

Design Production and Solutions – Written Responses to Live Audience Questions

Responses by: Cameron Norman

Q: *Early in my career I sought out mentors to bounce ideas off and workshop ideas into implementation. Are there organizations in Canada that you are aware of that have mentors?*

Most of the ones that I am familiar with are tied to specific professions (e.g., accounting, evaluation, public health) or settings, however, I've got some suggestions if you're looking for mentorship support:

If you are affiliated with any professional organizations, it might be worthwhile to inquire whether there is a mentorship program or professional meet-up tied to the organization that might offer some opportunities. On that last point – the meet-up – there are a lot of informal gatherings organized through services like Meetup (<https://www.meetup.com/>) and a few through LinkedIn.

Another great source of mentorship can be through alumni organizations. If you're a graduate of a college, university, or program there may be a mentorship initiative run through that organization.

Lastly, if you're with a large organization there may be some options available to you.

My experience is that mentorship programs are often not well-publicized (usually as they are informal, volunteer-run and usually without many resources). Hopefully, these provide some clues where to look. Good luck!

Q: *Do you have any guidelines or process for understanding how to communicate stories to the largest audience possible. I have prototyped like crazy, now I need to get them out!*

This is a great question. Keep in mind that the larger and more general the audience the more generalized the story needs to be. It's often easier to get your prototype in the hands of a group of highly knowledgeable, excited individuals than a more dispassionate audience. It's one of the reasons why dissemination efforts are often so challenging.

I don't have a firm process for this but do rely on a couple of strategies in my communications and advice to organizations. The first is to anchor what you've done to pressing issues facing the organization. Maybe you've prototyped a solution that isn't tied much to the major issue of the day (e.g., organizations might be focused on pandemic mitigation right now). In this case, emphasize the process over the product. Break down HOW you did what you did and spot things that can connect WHAT you did to what else could be done with another project.

Another option is to use your product – the THING you created and prototyped – as the lead. Here, you anchor your story to the thing with an additional focus on how what you've developed can lead to something else. It's using the product itself to highlight future processes (as well as the product itself). My recommendation is to focus on many small audiences using them as ambassadors ahead of doing organization or system-wide communications. There is so much out there it's easier to tell a compelling story to a primed audience than one to an audience that might not know much about what you're doing and have competing interests.