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If You Build It, Will They Come?



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On the first day of a new project, I often discover that many of my colleagues in healthcare haven't worked with designers before, which is why I'm introduced as "an IT guy." While I was initially startled to be stereotyped as "IT", I have come to realise that IT is exactly the right place for a designer to be.

We've entered a new age where technology should be defined not by its mere existence, but by its usability and design. Too often, healthcare technology is implemented with little regard for the people who will actually use it every day. We should be designing for people. As Vice President of Design, at Welltok, Inc., my goal is to bring elegance and personalisation to healthcare technology. I need technology, the same way an artist needs a canvas, but my goal is usability.

The key is empathy for the end-user. To change healthcare, we must first understand the different behaviours and needs of patients, physicians, payers and employers. When I'm designing, I always abide by three main principles:

1. **Build to Think: What does the end user want?** It's important to prototype early and often throughout the design process, asking real people the right questions. Recently, my team hit the streets of San Francisco, asking commuters questions like "What is your secret to good health?" and "What was the best interaction you've had with your doctor?" The answers helped us better understand how the average person uses the healthcare system, how they want to use it, and how we can design to fit those needs.
2. **Design as the Engager: Patients are no longer passive bystanders.** The future of healthcare depends on consumers taking control and proactively managing their health – and the key to help them get there is an experience that is convenient, engaging and enjoyable. Design plays a critical role in driving better patient engagement, clinical quality and controlled costs.
3. **Design as a Competitive Advantage: Providing technology isn't enough.** Healthcare companies following the mantra of "if you build it, they will come" are falling behind, because the challenge is not just to build it, but build it better. Think of technology the same way you think of customer service. When you analyse the competitive landscape as a designer, the result is that technology fades into the background. What you're left with is an experience, and if you've designed it correctly, the friendliest, seamless and most positive experience possible.

Healthcare is in the midst of a wave of technology launching the industry forward. As the obvious advantages of technology are being realised, the next wave coming to healthcare is design: tools and experiences that truly empower patients and providers. I'm excited to be part of that wave, and there's no better place to do it than embedded with my "IT guy" colleagues.

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