

FIRE!

The world's first Experience Campfire

From
Engineering To
The End Of
Storytelling

Exclusive ideas and insights
from the world's leading
experience designers

Volume 1



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NOTE: THIS IS A LOW RES VERSION TO READ ON SCREEN.
IF YOU PREFER A PRINT-READY VERSION, EMAIL
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Established in 2020, with co-founders from Shanghai to San Francisco, **The World Experience Organization – The W XO** – is a global institution dedicated to improving the quality of experiences, enhancing opportunities for experience creators, and promoting the Experience Economy.

We're a "campfire" around which innovators from all experience sectors gather to share stories, opinions and insights – on what the Experience Economy needs, where it's heading, and, most importantly, what it takes to design and deliver a great experience. Think World Economic Forum meets B Corps... but for the Experience Economy.

Welcome to the Experience Campfire...

WELCOME, welcome —
to our very first edition of FIRE!

We hope it'll be a useful way for you to delve into some of the curious, genius, and just plain useful ideas that come out of the Campfires.

It may morph into 'XQ — The Experience Quarterly', a round up of what's new and next across the Experience Economy. Do let me know what you think of that idea.

If you're reading this, you really are one of the pioneers: one of the people who's not only creating experiences and interested in making better experiences and becoming a better experience designer, but who's also, I believe, at the vanguard of the next great evolution of human society.

If you're thinking, "Calm down, James! it's only immersive cinema, UX, CX, entertainment, gaming, experiential marketing! It's just a job! It's just an industry!" — give me a chance to explain.

**"If you're reading this,
you're one of the
pioneers..."**

JAMES WALLMAN

Think what life was like a hundred years ago in 1921. Think about our ancestors' standards of living. Now compare that with today. Think of things like central heating, air conditioning, hot water, power showers, wall-to-wall carpets, TVs, regular holidays, air travel, space travel (!), jobs that are far less factory and drudgery, far more interesting, advances in healthcare, both for the body and for the mind.

The reason for this transformational change is very simple: it's capitalism, based on the practice of consumerism and a value system called materialism. This materialistic consumerism has catapulted us forward, transforming standards of living in a way unprecedented in human history.

Where am I going with this brief run through our recent history? Here: I think we're standing on the brink of a similar transformation. Just as consumerism, underpinned by the materialism which took root in the 1920s, transformed standards of living for billions in the 20th century — so experientialism and the experience industries will transform quality of life in the 21st century.

What will quality of life look like a hundred years from now, in 2121? I'm a cultural forecaster, have been since 2004, so I've a few ideas. Though of course I don't *know*. But if you think of the advances in standards of living in the past 100 years — just imagine how amazing, and frankly how fantastic, quality of life might be by 2121. What's the quality of life upgrade equivalent of hot running water, electricity and central heating as standard? What's the quality of life version of the introduction of air travel?

And the fuel for this revolution is coming from *you* — the researchers, makers, pioneers of the Experience Economy — as you create better user, customer, passenger, patient, audience, and employee experiences. More engaging destinations and high streets and Main Streets. More interesting, intriguing, and enjoyable education and itineraries and *lives*.

**"Experientialism
will transform
quality of life
in the 21st century."**

JAMES WALLMAN

So when you're designing your next experience, remember that you're not only trying to entertain or connect better with your guests or audience or customers. You're not only working to grow your business, keep the lights on, feed your family, and keep your team employed. You're also building the movement that's going to change the world.

I hope you enjoy this issue of FIRE!, and that you find useful ideas here that help you design better experiences and become a better experience designer.

I'd love to hear if/how it's helpful for you.



James Wallman, CEO, W XO

CAMPFIRE 1

Engineering, And Why Ends Matter

To make sparks fly at our first Campfire, we started at the end. Featuring talks from Joe Macleod, Bob Rossman, Diane Magers, and Claus Raasted.

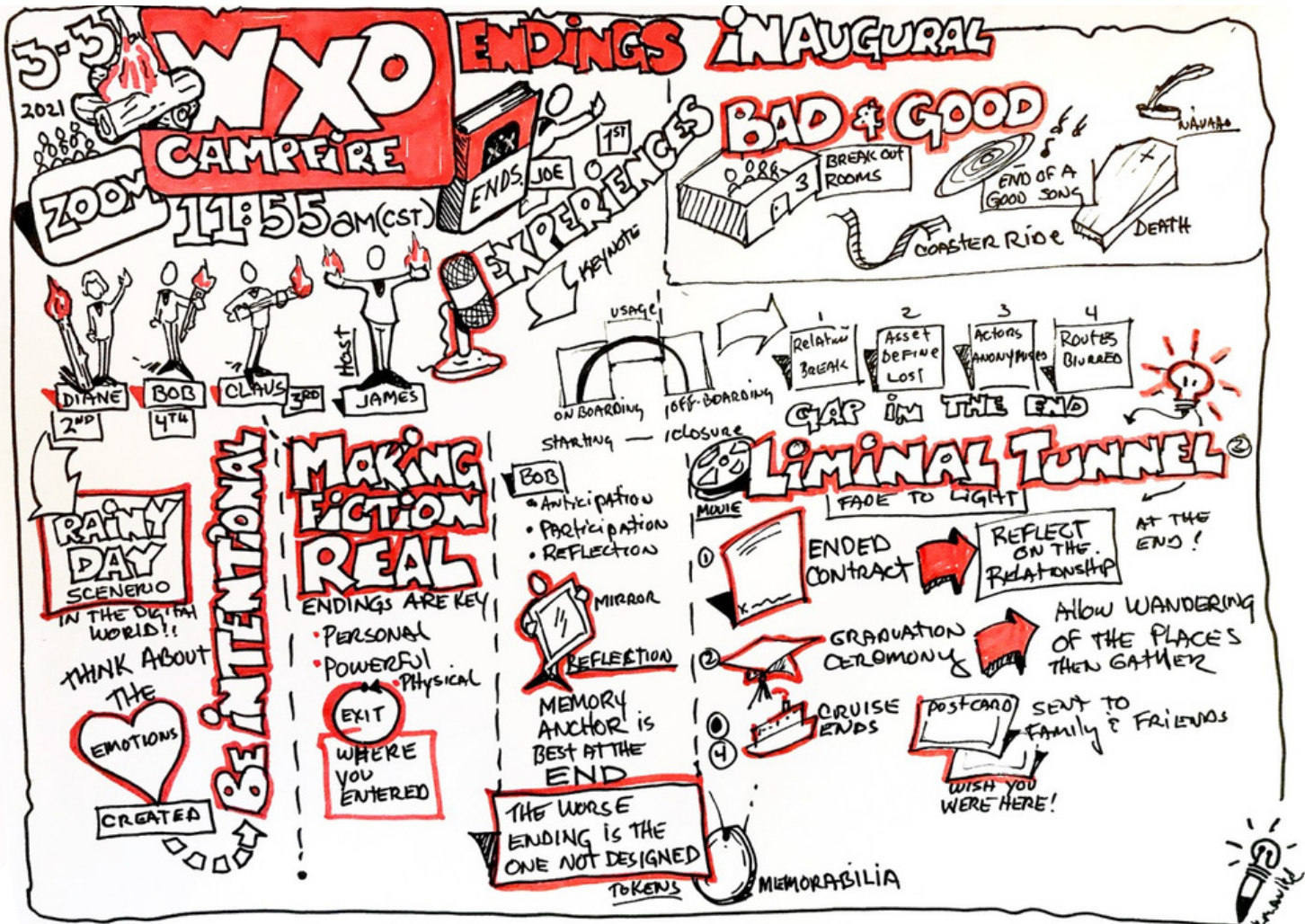
And they all engineered happily ever after...

For our very first, very experimental W XO Campfire, we got sparks flying by beginning at the end.

Inspired by Joe Macleod's pioneering work on the eight types of ending, for the inaugural gathering of W XO's Founding Circle we asked participants to fuse their thinking on how to design better endings to experiences, which too often end up being more whimper than bang.

From Shanghai to Stockholm, Iowa to Warsaw, experienced experts from around the globe joined us in the Zoom room to unpick what makes a truly good – or bad – ending.

Immersive theatre creators, experience design professors, UX designers and LARPing legends gave and listened to four firestarter talks, before transforming some damp squib endings into flaming finales.

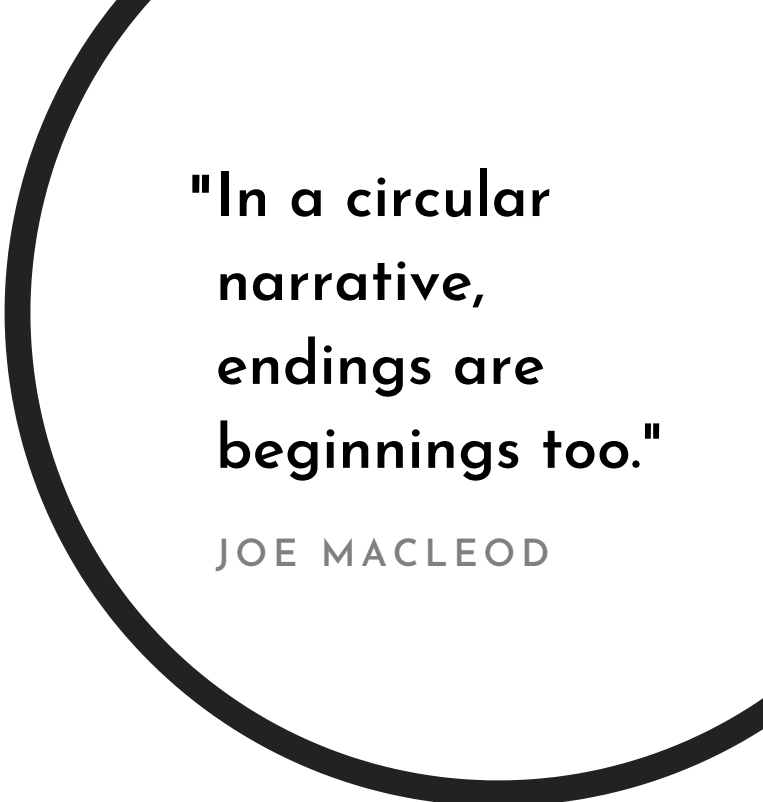


Visual representation of Campfire 1 by experience designer Kevin Dulle



UX DESIGNER AND AUTHOR

Joe Macleod focuses on an area that others overlook: endings.



**"In a circular
narrative,
endings are
beginnings too."**

JOE MACLEOD

To unpack the consumer experience from onboarding to usage and offboarding, UX designer Joe Macleod took us on a journey through several centuries of endings in a whistlestop few minutes.

In preindustrial times, Joe explained, consumption looked like a circle – for example, animals would eat grass and produce waste, which goes back into the land and restarts the whole process.

For modern consumers, though, we've turned this circular narrative into a linear one – creating more products that allow us to buy even more stuff, but disconnecting us from the experience of those products. This linear system results in a broken relationship between producer and consumer.

Worse, it has created a tense, broken relationship inside each of us: a consumer self and a civil self, who are always at loggerheads.

The consumer accepts the throwaway waste that comes with this efficient linear system. The civilian rejects the negative impact of all this careless consumption. In this system, each person's impact becomes invisible, each person's actions are anonymised. And so we end up with consumer experiences whose endings are devoid of meaning.

Instead, we should look at returning to a circular narrative that is consciously connected to the rest of the experience through actionable triggers, resulting in endings that are more conversational, collaborative and under control. And that serve as new beginnings.



EX-HEAD OF CXPA & CEO OF EXPERIENCE CATALYSTS

Diane Magers wants us to design for rainy days and "emotional conversion".

"Be intentional about the emotional conversion you want to carry people through..."

Diane Magers, the founder and CEO of Experience Catalysts, told us about emotional conversion.

Why is it that as experience designers, when mapping a journey we're used to thinking about the emotional impact of the intended experience, but not the emotions before and after the experience?

In particular, we're not good at understanding the emotions that might result from a broken or negative ending – and therefore we're missing an opportunity to design positive counter-endings.

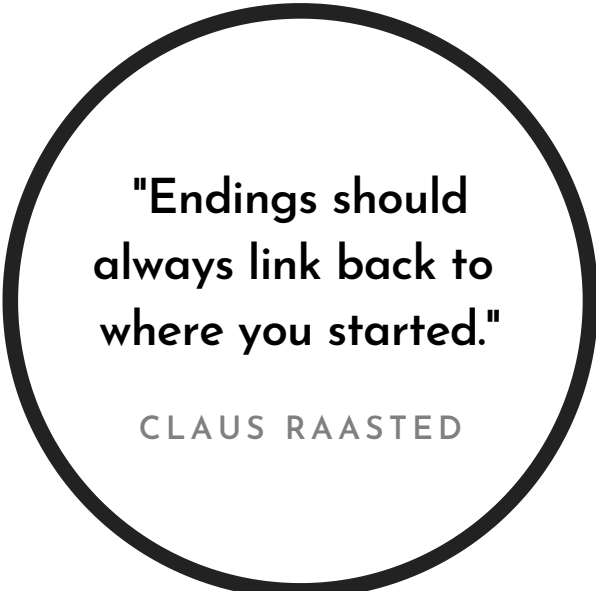
This means thinking about designing for 'rainy day' scenarios. For example, you might design a flawless interaction with a salesperson – but how do you carry that through to signing the contract? You might have an engaging digital experience, but what happens if there's a technical failure at the end?

The answer is to be intentional about the emotional conversion you want to carry people through, taking them from uncertainty to certainty, and then on to delight.



CREATOR OF EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCES

**Claus Raasted on why the best endings
remind you of where you began.**



**"Endings should
always link back to
where you started."**

CLAUS RAASTED

Immersive pioneer Claus Raasted talked about how through his long career in LARPing (live action role playing), he's learned the importance of designing not only an end to the fiction, but an end to the event that helps participants reflect on who they were at its beginning and who they are at its close.

Using an example of a Harry Potter-themed event he'd organised at a medieval castle in Poland, Raasted explained how people gathered in the school hall at the beginning of three days to sing an anthem, before coming together to sing it again before they left. After three days of bonding and adventure, the result was personal, powerful, visceral and physical, and showed how they'd all progressed together. From singing to crying, this shared outcome was pure catharsis.

Raasted's takeaway was that endings should always link back to where you started, preferably by doing something collective, physical and communal that allows for a group release of emotion just like this.

Experience designer and professor Bob Rossman agrees that you need to give something powerful to people at the end of an experience – and that ultimately, the worst ending is one that isn't designed at all.

When teaching experience design to students, Rossman always introduces the 'trilogy of participation' that applies to all events and human experiences: anticipation, participation, and reflection.

We tend to give all our emphasis to participation and neglect the others, but designers can extend their reach if they set up reflection as part of everything they do.

Rossman gave an example of when he visited a sculpture exhibition of Alberto Giacometti's work at the Hong Kong Museum of Art 18 years ago. At the end of the exhibition, he followed a sign asking if he'd like to be a model for Giacometti, had his photo taken, and was given a printout with what he'd look like as one of the sculptor's models – which he has to this day. Rossman calls this a 'memory anchor': an unforgettable experience that is most powerful at the end.

Be a model for
ALBERTO
Giacometti
10.5.2002 - 13.7.2002

傑克梅第 的模特兒

我是傑克梅第的模特兒_____!

I am BOB, the model for Giacometti!

我試做模特兒的感想:

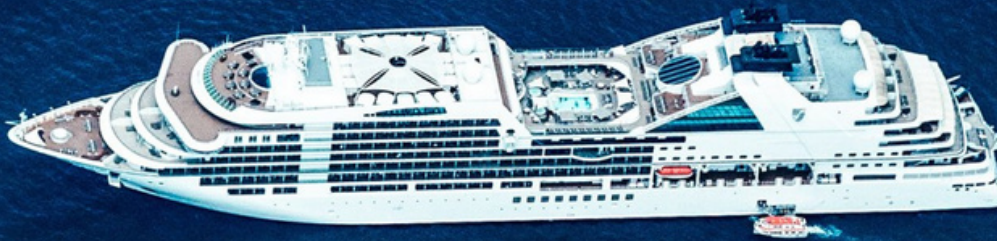
What do I think of
my experience as a model:



Bob Rossman (pictured, right), co-author of the award-winning book *Designing Experiences*, shared this 'memory anchor' from 2002.



Endineering In Action



Fired up by our keynotes, our campfire split into four breakout rooms to apply what they'd learned to some typically 'bad' endings, before "endineering" a better solution. Here's what they came up with:

The Ending:

The last day of a cruise is normally devoted to logistics, with people being unceremoniously offloaded along with the sewage.

The Endineering:

Put as much effort into the ending as cruises do into the onboard entertainment, by finding a way for travellers to follow up with the new friends they'd made once back home – for example, by taking a goodbye photo on a device that lands in their inboxes a week later, printing a farewell card, or distributing postcards to send to their new connections.

Engineering In Action



The Ending:

Finishing a contract with a telco or mobile provider is usually a one-sided experience with multiple hoops to jump through, with potential customers valued much more than current ones.

The Endineering:

Take a leaf out of Spotify's books and look into the 'reflection' part of the participation trilogy by offering a review of your year with the company, showing how much they've improved your life – for example, how many friends have you called? How many times were you there, ready to answer some late night call from a friend?

Endineering In Action



The Ending:

The typical graduation is a long, boring wait to walk across a stage and collect a piece of paper.

The Endineering:

Rather than wandering across a stage, wander across the college campus with family and friends, visiting different places and explaining where you had peak experiences, before coming together for a group toast or fireworks. This would make the experience personal rather than generic and activate the location as part of the ceremony, while still allowing for collective release.

Engineering In Action

Exit

The Ending:

At the end of a film, leaving the movie theatre and being accosted with the bright light and cold reality of the world outside.


The Engineering:

Create a gentle transition from the darkness of the theatre to the light of the real world by emerging through a tunnel or corridor dimly lit with imagery from the movie. This could slowly blend into imagery from the normal environment as you progress. Or, as Dallas Burgess suggested, you could create a 'spoiler bar', where people talk about the film they've just seen.



Campfire 2: Saving Our Cities

In this time of the pandemic and internet shopping, how might we entice shoppers back onto high streets and main streets around the globe?



**"If the high street
believes things will go
back to normal, they
will likely fail."**

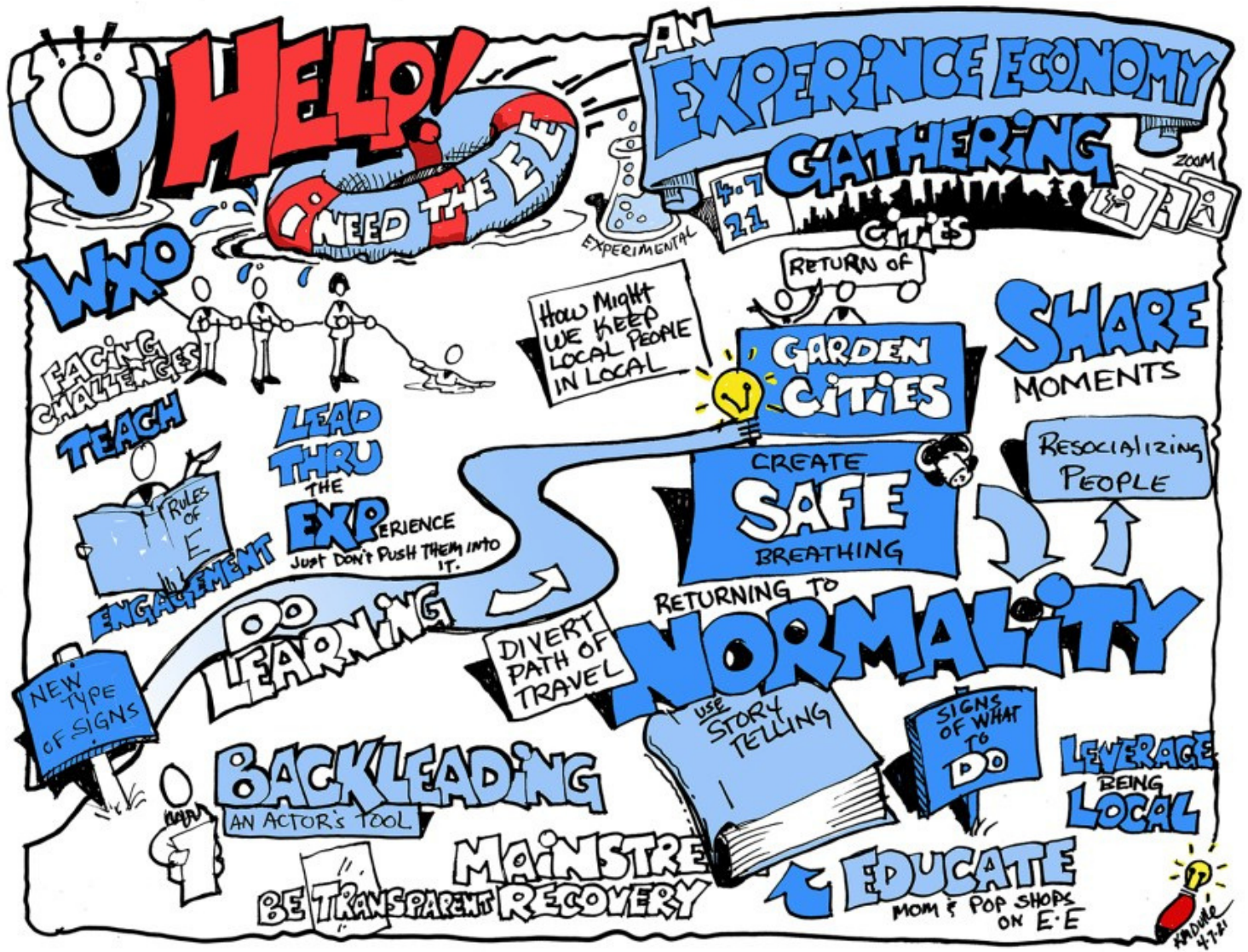
JOE PINE

The pandemic has accelerated all sorts of long-term trends that impact our cities, towns, high streets, main streets and shopping malls – trends like online shopping, working from home, virtual meetings, food delivery, and the home as an entertainment centre. In the last year they've all morphed from looming, long-term "things to think about" into very current problems triple-underlined in red.

What are cities and retailers to do? You can't lure people back with stuff. They can get that from Amazon. You can't excite them with service. Deliveroo does that. There's only one way to get people coming back to your streets and through your doors: to set your stage with exciting, engaging and memorable experiences that they can't get at home.

This is such a pressing issue that, following on from our inaugural evening of 'endineering', we decided to make this the challenge for our second Experimental Campfire. Since everyone in the WYO Founding Circle – from Mohamed Baghat in Istanbul to Stephanie Riggs in New York, from Peter Holst-Beck in Copenhagen to Joe Pine in Minnesota – is an experience expert, this time around we decided to switch up the format by replacing our firestarter talks with group brainstorming.

After jointly identifying the biggest challenges facing retail, our circle broke off into pairs to come up with some possible solutions, using tried-and-trusted problem-solving frameworks from their different sectors, including immersive tech, escape rooms, learning experience and more.



Visual representation of Campfire 2 by experience designer Kevin Dulle

Our experience experts then presented their solutions back to the campfire as a whole. Interestingly, almost all the ideas focused on local town centres, high streets and main streets rather than city centres. And for good reason – wherever you are in the world, your relationship with your local high street has probably changed over the past few years.

Is "going local" a pandemic trend, or here to stay?

Whereas beforehand you might have only popped in for the odd pint of milk – or bypassed it entirely on your commute to and from the city centre – the redrawing of our social boundaries by lockdown restrictions has forced us to stick to our neighbourhoods and shop more locally, breathing new life into mom-and-pop stores that may have previously struggled to compete.

However, with lockdowns lifting and workers tentatively trickling back into offices and city centres, the local high street is balancing on a knife edge. We already know that businesses of all stripes shouldn't be looking to return to the old normal and that without experiences, there can be no economic recovery.

So how can the high street take advantage of this strange twist in its fortunes to compete with the return of global retail, both on and offline, as we settle into post-pandemic life? In other words, how might we help them to thrive in this new, local-centric landscape?



How might we... make visiting IRL shops something that people are proud to do?

Author of *The Experience Economy* Joe Pine kicked off the conversation by reflecting on the importance of mindset.

“If the high street believes things will go back to normal, they will likely fail,” he said. “They need to understand that they have to give shoppers a reason to come to their stores, and that is by offering time-well-spent experiences.”

'Thrill engineer' Brendan Walker agreed, and offered Brighton Palace Pier as an example.

“They’ve developed a good local audience, but they’re worried that after a month of lockdown lifting people will get bored of this local experience and start dribbling back into London,” Walker said. “So how might we protect local by offering something quite different, rather than a 10% offering of the 100% offering going on in the cities?”

Architect Ray Hole suggested that this is already happening in smaller towns. “History shows us,” he said, “that all the big epochs of history had city centres which were decentralised during the next big unsettling.”



"Create social capital around local shopping. Reward local shoppers with something to post that makes them look good."

JOHN CONNORS

"The Experience Economy can therefore break out everywhere," Hole continued. "So how might we support the local high street to become better future hubs?"

Experience designer John Connors thinks the answer lies in identifying high street visitors' needs, and which of these needs local stores can compete on. Hint: it isn't low prices, vast selection, or convenience. Internet shopping wins those battles.

"Let's assume that most citizens feel a desire to act in a way that improves their community and would like to present themselves socially, either on social media or through conversation, in a way that shows how they are doing this," said Connors.

"If that's the case, then a good starting point would be a marketing campaign about *why* you should shop locally."

"Tell the stories of these local shop owners," said Connors. "Teach how a dollar spent locally stays in the community at a higher percentage than a dollar spent online."

"Lean into the same sense of local pride that makes folks cheer for their local football club," he continued. "And then create photo opps – maybe a sticker that says 'I shop local' or 'Support your high street'. Create social capital around local shopping. Reward local shoppers with something to post that makes them look good."

How might we... design solutions that account for 'resocialization anxiety'?


Author and experience design professor Mat Duerden picked up on the issue of “resocialization anxiety”, where people are nervous about fully re-entering society after a year of isolation, including on their local high streets.

“People are all over the place right now,” said Duerden. “And since experience design is about designing empathy, we need to be aware of this. How might we help people re-engage in these spaces, recognising that there’s a broad array of perspectives on how people feel?”

Immersive pioneers Sheena Patel and Stephanie Riggs decided to look at the challenges of social anxiety and rehabilitation from the perspective of co-creation.

“It would be interesting to find out how communities want to reclaim their high streets, where the gaps currently are, and to understand and work with the nuances in social anxiety,” said Patel. “What about using 'creative defiance', taking a place and flipping it on its head to give it a new identity, like what happens with a street festival?”





**"What about using
'creative defiance' -
taking a place and
flipping and it on its
head to give it a new
identity, like what
happens with a
street festival?"**

SHEENA PATEL

"How can we create these new identities as well as new rituals," Patel continued. "For example around breathing: to help people breathe freely again in their own communities?"

Consider the campaign in Spring 2021 by restaurant chain Wagamama that referenced the Japanese art of kintsugi – repairing broken pottery with gold lacquer. Wagamama 'gifted' their signature long tables to local communities to enable communal outdoor eating as an authentic, long-term act of kindness.

How might we... educate store owners on how to design better experiences?

Experience designer Andrew Lacanienta pointed out that some business owners on the high street design for time well saved, rather than time well spent. Added to the plague of online shopping and the fact that people have forgotten how to socialise, this oversight, he believes, could be their downfall.

LX pioneer Mohamed Baghat and experience design professor Bob Rossman suggest that the answer lies in educating people about what they can do in this new normal.

"We need to change the mindset of the designer, not just the customer or the shop owner," said Baghat.

"Why not make every experience a learning experience?" he asked. "For example, in public parks rather than signs telling us what *not* to do, how about having signs suggesting things we can do? We need to help people to see the positive behaviour we want to reinforce."

Paired with immersive theatre expert Peter Holst-Beck, Lacanienta suggested creating community workshops for local businesses on how to apply the Experience Economy.

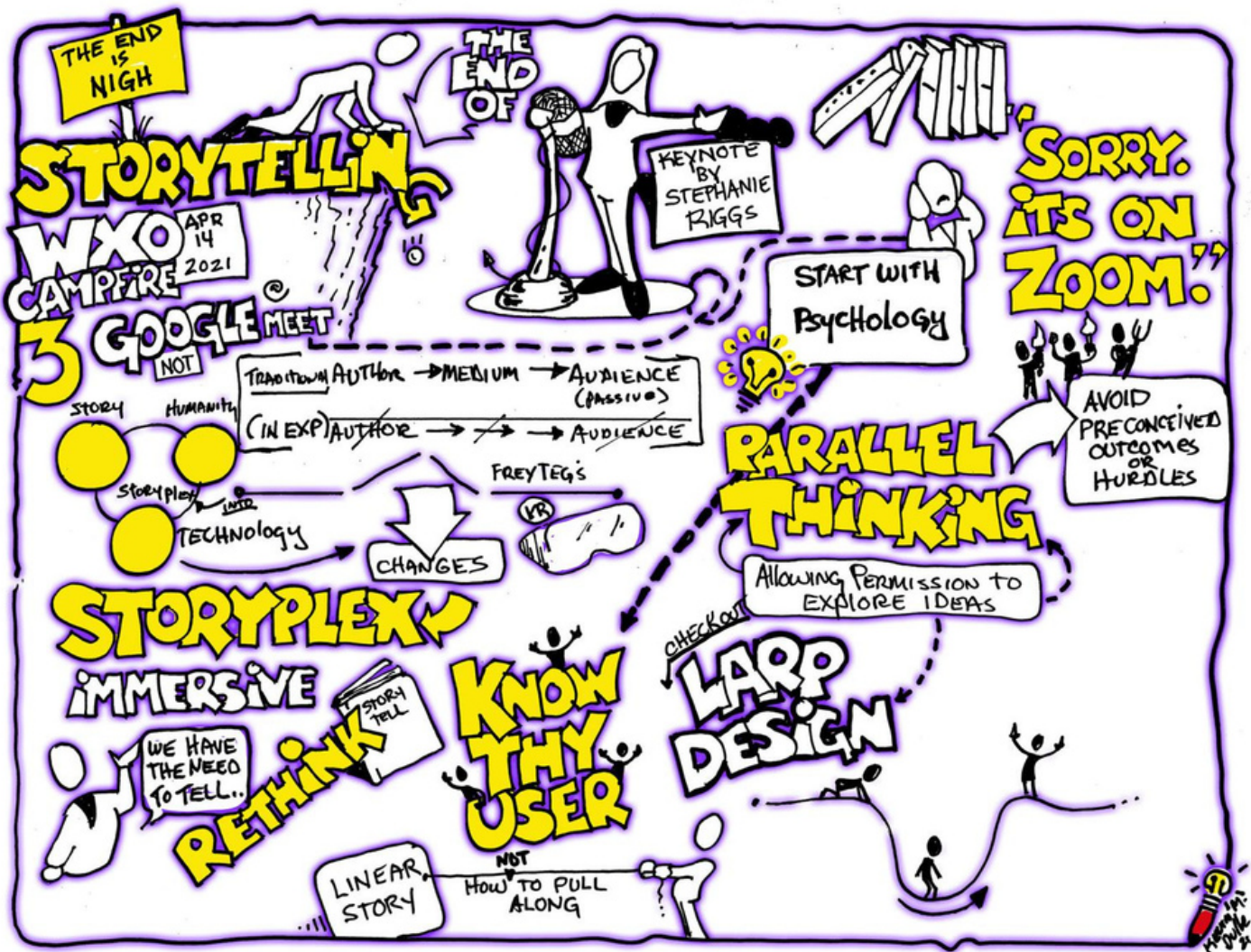
"This way, they can gain experience design tools and prototype real-time solutions that also have a financial benefit," he said. "Mom-and-pop stores need to become storytellers and stage their stories well".



Campfire 3: Is Storytelling Dead?

With technology and culture evolving, creative director Stephanie Riggs asks if it's game over for storytelling.





Visual representation of Campfire 3 by experience designer Kevin Dulle



"Stories have shapes which
can be drawn on paper."

KURT VONNEGUT

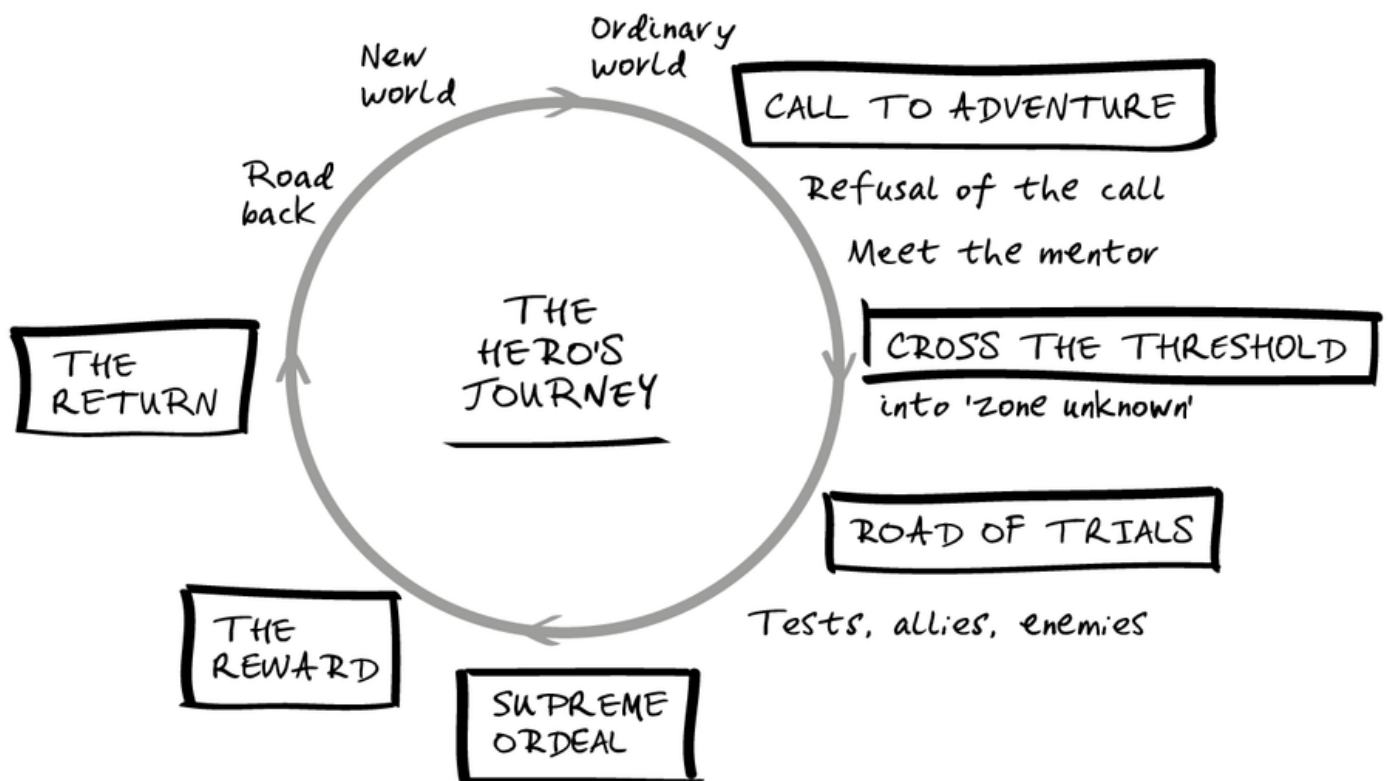
As experience designers, we often cling to the concept of story to guide an experience. But as technology and audiences evolve, is it time to cast off the shackles of storytelling altogether?

For perhaps our most brilliant and intense WXO Campfire yet, this is the controversial question our experience experts came together to try and solve, led by immersive trailblazer, Experiential Creative Director and former Disney Imagineer Stephanie Riggs.

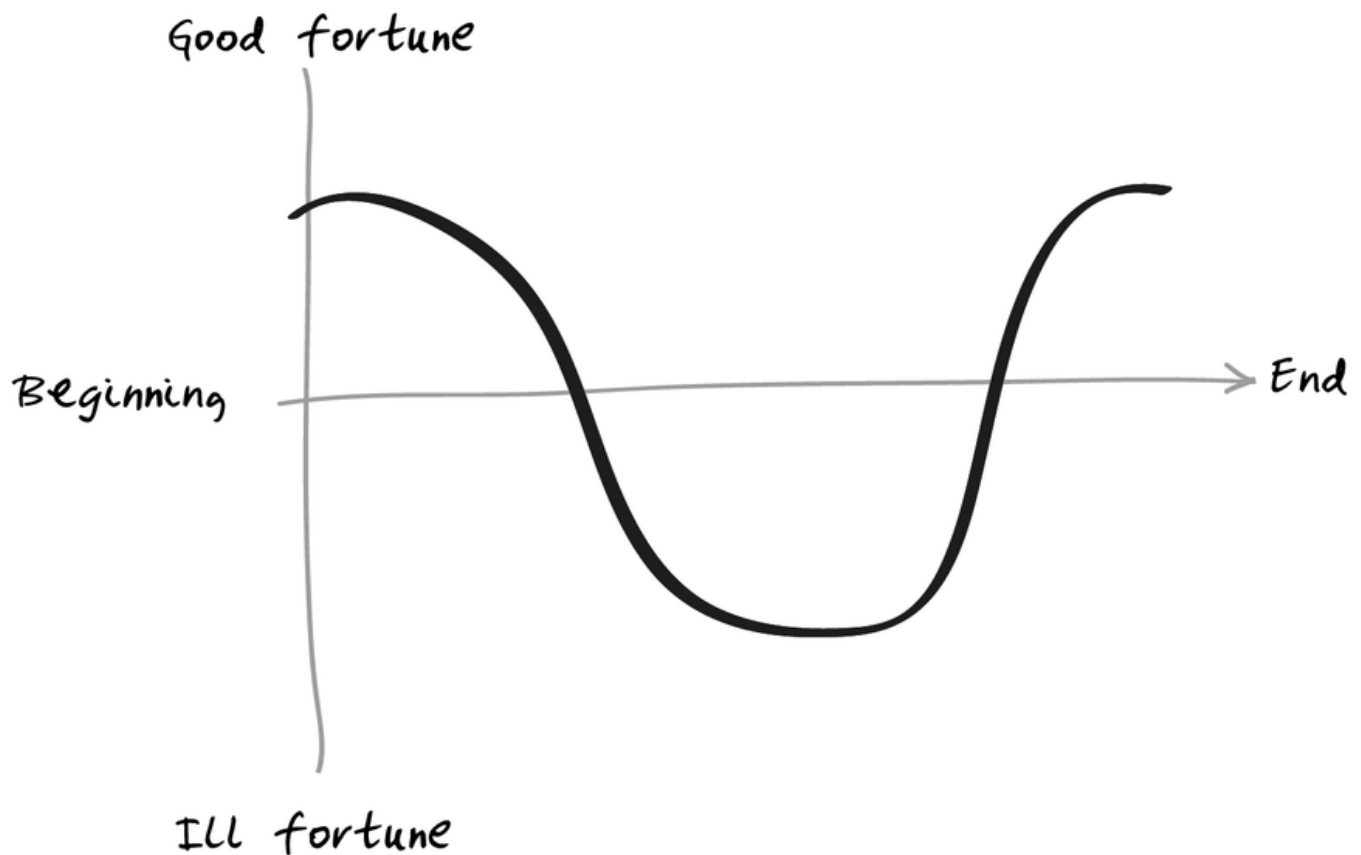
Joining from Utah, Ecuador, Hawaii and Chichester, members of our Founding Circle gathered around the virtual campfire to hear Stephanie cram some very big ideas from her book *The End of Storytelling* into a very

small time frame. Her brightly burning firestarter talk took us on a non-linear journey from classical story shapes to the disruptive notion of the 'storyplex'.

Whether we consciously think about story structure or not – as WXO Founder James Wallman pointed out in his opening remarks – it's a given that stories are the things that bind us together as humans and generate empathy, connection and happiness. The author Kurt Vonnegut once said that “stories have shapes which can be drawn on paper” – so it stands to reason that if we design experiences in the shape of a story, we are more likely to design experiences that lead to such empathy, connection and happiness.



A circular version of the Hero's Journey. Illustration by Greg Stevenson (www.greg-stevenson.co.uk) for James Wallman's *Time And How To Spend It*



*Kurt Vonnegut's idea that stories can be drawn on graph paper. Illustration by Greg Stevenson (www.greg-stevenson.co.uk) for James Wallman's *Time And How To Spend It**

Traditionally these shapes have been specifically structured, and often linear. Think of Joseph Campbell's circular Hero's Journey (on the previous page), or Kurt Vonnegut's 'man in hole' story shape (in the picture above), where person meets problem meets solution.

But Stephanie's prediction of the end of storytelling threatens to disrupt how we think about stories and in turn, how we design experiences.

Want to create experiences that are relevant for right now? Stephanie's quickfire guide to understanding and utilising the storyplex are on the pages that follow...


New mediums enable new narratives

Riggs began by outlining how the term “storytelling” is attached to other buzzwords in the Experience Economy – eg, 'interactive storytelling', 'immersive storytelling', 'digital storytelling'. And how this gives her “the biggest cringe”, as this sets experience designers up for failure.

Riggs's story began in the borough of Queens in New York City in 1940. She told the tale of Chester Carlson, a young physicist who approached massive manufacturers such as IBM with his invention for duplicating documents using photons and electricity. This had the potential to be the biggest revolution in printing since the Gutenberg Press – so why did they all turn him down?

The reason, so Riggs told us, was that his approach was so radically different that even highly trained engineers dismissed it. They were unprepared and unable to consider such a radically different approach.

Similarly, when it comes to storytelling we're so used to the tools we have that we find it hard to accept completely new ways of doing things. But technology changes what is possible. Every new medium gives rise to a new form of narrative...



Storytelling is such a well-established paradigm that even considering the possibility of not telling a story seems impossible. But technology changes what is possible.”

STEPHANIE RIGGS

Escape the old storytelling elements

In our existing storytelling paradigm, there are three key elements: the author (who creates the story by writing, painting, etc), the medium (a framing device such as a book, stage, television or computer screen), and the audience (who are generally passive recipients).

But in the experiential and immersive space, the medium gets disrupted.

There is an absence of frame. Guests are placed inside the environment and have nowhere specific to look. This in turn disrupts the audience, who now have a sense of presence, agency and interaction. The story is no longer pushed through, but is responsive and regenerative.


So if you want to just 'tell' a story, you're going to have a serious problem.

"I've seen how the word 'story' alone stifles creators and guests," said Riggs. "It reinforces old creative habits and uses old paradigms rather than evolving with audiences."

So it is with audiences too: when people first put on a VR headset they look straight ahead, because, as Riggs says, "they're used to a traditional framing device".



Looking forward in VR



**"Let's release ourselves
from the constraints of
storytelling and move
into something more
dynamic."**

STEPHANIE RIGGS

The storyplex is our way of releasing ourselves from these constraints by moving towards an interwoven network of story, technology, and humanity.

In the storyplex, our author is no longer the auteur. The elements of the story work more dynamically through the medium or technology, whether a VR headset or the human body. And it all comes together through the psychology of the experience.

Rather than a linear story structure that can be drawn on paper, these new stories look more like a funky techno screensavers: constantly evolving, interacting at different touchpoints, and responding to the audience and environment.



How to move from storytelling to the storyplex...

So how do we actually lean into this paradigm shift in how we approach and create stories?

Riggs set out five steps:

1. Think immersively.

2. Be narrative driven. Rather than a linear structure, think about story 'components' and what people connect with emotionally. Let the narrative determine your choice of technology.

3. Consider technological parameters.

These are determined by your narrative objectives, and in turn determine the capabilities.

4. Start with psychology. Design with HCI

(human-computer interaction) principles,

namely “know thy user, for they are not you”.

Understand that you are inviting people into a space where you are facilitating interactions, and that they are guests rather than players. Do not assume that because you are the creator, you have all the answers.

5. Iterate. Test, learn, evolve, and share. The

best way to learn might not be by asking questions, but by observing reactions.

Starting with the psychology of the audience is key. What values are you trying to get across? And how did the guest go through that journey? Are the story components easily recognisable to all participants? There are parallels with behavioural psychology, as you should design different nudges to get people to the same conclusion. Riggs explained that she often works with game mechanics or magicians, as they are experts at leading people into certain thoughts or patterns without them realising.

Psychology is the starting point. Not technology

Experience designer Paul Bulencea drew a parallel with the Nordic LARP movement, where, instead of listening to a story, participants become the story. This kind of storytelling is much more active and iterative, with everyone “involved in the sandbox of co-creation – everyone contributes to the story and everyone is the lead character”.

This type of immersion is a gateway to the subconscious for participants, Paul pointed out. These experiences can act like unintentional exposure therapy, and continue to interact with participants’ lives after they exit the experience.

Riggs added that the “sandbox” has to have certain rules to make sure that guests feel safe to disengage and go on a mental ride. Otherwise we’re “draining their cognitive resources” and not fulfilling our role as creators to take care of people.

Useful starter questions to ask when creating an experience in the storyplex are therefore:

- How do you want your guest to feel... during the experience, at the end and after the experience?
- How can you play with the story components to land this emotional goal?
- How can you orchestrate a first moment to prepare the audience for this experience?





Flipping the Paradigm

Fired up with this new set of tools to play with in the sandbox, we split our Campfire into pairs and asked them to rethink a previous linear experience they had designed through the psychedelic prism of the storyplex. Here are a few of the new, non-linear ideas they came up with:

Flipping the... University Lecture

Joe Pine and Andrew Lacanienta took the example of a university lecture, which is traditionally very passive and linear.

They suggested recording lectures ahead of time, so that students can watch at their leisure and use the class time for discussion instead. There could be core pieces that everyone had to watch, but additional elements – a book, a TED Talk – that students could choose to investigate, adding a much higher level of interactivity and engagement.

“While I’ve learned that students need structure and might struggle with the large amounts of autonomy and co-creation that take place in most immersive experiences, I like the idea of a 'create your own adventure' type of experience for asynchronous portions of the class,” said Lacanienta. “Allow them to guide their own journey, be their own author, co-create with the class, and prepare in different ways – all meeting the same learning outcomes so they are prepared for the synchronous lecture”.



Flipping the... Banker

Visual thinkologist Kevin Dulle often creates workshops for bankers, perhaps “some of the most risk-averse people you’ll meet”. To break out of the traditionally linear workshop design, he discovered “all I have to do is determine a starting point and a desired outcome, and then give them tools to apply along the way. The biggest thing is to give them permission to explore and create, and not feel like you have to control every nuance of the journey”.

Dulle gave the example of taking a banking model and switching it with that of an ice-cream business: the fundamentals are the same, but changing the context gives the bankers permission to play.



Flipping the... Canyon

Paul Bulencea discussed the need to distinguish between what psychologist Martin Seligman has referred to as the distinction between a cosmetic drug experience and a curative drug experience. With a cosmetic drug experience, you get a heightened state of presence as the work has already been done by the designers. However, with a curative drug experience, you need to start with an intention for exploration.

You can also see this, Bulencea pointed out, with canyoning: where you need to give people a sense of security so they feel safe to explore throwing themselves down a river canyon.



Flipping the... Summit

Immersive theatre expert Noah Nelson talked about a summit he'd organised where they lost their keynote speaker at the last minute. He could easily have asked another member of the audience to step in, but instead decided to use a salon format: a 'high table' of panellists modelled how the conversation would go, before they were broken up and peppered throughout the salon to become members of other tables. While the format was a happy accident, it broke down the relationship between audience and participant for a more dynamic experience.

Structural engineer and architect Ray Hole echoed the importance of this kind of serendipity. Giving the example of a building project on top of Mount Snowdon in Wales, he told us of the time he'd organised for a judging panel to visit, only for them to be confronted with a choir who were there to rehearse in the wonderful open-air acoustics, creating a new dimension of experience that hadn't been planned. The result? The additional extra that the organizers hadn't intended made for a much more interesting story.

The W XO Take-Out

“The concepts of the storyplex are not just where we are now, but where we are hoping to go.”

And with these words, Stephanie summed up the exciting potential of the storyplex – that it’s a renewed way of looking at stories that sets us free to iterate, experiment and evolve.

You might not want to sign up for all of its elements, but clinging to old paradigms stifles creators – and by focusing on process rather than outcome, we open ourselves up to new, unscripted possibilities that might emerge from co-creation and playing in the sandbox.

As experience designer John Connors said:

“It takes bravery to tell non-linear stories. As experience designers, we often try to design out uncertainty. But having the courage to put some of the control into the guests hands opens up very cool opportunities.”

Is storytelling dead? Maybe not – but it’s definitely changing. And we’re delighted to be setting the stage for its evolution within the Experience Economy.

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