

Becoming more human-focused in your problem-solving

 By [Helna Brown](#)

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I am more convinced than ever that the best problem-solvers are those who are passionate about people and keep people at the core of solutions. They have the passion for finding the best solution to enhance people's lives or the environment.

It doesn't matter whether it is trying to solve business, social or environmental problems. All problems are connected to people, which is why IDEO coined the phrase 'human-centred design'. Human-centred design is: "a process that starts with the people you're designing for and ends with new solutions that are tailor-made to suit their needs."



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An observation in my experience is that designers who acquire the three following characteristics have a human-centred design approach to their problem-solving:

1. They listen to stories, rather than ask questions, to gain understanding. The only need for questions is to gain insight and discover more. These problem-solvers are focused on the persons at hand and are empathetic listeners, and they will repeat what a person has said to make sure they understood correctly. It's easy. While listening to someone, don't form a quick answer or solution. Just listen. I am of the opinion that the greatest human insights and solutions can be discovered around a fire, in a taxi or at the hairdresser.

2. Human-centred designers are eager to learn about different cultures and broaden their horizons. They recognise that they are not perfect and don't know it all. Travel is an excellent way to do this. But not just your five-star Bali trips. You have to be part of different experiences to expose yourself to real-life circumstances, such as staying in people's homes and seeing how they live. My biggest insights have come from spending time with people in different walks of life. Simple things, like eating their food and spending time with their families has allowed me to experience life through their eyes.

3. Human-centred designers are willing to serve rather than build their empires. When you are passionate about helping others, instead of pushing your agenda, it is so much easier to focus on the best solution. This approach creates opportunities for innovative ideas that will transform problems into robust solutions.

As designers we cannot afford to be short-sighted, we need to be human-centred. I think it is imperative to shift focus from just solving the problem at hand, to engage with the humans at the core of the problem. If we do this, we will change situations and impact the world in a tangible way.

ABOUT HELNA BROWN

Helna Brown has 36 years of inquisitive thinking and enthusiasm for people...
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