

*Adapted from "10 steps to a long career as a designer" by Christopher Cashdollar and CreativeBloq staff, 2014*

**~ Stop making superficial comparisons:**

Images on Behance, Cargo Collective, Coroflot, etc. have little to do with the problem you have to solve right now. Depending on such information puts you downstream from the style setters who solve problems in their own authentic styles.

Drawing from historical sources is similarly problematic: know the difference between inspiration and crutches.

Look for broader principles in aspirational work: how does this design use symmetry? Contrast? How does the image align with the message? How was that effect achieved? Avoid being the 'hunter-gather' type, scurrying for inspiration in every new project. Instead, think like an agrarian; cultivating and honing your talent and influences over time.

Pinterest is a great way to collect images, but they must be curated to be useful. Tagging, organizing, and pruning help turn them into a reference library. Beware of influence seeking and strive for a balance between output and input.

**~ Practice articulating your intentions**

Writing good briefs takes practice. Everyone can improve their use of language – both verbal and visual. Practice comparing your stated goals to your design in order to stay on track.

**~ Sell your work**

Writing is great practice for speaking extemporaneously. Practice speaking to and interacting with strangers via Toastmasters or other options. Learning to sell your ideas can greatly affect what kind of work you get to do.

Communicate better with your client by practicing empathy. Clients can be awful, but you will find your job more satisfying the more you appreciate their goals. It's much easier to talk to someone when you are on their side.

Practice getting to the heart of the problem by setting aside your ego:

Not "I'm a minimalist so I made it simple." But

"By taking a minimalist approach, I clarified the strengths of the message."

**~ Surround yourself with people you can learn from**

Brash young individualists make a lot of painful mistakes. They spread themselves very thin.

Learn how to draw out helpful information, even when this feels uncomfortable. Working with a design star is only useful if you can appreciate how they manage to succeed.

Learn how to contribute to a team, so you can focus on doing your best work.

Even when you are around unsuccessful people, you can learn by negative example: where does he or she go wrong?

Sometimes a well-paying job is a dead end. Your mortgage payment, car payment, divorce settlement, cocktail habit can make the difference between staying put and finding a situation with long-term potential.

### **Beyond the 9 to 5**

You have many sides to your personality and to your talents. Take on outside projects to learn more about yourself and plan your next move. If you work alone, try working on a team. If your job is in a big office, try a solo project.

Guard your time carefully, because you won't have a lot of time for outside work. Compulsive behavior, family obligations, doing what people expect of you can use up all your free time.

### **Keep up your professional profile**

Be choosy about mixing friends and work. Your decisions about what to share social media can be especially tricky. Err on the side of privacy and don't assume pseudonyms will keep you anonymous.

Create reminders to update your portfolio site, contact information, etc.

Designers move around constantly which make the field feel 'small.' Do what you say you're going to do, and treat everybody honorably – even clients.

Creative people sometimes have unconventional morals. You may feel fine about making fake IDs as a freshman or scamming a company you felt was unethical – but don't expect others to vouch for you if they learn such things.

### **Accept that you have limits**

Yes, you draw pretty well but you may not be the best candidate to create an illustration for a paying client.

Who doesn't like to take iPhone snaps? And, yes, occasionally clients find them acceptable.

Retouching skills don't make you a master of lighting photography.

Get experience working with experts in related fields. Learning how to work with talented people will ultimately move you higher on the food chain.

### **Make relationships, not just connections**

Just because I have your card, doesn't mean we actually know each other. LinkedIn connections mean even less.

Nurture relationships with past coworkers, friends you've made at conferences, and the multitude of designers who inspire you. Think about what you can do for them.

Reach out to those you admire. It's not dubious if you have an honest interest in the work someone is doing.

**Be forever curious**

Practice new techniques, try new tools, take risks, push the envelope - this forces you to challenge your creativity, combats stagnation and can help keep you relevant.

Find out about the world, especially the world of your clients. Business news can give you a way into their way of thinking.

Go beyond the latest movies and games, which are rarely challenging. Read interesting books and magazines, watch intelligent films, listen to music by people who play their own instruments and sing their own songs, travel to countries with a different culture to yours and have as many meaningful conversations as you possibly can."

A career develops from thousands of very tiny decisions. Every design project is an opportunity to demonstrate a new skill, explore a new palette, etc. Keep relating your small choices to your long-term goals.