



**CAREER OPTIMIZATION**  
**THROUGH DESIGN THINKING**

# THE UX OF ME

CAREER OPTIMIZATION THROUGH DESIGN THINKING

By Chris Jones

## DISCLAIMER

The ideas and strategies in this book are purely theoretical. They have not been proven and simply provide a point of view. Responsibility for any actions taken, based on reading this book, lies solely with the reader. The author is not liable for either the successes or failures brought about by changes in behavior inspired by what is written. By reading beyond this point, each reader accepts responsibility for his or her decision to try out the following method.

# THE UX OF ME: INDEX

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1 - THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

CHAPTER 2 - WHAT IS UX?

CHAPTER 3 - GETTING STARTED

CHAPTER 4 – OBSERVATION

CHAPTER 5 – INSPIRATION

CHAPTER 6 - TESTING & REVISION

CHAPTER 7 – ACTION

CHAPTER 8 - RE-EVALUATION

WRAPUP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# INTRODUCTION

You've probably heard it said (or seen it written on a t-shirt) that life doesn't come with an instruction manual. Well exactly the same could be said of our professional lives. Once we're sitting behind our desk, standing behind a counter or in whichever position our job requires, what happens next is often completely in our own hands. Apart from the specific tasks set out in our job description or instructions given by a supervisor, when it comes to our career as a whole we usually have to figure things out by ourselves. For something that's such a big part of life, it seems crazy that we just have to make it up as we go along. It's like a giant puzzle that you've got to piece together, and like most self-assembly kits there is usually an important part missing. Some of us can be really lucky and find a mentor at a crucial point in our careers, an experienced and patient person who can guide us towards success. Or maybe you'll find yourself working for a company that gives regular performance feedback and a clearly structured career path. Unfortunately, most of us just have to muddle through, trying to work out how to do our job better or how to stay relevant.

**With so much to think about to just get the job done day in and day out, very few of us take time to consider what's the real purpose or come up with a plan for our career.**

Some people know exactly where they are going or they're naturally gifted at climbing the corporate ladder. This book isn't for them. It's for anyone that wants to progress in their career but hasn't got a strategy (or even a clue) how to make it happen. If you don't get constructive feedback, haven't got a good mentor or find it hard to figure out how to get to the next level then this book is designed for you. Even if you've worked for many years and are thinking "I wish that someone had told me all of this much sooner", it's not too late. What you're about to read could give your career a second wind by changing people's perception of you. No matter what industry you work in, at whichever level, the method set out in the following pages is designed to make you more valuable to your company and ultimately help you find more personal meaning in your career.

## CHAPTER 1

# THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

*“We don’t see things as they are,  
we see them as we are”*

- Anais Nin, Writer

Whether we like to admit it or not, we are all quite self-centered. It's basic human nature. We are trapped, not just in a body (which most of us wish looked a lot better) but also inside a mind that colors the world outside our heads. Our interior monologue is like an annoying running commentary on what's going on around us, imagining what other people are thinking about us or judging others by our own standards or personal values. Too much of our energy is focused on what we are experiencing and feeling. We'd like things to go our way a little more, be recognized for our true value and rewarded for our hard work. The truth is, nobody is perfect and how we think or feel can actually be a real hindrance to our success in life, whether it's in personal relationships or in our careers. How we see others is often a reflection of how we see ourselves. If only we could be more objective and less self-absorbed then maybe our life could be a whole lot better.

At work, we can be seriously held back by this focus on how we are feeling. We can take things too personally and can often suffer from a sense of just not being good enough. Or perhaps we feel that we are too good and are insensitive to how our arrogance or inconsiderate attitude affects others. We might think that what we do cannot be done better by anyone else. Superiority can be just as much a barrier as feeling second best. Apart from those working as solitary lighthouse keepers, we all have to deal with other people every single day, each of them inside his or her own bubble of thoughts looking out at the world. If we really care about how well we are doing in whichever career we have chosen, it's vital to think outside ourselves and understand how we can connect better with those we interact with each day. To put ourselves in their shoes, or better still - their minds, to see how we can be the person they need us to be. Not just someone that fulfills a function, but a valued employee that is indispensable and helps get the job done brilliantly.

**At work, when you interact with colleagues, customers or clients, have you ever asked yourself how they experience you as a person?**

Throughout my whole career, I've always wondered how I could be better. What could I do to overcome my weaknesses and become more successful? What follows is my solution this big question, a method designed to help anyone get beyond his or her perceived limitations and improve how others see them. You could say that this book has been 30 years in the making. It's a mixture of fact, fiction and a little fantasy, all wrapped up in a theory that brings together two aspects of my experience that led me to a light bulb moment. Like any theory it's a work in progress that hopefully readers will build on through their own experiences. Maybe you won't follow everything in this book. That's totally fine. But even if you just take one thing onboard from reading this, it believe that it will help push you one step closer to your goal.

As humans we are always evolving, or maybe revolving, it can be hard to tell sometimes. The main thing is to keep moving.

## **Two key aspects of my 30+ years working experience helped form this theory.**

First of all is my choice of career. For the last few decades I have worked in the world of advertising. Let me just say that it isn't as glamorous as you might see it portrayed in TV shows or in movies. We don't sit around drinking whiskey and making sexist remarks. It is, however, a lot more complex than most people think it is. There are so many different forms of advertising and marketing, but they all are designed to achieve something quite specific - help consumers know about a product, make them try it and then keep on buying it. There's as much science as there is art to this. Every product has to be more than purely functional too, especially when there are so many competitive products out there. That's where a brand is important. The definition of a brand (according to Wikipedia) is "a toolbox of marketing and communication methods that help to distinguish a company from competitors and create a lasting impression in the minds of customers". To be successful, a brand has to attract attention, appeal to customers, project its personality, express a truth that resonates with its audience and (above all) be unique. A brand might have many different products but all the best brands succeed because they have built a strong identity that people can relate to. There is a lot more to it of course. Advertising has to build a brand so people know what it stands for and even love it, making someone's brand choice an extension of their own personal identity. Some people are Coke and others are Pepsi for reasons beyond just taste preference. My work has involved so many different aspects of marketing communications yet they have all had the goal of contributing to a **positive experience** someone has with a brand or product. From print advertising to websites, in-store communication to social media, everything a brand does or says builds on this experience and imprints on the public's mind what the brand represents. Next time they recommend a product to a friend it will be from a brand they feel positively about.

The second aspect that brought me to write this book has been my experience mentoring people or being mentored throughout my years working in different types of advertising agencies in various countries. No matter what kind of job we have, there is usually one thing in common; we all have to interact with other people. What's more, all these people have certain expectations of us. Our bosses, colleagues, clients or collaborators need our opinions, our help, our advice or they simply want us to do something for them and do it well. I've always been a keen observer and believe that I have a good instinct when it comes to understanding someone's motivation. With my ability to get to the heart of the matter, I've found over the years that many people have come to me for insight or honest advice about different work situations. Empathy combined with straight-talking honesty isn't something people find in abundance. I believe it is what has drawn people to me as they looked for ways to improve their situations or find new directions.

I'm also pretty hard on myself, always questioning how I can improve my performance, push myself further and avoid becoming just a piece of furniture. Only when you put a spotlight on your own weakness can you be honest about those of others.

**Helping clients improve the image of their brand/products and helping colleagues make their mark or progress in their careers is actually not so different.** Both need a combination of insight, strategy and creativity. They each need to work on how they are perceived by the customer. The truth is, in whatever career we've chosen, **we constantly have to sell ourselves.** If we see ourselves as a product or a service, you could say that every person we interact with is a "user" or customer. Our boss, co-workers, subordinates, clients, collaborators, if they don't "buy" us then we won't get very far.

Picture yourself at work. You have particular tasks that you need to fulfill, some of these you do solo and others as a team. Maybe you have people working under you. Certainly there are people above you who have their eye on how well you're performing. If you care about your career at all you've no doubt spent time wondering how well you are doing. But in reality, there is so much more to success than just doing your job well. **Every interaction you have with colleagues, clients or anyone else you connect with as part of your job, all adds up to an overall impression and definition of how you're perceived. This is your personal brand.** It builds up over time just like any brand grows its image. Some of it can be subliminal and some more obvious. Every person that comes into contact with you has an experience that colors his or her opinion, not just of how well you perform but what kind of a person you are. It's about the value you bring to them, how you make them feel and the way you help them be better at their job too.

### **Take a moment and ask yourself: what is the essence of your brand?**

For those lucky people with effortless talent and charisma, they can probably stop reading this now. This is for those that have always needed to try that much harder. It's for the underdogs, the inferiority complex sufferers, anyone who has watched someone at work who just seems to be naturally and annoyingly brilliant then felt second best (or less). The truth is, we might never be that amazing but that should not stop us continually improving. This book is also for those people that see themselves as highly competent at their jobs but are somehow perceived as difficult or not team players. What you're about to read isn't a manual for becoming someone you're not. That would be a mistake and not sustainable. It's more a tool to help you fine-tune your positives and minimize your negatives so those you work with every day see you as someone truly valuable.

**It's time to make the most of what you've got (even if you think it's not a lot).**

## **Welcome to the UX of ME.**

## CHAPTER 2

# WHAT IS UX?

*“Nothing ever becomes real  
‘til it is experienced”*

- John Keats, English Romantic Poet

## **UX stands for user experience.**

Maybe it's a new term for you. If that's so, the first thing to know is that UX is pronounced like "You Ex" and doesn't rhyme with "bucks" or some other, ruder words. According to Wikipedia, "*UX involves a person's emotions and attitudes about using a particular product, system or service.*

*User experience includes the "practical, experiential, affective, meaningful and valuable aspects of human-computer interaction and product ownership. Additionally, it includes a person's perceptions of system aspects such as utility, ease of use and efficiency. User experience is dynamic as it is constantly modified over time due to changing usage circumstances and changes to individual systems as well as the wider usage context in which they can be found"*

**If that sounds a bit geeky (or boring), let me put it more simply. If you interact with anything, from a website to a mobile phone, an airline check-in desk or a carton of milk – you are having a user experience.**

You might also hear it described sometimes as "customer experience". But for the sake of this book let's keep it simple.

The discipline of UX has grown in importance over time within the fields of design and marketing. It can even determine a company's success or failure. Anyone that manages a brand today cares about UX. According to one of the master practitioners of UX, Jakob Nielsen: "User experience" encompasses all aspects of the end-user's interaction with a company, its services, and its products. This should not be confused with UI, which is the user interface that allows you to interact with or use a product or service. **UX is the end result, it's an emotional and rational reaction to what you've just experienced and determines if you will want to continue buying or using what that company or brand offers.**

As part of creating a great user experience, there is one popular methodology that uses solution-focused thinking to identify a goal instead of trying to immediately solve specific problems. This is known as **Design Thinking** and is used by educators, architects, web designers or anyone involved in the field of UX. You may think that design is purely about the end result, be it a physical object or graphic image. But design can be a process too that can help solve problems. It's not a new concept either. Wikipedia mentions that Nobel laureate Herbert Alexander Simon, an American economist, sociologist and computer scientist, wrote in the "Sciences of the Artificial" (MIT Press, 1969) that "design" is the **"transformation of existing conditions into preferred ones"**.

Interestingly, in the past few years there has been a huge increase in the number of businesses adopting Design Thinking as a way to make their organizations more customer-centric and ultimately more

competitive. Just do a Google search using the words “Design Thinking competitive advantage” and you’ll find many articles on websites such as Harvard Business Review, Forbes and Fast Company, showing how Design Thinking is a growing trend that is helping many organizations transform their businesses from the inside out. This approach is helping transform employee experience management, customer service and corporate strategy (to name just a few) by focusing on defining the core essentials of a company while continually finding ways to improve. Later we will look at some of the companies that have used Design Thinking to create many of the products or services we use every day to give you a clearer picture of what I’m talking about. Oh, and just one note to any UX experts reading this – I apologize if this book annoys or offends you with its UX shorthand and liberal adaptation of Design Thinking methods. It’s not meant to be a definitive expression of UX but more a plundering of some of its basic theories with a large dose of creative license.

## WHAT IS GREAT UX?

To my mind, **Lego** is possibly one of the best user experiences ever. It’s intuitive from the moment you pick up two colorful pieces and realize that they fit together perfectly. It’s attractive and appealing because of its colors and shapes as well as being interactive and highly addictive. But best of all, it’s whatever you want it to be and is only limited by your own imagination (and how many bricks you’ve collected)! It also puts a smile on everyone’s face. Anyone can make something with Lego with just a little imagination.

Another, more obvious example is the current overlord of the technology world. **Apple** has created possibly the most complete, seamless and inspirational user experience. Others might describe it as totalitarian, but for those that love the brand it is insanely great. From their beautiful product designs to the intuitive software that runs on it, the gleaming stores where you buy them, the customer service with youthful, uniformed “geniuses” and the slick marketing communication – everything Apple does speaks with one voice and delivers a complete, meaningful experience. There are Apple haters out there but there are many millions that have bought the dream and flock to the stores for the Apple experience. There is a reason why so many other brands try to mimic Apple, whether it is the product design, website or the in-store atmosphere. This perfection in user experience is worth its weight in gold (space grey, silver and rose gold too).

## WHAT IS BAD UX?

We’ve all experienced it. From packaging that’s impossible to open, airline websites where booking a flight is painful or a visit to the bank with massive queues and unhelpful staff. Once you’ve experienced something negative it can deeply affect your opinion and future behavior. As a user or customer of these

products and services, you can be left with a very bad taste in your mouth. It's the same with an APP on your phone. If you can't find what you're looking for, get confused or frustrated, then you'll be deleting it very quickly. Whether that APP was for entertainment, business or purely informational, you definitely won't recommend it to someone else. Bad user experience can be found everywhere, from digital interfaces to physical signs or notices, personal interactions or virtual ones, product design, physical retail spaces or customer service helplines. Since human beings have the habit of reacting more strongly to negative experiences than to positive ones, if you mess up your UX there won't be any second chances. What's more, these unhappy customers can now tell everyone else thanks to the power of social media!

## SO WHAT'S YOUR UX?

**In our chosen careers we are all trying to sell ourselves too**, just like a brand, product or service. We want to be offered a great job or promotion and want our colleagues or clients to like and admire us (or the work we've done). We all want to be praised and valued. If these people we interact with every day are the "users" then what is their user experience of us? Is it positive or negative? Would they say good things about us to others? How do they feel about us personally and professionally? To quote the author Maya Angelou, *"people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel"*.

## WHAT IF WE APPLIED THE DISCIPLINE OF USER EXPERIENCE TO OURSELVES? COULD WE USE IT TO HELP US INTERACT BETTER WITH OTHERS, HARNESSING THE TECHNIQUES OF DESIGN THINKING TO IMPROVE OUR VALUE AS EMPLOYEES AND ULTIMATELY MAKE US MORE USEFUL AND EFFECTIVE?

I decided to call this methodology **THE UX OF ME**. As I write this it's still just an intriguing theory and nothing has been proved. Hopefully the people reading will be my lab rats. As time goes by I look forward to hearing how some readers have taken all or some of the following strategies and used them with successful outcomes. Please email me your feedback at [theuxofme@gmail.com](mailto:theuxofme@gmail.com)

As you read the following chapters, you may feel that this isn't relevant to you. Perhaps you'll think that because of my career background this is only useful for people working in creative industries. So I anticipated this response and in chapter 7 you'll find several success scenarios. Two are based on input from real people I know working in very different sectors to my own, along with one from my industry too.

Although these scenarios have been fictionalized, I hope you'll see that anyone can benefit from optimizing their career using the following methods. **It's all about having the ability to imagine different paths to success, narrowing down the best one to take, then taking action.**

One more thing before we get started. Don't let negative thoughts tell you that you haven't even got the raw materials to become successful. If you talk to anyone that has achieved big things in their career you'll be surprised by how imperfect they are as people. They might suffer from self-doubt, be prone to procrastination, have trouble focusing or simply be a lot less talented than you imagine. What these people have learned is how not to be held back by these weaknesses. They were able to recognize their shortcomings and control them enough to allow their best attributes to shine. Above all, they believed that they were capable of something better and set out to make it happen. When your positives outweigh the negatives, you've reached a tipping point that will allow you to see that your goals are possible. Maybe you're not destined to be CEO of a multinational company, very few people are, but you're definitely capable of taking charge of your own success. Nobody else is going to do it for you.

## It's time to get started...

Order the book now and start improving the way you interact with everyone:

<https://amzn.com/B01LBVGF1Y>

For more details visit the book's website:

[www.theuxofme.com](http://www.theuxofme.com)

