Okay, I'm going to teach you how to do print layout because I need you to help me layout this magazine, I can't do it all myself." So he would layout the basics of the article and then I would work and do different flows and as the artwork came in, move around, and that's how I learned typography, grid systems, basics of layout and then I started to translate some of those things to the website, started to understand the concept of gutters and to the extent that you could do that with tables. I did that.

**[0:08:23.2] SS:** What year was that that you started?

**[0:08:24.3] JL:** This would have been '95 through 1997, I worked at the magazine and then I left the magazine and I very briefly worked for an ad agency in their digital group and I started there as a copywriter and very quickly became a creative director in the agency and I only worked the for let's see, '97 — maybe 18 months, I wasn't there a long time, I didn't love working in the ad business but just wasn't for me but I learned a lot but it wasn't my thing and I

got hired away from there to be creative director of the Toronto office of the club called Modem Media.

Modem Media was a very important company in the first phase of the web, it's the company that created the banner ad, it's a company that worked on a lot of very prominent web 1.0 sites including like we spend a lot working on GM.com, the first real version of like an automotive site, we worked on Delta airlines, I worked a lot on delta at different times. AOL, there were just a lot of large clients that were really important at, you know, I worked there from 1998 to 2002.

So right through the heart of the .com, into the explosion and then just a little bit after, things really implode in 2001 and I stuck around there and then in 2002, the Modem, which is a US based company decided they were going to retrench to the US because things were pretty grim from a business standpoint. They shut down their Canadian office where I was. That put me out of work and that's when myself and Geoff Teehan started Teehan+Lax. So we started Teehan+Lax in the summer of 2002 and we ran that until 2015 until January, February 2015 where I then joined Facebook.

**[0:10:13.7] SS:** Cool, wow, I didn't know you had TN and Lax for so long.

**[0:10:16.2] JL:** Yeah, 12 years.

**[0:10:21.5] SS:** How did you meet Geoff?

**[0:10:23.3] JL:** Geoff worked at Modem, he was an associate creative director there and I was the creative director. So we had always worked well together in a professional capacity, Geoff was or still is a really detail oriented visual designer, he's very, very good. I in my career, by the time I got to Modem, I really wasn't doing any design anymore but what I was doing was working with large groups of designers to help them do stuff and so, as we were talking about before, when we talk about managing design teams, very early in my career I made that shift from really doing any execution into just creating the conditions within which people others could do it.

**[0:11:11.0] SS:** You found that talent in yourself?

**[0:11:12.5] JL:** Yeah. I'm speaking here at Facebook tomorrow, so I'm giving you a little bit of some of the stuff I talk about tomorrow but don't publish this before tomorrow. One thing I learned about myself in journalism school was that I saw very quickly when I was in journalism school that most of the people I was in the class with were actually better writers than I was and were actually more interested in going out and reporting and they got great — I could see, they got great joy out of going to do interviews, really doing the investigation and I didn't enjoy that as much as they did and I knew I'd never be as good at it as they were.

But what I enjoyed doing was I really enjoyed editing, I was pretty good at coming up with story ideas. So I would always have a million ideas about what stories could be, I just wasn't necessarily all that interested in going out and reporting them myself. But I could see themes, I could see things that would be interesting to people and then I love editing and I also loved doing the layout. I loved basically making their words look better and read better and so I learned very early that I would probably just be better doing that than doing it myself.

A lot of that just has to do with how my brain works and I tend to be good at the macro but not necessarily as good at the micro. Which I think to be a really great visual designer, you have to be really good at the micro, I'm not obsessing over for details. I have like huge, huge, huge appreciation for people that can do that. I'm just not necessarily the person who is great at doing that myself. So Geoff for example is very good at that, he's very detail oriented, he likes to deconstruct things, see how they work.

So he's very mechanical like he likes building things, he likes cars, he likes that kind of stuff, which I don't but we made a good professional pair because we tended to have very much the opposite skill sets. I was good at some of the big picture thinking and I could provide some context and then Geoff was very happy to operate inside of that and go, "Okay great, now that I have that I can go build this things." So it was a good partnership from that perspective.

**[0:13:14.1] SS:** Cool.

**[0:13:15.1] DT:** Yeah, I want to ask you about that partnership because I know Sagi and I have been working together like brothers and entrepreneurs for a while and people are always asking

us that don't have a partner. How necessary that is and how much they feel that they need one. How do you think it would have been if you didn't have a partner, could you have been just as successful or was this the core thing that drove the success of your company?

**[0:13:36.9] JL:** So there's two questions there. One is do you need partnerships as it is being a person and then was this partnership the key to the company? So I know for myself, I'm 25% smarter when I'm talking with other people right? When I'm able to have some sort of dialogue or interplay. I just become smarter. If I just left my own devices, I'll come up with some stuff that might be okay but I'm way better when I talk it out with people and better when I have someone to bounce ideas off of. I'm better when looking at work, I get fuelled off of some input that someone else has created and I hope that they get fuelled off of the things I say back.

So in general, I just think like you need someone to work with or some group of people to work with and I'm at my happiest when I'm exchanging ideas, thoughts, execution, sketching new things, participating in a collaborative way. I think my work becomes better and I hope the other persons' work becomes better. I think that in terms of Geoff and I, very early on, it was very important. I think that by about by year three of the business, we had to very much separate because we couldn't be involved in every client together.

So from very early on, we actually weren't specifically working together on a client projects and so what happens was like, I would then be working more with other teams, I was focused on other stuff. So I think that it was really crucial when we started but when you actually look at the timeline, for the majority of the company, we were very much working somewhat independently. Then there were things that we would collaborate on and work on, like an example in more of the latter years was I had taken on trying to think about what the next version of our — I mean, it got manifested what the next version of our website was.

But really what I was working on was how are we going to talk about ourselves to the market, what were the things we were going to do? And I had worked with two other people in the company to really start to articulate those, a guy named Pierre Marley and a woman named Kim Lawless and we were working on a whole bunch of ideas about how we wanted to talk about Teehan+Lax. Then Geoff saw that and actually provided like one piece of insight that really

clarified it and then that became I think the site that we became very well known for, which is like the long form.

I think we were known before that but I think like, that version of our site and the case studies, there was a whole bunch of decisions we made creatively and from how we wanted to talk about ourselves that were formed from that and I think that like Geoff had an insight into that, even though he wasn't actually directly involved in the creation of that, he brought some really valuable thought to that. Then, he worked very hard on some of the layouts of that became the site. I mean it was really his design and some other people he worked with that became the basis of that site.

**[0:16:49.8] SS:** All right.

**[0:16:50.6] DT:** So can you talk a little bit about, you said you invested a lot of time talking about the company and thinking about your image and I guess the content you were sharing and we all know the articles that you've written and the UI Kits and all of this. So my question is, how did you guys decide that putting so much time and effort into what you're sharing with the world was important and how did you know you were going to get value from that?

**[0:17:10.1] SS:** I just want to add and double that, is that you probably had people working on those UI kits, those free UI kits that we all used and giving them away for free, even with no email signup required was like a bold decision. A very wise one I think but in today's companies, mostly I don't know how it is in Facebook but in most companies, when an employee comes up to his boss and tells him, "Listen, I want to write a Medium article or I want to create a free UI kit or whatever." Usually they will get kind of like people would...

**[0:17:41.8] DT:** It's at an expense of doing their regular work and maybe people are not seeing the ROI on this type of thought leadership.

**[0:17:48.8] JL:** So the UI Kits were an accident, I think that you have to understand the history of them which was something we did as — I mean I think we understood there would be some self-promotion on that but the first one was relatively easy to create. Geoff did it, it wasn't so much my idea, we had been very inspired by in the 90's, there had been a site called Web

Monkey, I don't know if, You may not even remember it. It was a really influential design and development site from wired magazine put it out. They had done a UI kit for web browsers, so it was all of the chrome and the form elements from IE like Netscape, all the different versions. I always thought that was like a super smart thing, we use them and they even created — because they'd stopped publishing it and we had maintained an internal version of that. Then when iOS came out, we didn't know how to use Xcode, we didn't understand because we were design company but we wanted to design iOS apps.

If you put yourself in that place, iOS apps, you don't understand Xcode. Nothing exists in terms of like envision doesn't exist, principle doesn't exist, Origami doesn't, no one of these things exist but you want to design iOS apps, you're going to have to create all of these widgets right? You're going to have to, basically, you're forced to create these assets and then once you're forced to create those, it doesn't take much to be like, "Hey, we should just create something easy so that all of our designers can do it. Oh well, why don't we just share this?"

That was literally the thought process and I think at the time, what had happened was I maybe misremembering this but we were like, we would love someone to pay us to design an iOS app because iOS has just come out. Okay, we need to have some credibility because no one's given us this job yet. How do we get credibility? It's like, what about if we create these sheets, it's going to look like we have these tools to build all this, we must know what we're doing, right? That was what started it.

By putting up for free and actually, the thing that really made it a success is it ended up on the front page of Digg. That was until — I can't remember what dethroned it. That was like our largest site traffic day ever of the history of the site in like 2008 and — 2007 and 2008. We were on the front page of Digg and then we just had to do it, we had to do it every update. We did toy at one point with getting email addresses and there were a few problems with that. One was, people just put a bunch of bullshit in, right?

Number two was, what we found people would do is, they would download the PSD and then they would use it, throw it out and then two months later, they would download it again because they just, "Oh, I need that thing again. Where did I put it in my computer? I don't remember." They throw it out and download it again. I was like, asking email every time is kind of useless,

we have this email, we didn't know what we would do with them because most of this people weren't actually clients, they were just other designers, emailing them wasn't that valuable from a new business perspective.

We just were like, "Well, just give it away and then it did turn out in retrospect to be very valuable and with credit to Geoff, he basically did it single handedly through most of the revisions and then towards the end, we had more people to do it but that was really the end. That's the whole story behind the PSD. Then we just kept doing it, definitely towards the end, more people got involved and it was too much for Geoff to take on alone. We brought other designers in.

Your actual original question was about like the time commitment and then the perceived values you ask your boss, "Hey, I want to take time to do this and your boss is like, I don't know. We've fundamentally, I was very inspired by Tim O'Reilly, the creator of O'Reilly Books has this saying, truism, which is you need to create more value than you take. I really believed in that and we all believed in that and so if you actually believe in that, then what you believe your job is, is to basically put things out there and have, it's a little hippie-ish but like trust that it will come back to you, it will reward you in some way and I think that if you just believe that to be true, you don't know specifically how this will pay out but you just do it knowing that if you create more value, you can take more value from a system.

**[0:22:31.0] SS:** That's amazing because we are now on The Side Project Accelerator and so the first lesson we just released last week and one of the parts of the lesson was we tell everyone whenever they're putting out content, they should see how people perceive them, are they givers or are they takers? It's exactly that.

**[0:22:49.7] JL:** I think that the other thing too is that if we didn't enjoy the act of that creation then it would have felt like work and I may have questioned its value but we just enjoyed doing it. We got a lot of gratification out of whether it was creating the tools or the articles. So we didn't really perceive it as work, the other thing that we did practically speaking was we booked it off, we didn't do it in our spare time, we actually stopped doing work and did this stuff instead of client work.

That was really important because it forced people to say, “This is important, it’s so important that we are “losing money”.” We didn’t think of it that way but there is a way to internalize it where you say look, “I’m not working on client work, I’m going to be working on this for the next month, our site or two months on our site.” Then it gets a sense of importance, you equate it to something that is strategically important for you to do. One of the big mistakes I see people doing when they are doing this kind of work is they try to do it on top of their work and I’m like no, this is like part of the work that you need to do.

**[0:24:03.6] SS:** Yeah, something about that, so redesigning your own website or a lot of times I really see that kind of work being by the management like above the people that I want to do it and think of what is important, it’s being looked upon and it’s like no, this should be on top of your work, it’s important, you should do it but do it on your free time on top of your work. How do you suggest like the people that want to do this kind of thing? How can they approach their bosses which are kind of like in a different mindset, how can they convince them otherwise?

**[0:24:37.5] JL:** I think this is a problem designers have had, which is this idea that we can “convince others” suddenly that what we think is right, I don’t actually think that’s true. I don’t think you can — I think it’s very difficult to do that. I think that if it’s not important to your boss, it’s probably not going to be important and you getting basically what I would say is, you’re going to have a really hard time getting them to think it’s important. They have to come to that conclusion on their own.

If you really want to do that kind of work and your company is like, “No, we don’t give a shit about this,” then you I think you may want to question. You could say like, “Well, am I working at a place that values the same things that I value?” There’s no way to force them to do that. I think in terms of trying to influence someone to think more about this things or try to influence a boss to persuade them to come to that conclusion, there are things you can do.

One of them is learning what’s important to them, what they value and then trying to connect what you want to do as a way to help them do that, right? I think that if someone’s saying, “Oh do this on your free time,” what they’re really saying to you is, “I don’t understand why this is valuable so I’m giving you this kind of like I’m humoring you by telling you to do it in your spare time.” What I’d be doing is saying like look, “You clearly don’t think this is important or valuable

because it's not important enough for me to do it to the exclusion of something else. So let's talk about why you don't think this is important," and then try to put that out on the table and then say, "Is there anything I could do to convince you that this is important, or how might I convince you that this is important? What if we try this and we see this results, we do it."

Generally what people want when they're thinking logically about this stuff is they want some sort of evidence about why they should do more of it. I think what happens with designers in general, not with just like your own website or doing stuff. We feel things very instinctually and then we are confused when others don't feel the same thing instinctually. We get frustrated, you see designers, "He just doesn't get it. He just doesn't get it right? I hear that a lot from designers. They don't get it." And I'm like, "What do you mean they don't get it? What do you mean? What don't they get?"

Really, what they're saying is that I have this instinctual thing and I just fundamentally believe that something that's aesthetically pleasing is better than something that isn't, right? You're confronted with someone who just doesn't have that same belief system. Then you get frustrated when they don't have the same belief system. I think that's just a waste of time and energy. Instead of being frustrated about it, you have to start to approach. Look, we pride ourselves of being so empathetic, designer's empathy right? Well, what about your boss? Have empathy with what that person's going through.

What does he or she experiencing and why can't you empathize with them? I think we get it wrong a lot on this types of issues where we assume what's important to us is important to others, we don't understand why they don't see it this way and then we don't spend any time trying to understand it and then trying to work with them to influence them, to hopefully try to get them this. At the end of the day, I think it's hard to get people to suddenly value something that they don't value. It's a tough thing to do.

**[0:28:01.9] DT:** So you mentioned that you started doing this like in around 2008, right? Were you guys also trying to be thought leaders and trying to put out content before that or was that really when it started?

**[0:28:11.5] JL:** We had a blog and I think we had some success with that when writing a blogpost, I think it was a bit easier in that time because there was just less noise that you could do something that would stand out. Really, the long form stories that we I think became better known for them, maybe our blog, although some people thought those were blogs, they weren't, we had a blog that would separate those were very much case studies.

So the story behind that is, in 2010, 2011, we were going to go redesign the site, we started to look at the audience of who the hell was even going to come to our website, right? We identified that there were really three people, personas, I don't know what you're going to call it, target audience. There were three sort of potentially types of people that were going to come to our site, one was clients, our potential client's right?

One was people who may want to work at our company. So other designers that were potentially employees right? The final one were like designers out in the community. In the initial analysis, we said like, "Who do we want to speak to on this site?" This is what I was referring to before, Geoff very smartly said, "It's all the same person and we need to go speak to that person," and what he was meaning was he saw that designers were our audience.

What we had just started to see maybe earlier than others saw it was that we had really good reputation with designers, I think going back to the PSD's, going back to the templates, designers knew who we were and thought we were valuable or thought that we were smart, or liked the work we were doing was very much stuff that other designers recognized as being high quality. One thing I learned during that timeframe was that most clients, meaning like a chief marketing officer or someone in the marketing group.

So if you think about who hired us between 2002 and roughly 2010, the person who is going to sign the check for the work we were doing was really someone with a title like chief marketing officer or head of eBusiness, there is this title for a while called eBusiness and this were generally people inside of large corporations who were being tasked with trying to figure out what digital meant to this businesses. Like a bank or an airline, and those were who are hiring us for large portion of our existence.

We started to notice a change somewhere round 2009 and 2010 where we suddenly started to get people calling us who had titles like VP of design, that did not exist in 2002. There was no one calling us with the title VP of design or design director and what we noticed was, designers by 2010 had risen up in the corporate ranks because the value of design had, really thanks to Apple in the mid-2000's, had suddenly become more important and companies were carving out fairly senior roles for internal design groups. They were staffed by the people who downloaded our PSD's like five years ago, right?

They had just grown up and were now old enough for more mature roles. These roles opened up. So suddenly they were now hiring, because if you think about it, if you're a designer and you finally get budget and you want to go hire a design firm and you're like, "Well who do I like?" Luckily we were one of those companies, right? But [prior to that, no offence to the directors of eBusiness or anything like that, but if I showed them three designs where let's say if I showed you these three designs you'd be like, "Oh that one is so much better. Number one is so much better than number three."

If I showed that same three designs to some of these other people, they wouldn't be able to tell the difference. They wouldn't be able to tell the difference between what we might consider great design and pretty good design, right? What we learned is actually trying to compete on quality of design in a client-driven environment was actually useless.

Designers having debates like, "You hear this from companies where designers are like, 'I can't believe we lost that to X company, they're so bad,'" right? Well, turns out that a lot of clients can't tell the difference between pretty good design and like really awesome design, but designers can, right? We had been a company that prided ourselves on quality, only to realize that it probably didn't matter that much.

But when we started to get hired by other designers, we realized that that was actually good because we had clients who could tell the difference between those two things. We made a decision that we were going to just focus on speaking to designers. Once you decide that that's your audience, it actually becomes pretty easy to start creating content or things for them because you're just doing it for yourself. You're like, "Well what would I want to read, right?" So that was sort of the start of it.

The second thing was, we had done an exercise, in 2010, our company got into a kind of a bad place, staff were leaving the company, we were having to like churn, there was something was wrong and what was really wrong was we had grown, we have gone through some exponential growth. We had grown up to about 50 people, I think we were about 35, 40 people at that time and we just hadn't scaled our maturity along with it.

So what ended up happening was there were a whole bunch of people who had been with us a long time. From the time we were maybe six or seven people all the way through when we were 35 and they were suddenly like, "Well this isn't the company I joined, this is very different but what was odd was they were leaving to go to kind of equally sized or larger companies." So it wasn't like they were going back to six person companies, they were going to pretty big companies.

We asked him like, "Why are you going there?" They said, "Well, they seem to have their shit together, you guys don't, they've got HR processes and they've got a career ladder, they've got all the stuff," and really as we dug in to that more and more, what it became, what we came to understand was that they were saying, "Look, I can't tell the difference between you and this large agency. I'll just go to the large agency because I get all of this benefits that you don't have like I said, career ladder, HR support, those types of things."

So we had to really go figure out, who were we as a company and what was important to us. We had to then be able to talk about that and say, "Look, here's why you work here." Because we had grown so much that we weren't this scrappy little — we weren't a scrappy up start anymore right? We were one of the larger companies in the city in Toronto, were one of the larger design firms now.

We weren't a scrappy company but we weren't really a huge company, we're sort of something in the middle right? So we sat down and we started to write down our values, which sounded like a really corporate-y BS-y thing to me. The more I did it, the more I understood that this were really important and one of the things, one of the values that we have, that we basically was always there, we just had never put it into words was that we really valued honesty. That was a very private thing for those of us in the company that we were just, we liked being honest, we

liked being — I know that sounds obvious but many companies if you ask them to write their values, honesty aren't necessary. Not to, I don't know specifically what Goldman Sax's values are but I would be pretty sure like profit motivation, we want to make money for our clients. I'm not sure honesty is like the number one value, they have other ones and that's not good or bad, it's just, every company's value may not be honesty right? It was really important to us.

If you think about this, if you take those two concepts, you want to talk to designers, you know that those are the people, those are both your clients, the people who are interested in you and potentially the people you're going to hire from. So that's your audience, and you value honesty. Well then what do you create? Well you create really honest case studies, right? If you're a designer, what you care about is like tell me everything about how you made this thing. The way we thought about it is like DVD commentaries.

If you ever listen to the commentary track on a DVD where he director or the actors are like the people talk about, the making of it, it's a way to look at that. Film, through this totally different lens, now, if you're a film geek, you love listening to director commentaries. But for most of us, we could care less. We thought about in those terms, most designers want to know like the process behind how this happened. If you're really honest, you're going to talk about that, you're going to talk about what went right, what went wrong, what you learned, what you wish you could have done better. We just wrote from those places.

At the same time, another thing was, I was really interested, not just me but others in the company. We were really interested in how to explore the ideas behind long form content. That was just something we were fascinated by — how do you tell really long stories because we had just worked on medium, we had worked on a few other editorial products, we were just like super interested in this concepts at that moment in time. So all of those things came together to create that stuff.

It just turned out we were exploring some of this ideas ahead of other people right? I don't think we were geniuses or anything, we were just sort of gaming out this concepts and then once you gave those to designers and you said, "We want to tell this stories very deeply, we want to be really honest and we want to explore long form content, go."

Then that's what comes out the other end, right? Now they're suddenly like shit, we can do this and as we wrote this things, there would be paragraphs and we would say wait, how could we tell this in a different way and we start to create H scrolls inside of there. we started to come up with little animations and just that was the moment. I also think it was a moment that may not come back because it was probably the last moment I think you could really invest in a desktop based site at a deep, deep way, it is responsive and you can look at it, I don't know if I'd recommend reading one of those stories on your phone but you can.

But it was really a desktop experience and if I had to go build that site today, I probably wouldn't build... no, I know for sure I wouldn't build that. Even with all those same variables being true, I'd build something different, I'd probably build something with more video in it, probably build just something different. I'd tell stories in a different way. That was a really long answer to that question, I'm sorry.

**[0:39:20.9] SS:** That was a great answer. Should we dig deep into now management or like your role at Facebook, maybe although we could talk a long time also about the...

**[0:39:35.0] DT:** I think it was the next transition, I'm really interested in how you scaled first Teehan+Lax to that size and then maybe afterwards you can talk about being a manager at Facebook. You went from six to 36 or something very quickly?

**[0:39:49.1] JL:** Well no, not actually. So I had the advantage of not doing it quickly, I think our growth at Teehan+Lax was over 12 years and we eventually got to about 50 people. Our growth there was pretty, if anything, very restrained where we grew, I mean, I can't do the math in my head but you go from six to 50 in 12 years. That's not a massive growth by any stretch of the imagination. I think that that growth was pretty restrained, very organic, we were very concerned, one of the founding concepts around the company was that it was always going to be a boutique, it was going to be very good at the things that did and that was it.

That was actually one of the reasons why we decided to stop doing it was we feel like after 12 years, we kind of taken it as far as it could go. The company — one of the things about organizational dynamics and scaling businesses. I think this is probably true in all businesses but it's particularly true in a services business. That's like an ad agency or a law firm or

accountancy where people are the primary thing that's being sold, or the output of people is the primary thing being sold is they tend to go in the — I'm making a steps motion with my hand right now which is always good for podcasts is doing visual metaphors.

But if you only think about a series of steps in your mind, you basically go through this trajectories where the company starts small and then it goes to about seven or 10 people is like the first step, right? Then you're doing really well, you're running 10 people and then it has to make this, in order for it to make the next step up. It goes to about 20 people and then it has to go to, it sort of doubles like 40. The problem is when you get to 40, the next step up is 80, right?

So you can go from like 10 to 20 actually relatively easy and even if it's like three years, it doesn't really feel like a ton of growth. I mean I know, I remember a moment when I walked into the office and we were now 18 people and I was like, "Holy shit, what happened? Where did this people come from?" But they've been there like a year or two, it wasn't — you get to that point like my god, this is like a real business right? Then when you go from 20 to 40, it's like, that does not catch you by surprise, that is like very much conscious growth that you are going through, when you get to 30 people, that's when you at, now you're no longer small company.

You have to start like hiring people, like a finance person, you have to start hiring all this structure around them and once you start hiring the structure, your office manager, HR person, finance, now the economics want you to be like 80 people and that's where we were. We were right in that band when we decided to stop doing it because we knew that we had to basically go to 75 or 80 people and that wasn't the vision for the company. So the only choice was to get smaller, which for a bunch of reasons we didn't want to do or just stop doing it.

So we just decided that, "Look, we've taken this as far as we want to take it." We knew what came next, we knew what we had to do, we just didn't want to do it, right? In terms of scaling, that was relatively organic, relatively slow but I understood the dynamics of what happens at each step and what you have to do to help support growth right? You can't just do nothing, I think it's a mistake a lot of small firms make, which is they don't have any process, they don't have any structure, they don't have any titling and they think, "Oh you don't need any of that stuff." You don't when you're seven people right? Even when you're 20 people, you can probably get away with it.

Then you get to 30 and the wheels come off because 30 people don't operate the same way as seven people do. Yet you were given all this bad evidence along the way because things were working and so you think like, "This works forever." I have this conversation with young companies all the time where they're like, they'll very proudly tell me, we don't have process, we don't have hierarchy, we don't have titles.

And I'm like, "Oh yeah? How big are — let me guess, you're like seven to 15 people, right?" And they're like, "Yup." I'm like, "Come talk to me after 30 and we'll see if you still believe that." And they're like, "What do you mean?" It will all — you can't do that forever and most people think you can and so that's something that when you scale, you have to do it differently. You want to say something?

**[0:44:22.9] DT:** Yeah, can you talk about those specifically, what were the issues, why can't you do it? Because I want to say, I feel there's kind of a vibe on the web, I don't know if it's actually happening at these companies but companies like Buffer for instance, we're talking about very flat organizations and open cultures and this and not traditional titles, even if they do have titles. What were the things that you ran into that said, "This is not how it can be done."

**[0:44:46.4] JL:** There's two different levels to it, one is just practically, there's a bunch of structure people need as you get larger. So here's a few things, just as examples, right? When you are a young company and you're comprised of a bunch of 20 year old's. You don't have to think about HR policies right? You're fine, we didn't either and then suddenly, one of the women who worked for us got pregnant and she said, "So what's our maternity policy." It's like, "What do you mean our maternity policy? I don't know." She's like, "Well, can you tell me? What should I plan for," right?

So now we have to write them and we should have. That was the right thing to do but when we were starting out and we were six dudes and who were like no one was having kids, you don't have to worry about that right? So what do you mean policies? So there's like an example of it. Number two, let's say you're successful and people are now with you four, five, six years. At some point, they will come to you and say, "I want to understand where my career is going," and that is a totally appropriate question and the answer to that can't be like, "Well," — and this was

literary was our answer for a while and I only realized in retrospect it was really, really bad was, “You make your own career here. There’s lots to be done, we’re flat. We have no hierarchy, there’s no titles.” I think that at some point, someone is going to say, “Look, yeah I get that. I don’t need some fake BS title, but I want some understanding of how I make progress here.”

So now suddenly you have to do reviews and you have to some way to be able to tell someone what your expectations of them are and if they are exceeding, meeting, or going below those expectations and that has to be done in a fair way across your organization. This doesn’t mean you need to employ traditional hierarchal, like what I think we’re reacting negatively to, which is what we perceive to be old corporate structures. I’m not saying you have to put those in place. There are other things you can do but you can’t do nothing and I think that what a lot of companies do is they try to do nothing.

And I think that in terms of titling and hierarchy, there’s two things. There’s one aspect of that which is about recognition. People want some ability to be recognized that “I’ve been here for seven years, I do a set of tasks that are really important to this company and I want to be recognized for this”. Titles are one way to recognize people for that. There are other ways, right? So you have to have some method of recognition and I think at some point people do, in terms of titles, I kept saying, “Titles are bullshit, what do you care about it?” Yeah, my name is also on the door, it’s easy for me to say that right? I was the CEO of the company right? What do you need titles for? I didn’t need a title but I explicitly and implicitly have one.

So I don’t think that’s a fair argument to people and I don’t think we’ve, as an industry, internalized that enough and really, really thought about that cause. So I think that you do need those types of structures and you need to start to give people some formality in terms of how can they think about their career, how they progress in those careers and how will they succeed in that and that doesn’t happen by accident. It just doesn’t happen by chance so those are all things but once again, when you’re small and you’re entrepreneurial and scrappy, you can find seven people who don’t care about that stuff.

Look, there’s enough challenges just in trying to do the thing you’re trying to do that you’re probably okay. So there’s recognition, there’s progression, there’s interesting challenges, everyone is roughly equal because there’s only seven of you, right? You can get away with

doing nothing in that scenario but that ends I would say somewhere around 18 to 20, that ends and then it really ends at 30 by the time you get that.

You can pretend that it's not happening between 20 and 30. Then when you get to 30, and I can tell you from talking to owners of companies again and again, 30 is the magic number where it breaks and it kind of makes sense. There's some tribal dynamics to it. We tend to be able to relate to people in groups of roughly 10. So suddenly, when you're two groups of 10 you know everyone in the group. Now you're three groups of 10, that becomes even harder. There's a lot of organizational behavior and dynamics at play here yeah.

**[00:49:14.6] SS:** Cool and so going now, like skipping ahead into Facebook, what was your role when you came into Facebook? Because I know right now you're running a few big teams, you're director of design and so you can tell us a little bit about your role in Facebook and how you see the scale of Facebook right now with the people that you are managing?

**[00:49:35.4] JL:** Yeah, so my role hasn't changed profoundly since I arrive. I'm overseeing roughly the same teams as when I arrived a year ago. We've moved a few teams around internally and so there's one or two teams that are new for me, one or two teams that I used to be part of my team that are now elsewhere. So I manage, I won't give you exact numbers but it's more than 50 less than a hundred designers across three offices and on about — what you'd call a product at Facebook is a bit of an arbitrary distinction where we just choose the draw the feature set and say, "these features we consider a product".

So it's somewhere between 20 to 30 products, once again, depending on how you think about them that ultimately I'm keeping track of. My job at Facebook, which was to me very similar to the job I was doing to Teehan+Lax. The way I viewed my career progression here was not that I want to go do something completely new. It was a pretty logical evolution that I've gotten to a point, if you think about our scale, we were about 50 people the majority of which were probably 25 or 30 more designers and I wasn't interested in scaling that to the next level.

But when I went to Facebook, I was able to gain that scale along with all the support that goes around it. So if you go back to my other things, which is you have to start to build these structures of support around people as you grow. I wasn't interested or probably wasn't and I

know for a fact is not experienced around to do it myself but when you come to Facebook, you have all these well-formed HR recruiting, all of these things that enable you to scale and have a lot of support and to be honest, people are really, really good at what they do surrounding you.

So that makes my job a lot easier, which is, okay, now I can think about managing a design group of let's say a hundred designers, but there's a whole set of things that I don't have to worry about because whereas you run your own company, you have to worry about all of those operational things so that's good. So for me, my job is now been able to let me focus more on how do we build really, really great products that people want to use in the world and that's really what I view my job as being and it's what I've viewed my job being actually through my career but I am just able to do it on a product that is incredibly impactful globally.

**[00:51:59.3] SS:** All right, great. That's a lot of designers to manage, that's a lot of people.

**[00:52:02.5] JL:** Well, so I have amazing managers that I work with who manage their teams. So I don't manage each one of those designers individually. I actually like the size we're at right now because I still know every designer. It's not so large that I don't know the names of everyone and I can have time with them and I can be somewhat accessible to them. As we scale, there will just be a practical limitation how many hours there are in the day and how many brands my name can hold but we haven't hit that yet.

So I think we're at a good place, and you'd be surprised though at how quickly you adapt to keeping track of that number of things. You get good at knowing what information are important, what to pay attention to and what not to pay attention to. It becomes a skill you get good at.

**[00:52:53.8] SS:** All right.

**[00:52:54.6] DT:** So what's the structure that you have under you in Facebook? In this design group structure and also, going back to your career ladder talk before, how is it set up at Facebook to make it successful?

**[00:53:06.8] JL:** Yeah, so really at Facebook we tend to focus things around products. So those 20 to 30 products that exist, some of those group together into — so there's very small products

that exist out of larger products. So an example of that would be events is one of the products that I manage. So events we consider that at product team but inside of events, there will be a team of designers and engineers that work on private events.

So a private event would be like kid's birthday party. You want to organize some of that and then we have another team that works on public events. Public events. Public events are like concerts, a Beyoncé concert. So events is the product and if you think about what are you going to build for a large concert promoter to promote their event is obviously going to be a different feature set than what you build for someone to organize a birthday party for their children, right? And then even inside of that, there might be some sub-divisions of features where designers might work on some subset of those features.

So there will be managers on events and there will be designers on events, so you do that along the line and if you know enough about how Facebook is organized, you can actually look at the blue app and see the different teams inside of it, right? I think one thing that we have been really good at is hiding that from people. I think that when people go like, "Why does Facebook work this way?" What they're really probably seeing in those moments is just different teams working on our problems and that we haven't caught some of the differences and we have to rationalize those so they seem similar.

One thing I think we do really well at Facebook is we have two distinct career ladders, well for everyone but I'll just speak for designers. One career ladder allows you to be a great designer and continue to be a great designer for the rest of your career. The other one is a management career ladder and they are separate, and you can actually move between them within reason. The reason for this is that in most career ladders, as you rise up, and this was definitely true in my career, as you rise up you get to a point where in order for you to continue to progress you have to manage and that is a bad, bad thing.

And the reason for that is that it assumes that you're best designer is your best manager and that is not true at all. In fact, it is rarely true and so by having parallel paths where someone can continue to rise up as a designer and be at least from a job ladder and compensation and recognition at an equivalent level of someone who's managing, that's really, really important and

we don't force designers to make — like basically, you have to choose to stagnate your career and not manage.

If you work at companies where you've seen this, where you've got a designer who's pretty senior, doesn't want to manage, they kind of just sit at this level and they can't go any higher and then either they leave or what more likely happens is they get forced into management, which they hate and aren't very good at and then we get upset because they're failing at that part of their job.

**[00:56:17.0] SS:** I think it's a great distinction and those two career paths are something that a lot of companies should build, especially for designers which the talent this is something that you always want to have going on in a way. For me, when I started managing, I was really afraid that I'm going to lose my design skills. So I was always in a constant kind of, "I've got to have design time during the week." So I was looking all the time how can I design while still managing and I found that it was really hard.

And eventually, the company expected for me to do both and that was super hard. So yeah, the first time I heard this kind of approach was Mike Montero when he was talking about taking the designer and making them a manager is not the right thing to do exactly. But yeah, I think for any good designer that does choose a management career, do you have any tips on how could they get into the management? Any practical tips on starting out?

**[00:57:14.6] JL:** So first of all, you have to start from the position of this is something you want to do as a skill, which I just said, I think that it's okay if you don't want to manage and there's a few analogies that I use. One is a sports analogy which is very rarely in the history of sports has the best player become the best coach, right? Generally the best coaches were actually pretty bad players or maybe didn't even play at all or it's been a long time since they've played.

The reason for that is that it's a different set of skills to be the best versus to get the best out of people and so first thing is you have to want to have to be great at getting the best out of people. So assuming that is true for you, the major thing I would say is you have to get comfortable with the notion that your job is now to make other people look good as opposed to

make yourself look good and that takes a tremendous amount of self-confidence or at least an amount of comfort that you're comfortable being in the shadows.

I think ultimately, I think of my job and I think a manager's job is that you take none of the credit but all of the blame. So my first tip for people is really think about whether you're okay with that and then start to operate from that position meaning, make choices about what you're going to do or how you're going to accomplish those things and then I think it's kind of open ended about how you do that. There are a million books on management, none of them are correct or right or wrong, they're only right or wrong for you and your style.

So the first thing that you want to do, I think, is to start to get a sense of what style of management works for you, right? So if you have accepted that your job is to make other people look good, you're kind of going to now have to go in the shadows, your job is to lift other people up, then how are you going to do that, right? And there are different ways of doing that. Some people do it through what I will consider an approach, which is really just about caring very deeply for individuals so you spend a lot of time making sure you employees are happy. You make sure that are they personally happy and you spend a lot of time optimizing that.

Others I think spend time trying to set up a whole bunch of factors to make sure that the work is getting done really well. Others try to just clear. So often in organizations, the biggest challenge for the teams is there's other people in the way so engineering is in the way, management is in the way and so sometimes the manager use their job as to clear a path so their team can move forward. I think there's a bunch of different ways that you can manage, but at the end of the day, you're just trying to make other people look good and you're trying to figure out what it's going to take to do that.

**[01:00:15.2] SS:** Good, that's a great tip.

**[01:00:16.1] JL:** Yeah, I know that just for myself, I tend to do a little bit of a clearing work. So I try to figure out what's preventing the team from being good at what they do and then look to just get rid of those road blocks whatever they are because I am not saying that my situation in Facebook is management. That's not our issue at all but it's often that there's just something that's preventing the team and it's usually like a really small thing that with two e-mails and a

message I can get rid of for them because it's either a miscommunication or the circuit is not connecting.

It's pretty easy for me to be like, "Oh hey, no we just need to," — and once again I am using hand gestures that you can't see if you are doing laundry right now or whatever you're doing listening to this. But with my hands, I am making my hands go together, closing the circuit yeah. That's a lot of what I find my day is. The other thing and I spend a lot of time in my day doing, which I hope is valuable to my teams is trying to give context for the work that they're doing. So trying to shape and help them understand the trends and forces that are acting on this product and how they can make design decisions inside of that.

I think that one thing we don't do enough with designers is we spend a lot and it's not easy but we will tend to spend a lot of time debating craft, right? "Oh, have you thought about this type choice or this color choice? Or there's alignment issues here, there's tension between these two elements," and I think that's great. I think those are all very valuable but I feel that it comes with a cost of us contextualizing the design decisions that we're making. Does this solve a problem for people? How does this design solution, this feature you're presenting, this flow that you're doing, how does that actually helps one make progress in the thing they were trying to do? How does this answer a problem they have and will we be able to generate data when they use this that will tell us whether we're helping them gain progress?

I don't think we do enough of that. We don't spend enough time understanding those forces. The things that push and pull you towards using something and the anxieties and habits that prevent you from using it. So I spend a lot of my time talking to my teams about those things, which are grounded in research, they're grounded in data, they're grounded in economics. Because I think the craft stuff, to be honest, we do that pretty instinctively and so like an extra effort in craft is probably not as valuable versus an extra hour of talking about context.

**[01:02:54.2] SS:** That's a great thing to preach to designers I think and so by the way, do you have any design principles you wrote down in Facebook and stuff like that in order to also give context to design decisions?

**[01:03:08.0] JL:** So I ask teams and this has gotten some popularity in the company to answer three questions for me. Whenever I look at work, I wanted the answers to three questions and I don't know if these are principles but this is the closest thing I have to principles. So the question I want to know is: What problem are you trying to solve? How do you know this is a real problem not just one you made up? And how will you know this will solve this problem for people?

If you think about those three questions, the first one, what problem are you trying to solve? So I fundamentally believe that all design has to solve a problem or something. If it doesn't, it's art. I think a design that doesn't solve a problem is just art and there's a great — art is awesome but I'm not an artist and I don't manage artists so it's not valuable for me. So once I see design that doesn't have a clear problem it's solving, it's either not very effective design or its art, right? That's how I think about it.

So in order to answer that, you actually have to spend some time talking to people, you have to actually understand the context within which the thing you're designing exist, just to be able to answer that question well. The second one is how do you know this is a real problem? In order to answer that question, it means you've done some research and that there's some evidence that this is a problem that existed and that you just didn't imagine it. It's very easy for us to imagine problems for imaginary people.

This is the most common one and it's your mom right? "My mom does this, wouldn't my mom use this?" and not that your mom is imaginary but I guarantee you, even if you had this situation with your mom, you haven't probably interrogated your mom well enough to deeply understand the problem and so I worry that we use these proxies. I also don't typically love personas, to be totally honest, as a device because I find that personas are often some amalgamation of people and in order to fill in the cracks, you putty it over or with imaginary connective tissue.

I don't want to speak ill totally of personas. I think they can be useful but I tend not to use them that much. So how do you know these aren't imaginary problems right? And then finally, how do you know if you solve that problem for people? This is something I think we don't do enough as designers, which is what data — after we put this thing into the world, what data will tell us if we

were successful or not and when you design, did you design in such a way that you can actually get this out of the system, right?

So one thing that we found is people often measure the wrong thing. You want to, when you're designing something, have a good understanding like, what data will this give me that will tell if I'm successful. For example, I'll just use Teehan+Lax's website as an example because we were talking about it, so it might be helpful to go back to it. So for example, let's just use your website or a website, if you want to understand if you've solve this problem for people, what data point are you looking at? Do visits, is that the thing that tells you if you've solved it for people? I think one thing that medium did really smartly is they started to look at read time as opposed to just like clicks. So they wanted to understand were people actually reading their articles because they value total reading time as a metric.

**[1:06:30.2] DT:** How do they measure read time as opposed to just on page?

**[1:06:33.8] JL:** Yes, there's a few ways you can do it. I think the way that Medium does it, they've talked publicly about this but is that, it's a combination of looking at how long you spend on the page, your scroll rate, they can get pretty good data. We know that humans read at a pretty consistent pace. So you can tell if someone, if it takes about — that's how you can do the like this takes about five minutes to read and if you're spending five minutes and you're scrolling at a certain pace, they can pretty much tell your pace of reading.

But for example if you're like, the way I'm going to tell if I've solved the problem I have and if you're a content site, the problem people have is they try to be informed or something like that is read time then you'll start to figure out how to instrument your product in order to get you that data and then use that to influence your future decisions. So those three questions to me are super important and they're pretty easy to ask but they're really hard to answer well. If you actually try to answer each one of those well, it means you're doing research, it means you're looking at data, it means that you are deeply understanding the problems that exist. So that's why I like those three.

**[1:07:38.8] DT:** We should have asked before you mentioned that honesty was one of the values you wrote down in your company. I'm curious, what were the others? What was on that list?

**[1:07:45.8] JL:** Yeah, the values we had at that time where we valued on honesty, we valued the creation of things. So what we meant by that was like, we always like things that were pretty pragmatic, we like building things that people used, we like pragmatic things. So we tended to do stuff, so if you take that and you extrapolate it out, we tended to work on — we wanted to work on clients and products that were functional in nature versus ornamental. We didn't actually do much in terms of advertising or you wouldn't see us creating really cinematic sites, right? Where it was all about like kind of overblown story telling. Because those weren't things that we valued heavily.

The other ones were like we valued the act of creation. We've thought that design was as much about the process as it was the final product and we very much valued that process. The way that manifested itself in real terms was one of the things those stories did was they spoke deeply about the act of creation as being something valuable. So for example, what we would do is sometimes we would show, "Look at all the things we made to make this." The reason we wanted to do that is because we wanted the people who hired us to be like, "Oh my god, look how much work went into this."

My favorite moment of that is in the readability case study, one of the things you can do is you can actually see every asset we created for readability. Readability is a read later product, and if you look at the actual product, it's incredibly sparse right? It's mainly articles, stripped out. There are over 3,000 individual visual assets inside of that product but you wouldn't know, right? To look at it, and so that was actually a problem we found when we were trying to sell design which is like, "If we've done our job really well, the design goes away." That's actually an interesting challenge at Facebook. We spend a lot of time trying to make Facebook the UI be very like not in your way and as a result, people are like, "What does the designer at Facebook do," right?

I actually think that this is a problem all designers have. Because if you do your job incredibly well, the UI disappears. Then it looks like it's not designed and what we wanted to do, and I think that this is something that's valuable for designers to do is to go like, "No, no, no, there is a

tremendous amount of work that goes in to making something look like there was not much there because it's an act of reduction, that takes an incredible amount of time to reduce something down to its barest essence, to only the things that need to be there.”

I very much have that aesthetic. I value that aesthetically, I like things that are where there's almost nothing left to be removed, I tend to not love over, if you come to my home, it's very clean lines and minimal things. I don't love overdrawn or overdone aesthetics and I think a lot of designers in product feel similarly, it's why we are attracted to Dieter Rams' work which is that's a core principle of. I think for a long time, we tend to like Apples because I think that's once again part of their aesthetic which is part of Dieter Rams' aesthetic. I think a lot of us tend to like modern, modernism.

I think a few of us have dabbled over the years in some more, for example you saw a trend for a while where people were using a lot of slab Serifs in their work like a lot of blog — you still do, you see that a lot in the poster design and things like that but there was a time, it never really caught as an aesthetic. Our aesthetics tend to be more towards the Swiss and now those styles, you tend to see people use sans serifs more than seriffed fonts, although that's changing a little bit but we don't use gothics very often. So I think there's something about digital design because it's a screen that we gravitate towards the cleanliness and then of course as screens have gotten smaller, we need to embrace that even more, right? So that's some like pure aesthetic design talk at the end of this.

**[1:12:05.4] SS:** Very cool. All right, I guess that wraps us up. Jon, thank you so much. That was a super insightful talk. Also we talked about so many different subjects and different parts of the grid.

**[1:12:14.7] JL:** Yeah good luck editing this.

**[1:12:18.7] DT:** Yeah man, definitely. You're a jack of all trades and all over so many different fields that you were able to touch on there. I really appreciated that, I really enjoyed that.

**[1:12:27.0] SS:** Yeah, thanks so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[1:12:38.7] SS:** We would like to thank Launch School for sponsoring this episode.

**[1:12:42.6] DT:** Launch School is an online school for developers, but what makes it so special is they have programs that would be perfect for designers because they take a slow path for serious beginners to be able to master software development and product companies.

**[1:12:53.9] SS:** Yeah, thanks a lot Launch School and by the way, all of their prep courses are free and have great videos and several books that you can start off with. Now, we got some exciting news for you, we'll be in San Francisco next week and we're hosting two meetups on Wednesday August 24<sup>th</sup> and Thursday August 25<sup>th</sup> 2016, worth adding.

**[1:13:13.7] DT:** Yeah, so our first meetup will be a micro workshop to start off your personal brand. The stuff we'll talk about is taken from our Side Project Accelerator. This will be a part lecture, part hands on experience in which we'll discuss our philosophy of audience driven product development, the giver versus taker theory, and the techniques we use to create our continent hacking UI. This session will be interactive and by the end of the night you'll be on your way and have the tools to publish your first article and build your personal brand as a side project.

**[1:13:38.7] SS:** Yeah, the second meetup is about scaling a design team so if you've been listening to this podcast, you're going to want to be part of it. We're going to go into all the insights that we've learned from interviewing the world's top design leaders and also talk about what work for us with our team in Similar Web.

**[1:13:54.7] DT:** So we'll have all the details in our show notes so simply visit [Hackingui.com](http://Hackingui.com) for details.

[END]