Don't just do good design, do good!

David Berman suggests that designers take the Do Good Pledge as the first step to bringing about positive change through their work

"Now that we can do anything, what will we do?" - *Bruce Mau.*

We live in a truly remarkable time. Although it is easy to dwell upon the world's troubles, as a global community, we live in a time of unparalleled opportunity, and unprecedented creative potential for hope.

As designers, we are the stewards of the communication of knowledge. And it has never been easier, never less expensive, never more immediate, to send messages over great distances to larger and larger populations.

The Internet makes so much sharing possible. And yet Nicholas Negroponte reminds us that, for the majority of people alive today, the Internet is still just a rumor. However, over the next ten years, that will change forever. Before this decade ends, most human beings will have had their first interaction with the Internet. Will that first access to the Internet be about sharing the best we have to offer: medicine, conflict resolution, democracy, governance, free

thought … or will it be just one more way to convince ever-growing populations in the developing world that they need to consume stuff -- way more stuff -- in order to feel they belong in the global culture?

I believe that the Internet provides us with our single most valuable opportunity in which to help build a better world.

The digital divide
The digital divide of our global society separates humanity into two groups: the technological haves and the have-nots. This dangerous divide increases the risk that the rich will get richer, while the poor get poorer.

There are two potential outcomes over this next decade, and we designers have a crucial role in determining which of those outcomes will define the future of the one global civilization all humanity now shares.

Will designers bring the best we have to offer, in support of goodness and truth, or will we prop up the greed disorder

of a minority, by using our cleverness to help convince more and more people that they are not tall enough, not thin enough, white enough, curly enough, cool enough… and the only way for them to fulfill these invented needs is by consuming more stuff?

The fourth screen
My friend, Dr. Peter Bruck of Salzburg, speaks of an evolution through four screens of visual communication: the movie screen, the television screen, the computer screen, and now the fourth screen: the mobile screen. These four screens represent a century-long transition from communal, one-way communication to interactive, personalized, portable immersion.

It will be on that mobile, pocket-sized fourth screen -- and not the computer screen, that the majority of humans will encounter the Internet for the first time. Already, every month this year, in India alone, 15 million people will power up their first mobile phone!

@JASONSANTAMARIA *Spent the day on the couch sneezing, coughing up a rainbow of colors, and drinking orange juice. Spring has sprung.*

Life and death in 160 characters
Imagine for a minute that you live in Ghana. Your young daughter is ill. Not deathly ill, but mysteriously coughing all night. You're not sure what's wrong, and you rush to a pharmacy at 3 am to buy medicine. But you're uncertain what to do: your dilemma is that you know that in Ghana over 20% of prescription drugs are fake. You buy the medicine, yet you don't know if it will do more harm than good. You can't be sure what's in the bottle. She's crying: what will you do? It may hurt her more than help her. Are you going to have your daughter swallow some mystery substance?

That's the reality for people in Ghana today, but that reality is changing for the better: a remarkable team at mpedigree.com designed a simple mobile phone app that can solve this indignity. They arranged with drug companies to put a unique numeric code on each bottle of medicine. At the pharmacy, all you need to do is pull out your phone, text that unique number printed on the medicine bottle to mpedigree's phone number, and within a few seconds you get a reply telling you if the bottle in your hand is fraudulent or not.

It's a simple design: no Pantone colors, no fancy typography, slogans, intriguing interface, or clever branding … just 160 characters of life-and-death design that saves lives and helps build a sustainable economy.

Don't just do good design… do good!
We have the opportunity to decide whether we will simply do good design, or whether we are going to do good with design. We have a choice to make: to help sell more caffeinated sugar water to children, or to use our skills and our opportunities to help create a better world! Imagine what would be possible if designers did not participate in the export of over-consumption and the unbridled fulfillment of greed. No one understands the powerful mechanism behind these manipulations better than design professionals, and we have the creativity and persuasiveness to make a positive change. We must act, be heard… and sometimes simply say 'no'… by designing a better 'yes'.

Some of us choose to pursue design purely as an exercise in the esthetic. I know that simply creating beautiful objects or surrounding yourself with beautifully designed things can help create a fulfilling and comfortable life. However, that is only the surface of the sense of accomplishment you can achieve with your creative skills.

Go further: recognize the interdependence, power, and influence of your role as a professional, and let it resonate with the world around you and within you.

The Do Good Pledge
Designers ask me, "So what can I do?" My answer: Take this three-part Do Good Pledge, with its components of professionalism, personal responsibility, and time

"I will be there to my profession."
For a couple of millennia now, doctors have been taking a pledge. Imagine if, instead of following the Hippocratic Oath, doctors only focused on the wealth they could gain from performing cosmetic surgery, or shaking down dying people for their entire inheritance in exchange for a remedy that would extend their life by a few weeks.

Design professionals have built their own oaths. Join a national or regional association of design professionals that has a code of ethics. By joining, you'll make a public professional commitment to abide to a minimum standard of ethical conduct.

A commitment to professional ethics implies a minimum standard of conduct: a combination of your personal and public principles. This is the personal commitment you make to yourself, in the form of your mission, morals, and beliefs. The professional commitment is a promise to uphold a common set of published minimum standards of behavior, a promise you make when you join a professional body. Professionalism implies a 24/7 commitment, a recognition that your profession is part of who you are.

"I will be true to myself."
Be guided by what you know is right.

People ask me what constitutes doing good. I can't answer for you whether a hybrid SUV is part of the solution or part of the problem. However, I do know that if all designers simply looked in their hearts, chose to be their best selves, and only did work that was in alignment with their principles, we'd be 90% there.

Be aware of your principles. Part of what designers do as professionals – just as is expected of doctors, judges or engineers – is to strive to maintain our principles at all times. So, when it comes to the question of what is right or wrong in the professional world, simply ask yourself, "How would I deal with this on a personal level? Would I recommend this product to my children? Could I look my child or best friend straight in the eye while speaking this message or pitching the product I've designed, or would I have to look away?"

If each one of us forbids ourselves from doing anything or helping to say anything that is out of alignment with our personal principles, then that will be more than enough to change the world. Saying 'no' at times is a big part of it. But it is often more creatively powerful to propose an alternative solution that aligns with the principles of all parties. If we all do that, we will achieve the required shift: we'll be contributing more than we're taking away: doing more good than harm.

"I will spend at least 10% of my professional time helping repair the world."
I am not asking you to sell your design agency. I am not asking you to quit your job. Since time is money, I'm asking that you commit at least 10% of your professional time to help create a world that is more just. That's at least four hours of a 40-hour professional work week. Four hours of design for an organization, a company clearly acting for the social good.

There are close to 2 million designers in the world. If each of us were to take just 10% of our professional time, imagine what would be possible: close to 8 million hours a week of designing a more just, more sustainable, more caring civilization. I doubt there's a problem on Earth we couldn't solve.

@ZELDMAN *Friday night. Looking up divorce related bank records while my daughter watches Cinderella.*