Developing Empathy, Embracing Ambiguity, and Conquering Failure

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A truly unique component of the Outdoor Product Design & Development program is its strong connection to industry. Routinely, industry guests can be found speaking in a dedicated Industry Seminar class. Dave Gibson, a local industrial designer, spoke to OPDD about opportunities that exist for good designers to make an impact in the industry.

Throughout his presentation, Dave referred to three things that a good designer needs to understand and, at their core, embrace. No matter what a designer is creating, they must develop empathy, become comfortable with ambiguity, and embrace failure and rebound from it. Throughout his presentation, Dave gave some key takeaways regarding these three points.

Product design without empathy is just an exercise. It’s important that designers work to understand problems that real people face. Without understanding the pain points of others, it’s difficult to design a product or solution that solves a real problem.

Design is never straightforward and there isn’t necessarily a guidebook for solving problems. Designers must be comfortable with the unknown and the ambiguous. Designers create order out of chaos in order to find a clear path and solution for moving forward.

Dave stressed that failure brings you closer to solutions. No product is ever designed perfectly on the first try, or second, third, fourth, or fifth. Student designers must be able to rebound when something doesn’t work perfectly, their design is rejected, or they don’t solve something on the first try. Iterating on ideas is a key to good design and solving real problems.

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