

Force Multipliers Longterm Design Careers for Non-Leads

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INTRO

ITINERARY

- Act 1 – Designer Criteria
- Act 2 – The Gap
 - Seniors vs. Non-Seniors
 - Leads vs. Non-Leads
- Act 3 – Growing Force Multipliers



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TARGET AUDIENCE

Team Leads, Producers, Managers, Design Leads

Designers!

ACT 1

DESIGNER CRITERIA

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Professional

Project / Development

Design

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

Skills used at ANY job

Not specific to Design or the Games Industry

- Communication (Verbal / Written)
- Attendance
- Thoroughness

Make you a more pleasant person with whom to work

PROJECT / DEVELOPMENT SKILLS

Specific to your Project / Technology / Company

- IP Knowledge (D&D, Star Trek, etc.)
- Genre Knowledge (FPS, RPG, etc.)
- Development Environment (Asset Management)
- Troubleshooting

Allow you to make decisive and quick changes within your infrastructure

DESIGN SKILLS

Specific to your Design Subdiscipline

Potentially Specific to a Genre / Engine

Allow you to build content and features in tools

DESIGN SKILLS

General Skills

- Math
- Usability / Player Communication

Specific Implementation Skills

- Items
- Item Assignments
- FSM Scripting

SKILL PROGRESSION

Skills are either binary or graded.

- Binary Pass/Fail
 - “Good Enough”
- Literacy / Competency / Mastery (LCM)
 - Literacy – I can use it
 - Competency – I understand it
 - Mastery – I can improve on it

ACT 1 RECAP

Professional (Any Job Skills)

Project / Development (Specific Project Skills)

Design (Feature / Content / Tools Skills)

ACT 2

THE GAP

THE GAP - PART1

NON-SENIORS vs. SENIORS

STAFF RANKINGS

- Junior (0-3 Years)
 - How Well They Learn
 - 50-75% Literacy, 25-50% Competency, No Mastery
- Staff (3-6 Years)
 - How Well They Contribute to Content / Features
 - 25% Literacy, 50-75% Competency, 0-25% Mastery
- Senior (6+ Years)
 - How Well They Own Content / Features
 - 50% Competency, 50% Mastery
- Principal (10+Years)
 - How Well They Drive Projects, Teams, or Abstract Goals
 - 25% Competency, 75% Mastery

STAFF RANKINGS

- Expert (15+ Years)
 - Principals, But With Incredible Experience and Expertise
 - Have Invented Genres, Spearheaded New IPs, Etc.

THE INFLECTION POINT

- Competency in All Key Areas
- Mastery in Several Areas

Not Enough to be a Force Multiplier

THE INFLECTION POINT

Senior+ Requires New Type of Skills

Ownership (Process)

Mentorship (Management)

Vision (Architecture)

Technical Design (Infrastructure)

Multiclass (Versatility)

OWNERSHIP

Mastery of Process and Pipelines *at All Stages*

Quality intra-department communication (systems, content)

Quality inter-department communication (art, programming)

MENTORSHIP

Making Experts Out of Non-Experts

Teaching Mastery to Others

Create Disciples

Designers and Non-Designers

VISION

Non-Seniors are Reactive Designers

Respond to Direction

Follow Standards

Fix Bugs

Solve problems with known or easily deducible solutions

Cures; Can Solve Issues Once Known

VISION

Seniors are Proactive Designers

- Guide Direction

- Create Standards

- Prevent Bugs

Solve risky, complex, or volatile problems

Vaccines; Prevent Issues From Ever Happening

TECHNICAL DESIGN

Technical Design is a valuable sub-set of Design

Also an ambiguous, ugly term...

Programmer who can also Design

Designer who can also Code

Designer who makes Scripts / Tools

TECHNICAL DESIGN

Redefining Outside of Specific Skills:

Designers that focus on improving how design builds and delivers features / content

Infrastructure Design

TECHNICAL DESIGN

Infrastructure design focuses on tools, standards, and process (overlap)

Cake Analogy

Designers are expected to make Cakes

Artists, Programmers, etc. make Ingredients / Frosting

Technical Designers make Cake Mixes

MULTICLASS

Designers that can fulfil multiple roles add flexibility to their team (but not throughput)

Small (30) and Medium Teams (60) value this more than Large (120) or Very Large (240) Teams

MULTICLASS

Designers

- Don't sell yourself as multiclass

- Takes years of training in both disciplines

- Often takes a career change

Leaders

- Be suspicious of devs who say they're multiclass

- If they're really multiclass, they've done both jobs before

THE GAP - PART1 - SUMMARY

Mastery of Design Skills and Tools does not a Senior make

Senior+ Designers must **routinely** demonstrate skill in:

- Ownership

- Mentorship

- Vision

- Technical Design

- Multiclass

THE GAP PART 2

LEADS vs. NON-LEADS

LEADS?

‘Lead’ Labels are Ambiguous

Lead Multiplayer Designer?

Lead Online Designer?

Are they leading people or features?



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PEOPLE LEADERS

People Leaders are supervisors / managers

They lead... people!

Not Projects

Not Features

People

People Leaders become Force Multipliers by making others more effective

PEOPLE LEADERS

People Leaders focus on a few senior+ skills:

Mentorship

Ownership

Vision (Some)

Professional / Development Skills Focus

DESIGN PARENTS

So yes, they're like design parents, raising design children

Good Cop and Bad Cop

Celebrate successes, but hold individuals accountable for failures

MENTORSHIP RED FLAGS

Don't Find Much Joy In the Success of Others

Flustered by Juniors or Non-Experts

Focus Too Much on Either Celebration or Discipline

Reluctant to Make Hard Staffing Decisions

OWNERSHIP RED FLAGS

Not Good at Breaking Work Into Discrete Steps

Uncomfortable with Non-Designers and Uninformed Audiences

Struggle to Identify Efficiency Improvements

LEADERSHIP BURDEN

Staff ranks have different costs on people leader work:

Junior	-20% IC Work
Staff	-15% IC Work
Senior+	-10% IC Work



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BURDEN EXAMPLES

TEAM ALPHA

4 Juniors

1 Senior

90% Cost on the Lead, don't expect much out of him

BURDEN EXAMPLES

TEAM OMEGA

0 Juniors

3 Staff

2 Seniors

65% Cost on the Lead, can do some small work



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GROWING PEOPLE LEADERS

Calculate the % Cost on your People Leaders

Start them with a low %, work your way up to 100%

Remember that Managing Juniors != Managing Seniors

Where Does That Leave Non-People Leaders?

SUPER SECRET STAFFING NOTE

Most designers (really, most developers) don't want to be people leaders

They want the agency that comes with a 'lead' title/role, but NOT the burdens of being a supervisor / manager

Few really want to give up being an individual contributor to focus on management

NON-PEOPLE LEADERS

Don't want to be supervisors or managers

How can we grow them to be effective force multipliers?

NON-PEOPLE LEADERS

Non-People Leader Focus

Process (Some)

Vision

Technical Design

Multicass

Non-People Leaders become Force Multipliers by Improving Everyone's:

Efficiency

Quality

Ability to Take Risks



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ACT 3

GROWING FORCE MULTIPLIERS

BACK TO THE SKILLS LIST

Senior+ requires entirely new sets of skills:

Ownership (Process)

Mentorship (Management)

Vision (Architecture)

Technical Design (Infrastructure)

Multiclass (Versatility)

OWNERSHIP



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OWNERSHIP

Non-People Leaders still Contribute to Ownership

Seniors Help Define, and Maintain, Process / Pipelines

GROWING OWNERSHIP

Participate in Key Pipeline Stages

- Kickoffs / Pitches
- Pipeline Stages - Entrance / Exit Criteria
- Postmortems

KICKOFFS / PITCHES

Define Boundaries of Features / Content

Deadlines

Resources

Audience

Develop Agency and Comprehension of Schedules

PIPELINE STAGES

Require Non-Leads to Help Define Pipeline Stages

- What does a level designer need to start building a whitebox effectively?
- What does an environment artist need at the end of a whitebox stage to start decorating effectively?

MENTORSHIP



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GROWING MENTORSHIP

Teaching Seniors to be Teachers

Buddy System

Peer Reviews

Presentations

BUDDY SYSTEM

Pair Prospective Seniors with Juniors

Train On:

Standards / Organization

Pipelines / Process

Team Dynamics

VALUE OF TRAINING

Juniors are Often Seen as Burdens

Great Training Opportunities for Seniors

Resist Temptation to Make Leads Always Do It

Grade the Results!

PEER REVIEWS

Reoccurring Peer Reviews

Landmark Peer Reviews On Important Risks

Rant Incoming...

RANT ON PEER REVIEWS

DO NOT DO ALL PEER REVIEWS AT THE END

A PEER REVIEW IS NOT SIMPLY A PLAYTEST (WHAT)

PEER REVIEWS MUST CRITIQUE STANDARDS,
ORGANIZATION, COMMENTARY, AND RELIABILITY
(HOW)

PRESENTATIONS

Tools Demonstrations

Competitive Analysis

Gameplay Concepts

Training Videos!

Target some presentations at *other departments* and
other design subdisciplines

VISION

VISION

One of the hardest and riskiest skillsets to build, but one of the most vital

Entire GDC Sessions on Related Topics:

Prototyping

Finding the Fun

Affordances

Gameplay Iteration

GAMEPLAY INSIGHT

Gameplay from 'Average' to 'Good'

Not required for EVERYTHING....

Action Games -> Combat Mechanics

Puzzles Games -> Puzzles!

AFFORDANCES

Designers Won't Know Everything in Advance

Know SOME of the needed affordances

Know there are MORE that will be needed

Make efficient use of iteration time to find them

AUDIENCE

Non-Senior Designers often assume:

They are the audience

Someone like them is the audience

Senior+ Designers ask questions about the audience:

What other games does our audience play?

How long are their gameplay sessions?

How many different audiences does our game have?

GROWING VISION

Vision Can Be Trained (Slowly)

Education

Practical Experience (Prototypes)

Focus Tests

Workshops

GROWING THROUGH FAILURE

Vision is Often Trained Through Failure

Projects Need Opportunities for Designers to Risk Failure

“Fall and skin your knees, but not break your legs”

TECHNICAL DESIGN

TECHNICAL DESIGN

Harken back to the Cake Mix example:

Dev Teams deliver Cakes to Customers

Technical Design Increase Consistency and Efficiency
of Cake Production

Deliver More and/or Higher Quality Cakes

GROWING TECHNICAL DESIGN

Technical infrastructure skills generally grow through experience, exposure, and practice

Standards

File and Folder Naming Standards (Enforcement)

Data Organization / Hierarchy

GROWING TECHNICAL DESIGN

Tools

Data Entry Automation

Tech Liaison (Needs, Value, Etc.)

Tool Usage Documentation (PRACTICAL)

GROWING TECHNICAL DESIGN

Gameplay

Developer Maps (Test Maps)

Archetypes / Prefabs Construction

MUTLICLASS

MULTICLASS

The grim reality...

Few Opportunities

Small Developers (30-)

Very Large Developers (150+)

Career Change

Battlefield Promotion

CHANGING CAREERS

Career Change Can Improve Happiness

Potential Pay Cut and Start at the Bottom

Most developers aren't willing to do that. *But some are.*

BATTLEFIELD PROMOTIONS...

When disaster strikes... be prepared.

Exit Strategy

Timebox

Be Honest About Career Prospects

SUMMARY

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TAKEAWAYS

Senior Skills List One More Time:

Ownership (Process)

Mentorship (Management)

Vision (Architecture)

Technical Design (Infrastructure)

Multiclass (Versatility)

LEADERS

Discuss Ways to Test Skills with your Designers

Find Opportunities:

- Won't Kill The Project if They Fail

- Allow for an Exit Strategy

- Can Support with Resources

- Can Quantify Results!

Small Features, Optional Content, DLC, Etc. are great opportunities!

IF THEY FAIL...

Do Not Punish Failure

Do Retrospectives / Postmortems (even if they succeed...)

Let the Whole Team Learn

Expect and Actually Do Better Next Time

DESIGNERS

Find Outlets to Practice or Demonstrate Senior+ Skills

Don't Expect an Instant Promotion

Remember These Are New Skills

Learn From Failure, Keep Trying, Don't Repeat Mistakes

1 on 1s

1 on 1s (Discussions with Leadership) Used to Discuss Your Skills

Under ~4 Years

IC Skills Focus (git gud)

Get Senior+ Experience Where Possible

~4-6+ Years

Focus on Senior+ Skills

Ask for Opportunities

SPECIAL THANKS

SPECIAL THANKS

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SPECIAL THANKS

AND YOU!

THE END

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