

A letter to the graduating seniors of Strategic Design and Management BBA 2020

WHY YOU ARE EQUIPPED TO THRIVE IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

Tuesday, March 12, 2020

YOU ARE TRAINED IN DEALING WITH COMPLEX PROBLEMS. *You don't shy away from them, because you have a process.*

Life itself is uncertain, and you are equipped to thrive within life's uncertainties. You are accustomed to disruption, and can frame it as opportunity.

YOU ARE RESOURCEFUL. *You know how to do the best with what you have.*

Your world turned upside down, and you had to find new ways of coping while also approaching your team mates with respect and empathy, and still owning your responsibilities.

YOU ARE SKILLED COMMUNICATORS. *You are able to bring ideas to life through carefully crafted messages and evocative imagery.*

Through empathy and active listening, you learn the underlying needs and motivations of audiences and stakeholders. You persuade decision makers to respond by inspiring them through compelling research and sense-making, and impactful recommendations.

YOU DESIGN WITH INTENTION. *Your approach to problem solving is rooted in purpose.*

You are comfortable asking, "why do we do what we do?" You are aware of your own mental models, and helping others identify theirs to work towards a more equitable future.

YOUR SKILLS ARE VERSATILE. *You and your toolkits are industry agnostic.*

Every industry needs minds like yours, especially during times of flux and uncertainty. Your versatility extends to the types of problems you are equipped to tackle, the types of teams you can engage with, the creative medium or the mode of communication.

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YOU NAVIGATE UNCERTAINTY. Uncertainty of the outcome isn't an obstacle for you -- rather, a call to action. You're primed as strategic designers to probe, if not rely on, ambiguity as part of the design process.

YOU HAVE A PORTFOLIO OF PROCESS TO REVISIT. Your outputs - the journey maps, system diagrams, stakeholder maps, canvases - all speak to the strength of your thought-process. When in doubt, revisit your creations -- the artifacts are proof of your mind's work.

YOU CAN OBSERVE THE SYSTEM. You've cultivated a kit of tools that enable you to explore the proverbial forest as well as the trees and everything in between.

YOU CONNECT DOTS. You understand how people, places, ideas...and objects do and don't relate to one another. And design accordingly.

YOU TRANSLATE INSIGHTS INTO ACTION. You possess the unique ability to transform research into innovative strategies for the development of brands, products, services...and systems. In short, you make things happen.

YOU ARE EMPATHIC. You find creative ways to connect with different stakeholders in order to understand a given problem or opportunity from a diversity of perspectives.

YOU HAVE GRIT. That's, in part, what got here today and what will propel you forward for years to come.

YOU HAVE TIME AND FLEXIBILITY. Much of the world is on pause. Beyond potentially real financial concerns, you have the flexibility to use this time to pursue your passion projects, add to your portfolio, start your own venture, develop relationships and put yourself in a better position for success when things open up again. The expectations are low. But you may never have an opportunity to reach high like this again.

YOU WRITE THE NEXT CHAPTER TO YOUR OWN STORY. How will you tell your story around this time of uncertainty? Will you be a bystander? An agent of change? Someone who is grateful for having received help? Or someone who was in the position to help others?

YOU ARE STILL GROWING. Whenever you're feeling down, frustrated or anxious about the future. Just add the word "yet" to what you're thinking. You haven't found a job... yet. No one is hiring...yet. I haven't been able to launch this project... yet. Yet means you're not quite where you want to be... but signals that you will get there.

YOU ARE STRATEGIC DESIGNERS.

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YOU ARE SKILLED COMMUNICATORS. YOU ARE ADAPTABLE TO UNEXPECTED CHANGE. YOU ARE STILL GROWING. YOU EMBODY THE SPIRIT OF COLLABORATION YOU ARE RESILIENT IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY. YOU WRITE THE NEXT CHAPTER TO YOUR OWN STORY. YOU FEARLESSLY TAKE CHANCES - YOU ARE NOT AFRAID TO FAIL FAST & OFTEN. YOU HAVE TIME AND FLEXIBILITY. YOU ARE STRATEGIC IN YOUR APPROACH TO INNOVATION. YOU HAVE GRIT. YOU'VE BEEN TRAINED TO BE SYSTEMATICALLY CREATIVE. YOU ARE EMPATHIC. THE WORLD NEEDS YOU MORE THAN EVER. YOU TRANSLATE INSIGHTS INTO ACTION. YOU ARE EQUIPPED TO BUILD THE WORLD YOU WANT TO SEE. YOU CONNECT DOTS. YOU HAVE A NETWORK OF PROFESSORS, ALUMNI, FAMILY, AND FELLOW STUDENTS TO TURN TO AND TAP INTO. YOU CAN OBSERVE THE SYSTEM. YOU NAVIGATE UNCERTAINTY. YOU HAVE A PORTFOLIO OF PROCESS TO REVISIT. YOUR SKILLS ARE VERSATILE. YOU ARE TRAINED IN DEALING WITH COMPLEX PROBLEMS. YOU ARE RESOURCEFUL. YOU DESIGN WITH INTENTION.

YOU ARE STRATEGIC DESIGNERS.

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For these reasons and more, you are equipped to thrive in an uncertain world.

THINGS TO TRY WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE NOT

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CLOSE YOUR EYES. Consider: What are your surroundings trying to tell you? How? Why?

LIST YOUR ASSUMPTIONS. Remember: One plus one doesn't always equal two. Or as social psychologist Ellen Langer likes to say, "If you add one piece of gum to another piece of gum, you get one piece of gum...(Translation?) Virtually all of what we think we know is wrong in one context or another."

LISTEN. Or as journalist Bob Woodward once said, "Shut up...and let the silence suck out the truth."

REFRAME THE PROBLEM AS AN OPPORTUNITY. Simply replace the period at the end of any sentence with a question mark. Et voila - you've transformed the endeavor.

DON'T DO IT ALONE, lean on your colleagues.

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