



# DESIGN LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS FROM ADPLIST MENTORS

How to get your organisation  
excited about an idea through  
Design Leadership

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eBook

# Intro

**Echos Desirable Futures Lab** and **ADPList** are official partners for the **Design Leadership Program**, a 10-week journey for Design Leaders to become more effective, and reach the next step of their design leadership by learning from top global leaders.

Mentors from diverse professional and academic backgrounds came together to answer current and relevant questions about Design Leadership. By combining multiple ways of interpreting the subject, we aim to give the reader tools to better communicate and articulate the powerful value of design, find a common global language, and secure the strategic space where design can be heard.

**Design Leadership Insights from ADPList Mentors eBook** is a quick-to-access pocket book of inspirations on how to get your organisation and team excited to innovate through Design.

The content of this ebook was curated by Lunna Pigatto, Strategic Designer and Program Manager for the Echos Design Leadership Program, and visually translated by Franchesca Perez, Visual Designer at Echos, in partnership with ADPList Mentors: Alessandro Caliandro, Jonelle Chandler, Jorge Bodas Guerra, Matt Schwartz, Mark Uraire and Sarah Heimeir.

We hope you enjoy this pocket source of inspiration and information. Let's get excited about design innovation!



ADPList (Amazing Design People List) is Echos' official partner and community builder for the Design Leadership Program.

Get virtual mentorship from over 1000+ mentors from the world's leading companies.



Echos Desirable Futures Lab helps organisations become more innovative whilst building a desirable future. We accelerate cultural change and build new products and services.



# DESIGN LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS FROM ADPLIST MENTORS

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## Sarah Heimeier

Lead Service Designer at Prospa

Sarah Heimeier enjoys the interplay of strategy, research, and service design. As a designer, mentor and coach, she's continually evolving her design process and the methods she uses. She is Service Design Lead at Prospa, working on designing and delivering the company's vision.

Sarah has an Honours in Industrial Design and has completed the altMBA. She's won a few design awards on her journey. With a love of learning, she's always looking for new things to pursue, such as improv, stand-up, drawing, and much more. Her goal is to fill her days with puppies, family, and plenty of laughs. Sarah has an Honours in Industrial Design and has completed the altMBA. With a love of learning, she's always looking for new things to pursue, such as improv, stand-up, drawing, and much more. Her goal is to fill her days with puppies, family, and plenty of laughs."



## What do you believe makes a good design leader?

A good design leader inspires and challenges. They will help people to feel passionate, motivated, push benchmarks and strive to learn and grow. They help to create a culture of shared knowledge and community. Flexibility is key as they adjust to changing needs as the business evolves.

**Design leaders connect with people from across the business. Working with them to align on and craft a clear vision of where the organisation is heading and how to deliver that vision.**



sarah heimeier



## What are some of the problems design leaders face?

Design thrives in an organisation that celebrates failure.

### Design struggles in an organisation that doesn't embrace failure and experimentation.

We need to work with other leaders to build an environment of learning.

Design can struggle where others don't understand the value of design and think that it will take a lot of time. It's important to articulate the value of design. This is done by carrying out research to understand others perspectives – what values are they looking for, what problems need solving and how design can help. You can then pair with other leaders and deliver value.



## How would you define design leadership?

Every designer is a design leader. Every designer needs to be the champion of great design and for the customer. Design leadership helps others feel passionate.

### It motivates organisations to strive for great things – for the customer experience and business.

A huge part of it is about creativity, autonomy, flexibility and development.

## What can design leaders bring to an organisation that others can't?

A deep understanding of customers, pain points and the value the organisation wants to achieve overall and in different areas of the business. They help others dream about the future, craft it together, and then deliver it.

Design leaders bring more collaboration with teams. With an ability to bring together different perspectives and voices. This helps to break down the future experience, so that it can be validated and delivered. While also promoting curiosity.

## How can design leaders establish and advocate for a design vision within an organisation?

A powerful future experience will inspire teams and guide your designs. Design leaders can establish a design vision by collaborating across the organisation to create it. A vision can't be created in a silo. By collaborating to craft the organisation's vision, everyone is involved in creating and communicating a compelling vision and direction.

When you have a clear vision of your customer experience, then everyone can work together as a team and you can easily articulate the value you'll be delivering.

**A vision isn't just about inspiring a brilliant experience for your customers, it should also inspire your teams and inspire yourself.**







## Jonelle Chandler

Partner & VP of Creative & User Experience at Qualified Digital

As a Partner and VP of Creative and User Experience at Qualified Digital, Jonelle has spent the last 5 years building out the design team and creative offering from the ground up. Her goal has always been to amplify diverse design thinkers who love to create innovative award-winning digital experiences. With love for business, technology, data, and creativity, it's allowed her to take what is sometimes only an imperceptible hint of an idea, and execute it into a beautiful existence. Jonelle's top passion is bridging gender and ethnic gap in both creativity and tech by mentoring the next generation of designers, technologists and creatives at programs such as Built By Girls, ADP List, Women in Wireless, Blacks Who Design, and the Invision Design Leadership Forum. Her perspective as a Black female creative gives her a natural affinity to amplify and uplift undiscovered voices, lifting up the people around her, and allowing herself to be lifted up in the process.



## What do you believe makes a good design leader?

Being a good design leader requires a lot, a lot of stuff. It's a completely different job from actually executing design. It's still designing and it is creative but in a different light. Instead (or in my case, in addition to) a design leader creating, empowering and building a strong team to create and execute bold ideas, you're building trust and more importantly, you're stepping out of the spotlight and cheering everyone on! You're getting excited for them, encouraging them, coaching your star team, keeping them motivated and really listening and engaging with them in meaningful relationships. I fangirl everyone on my team. And it's great to watch them shine.



# What are some of the problems design leaders face?

Isolation, Burn Out and Scaling a Team.

**At times leadership roles can feel very isolated and non-creative when you're the coach.**

You constantly celebrate everyone but at times it's important to take a step back and reflect and coach inward. Burnout is also real, especially when supporting a team. It's easy to feel isolated and put everyone first resulting in a little self neglect. Scaling a team is by far the most challenging - things tend to move slower, reinvention of process is in place and sometimes you just have to figure it out as you go.

## How would you define design leadership?

It starts with meaningful relationships, encouraging diversity of perspectives while your star team focuses on the work at hand.

**It's empowering and promoting culture and belonging, normalizing shared challenges and accelerating/uplifting those around you.**

## What can design leaders bring to an organisation that others can't?

Most times in an organisation leaders are trying to solve unique and complex business problems. Design leaders are great for having creativity, unique perspective, and innovation. This tremendously helps when navigating ambiguity - Design leaders also promote bold thinking, pushing past the obvious and creating a collaborative environment to solve business problems.



## How can design leaders establish and advocate for a design vision within an organisation?

I think a lot of that has to do with understanding the business, pain points, and also the wants and needs of an organisation. Once that's figured out presenting a design or creative vision around that can really compel stakeholders to see things differently. In my experience, everyone loves design, everyone thinks they are a designer.



**But really every human is creative in some aspect, most of the time it's visualizing or creating the bridge from business to design.**







## Mark Uraine

Product Design Manager at Shopmonkey

As a Product Designer and Creative Technologist, Mark is dedicated to making software, and the web, more accessible and human-centered by facilitating the transfer of information. He designs using proven methodologies, research, and intuition. Mark communicates and collaborates with global teams, especially through visual prototypes and design iterations that provide clarity. He has been making mistakes since childhood and find it's still the best way to reach new ground.



### What do you believe makes a good design leader?

A good leader excels in craft, communication, and collaboration. They inspire people through their own design work and attention to detail. They communicate clearly and consistently to keep everyone aware of what's important, what's coming up, and how everyone is impacting the company and the users. And finally they collaborate regularly to bring people in, provide feedback and direction, and even by working closely with users and stakeholders.

### What are some of the problems design leaders face?

People problems are among the most common for design leaders. This can include difficulties in energizing lower-performing team members, balancing people's desires with business needs, and learning how to communicate with individuals in ways that prompt positive results. Other problems center around the balance of business requirements and user needs.

### How would you define design leadership?

Design leadership are those that embody a desired direction. They are those people who others look up to because of their craft, their ability to communicate, or their willingness to collaborate through difficult challenges. They are a north star in it of themselves.

### What can design leaders bring to an organisation that others can't?

The user-centered approach. Design leaders would most likely champion the user in an organisation. It strengthens the design leader's ability to collaborate. Working with users has taught leaders to pull insights from everyone, including other business departments. Learning more about the user requires the design leader to learn more about the various facets of the business.

Mark Uraine

**How can design leaders establish and advocate for a design vision within an organisation?**

**To advocate for a design vision within an organisation, a design leader must learn how to communicate effectively with others. One must talk the talk, understand the acronyms, and discuss how design can impact the financial goals of the organisation.**







## Matt Schwartz

Head of Design at Sporttrade

Matt is a product and experience design leader, combining business thinking, UX research, and visual design to craft beautiful, engaging experiences. Over the past 18 years Matt has worked for startups and corporations across various industries including radio, entertainment, telecom, financial, insurance, fitness, and travel. Currently, Matt is the Head of Design at Sporttrade, a U.S. fintech company building a first-of-its-kind sports betting exchange.



## How would you define design leadership?

### Design Leadership

*noun*

The action of inspiring and leading, a team or company, through the lens of its customers.

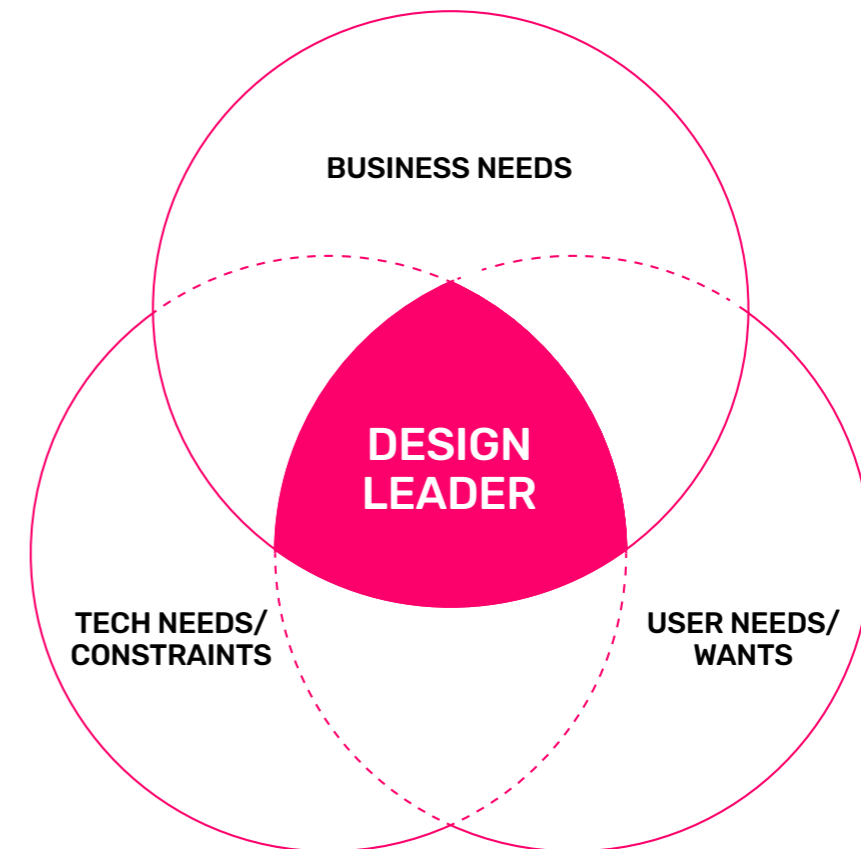
To lead the creation of innovative, human-centered, solutions through qualitative research, user testing, and iterative design.

## What do you believe makes a good design leader?

A great design leader is made up of several characteristics that pertain to their business acumen, designer skill set, and their personality, specifically, how they treat others.

### Business Acumen

From the business side of things, a good design leader needs to balance that perfect venn diagram:



As much as we always want to dedicate 100% of our impact to the user, it's important to know AND understand the KPIs and other metrics for the business so that when working with product and prioritizing roadmaps, you are contributing to the greater impact of the business.

Matt Schwartz

For the tech side, it's important to understand solution feasibility. We always hear, "hey, anything is possible" and I sort of agree for the most part, but it's all within reason. Can we keep on track with our roadmap, are we spending too much time developing a low impact solution, or not enough time on the more important features?

Lastly, and this is the easiest part, being an advocate for the user. This is so they have a "say" in the meetings on what should be tested next, or designed, or built. And are considered when figuring out the roadmap, and the goals/KPIs.

### Designer Skill Set

I believe a good design leader understands and has some level of background across the product design spectrum. Being a leader means to be great at being good at a lot of things. This is different from other contributors on the team where they are great at specific things.

This means, rolling up the sleeves and taking part in user interviews, usability testing, analog research, prototyping, design iteration, and visual design deliverables.

### Personality

This is really important to understand how to treat others on your team. Be there to listen and someone your team can vent too. You don't always have to solve problems in the moment, but your job is to provide air cover so the design team can get their amazing design work done and shipped. You need to learn how each of the designers on the team work (everyone has their own cadence, own speed, and process) and a good leader respects that.

## What are some of the problems design leaders face?

Depending on the organisation a design leader could face an uphill battle to get the other leaders in the company to understand the impact of design thinking and that UX design is good for business. It's on the design leader to bring design thinking to the table and earn the trust and respect of other leaders in the organisation.

Design leaders often face brand new challenges from being a senior lead on the team and transitioning into a leader. In relation to being a good design leader is someone who understands the business needs, and oftentimes a new problem emerges when moving into the leadership role. That is one where (that previously) nasty word of compromise comes up. Compromise isn't a bad thing, which often in design circles it's touted as something you NEVER do. That's wrong. Compromise and picking your battles is how you ship good usable products quickly.





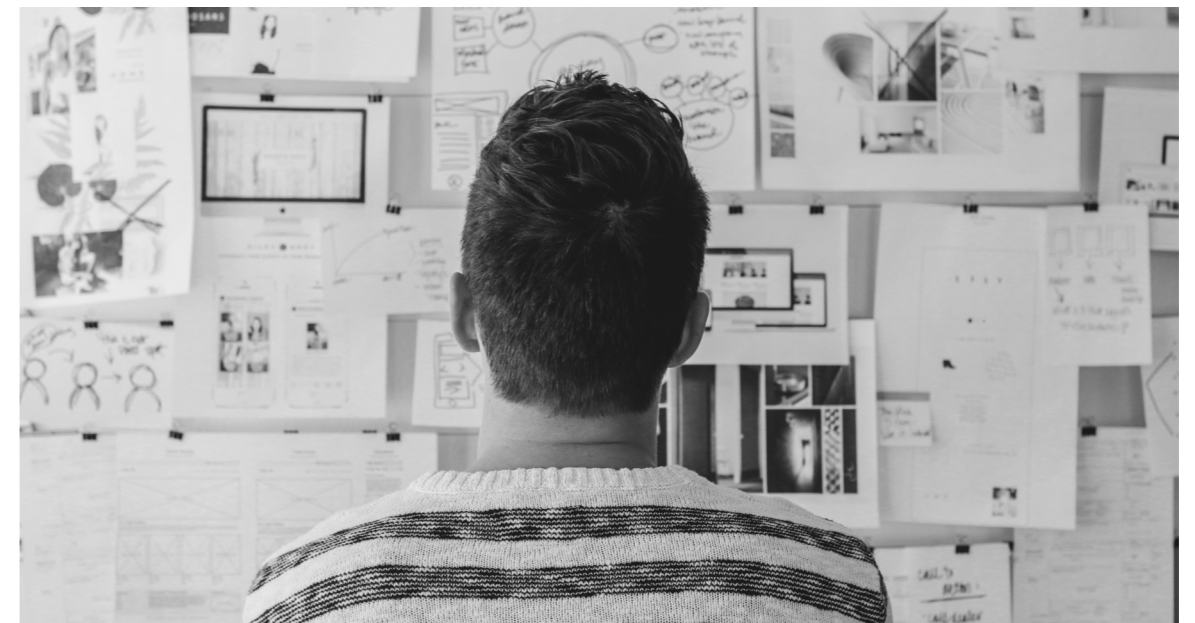
**A design leader must understand the difference between what works well and what's ideal.**

## What can design leaders bring to an organisation that others can't?

Design leaders bring a holistic approach to problem solving through a process that isn't magic. It's logical thinking.

Many non-design oriented business leaders in organisations don't think that way. They are full of ideas and solutions and go about validating them. Which is wrong. A good design leader discovers opportunities and ideas on how to solve them. But they test these ideas, rather than go out for validation.

**A great day in research is when you realize you got it all wrong and can now go iterate on your original ideas. All before a line of code is pushed.**





## How can design leaders establish and advocate for a design vision within an organisation?

First off, a good design leader can sell ice to an eskimo. They have a skillset where they can present to a group and garner excitement around whatever they want. This is key in establishing the design vision.

The easy part is coming up with what the future/vision is. That's done with the process of great UX design.

### Research, design, research, iterate, repeat.

The hard part is selling this vision and then getting everyone onboard.

Getting everyone onboard. Easier said than done. But you start with your closest allies in the organisation. Build that excitement. Get them so amped that they can recite your pitch, presentation, and enthusiasm without you even being in the room.

Sometimes I've found if you have an ally pretty far up the chain, maybe it's a quick coffee or hallway (ok, Slack) conversation to get their buy-in and then you have some help from the top down.

At the end of the day, continue to get others to see your vision, but remember that we are in the business of doing research to find the best solution. So tweak the vision as you get feedback, maybe there is a time to compromise a little on one aspect to get buy-in on another more important part of your vision.







## Jorge Bodas Guerra

Senior Product Designer at JamesEdition

Jorge is a very enthusiastic and proactive team player with solid layout and composition skills.

He believes that simple, clear, and user-centered design should interact, communicate, and evoke delightful emotion. Jorge considers himself somehow, an aesthete. Having special sensitivity to beauty (can be found in many forms).

He believes in people and the power of gathering together to achieve goals. He is also a big music lover and really enjoys reading comic books.



## What do you believe makes a good design leader?

**One of the things I have discovered during my design leadership experience is that you can't do it alone.**

Therefore, it's essential to work on your relationship with others. For this reason, design leaders need to feel comfortable when having meaningful conversations with the team. Technical skills matter, but soft skills matter even more. As design leaders, we need to show empathy and connect with the team. To have a holistic view of your team and their motivational drivers, you must look beyond seeing them as resources, but understand them as individuals by supporting their growth. It's about gathering people and getting them excited about an idea, then following through and making the idea a reality.



## What are some of the problems design leaders face?

Many aspects of design leadership might be challenging: management, inconsistency, strategy. If I had to highlight one, it would be to transmit design values to other people in the company.

**Design is a language, so it's essential for design leaders to ensure that everyone involved understands and speaks that language.**

If you can do that, all teams will be able to grow and mature in the same direction. It is not just about others speaking your language, it's also about understanding and learning the business. Design leaders need to get to know the people in charge and ask the right questions.

## How would you define design leadership?

In addition to team management, design leaders need to focus on the process of maturing design practices. They need to introduce strategic frameworks such as design principles, design critique, user-centered practice, etc. Design leaders also need to familiarize their partners with the above-mentioned design practices. In summary, the role of design and its impact on the organisation need to be upgraded. When leaders succeed in this task, we can observe designers making user-centered decisions, like partners and other stakeholders.

## What can design leaders bring to an organisation that others can't?

Design, among many other things, improves the way a company works. The application of design thinking can only help to increase the value of the company. It also allows the company to solve problems through a solution-oriented approach. The solutions must be durable and scalable. Consistency is important when it comes to facing rapid changes, and it is essential for the growth of the company. In addition to this consistency, I must mention that the design focuses on creating a solid structure by paying attention to details at each stage.



## How can design leaders establish and advocate for a design vision within an organisation?

Everything is the result of things that have happened in the past, and I believe that this is an aspect that directly affects the relationship between design and the company.

**In order to build a picture of the company's future, it is important to translate what you know about design into a language that the business understands.**



**Achieving this goal will help companies focus away from distractions and work together to design solutions to the problems. These solutions must be tailored to the purpose they are intended to serve.**







## Alessandro Caliandro

Product & Design Lead at UNGUESS

Alessandro is a designer with 15+ years of experience in agencies and startups. He is a big ambassador of human-centered design and user research.



### What do you believe makes a good design leader?

A good design leader, despite having strong technical skills, must have developed many soft skills: must be able to be a point of reference for the team and combine operational and inspirational aspects.

### What are some of the problems design leaders face?

The main problems can be to make the rest of the company understand the importance of design and the role that each person on the design team must have within the processes of creating and developing products and services.

### How would you define design leadership?

**Design leadership is an important function within design management processes that allows you to combine tactics and strategy.**

### What can design leaders bring to an organisation that others can't?

A human-centered approach not only in the design of products or services but also in the discussion of business issues and corporate strategy.



**How can design leaders establish and advocate for a design vision within an organisation?**

**Advocacy for design is one of the main activities of every designer, the design leader can influence this by having access to discussions with the main stakeholders of the company.**



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## Echos is a desirable futures lab driven by design.

Design is the new leadership. It offers a comprehensive and practical approach to innovation and is a pivotal contributor to successful organizations.

Instead of predicting the future, we speculate, design and help activate desirable strategic futures. Our approach combines the best business strategies, futurism and emerging technologies with the best human-centred design from an ethical and inclusive perspective when building new possibilities for the future.

We use technology to bridge the digital and physical worlds to provide unique and seamless interactive experiences for the user.

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## Welcome to Echos, and help us create a desirable and diverse future for all.

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