

SYNOPSIS

Design thinking has taken on a central role in freeing the corporate imagination. It leads to Big Ideas about innovative products, services and business models. But what's missing is a broader view of the end-to-end customer experience. Which is why Experience Thinking, a new evolving field, fills a critical gap in the innovation process. In this interview van Gelderen explains his framework for reimagining the customer experience and his unique approach to research and design.

META TAG

Tedde van Gelderen explains why experience thinking is so critical to improving the end-to-end customer experience.

CUSTOMER FIRST THINKING PODCAST #7

Experience Thinking: An Interview with Tedde van Gelderen, President at Akendi

Tedde van Gelderen is the President of Akendi, one of the pioneer design consultancies in Canada, focused on the end-to-end experience lifecycle. He recently published a book called *Experience Thinking* which describes his unique approach to creating truly connected experiences.

Over the past decade design thinking has grown in popularity as a catalyst for innovation. Historically, the design function has always operated on the business perimeter, answering to product management, engineering or marketing. But with today's intense pressure on businesses to ward off digital disruption, design thinking has taken on a central role in freeing the corporate imagination.

Until very recently design thinking was not even taught in business schools. The curriculum has been overwhelmingly devoted to scientific management principles which stresses measurement and process (like Six Sigma, TQM, etc). Design thinking, by contrast, looks at problems from an outside-in perspective: how people experience the world. Applying abductive reasoning, it tries to reframe the problem by factoring in the often emotional and irrational choices made by customers. To think like a designer demands curiosity – insight - free thinking – empathy - and a collaborative spirit: attributes more often found amongst polymaths than technocrats.

Design thinking leads to Big Ideas about innovative products, services and business models. But to improve the usability of a product or service, a different design methodology - human-centered design – is applied. Both have their role in meeting the needs of customers. But what's missing is a more holistic view of the customer relationship – one that takes a broader view of the end-to-end experience. Which is why experience thinking, a new evolving field, fills a critical gap in the innovation process.

Experience Thinking looks at what's important to customers – searches for unmet needs – pinpoints the desired outcomes – and homes in on the ideas that can turn a humdrum experience into one that customers will rave about. It can be thought of as the “corpus callosum” connecting creativity and innovation in order to crack the code on difficult-to-solve problems or come up with truly unique experiences.

“When you take a holistic look at how people react and would interact within a set of events at specific points in time, you are implementing Experience Thinking”, writes Tedde van Gelderen in his book Experience Thinking. As the founder and President of the Toronto-based design consultancy Akendi, van

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Geldereren has worked with a broad range of companies over the past decade, helping them create what he calls “intentional experiences”. His framework divides the design process into four interconnected quadrants: Brand, Content, Product and Service, each with its own goals, techniques and outcomes. Together they form the tapestry of a connected end-to-end experience.

Prior to founding Akendi, the Dutch-born van Gelderen worked mostly in the area of user experience design where he applied his post-graduate degree in cognitive psychology, either as a design manager or consultant. Today the company he founded has offices in both Canada and the U.K. and is considered a pioneer in the realm of experience design.

Tedde Van Gelderen: I came from a company before that we sold to a software company. And I've always been interested in the human factors and usability and the UX User Experience side of things. And I always felt that our companies tend to specialize too much. So they're either too much of a research company or too much of a design company. And I really felt that bridging the gap between the research and design is one of the critical challenges really that a lot of companies face. And whether they're consultancies, or big organizations, that had crazy experiences. They're all suffering from this. We find a bunch of stuff and insights out and then we have a hard time turning those into decent designs. Because they're different teams, different people, they're not connected as much as they should be in terms of getting the information out of people into a design. And so I want to have a company that does exactly that, which it does to this day, is that we are half and half a research company and a design company. And some of our clients know us as researchers, some of our clients know us designers. And I love to do projects where we do both.

Stephen Shaw: So does the work tend to bifurcate or are you finding more and more people are asking to go end to end?

TVG: More lately, last couple of years I think the understanding of this space is growing and I think it's better now than it used to be and that people do understand that they need both to get it right. So we do more and more projects where we do both research and design and are seen as being one package, which is, it's not new, but it's growing, that's for sure. Yeah.

SS: Well, it helps to eliminate the complexity of managing multiple suppliers and hand-offs, obviously, if you can do that.

TVG: Absolutely. But it's a challenge to be good at both and to show that you're an expert in both, because to my earlier point, it's a lot of people and our clients are still thinking sort of singular focus. You're good at X, or you can't do a lot of different things because they don't...

SS: Right. You can't do everything well, you know.

TVG: No. And they keep, in a way keep separating out the experience into these different segments and then seeing that you're not building the experience as a whole and it needs research and design, which I always find funny because it's, we do have the acronym R&D, and that's called, I know it's research and development but I could easily say it's research and design. So we have R&D as an acronym so why don't we use this properly?

SS: Or it's Research Design Development.

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TVG: Well, RDD. And there we have another process that's just invented.

SS: Well, and it's a process intensive subject area, and we're gonna get into it a little later in this interview. When you started the company there was no, I would say, you know, by my recollection, governing ethos around the concept of design thinking. And, you know, when you kept hearing that term more and more and more. But you use the term *experience thinking*. Do you make a distinction between the concept experience thinking and the concept of design thinking? Is one subsumed under the other or are they two separate things?

TVG: Yeah. I try to stay away to some degree around the conversation of who owns what, or what is part of what. You see the same conversation happen with UX and CX. And I'm going, "Well, is customer experience part of user experience? Is user experience part of customer experience? I think those are, yes, interesting to talk about but..."

SS: Is there a natural hierarchy?

TVG: Yeah. And so CX and UX don't have hierarchy in my view because I think they're different parts of the lifecycle. They're different parts of the experience that people go through. You start with CX to become a customer first and then you turn into a user, but then you really turn into a customer again. So they really are intertwined and they're not really an either/or, or bigger, or smaller, it's about the purpose in the moment. And so in the moment you're a customer you're looking for value and benefits. You're buying something, you're gauging something, but then you're using. And that's really what I talk about in the book as well, is that you become a user at some point where you interact with things and you don't think about the value proposition or the benefits or all that stuff anymore. You try to make things work and get the information you need, get the transaction done, get the functionality going. It's all about that. But then after a while you start to wonder, "Oh, I got all this stuff working now. Was it worth it? Was it of value?" And then you turn slowly into a customer again. And so it's more like waves that enter into this person. So that's on the customer user experience side. On the design thinking versus experience thinking side is that design thinking as a background, it's a repackaging of a known process which is called User-Centered design. And User-Centered Design came up in the '80s and '90s. (8:54)

SS: User-centered design.

TVG: User-centered design, yeah. And had morphed old, after a while into human-centered design. And so that has a distinct set of processes and steps that design thinking really borrowed 95% of those steps and they relabeled and redid them and they added a couple more words like empathy, but really they're doing the same thing. Which is nothing wrong with that and I have no objection to design thinking at all, but it is repackaging of a process that is helping you creates products and services as a thing. So it's more singular in a sense of the way that is trying to do, it's design thing, it's creating a design. So it's more singular in this thought and it doesn't have the breadth that I was missing that I thought, "Well, it's not about designing it's about the experience." Which is what "The Experience Economy" book talks about and others talk about. We are creating experiences and I think it felt always constraining to me that the amount of people say design thinking that it's always focused on the design people and the design itself, which, like I said, it's a great thing that it opened a lot of doors, and it opened a lot of more awareness for a lot of people, but it felt constrained to

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me. And I was saying well, I need, and I always talked to clients, and to colleagues, and to others about this notion that we are creating real experiences, we're not creating designs here.

SS: But when you started the company, was that your, were you at the starting gate with that philosophy or did you grow into that philosophy? Did you start out as a UX design company and start to realize that the concepts, some of the concepts were very portable to other ways of strategically thinking about a business?

TVG: I did it very early on. So when I started the company I started to think about these things very early on. I never did much with it in terms of shouting it from the rooftops, that's what the approach was that I was following and promoting. Mostly because I really felt there was such a big gap between what I was talking about and what the marketplace was basically buying, or getting, and understanding, that I felt, "I can talk about this." But really very few people are listening and if people are listening it's gonna be in the field itself and it's not gonna be our clients because they're so far away. And really that's what for me a big reason why the book took so long. Because if you go back and on the website I have always talked about experience thinking and I've always talked about a lot of the concepts in the book for years, for decades, and more, but I've never really showcased it, and talked about this more because I felt yeah, that gap is too big. And that is why I was happy with design thinking as an idea because I think it started to bridge that gap and I think we're getting close now. We're getting into a moment where people start to embrace this as a notion. And the same you see with, "The Experience Economy," as a book is 1999. That's been two decades almost now and still people talk about us as if it's a completely new idea and that, "Oh, wow. We're creating and staging experiences now." Yeah, people thought about this, it was great and they captured it even in a book. I'll read the book. And look at the number there, the year there, it's not new. There's just nothing wrong with it, but I think it just shows, again, how long it can take for basically just society to pick up on these ideas and to start to run with them. (12:17)

SS: Well, I think too, the conditions have to be right.

TVG: Absolutely.

SS: Businesses are notorious for embracing change very slowly and adopting new concepts driven by urgency and the threat of disruption, which is, of course, what every business is facing today and sort of they're having. And that's actually something I did wanna ask you about. Because, you know, Forrester Research, those guys produce these CX rankings every year and rank companies in different sectors according to whether they're improving or not, and certainly what they've been reporting on is a flatlining of those indices suggesting that companies hit a wall at some point and can't keep pushing it further for whatever reasons. In your own observations of businesses, either clients or otherwise, what do you think... First of all, do you think that's legitimate that companies are in fact hitting a wall? And two is, what do you think those reasons are? Is it because the concepts that you're trying to explain are abstract and complex? They require a willingness to embrace complexity and most businesses, I would argue in many cases, shy from complexity, because complexity equals cost. What do you think are the contributing factors here?

TVG: I think you're actually right that there's a really big drive to simplicity, to narrow thinking, is that as long as we solve my problem in my wheelhouse, I'm okay. And you hit a wall at some point as

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absolutely I think I see a lot of that. And as companies get more sophisticated in their UX and CX practices, yeah, it's inevitable, and I think the next step up really is the logical one, which is what I talk about in the book, is that you need to start to look sideways. You can't just keep optimizing your own silo. You need to start looking at this more holistically and people go, "Yeah, we're already doing journeys." But like this morning I had a conversation with somebody who does market research. And I said, "So look at your journeys. For some reason you think your journey ends when the customer buys. They say, "Yeah, that's when we do journeys because we're looking at the CX piece. And it ends when you purchase and it ends when you engage and then it stops." It's like well for real world people here, the experience does not stop. We start actually now with the next phase in our lives which is actually using your service, using your products, so the experience continues. So when you think, and this is what I talk about lifecycle experience, is that we have to look at from cradle to grave, from end to end, really end to end. Not end to end from a buying perspective or a customer perspective but from end to end from a service lifecycle perspective. And then see what the experience looks like and then you hop and skip through to the customer user and customer again. But look at it from that holistic perspective. That's where you have to now look sideways because you can't figure it out just by customer experience. In the same way, UX people can't figure it out just looking at their own stuff. And because they are just as good and bad in [inaudible 00:11:59] that which keep optimizing products, and then we don't know how to sell these things or we don't know how to really engage to get to the product. (15:25)

SS: Right. So the disconnects, are they largely because organizations have yet to embrace the con... We like to use this term unified experience which dovetails quite neatly with your concept of experience thinking because the unified experience should be the outcome of experience thinking that, it should be the outcome of a customer-first philosophy. So let me ask, actually ask the question. Is the question, is it really more a matter of organizational silos getting in the way of creating that unified experience? Is that one of the biggest obstacles?

TVG: I think so, and I think so. And I think that's happening. Now we're slowly getting to the next wave if you will. We had a wave in the past where there was a big change and I'm still amazed now like a word like digital transformation is coming up again as a big new thing even though it's been around for a while. But we've moved from paper-based, from hardware-based, from all the things that are more traditional to more digital. And so there was this wave where we had to reorganize and restructure the organizations like that. Ultimately, you're forced to make a change. You're forced because of the marketplace to make a change because you're going to lose market share, you're going to lose ultimately everything if you don't change and adapt. So I think the reason why people and companies start to look at this more is out of necessity, which I think is as good a reason as anything. I think there's no right or wrong yes, or no, or this, or that answer that they should keep up putting off small fires and also maybe look at the strategic part. I don't think they should ditch the small fire stuff and look at this only. I think they need to do both. And I think they need to find money to do the strategic work as well as keeping putting out these small fires. Because they will always be there. I don't think there's an either or. But I think as companies look for different ways to differentiate, and I think there are good examples around that, that try to integrate it more. And you see it happen, like within Amazon buying now a grocery store, is that people are adding to that value chain, they're adding to the overall experience because they see the connectedness of it all.

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And the idea of that is it's becoming stronger. And so as companies start to adapt they find the money to invest in them.

SS: I wanna come back to definitions for a second because there's a lot of murkiness in the definitions get, you know, there's always crossover, etc. There is this idea of brand experience and customer experience. Explain to me what the difference is between those two things or is, again, is it a hierarchy, brand before customer or customer comes before brand? How does that work exactly?

TVG: For me, brand experiences are the one's that you would define first. They come from within the organization mostly. They're not necessarily defined by the customer, they're reacted to by the customer, but not created by the customer. It's something that the company.... It's, and I talk in the book about the brand promise a bit and I really like that term because I think it encapsulates so much of what brand really is about, is that you are creating a promise for people, you are creating something that you'll need to fulfill everything after that needs to... (18:34)

SS: Line up as a member.

TVG: Yeah, and basically make that happen. So brand is always first. The customer is not first, it's brand is first in terms of designing things ... So that's the other thing is this, I very much talk about the processes to get somewhere to create experiences. And so for me the first type is to brand. And why do I say that is that I've been in too many organizations in too many places where we were forced to go back to square one. Because we created a better product, we created a better service. And because of that we changed some of the experience.

SS: You've changed the value proposition.

TVG: You've changed the value proposition. You changed the visuals, you changed the way that people talked about the experience. And people start to realize that and go, "Hey lets back up." And then they started to talk about the customer experience, and they start to go, "Hey, we should maybe look at different ways to sell to customers and to engage with customers. Hey let's back up." And then we ended up talking about the brand again. So it started with a product change and a product improvement was all the way back up to the brand, and then we said, "Well, we're not here to fix your brand, we're not here to rebrand you. That wasn't the whole purpose at all at this point." But we...

SS: You need a defining vision.

TVG: And that was lacking. So it was creating, we would fill up the void that was created by our own making the experience on the product, the services as so good that everybody else feels, look bad. And they're going, "Hey, we need to bump everything up now," and it always ends with the brand. Which is why I say, I start with the brand because that's ultimately when you're really try to peel the onion, you end up.

SS: It must be hard for you because it must be so tempting to, how shall I put this? Tread on the turf of agencies because you're really at that point talking about brand identity and coming to the heart of what the brands all about and then into purpose. And that should in fact inform how the brand presents itself to the marketplace, either in terms of experience design, or in fact how it presents

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itself from a perception standpoint. It must be hard to resist the temptation to say, you know, kind of, "Guys, you got the brand all wrong here."

TVG: It is because as my company goes we're not a full-on brand agency. So we wouldn't actually take on as much of that work because we do that, we do bit of that, but for me it's, absolutely. And that's partly why I want to write a book to it, to position more UX, CX, and then those four experiences that I defined, brands, content, product and service, looking at those angles to say, "You guys these are all distinct experiences that have a distinct process with a distinct way of approaching this but they all work together. So forget about who's doing what or what company does that, you need to figure this out and do that in this order, because the order makes sense." So when we start fixing products, they are connected and that's ultimately... (21:25)

SS: Well, that also leads to really a reinvention of the brand building process. And all the textbook stuff basically is obsolete now. I mean, the way we used to have to think about brands is having an overriding purpose which informs, which is connected to values of your customers which in turn informs how you speak to them and etc. and also informs the customer experience.

TVG: It does. And then you keep going. And so you have to brand first then the customer, and then the user when you are actually engaging with the product and service, which is something that's a lot of times, again, this is sort of left because we stopped. And because we are in this, as we just talked about these steps, we're crossing over different departments too and then we get all disconnected and then...

SS: So I asked the question earlier about how come, why do companies hit a wall? And that's exactly why they hit the wall.

TVG: That's what happens.

SS: This is dang hard.

TVG: It is.

SS: So I want to talk about, go back to this idea of innovation because, you know, innovation is key to success and avoiding disruptions as we talked about earlier. How much of the innovation is determined by the experience thinking process? Are those two tightly interconnected? How do companies make innovation a continuous part of what they do? Innovation across all fronts as well because is what I'm referring to, not just product innovation.

TVG: So for me I try to separate experience and sort of the human element to this and what people do, with the service and products separate from the business thinking. So I see innovation coming from basically three areas, and there's no surprise there I hope for people that listen this. It's the, business will come up and new innovations either from a business model perspective, from a markets, from something there. There's a technology or content area that obviously comes up with new innovations because of the technology. And there's an experience area where there's just glued these other two together in a different way that makes up a new experience and you go, "Hey that's new." So I see those three angles to innovation and for me an experience that I talk about is one of those angles. I would never claim that innovation only comes from the experience. I do see

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a huge opportunity that I don't see always in the technology even. Because even there's a lot of new technologies coming up and even with artificial intelligence now, a lot of people know that's partly repackaging of business, smart business rules and it's not necessarily really self-thinking beings. That's not where we are right now. But in the experience level there are so many brokenness there. They're so many opportunities where we go, "Oh, I wish I had this now as the next step or now I bought it and that's wonderful but now I have to install it. And it's broken and I don't know what to do now. And I know actually get service and support I don't know how to do that either." There are so many opportunities in the experience realm alone that I feel if I look at innovation, if I was a CEO of a big company and so I know where I would put my efforts right now if I want to differentiate. (24:33)

SS: Service argumentation to products has been a key way to broaden that experience, that is added value, either free or otherwise. And that fundamentally changes the value proposition itself. But how do you, the part mystifying me a little bit is how you organize around that? I mean, does a conventional product manager then have to have an experience hat on or is he now reliant, he or she, reliant on, for example, marketing to come up with ideas to augment that service offering in unexpected ways? How is that supported from an organizational design standpoint?

TVG: Well, the first level is the one we talked about earlier, is the level of the lifecycle experience. And so looking at the lifecycle and looking at the experience that people have from really end to end that is one real distinct point where you start to organize yourself around it. Because it becomes a very natural connection. Like, we talked about it earlier. So you start off being a customer, you start to become aware, you have advertised here, you have a trigger, you have a call to action. You start the engagement phase. And so the CX is sort of covered there and then you morph into becoming a user and the user interacts with the products and services, and then you become someone who needs support. And you get support and service, and then there's end of life where you cancel or you renew and you go back to the side. So one organizing structure is real life cycle and that's how companies should really more - and they do. Because there's a real search now and journey mapping and creating more experiences in a journey fashion. Which is great as long as they become full end to end and not been chopped up in these areas.

SS: So let me ask on that point though. Who owns that experience? Because if no one owns, sorry, if it's not clear who owns it. Should marketing own that end to end experience. It's like, who should be in charge?

TVG: Yeah, and this is part of back to that organizations need to adapt to the new reality, is that slowly slowly you see people have a CXO role, have a chief experience officer role. Those people, so unfortunately, it's another angle. So you have business people that are in the business seat, the people that are in the technology and content seat, and there's people that are in the experiential seat. And you need somebody that starts to owns that separately from the others and they do cross marketing, they do cross engineering they do cross media. They all combine to connect these things because that's the only way...

SS: So their job is to be a unifying force in the company to pull together the disciplines required to execute against the vision, the design vision.

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TVG: Yeah, absolutely. And that's gonna be their role. Yeah.

SS: And when you look at businesses that are more mature in their adoption of experience thinking, you know, design thinking. Are you seeing that chief customer experience officer more prevalent or do you see other organizational models that you would recommend as best practice?

TVG: I think what I see, I see a definite move towards that and one of the very succinct things that you see right now is that more and more organizations start to talk about services design as the thing. As opposed to 10 years ago services design was really not a term that a lot of people would use, but more and more start to see services design. And it's often explained as saying, "Okay, I'm not in charge of just one single product, but I'm in charge of multiple products that combines, form a service. And so people see themselves as service designers because they are in charge of, or a have influence over multiple products. And that's I think it's a really good first step to go from that singular silos narrowmindedness, "I'm only looking at one product design or one thing now I'm looking at multiple. And let's call it the service," which is great and I think that needs to grow further, and that that's something that's, that I see change. But nevertheless, historically organizations are so rooted in the way they've done things for decades that I don't see this organizing.

SS: Well, I know those P&L's around lines of business unit dictate priorities. And if those priorities aren't shared priorities or shared goals or don't ladder up to a shared goal, it gets dysfunctional. Where fighting with each other for resources and justifying their own projects and how do you even prioritize across multiple areas is a massive challenge, I would imagine for most organizations.

TVG: Absolutely. And that's what you see happen. So I think partly why I wrote the book too is to, you have to start with a framework to start to see the connections, to start to see that these are not isolated islands that people sit on. They are connected with bridges and how do we form that? And I think that awareness is the first step. If people are not aware that it even exists, how can they even change? (29:28)

SS: So I wanna get into the whole process and you spent quite a bit time in the book talking about that. But just before I go there I'm just curious. When companies knock on your door today for help, are they still really focusing on low-hanging fruit or are they more aspirational in their requests for you to come in and help them?

TVG: For us, we've been fortunate that we're increasingly doing the bigger picture, and the bigger stories, the bigger challenges kind of projects. And I think that really is a direct relation to the increasing awareness of this kind of process and in general not just what I've talked about.

SS: And are you working at the C-level of an organization, or are you finding yourself working within the folks who manage the customer experience? What is typically your entry point?

TVG: Entry point, it's director and up. So it's getting better. I mean, there's definitely, and for me, concretely, I mean, as consultancy, there's different things you do, of course. So you have low-hanging stuff that you still have to do. But I see a real change in the last two years around moving that up to the C-level.

SS: It's more of a corporate priority.

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TVG: It's a corporate priority, it's has more visibility, there's bigger budgets and we clearly see that happened. And people are not as scared anymore of projects that really involve a bit more research connected to more design. And they see the signal that this is really a holistic kind of thing that you have to attack in that fashion. And that's a very clear trend I see.

SS: So I do, because the book does spend a lot of time talking about process. I do want you to share your wisdom and experience around that. Let me deal with a few terms. You talk about an experience a roadmap, as an example. How do you define experience road map? s that the lifecycle roadmap or is that some other roadmap. What is that exactly?

TVG: It's the experience roadmap. It's definitely around the lifecycle. And what it's talking about is to see that experience, that direct thread that I talk about early in the book around people having an experience that really easily crosses four, five, six different departments in an organization in sometimes a matter of days because of buying a product or signing up to a service, getting it installed, and getting it used, and then interacting with it on a daily basis. For us, as end users, as customers for us, it's a completely obvious connection. The organization doesn't necessarily see that. But our roadmaps are really about first of all making that awareness, creating that connection, and then create a roadmap of how to integrate these pieces better.

SS: Can you bring that to life for me just a little bit? Like, a for instance or an example of how that could work?

TVG: Well, if you're looking at experience itself, it's when you become aware of a product or service. It's like, so signing up for internet. I mean, it's, if you're looking at service level, that's an easy one to think about. It's, you become aware of that you're moving to a new house, you have to reconnect your home. You have to make the choices then. "Do I stay with the same ISP, or do I go to somebody else?". What are the offering? So I become very much a customer there." Once you've decided that you're gonna go with X, then you go into a major retail location or you call up or you go to their website. So you switch channels there to get what you need as a customer. Once you've done that then the actual move happens. So now you're moved up to another, usually on the phone, a case manager or somebody who's dealing with your case to get all the things scheduled. And then when the schedule's happening, somebody, who is usually from another company as we all know, that is coming to do the install and the connection. And then once that's up there then the thing still need to work and after a week hopefully that's still in place. So all these are typical kind of scenario of that end to end life cycle that I talked about, that the journeys are more than the retail or even the customer side. It's the use side and it's the service side as well, and it's crosses multiple channels. It's phone, it's e-mail, it's the website. It's person, it's physical, as you see the car or the van out there. It's all those things make up for us the experience. So when you think about that roadmap it's about how do we connect that better. And not just looking at the emotion that people have, because a lot of you do in Journey Map when people say, "How happy or sad for you?" That's really the highest level, that's a satisfaction survey kind of question. That's only one piece of it. It's really about, "So do we know exactly, and have we purposefully designed all these experiences within that journey? And are we really aware?" Because that's what I find time and time again. When you talk to teams, they didn't even know that the team next door to them had this wonderful new idea to do blah, and they would never talk to each other, because, "Hey I'm the web team. No, I'm the

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dispatch team. I am the drive-around-in-a-van-team." They don't talk to each other which is why I talk about connected experiences is that in order for this to work better we need to not just have that journey map, which is great, but then actually what do you do down and this comes back to the organizational structure. How do you make sure that these teams work effectively with each other to create a coherent experience? (34:51)

SS: So just to be clear, because this is where I get lost in the lexicon, does the experience map represent a broad, end to end view that is further distilled into multiple journey maps? A lot of companies today seem to start with the journey map and that could be something as simple as an e-commerce transaction, or more broadly in terms of the conversion from buyer to customer. In your view though the experience roadmap is really the point, the organizational point for the organization to say, "Here are all the opportunity areas, and then within each you might have to conduct a journey mapping exercise to get to the heart of solving the specific problems and/or innovating," I would imagine as well, right?

TVG: Absolutely.

SS: So you describe in the book, you know, a number of steps in that design process. So I wonder if you could just sort of walk through what those key steps are, the purpose, and how they connect with each other.

TVG: So I have four areas that I talk about and I chose those four as to being the key ones. And it may expand in the future. So it's brands, it's content, it's product, and service. And one of the main points I want, and why I go into it a bit more, without really explaining how you do it. So the book is not about how you do it, it's about what are the steps that need to happen. And the first thing I try to communicate is to say let's all realize we're doing similar things. Let's all realize we have really have a similar process that we go through, which typically starts with strategy, they do research, they do design. They test and get feedback, then you build and then you launch. The flow for whether it's brand, product, service, or content it's not that different. And that's the first realization because I find a lot of teams sort of fall over each other to explain to each other how complex their processes is, and how different that is from the others, and how unique. And I'm going, "Well, yeah, maybe because you use all these different words, but really if you step back we're doing very similar things." And that's good it's because that means we can all talk to each other at the right moments to realize, "Oh, now you do a bit of research, now you do with a strategy, now you do a bit of design." We get all those. So that's why I went into more detail there and to talk about the things that people would do without saying how you will do it. Then secondly, it's for me about the realization that these four areas really work together well. So in order for people to understand each other if they realize we're doing, we're all in the same boat, we're trying to achieve the same things, let's work together more. So it becomes, we realize we're all working towards the same experience, we're all feeding into that experience together. And that's the other purpose for this is that if you take that level and everybody takes their own process and say, "Okay, this department is good at that, this department is good at that," but ultimately at a higher level they can talk to each other. And so if there's a CXO role they need an overarching framework to work with. And that's what this is supposed to be is that we're helping understand that framework first and say,

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"Okay, these different departments and groups still need their own individual processes, but they are common, they are alike and they ultimately all feed into that lifecycle experience."

SS: So just again I struggle a little bit with the design problem because communications issues you alluded to. But is this a case of setting up, once these journey-maps have been completed and you've sort of identified the prioritization in terms of fixes or redesigns as the case might be, are you setting up at that point multidisciplinary teams to solve the particular problem? Let me ask you the other side of the question. Does the role of design thinking end when the problem's has been codified and handed off to that task force, or does it follow right through to analyzing the success and impact of that change on your organization?

TVG: So the latter part that's outside of the lifecycle because I took the more narrow view of the experience of a human as they go through the life cycle. So and this why I mean by the earlier three elements, the tech, the business and the experience, we're only looking at experience. So what you're talking about the effectiveness for the organization, for me that's a business question. And I think that needs to be separately dealt with and that's not what this is trying to do. (39:07)

SS: But also business case like there's a front end to that, right? Not just the measurement, but what are you trying to measure and what's the return on investment for our business, right? Who creates that business case for the organization?

TVG: That's still the people that are in the business that are not necessarily experience one. And I think that's an important point to make because I strongly feel that even people that work in UX and CX they have this tendency to sort of bleed into the other areas and to take over how tech is done and then also how business is done. And I really scratch my head and say, "Is that really your expertise? Is that really what you're supposed to do here or do you just think it's fun to think about business models, and you think it's fun to think about a new tech or a new content? But it's not really your thing." So I am a big proponent to saying, "Keep it simple people. It's difficult enough to get the experience right. So can we just focus on that element and organize ourselves around that." But then work obviously collaborate all the things you need to for business tech and experience to make it all work. But don't take over, don't bleed into that and say, because I think those are good questions. You need analytics from a business perspective. Absolutely, you need effectiveness measurements, you need ROI questions answered. Absolutely. But that's not a pure experience question in my view.

SS: But the big challenge is just defining the problem, right? I mean, just stepping back and having the ability to say, "What problem are we really trying to solve here by going down this design path?" There's lots of trade-off conversations that must go on at senior levels around just that part of it. And it's one thing to define the ideal state and it's another to confront the reality of achieving it, right? So that's change management at it's basic.

TVG: Absolutely. And I think that that is the big shift that we still see happening, is that traditionally we had business and tech, and those were the main areas in our organization and they talk to each other. And so, "Hey, we gotta make a business case. Why should we build this? Why should we make this?" And then tech says, "Well, we can't build it or we can and then we work together." Now we have this third component called experience or the human side of things and they have become

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a real voice and they've become a partner at the table. And I think that's the three connections that we need to see more off that the experience becomes a full-fledged member of this and it's not underneath the business, or underneath the tech, but no, it's at the same level now because they have something to offer in innovation. And I think that is to your earlier point about the Forrester and all these other reports coming out, where we plateau, is that I think we need to get more say in these experiential things because they become the thing that differentiates us. (41:48)

SS: Or maybe another way of looking at it is that you can only push satisfaction rankings so high before you're just really in a parity state. How do you fundamentally challenge the existing business model that companies are offering like by being truly disruptive? So that goes back I think to a question around insight and research where we started with this conversation. Because the integration of insight into this is obviously key to success. In your experience what have been the key instruments, or tools, or methodologies, that you've seen really work in getting organizations to actually, you know, put customer needs first or convert the customer-first thinking? What are the "aha" instruments that you use or have seen used that really help convince people that, you know, thinking differently about that customer experience is really essential to success?

TVG: Yeah. And the answer it's shockingly simple I always find. It's, by far the number one tool that I use and that has been highly successful is the basic premise of walk outside this building and go meet some people. And I still do this every month, that I come across I meet a company that wants to improve their products, you start to talk about it. They have some sense of their customers and they talk to their customers, but they're never talked across this to end to end. They never talk to their users, even their customers that have problems, they come back, they don't have good channels or good ways to capture their information. And they're shocked when you say so what about "Hey, let's meet some people here, let's talk to them let's learn what they're doing. Let's learn about the problems are they having." It's mind boggling, but I...and I'm not kidding. Last week I had that conversation with a multi-billion-dollar company and there was a department and no we've never met.

SS: How do they stay in business?

TVG: How... And apparently they guess right. They get something. It's like, how do you....

SS: They must. They hire clairvoyants to figure it out for them.

TVG: I don't know. I really, but that's the tool. That's the tool still to this day. And it was the same two decades ago, it was the same five decades ago, but it's still I think that's the premise of this whole experiential thing is that it's about the human, meet these people learn from them, listen, observe, understands, take that information out. And like I said earlier, the premise of company in the first place was to get research into design, and that still is very much the magic sauce here. And I find it frightening to see the lights go on in people's eye still. Because I love it because it's you know you're adding value but at the same time are going, "Come on people let's move, let's get past this now and gets a little bit more sophisticated and how we turn this into a value."

SS: So is your methodology and this is fairly widespread and you talk about it, the use of persona design, to really help describe what those needs are? Are you a big believer in that?

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TVG: Well, persona is one tool. So what I like to do is understand people, full stop. So whether you package that or ultimately represent in a persona, that's one thing. But the learning part is who are they? What do they do? Both from a customer perspective of how you interact and how you engage and also from user perspective of how to interact with a product and service. And then lastly where do they do it? What's the environment they are in? What's the situation they're in? Which is also highly, it always comes back to mobile. If we talk about mobile use people, and I still see that, there's a lot of teams when you walk in the first conversation people want mobile they talk about being on the train and being on the road. But the biggest use of mobile of course is in the home, is just sitting stationary in your couch doing your mobile banking because it's easier than going to your desktop and to your laptop. So, it's what are we talking about? Can we just know what the context is? Can we understand where we're using things? (45:48)

SS: Well, it's funny that companies even start, keep thinking about channels as opposed to the only channel experience, right?

TVG: And see it much more fuzzy, but much more holistic and saying, "Let's just learn from what the situation is. Where people do it, what they do, who they are." And who they are is the persona part, but the journey is to what they do and the context is kind of in the middle of saying, "Well, both the journeys and personas would have some of that." So learning that let's start there.

SS: So go back to the confusion because it's still the whole concept of the experience design and so on is still cluttered with different terminology and technology. Just pick up systems designs textbook these days and flip through it and you're as confused by the end of it as you were at the beginning. And so a lot of these terms pop up in language. You've mentioned journey mapping, there's different types of journey maps. There's journey analytics. Where does that fit in? There's personas and the different types of personas depending on whether you're doing an UX or in fact describing an overall experience. What are the artifacts that are most essential in your view to this to the success of the process? The artifacts that you create that are fundamental to success?

TVG: Ultimately we're building on what people are doing already today, so, and what they have been doing. So we're building on the old school product design, user interface design, user experience design, artifacts like wire frames, like schematics, like anything, foam models, any materials. Anything that we used to do to mark up and to prototype these experiences, we're building on that. And so what I see is that our tools are the same as before. We still need to do wire framing, we still need to figure everything out in prototype and everything the way we were doing before, absolutely. But on top of that now we're going to look at this broader and say, "Let's not just look singularly at one product and one small service, let's look at it broader now and combine these things." And we need artifacts to capture that information. And that's what the journey mapping is doing. And the persona has been around for a while. User groups and customer segmentation that's of course that's not a new thing, it's just related a little bit, but that's still the same. But I feel that we're very much building on top of it and we are adding these tools like journey maps to help us organize ourselves.

SS: And what about workshops, for example, empathy workshops. I have had personal experience with those, worked quite effectively in getting a group to really sort of see the pains and gains and the customer's experience with a particular scenario. Do you agree with them and their other types of

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workshops that you find really work well in getting alignment and sort of a unification of vision around customer experience?

TVG: Definitely. I see those workshops. There are to some degree effective for sure. It's collaboration design and collaboration has always been a tool in the toolbox and I see design thinking has pushed it a bit more. So you hear more about co-design and about the empathy part more. I'm not particularly, "Oh let's all do these now." I think it's one way to do this. In research it's a very good practice to always triage your methods. And so let's not rely on one method only but let's do a couple. And so let's do some interviews and see people and meet them, do some field research, some monography, do a co-design workshop, absolutely, do a survey, do some analytics and combine them all. So never rely on one. And that's sometimes what I do see more so in the design thinking world and others is that there's reliance on this singular process and say, "Oh, let's all do a workshop now." And then we're surprised that we don't get the results we were looking for because this containment, there is bias even in those workshops. That if that's become the only source of information that's dangerous. As I want to de-risk my designs, I want to do it in a good business way which then means I have to use the tools that are appropriate, so not just focus on one single thing. So that's what I see as the tools that we use. But it's one of them. Definitely I see it as one of the tools. (49:58)

SS: And when you're brought in on an engagement, is there continuity for you. Like, do they come in, do knowledge transfer and then march off on their own trying to emulate, you know, the practices and techniques and artifacts you've created? Or do you find that there's a huge role for you to play and simply being somebody who continues to be a catalyst for change and keeping the fires going around this?

TVG: Yeah. We do it in the three ways. So I see, and I saw the book as part of helping that awareness. And so you can do the work for people, you can do the work with people, you can you help them do it themselves. And those are basically the three basic ways to do it. You can do it for them which is the traditional consulting projects, you do it with them you become a coach. And that's very much what the book is meant to help with is to coach organizations to become more aware of these kinds of things and help them get better. Or you train them and then you never see them back in the way because they already know how to do it themselves. Those are the basic three ways to do it.

SS: And what about cultural change? I mean, making this pivot to customer-first thinking is a tall mountain to climb. You know, what instruments or techniques are best used to try to socialize this concept and get people across an organization to buy into it and really eliminate the resistance to change or pockets of resistance that you often find?

TVG: I find the resistance comes from not getting it. And not getting it is often because we've never done this before. And that's the inherent challenge for any change management. But it starts really not just there, it starts with the, "Well, how do I know there's a better way? Tell me about that?" And so the awareness of that newness, the awareness of the new process, that's really where I see that the biggest challenge lie and where I see it as an ongoing coaching role would be most effective is if we were trying to create more awareness in a crowd. And the book is helping with that to see there's a language there that people now can use to help themselves and each other, understand that there is a process around it. There is some logic to this madness and there's not just

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everybody's running around putting out the fires. But there is a concerted effort can be done in this framework way to help them create better experiences. And I think that's there, but it's a longer road of awareness. Like well, no different than something like design thinking where it was it took them a decade to get where they are now, if you look at the process itself and the awareness and the option to us now. (52:44)

SS: So it always helps, I suppose, to point the finger at companies that are getting it right. You know, I think of Disney, you know, the company that was all about creating happiness is their brand purpose, but delivering on that goal day in and day out. You know, but those are the often referred to examples. Are there other companies out there that you look at and say they're really getting this right. I mean, just judging by NPS scores of course, sometimes I suppose you can tell. But there aren't that many companies really at the top of that. You know, I think of USAA, you know, financial services seem to really understand the concept. But what are some other examples that come to mind that you use in convincing companies this a path to go down?

TVG: Yeah. So I will give you one example for a company that definitely got some of their journeys. So it's coming back to your earlier point around the overall lifecycle. So end to end lifecycle design it's hard and so there are very few companies and to your point Disney is one of them even though when you go to their websites as one of their channels the website is a different level right now than what you have when you go to one of their parks. And it's simply not at the same level right now. And they could do better there. So looking at it from the lifecycle perspective, it's really hard to find companies that do that. I think it's either discouraging thing or that's completely aspirational. You go, "Hey there's a big opportunity here."

SS: It's greenfield.

TVG: Yes. We can do better it's how you look at it. I see at the lower level, at the journey map level, that's why the journey's level I see definitely companies doing it better. And insurance one of them more local that has recently definitely tried to do a lot better job, and they used this I think as a new way to enter the market is [inaudible 00:53:20] the insurance company and they split it off from a parent company to start a new experience which was more aligned. Which was, and sometimes and that's always for me the reminder of that these innovations don't always have to be your shattering. But as we all know car insurance doing it completely online it's still an innovation right now because very few allow you to do that, there's still a phone call involved and there's still paperwork involved, it's still fairly archaic process. So moving to digital, moving to a complete online self-serve model, for insurance that's a big innovation still. And so they have been very successful in doing that and creating a website that supports that more than others do. So I saw that at the journey level. I think there's a lot of organizations that have part of that right, and this would be one example.

SS: So if I can play that back a little bit. There are breakthrough companies in a sense of really, apart from I imagine digital start-ups which, you know, have a blank slate to do whatever they please, but much harder for companies to make that pivot today and there are a lot of examples other than, and I think this is the point you're making putting out the fires, and that's a journey mapping piece of that, right?

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- TVG:** It is. And I think that's where digital transformation still to this day lies. And I'm looking and I see some of these bigger projects come up, but it's still early days I think in terms of real digital transformation in a truer sense that companies really move to that. Yeah, we're not there yet.
- SS:** It seems to me this orientation now toward looking at companies like Apple which incidentally, you know, it's interesting that they're no longer going to be announcing product unit sales. But that the revenues is actually coming from the services side of their business, which affected, really they were early into this in creating an ecosystem that really extended the experience beyond product. So they were a forerunner of what we're starting to see. Amazon, it's diversification, it's horizontal integration, so many ways that they've been pioneers. Is the future of business to look at the world the way those two companies do, which is to say, we need to create an ecosystem with partners, we need to create extra value in every way we can even if that means smoothing out the value chain or integrating other partners into the mix here and delivering value in many more ways we can do because it's the idea of gaining a trusted relationship with the customer is gonna shrink and shrink and shrink to a very select number of companies that can deliver against all of customers' expectations today. Is the future business, gonna ask you, like, end a really long convoluted question, the adoption of ecosystems is as fundamental to success, and what is the implication for design thinking in that instance? Has it sort of changed the whole idea of design thinking, or is in fact design thinking essential to the success of an ecosystem approach here?
- TVG:** I think there's just two answers to that. From an experiential perspective I would say yes. So when you look at it from the human and the experience that the humans have with the company, I think the Apple model and the Amazon models are the obvious next step is that we're integrating more off the chain, we're integrating more of the experience, we connect the experiences more. Absolutely. And I think there's no doubt about it that companies will create more value when they start to do that. Mind you, for example, Apple didn't have retail stores before. So they used to have only online or through other B2B environments... So they chose to become more owners of their own experience by creating retail stores. And I think that's always, it's been a while now, but there was a long time when they didn't have that. So realizing that I think they made a very conscious decision that they want to own more of the experience. Which I think talks to this whole ecosystem kind of thinking.
- SS:** Well, I was... So those are trillion dollar companies or almost trillion dollar companies and can have the deep pockets to fund that sort of ecosystem. But I'm thinking of companies that don't have that amount of resources exactly, or disposable. Can they form partnerships where they effectively create a marketplace in the particular categories they serve and through extended partnerships that companies aren't directly competitive, but indirect competitors, basically form a critical mass around serving that marketplace? In other words, taking the Amazon or Apple model, but particularly the Amazon model, and applying it to different to a business.
- TVG:** Yeah. And I think see that already. I think it's, so the short answer is yes, but I wanna give another example that's more on the business model sides which is recently car manufacturers now start to offer a subscription to cars. And so what they're doing is they're taking away the complexity that is all for us car owners exist today, that we have to service our cars, we have to deal and think about insurance, we have to deal with owning it and all that stuff now is lumped together into one monthly

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payment, and I don't even own the thing anymore. I just rent it as a full-blown rental car forever. And I think so the move to, I think that's obvious, good idea, and it's obvious there's a market for it because they're successful even though one car, I think Cadillac stopped it, but Volvo is still doing it and they're adding to it. That model of thinking like a service - so it's car as a service, we have software as a service. Now we have cars, we have cars as a service. It's a natural progression to a lot of these things. And whether they do all the composers themselves or they partner up with different partners to make that all happen, I think that's completely up to the business people. But I think to my earlier point as opposed to the Apple more on the experiential side, I think that's more of a business decision side where companies, if they're smart and they create business models that make sense, they move away from products and they move, like we're already, because we've basically been primed to buy that through our phones and through their phones plans. We're now more and more used to the service approach to things, and now everything becomes a rental.

SS: Right. Right.

TVG: Why not? So I think those are two angles to the same thing. So business model-wise, same with Uber. I mean, when we look at it, it's completely a business model and an experiential one, because Uber, is simpler and it has a disruptive business model. And both of them I think made their success, not either one of them, I think both were good. And I think, and now taxi companies are catching up and they have an app now that is more like an Uber app, which I thought was interesting because it shows the missed opportunity they had to do that in the first place. They have been around for decades longer. So they could have done that. So I think these kind of movements into an ecosystem kind of thinking, a service-like thinking it's absolutely growing and it's absolutely way to go.

SS: And will lead to the halcyon days for systems design thinking and service design thinking because all businesses will be subscription-driven and service-driven. Right?

TVG: I think there's a way to go. Absolutely.

SS: Yeah. There's a long way to go.

TVG: Yeah.

SS: Thank you very much. I really appreciate this conversation. It's been terrific learning for me too. do. So I really thank you Tedde for that. And good luck with future endeavors.

TVG: Okay. Thank you, Steve.