



**On Redefining:
New Rules**

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To spring forward from concurrent crises, DI's Managing Editor issues a call for new rules—and the courage to break the old ones.

RULES

So many of us get hung up on the rules. For most of our educational and professional lives we were taught to work between the lines. Particularly when it came to contracts, commerce, fees, and value. For centuries, unwritten, unspoken limits constrained what we could do and what we could get paid. These were instituted by state licensing entities and adopted by owners as “compensation guidelines.” Social mores and professional boundaries limited the societal reach and expectations placed upon designers and builders.

But where have these rules gotten us? Sure, they've governed behaviors and set standards for decades. Architects, engineers, and builders practiced under these conditions because we were “professionals” beholden to public health, safety, and welfare, and were held to a higher standard, a higher calling. None of this has changed.

But amid multiple concurrent crises, we are being called to answer to even higher-order standards now, such as the 2030 Commitment, and the confluence of inequity, racial, environmental, infrastructure, economic, political, and COVID-19 pandemic issues that confront us in 2020. Do we have adequate training and province to speak to racial issues? As individuals we do — in our moral, ethical, and personal beliefs and behaviors. As firm leaders we



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do — because our followers, clients and communities look to us for leadership. But will we act, or change behavior?

Too many talented, smart, hard-working design and construction professionals have labored under out-of-date, guild-like restrictions and shackles for too long. In our current context, it's time to rewrite the rules. It's time for redefinition.

NEW RULES

What kind of new rules am I talking about? In the style of politically-incorrect-by-design pundits such as Tom Peters, Bill Maher, et al, I offer the following ten areas with potential for immediate, lasting impact and positive change. More than idle theory, they represent tested principles. In fact, I believed in them so strongly I put my career on the line to implement them: beyond new rules, I created a new role. I went to work for a contractor to put myself in position to create, test, and implement these ideas.

New Rule # 1: Design Your Own Incentives to Increase Your Value

Architects should no longer allow themselves to be paid based upon outmoded compensation methods such as percentage of construction cost, fixed fees, or hourly billing rates. Value-based designers should be smart enough to design fees that reward value, service, and benefit. Examples borrowed from other industries include subscription services (e.g. cable TV, legal fee retainers, incentive-based agreements, and the cost-of-work-and-services plus a fee models employed by CM-at-Risk agreements for decades.) In these constructs, all costs are covered, and the professionals are incentivized to wake up every morning to serve their clients and projects to earn well-deserved profits. In turn, this funds research and development, professional development, community giving, and sustainable enterprises.



New Rule # 2: Ditch the First-Cost Perspective and Plan for the Whole Life Cycle

Owners, designers and builders should immediately stop thinking about projects as short-term, first-cost endeavors. People, projects, our planet, and our prosperity demand and deserve a longer-term balanced outlook. Design decisions based on short-term, shortsighted, self-serving interests and misguided criteria should be discarded in favor of operational, sustainable, long-term thinking. Owners, developers, and financiers should recast their proformas accordingly.

New Rule # 3: Leverage Design Thinking at a Broader Scale

Those with the responsibility to design, build, own, and operate our physical environment should be intelligent enough to leverage their skills more broadly. Without losing the craft and value of artful, bespoke thinking, this cadre of professionals must leverage their efforts more widely to provide greater access to design thinking, more intelligent use of resources, and equitable compensation. We need to learn: our actions affect others outside our own sandbox.

New Rule # 4: Think More Deeply About Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

In the satirical worlds of George Orwell and Ray Bradbury, makers who persist in designing and building their projects with teams of their own clones would be banished to some district on another planet. The vast, diverse, connected nature of our project work and the immense responsibilities we owe to others demand the inclusion of diverse people, skills, and points of view. We must embrace and benefit from our differences. In addition to diversity of race, gender, and class, we need to celebrate the diversity of skills and thinking needed to design in today's pluralistic world. Designers need builders, schedulers, and cost estimators to keep them in check. Builders need to understand, embrace, and own the up-until-now mysterious world of design. Owners must lead.

New Rule # 5: Master New Technologies for Smarter Design Process: LEAN, BIM, VDC, and Alphabet Soup: Still Working Dumb?

Luddites who shun the application of technology and intelligent processes will suffer the penalties of market forces if they fail to adapt. Most other industries on the planet have embraced technology. They have automated and augmented their processes for huge benefit. Yet many designers and builders languish in the ways of old. In a world where we can procure goods and services in seconds, minutes, and days on Amazon, and query anything on Google in seconds, design must join the modern epoch and find ways to become lean. Building information modeling (BIM), virtual design and construction (VDC), integrated project delivery (IPD), augmented reality and immersive reality (AR/IR) are just a few of the acronyms. Go forth and master the new tools!

New Rule # 6: Set Specific, Performative Goals (Beyond Cost, Time, and Quality)

Projects that simplistically set out to be on time, in budget, and of quality will attain none of the above. We must shoot higher. We must demand and achieve more. Prescriptive programs that specify energy, sustainability, process, financial, functional, social, design, human, and a host of other objectives should be the norm. Owners and their teams need to learn to articulate, record, track, and accomplish such data-based outcomes.

New Rule # 7: Plan Collaboratively, Early, Using the Best Available Tools

Project teams who foolishly believe they don't have time to plan are forced to spend extra time executing. Multidisciplinary, interactive, technology-informed work sessions are the high-value way to collaborate. To continue working in isolation with non-value-added time lags is not only foolish, it's wasteful. Instead, come together to analyze your projects early in the cost influence curve. You'll be glad you did. Those who wait fail to get to know one another and take advantage of their collective expertise.

New Rule # 8: Embrace Risk

Designers must learn to embrace risk rather than simply introduce it. By their very nature, design activities intentionally seek new combinations and creative ideas. Hence, risk is a prerequisite to reward. While we're not taught to speak of risk in school, the new designers of the future must open their arms and learn to mitigate and manage risk. A recent DesignIntelligence survey of design professional hiring managers showed that the number one missing piece new hires lacked in educational experience was an understanding of risk. Many will need help from contractors, insurers, regulators, engineers, financiers, data scientists, and risk analysts, but they must learn to become a part of the solution rather than merely the introducers of the problems.



New Rule # 9: Create a Culture of Service

The closed-culture, mysterious world of design must open its eyes, doors, and arms to the service relationship. Designers focused solely on “their” design to the detriment of their clients, projects, and the environment will ultimately fail to build strong networks, and their businesses will fall behind. For too many years designers have introspectively over-focused on their craft, aesthetics, and the art of architecture, to the exclusion of their clients’ needs. Designers of the future must embrace the objectives of their clients and teammates — as all others in the business world do. The narratives of projects such as the Farnsworth House, Fallingwater, and thousands of others that did disservices to their clients due to their architects’ self-interest are fine examples of what not to do.

New Rule # 10: Bring in New Teammates with New Skills – and Improve Outcomes

Designers, builders, and owners must shed their biases and actively seek radically new kinds of participants for their project teams. Designers should seek complementary teammates such as contractors, schedulers, cost estimators, and design managers to keep their processes in check. They should seek the skills of technology experts, energy analysts, cross-discipline enablers, and translators from other disciplines. These new skills will bring synergy and improved outcomes to projects.

I hope you’ll give some thought to your current context and use this opportunity. Are you playing by the rules, or are you rewriting them when necessary? Write some new rules for your team—and redefine your future.

As we look to spring forward from an insane beginning of a new decade, let’s agree to question the status quo and rewrite some of those old rules to suit our new world and new ways of practice. Here’s to the leaders willing to redefine social practices, value, and process in the years ahead. Only then will we be positioned to reinvent ourselves to serve our fellow mankind, the public, and the planet in the myriad ways they need us—ways in which we listen to and love one another.

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