

Human-Centered Design in Practice: The 5 Core Competencies Every Modern Product Team Needs



*Certificate in Design
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Human-Centered Design in Practice



With so much focus on advancing artificial intelligence (AI) and digital design upgrades, it's easy to forget how impactful human-centered design still is. Samantha Warren, a senior director of design at Adobe's Firefly, wrote about reflecting on a design career inspired by her mother's artistic ambitions in 1968.

Her mother graduated from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh as a fashion illustrator, a dream job that has since been lost to the advance of technology that Warren herself helped to create. When Warren asked her how she felt about these advances, her mother's excitement around growth and change in the design industry forced Warren to reflect on what aspects of the industry remain unchanged.

Ever constant is the humanity inherent in art, design, and media. Warren refers to mastering these hands-on skills as "future-proofing" a design career. Programs like CSUN's [Design and Innovation](#) have created certificates for mid-career professionals to hone these skills. The [Design Experiences and Interactions certificate](#) specifically focuses on communications and marketing design to elevate your artistic abilities. Human-centered design is still at the core of what makes effective, ethical and empathy-driven design work successful in the industry.

So how to ensure your career is prepared for the tech evolution ahead? Here are five core competencies that every modern design team relies on today.

Core Competencies

- Problem-solving
- Ingenuity



1 Problem-solving skills

Some of the greatest design solutions recognize their impact on consumers' daily lives. To create experiences and products that improve day-to-day living, and effectively use the right tools during the design process, designers must be strong problem solvers.

Essential skills include clear communication, dynamic critical thinking, the application of data analytics, and the ability to balance form with function.

2 Harness ingenuity

Ingenuity refers not only to a designer's creative chops, but also their ability to effectively apply new skills. Adapting to design changes and incorporating feedback during the operational stage is important, as is understanding the most appropriate technology for the job. Designers who bring the unexpected, demonstrate strong craftsmanship and uncompromising quality will go farther.

Not sure where your ingenuity lies? Try identifying a few passions. Do you never miss a classic movie marathon at the local theater? Do you love to watercolor on the weekends? Pinpoint those skills and imagine how they can be transferred to your creative work. The stillness required during painting can be a strong team member asset. The storytelling strength of a classic film might be the key to the next campaign.

Core Competencies

- Team
- Empathy



3 Be a top team member

The ability to communicate, present, and lead are skills machine-learning tools are slower to master. Building strong relationships through direct communication, empathic conflict resolution (read on for more!) and more effective problem-solving ensures the highest quality design. The most talented designers understand that each person brings something unique to the creative process, and relies on these relationships for the best result.

At CSUN, the [Design Experience and Interactions certificate](#) creates real-life experiences where students are able to test their team and leadership skills by collaborating with industry professionals. Our graduates are better prepared to become team leads in their next career phase.

4 Apply empathy

Empathy is not only an important leadership skill. Designers who harness empathy in the creative process are more attuned to products and methodologies that meet consumer needs. Understanding a consumer's business, environment and challenges better prepares designers to be strong creators and advocates.

Simply solving a problem doesn't mean a creative team understands it. Successful designers stay engaged in the resolution process and recognize how impactful design can improve a consumer's life.

Core Competencies

• Storytelling



5 The art of storytelling

The best design tells consumers an engaging story. Many of those stories and taste making details come from a background in traditional art and art history. Samantha Warren describes stories as "...the composition of what is extraordinary, human and valuable..."

She believes compassionate storytelling can help designers keep their heads above the AI-data saturated waters. Data analysis is excellent for identifying patterns and possible solutions, but an effective story helps to foster connection. Greater connection between professional teams and consumers is often the key to longevity.

Consider the difference between an academic text and a novel. There's a necessity to the technical terms we find in classroom reading. The statistics, the definitions, all of them help us understand a particular methodology. A novel's aim is to entertain us. It may carry an overarching message, but it's equally focused on guiding us through that message through action and characterization. Good design can unite these two concepts at the highest level of innovation.

The Future Moves Forward

Advancement in machine learning and technology has provided invaluable improvements to design work. Rather than resist those improvements or fear them as the future moves forward, mastering these human-centered skills can help prepare designers for what comes next.

Just as Samantha Warren's mother embraced the evolving nature of fashion design by celebrating the advancements of AI art, so too can modern designers ensure their skillset is ready to tell the next story.



CSUN's Design & Innovation Program



For designers in all fields looking to grow their skills and enter into the next phase of professional growth, CSUN's [Design and Innovation program](#) is a flexible, affordable option. The program is comprised of three stackable certificates—[Design Experiences and Interactions](#), [Design Strategy and Systems](#), and [Design Leadership and Impact](#)—along with a collaborative graduate project, that together make up the Master of Arts in Design and Innovation. It can be completed on its own or applied toward the full master's degree.

The certificate and master's program are offered online, with supportive faculty and student cohorts to help move you towards graduation. There's never been a better time to earn your degree. According to the Otis Creative Economy Report, California's creative economy has overperformed industries like government, healthcare, and retail trade, among others.

Embrace the next step in your creative journey with CSUN's [Design for Experiences and Interactions Certificate](#) and build the skills to become a designer adept at leading teams with compassion, originality, and craftsmanship.

Sources:

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