



September 27-28 marked my first MiC conference as I am relatively new to the public sector. It was awe inspiring to be in the presence of local (homegrown) celebrities but also some of Canada's civil servants whose enthusiasm, drive for innovative and disruptive thinking helped to reframe my way of thinking.

First we were told that innovation was akin to improv. Anyone familiar with improvisation knows that the first rule is that you agree and say "Yes". This allows us to show that we empathize with the user. Saying "no" just ensures that the ideation comes to a grinding halt. Rule # 2 is say "Yes AND ". This helps gets users closer to a solution by identifying all of the opportunities or potential pitfalls. Rule # 3 is to Make Statements. Once the problem has been identified state it. Rule # 4: There are no mistakes.

First rule, Saying Yes is part of acknowledging *what* is being communicated with you. It is important to take care and ensure that the message is understood entirely and not just to work off what you think you heard. As mentioned during the Thinking Like a Designer workshop, it is important to ensure that we understand the problem we are *really* trying to solve so that we are all aligned in our purpose.

Second rule, say Yes AND. It requires going one step further after answering the question by guiding the user along to the next step or pointing out any potential pitfalls that may be around the corner. By being adaptive and purpose driven we are able to identify the *right* problem to solve. As Gavin Armstrong from the Lucky Iron Fish Project mentioned, they were aware of the need for intervention in Cambodia where 44% of the population is affected by dietary iron deficiency and understanding that iron-rich foods and supplements were cost prohibitive for most. Despite the simplicity and health benefits the iron disks that were being distributed provided, no-one used them. Instead of giving up they realized that this was an opportunity to delve deeper to understand the *why*. As Christopher Charles, part of the original research group, stated "You can have the best treatment in the world, but if people won't use it, it won't matter". When you hit a wall, reframe the question.

Third rule, make statements. Once we have identified the right problem to solve, state it. Be clear and concise so as to avoid using ambiguous language. **Cambodia is a society steeped in traditional beliefs and customs.** From this statement they were able to understand what people held as their values and beliefs in order to transform into a product that would align with the local lore.

Lastly, there are no mistakes, only opportunities. If you never start something because of a fear of failure, then you have already failed. Again, the Lucky Iron Fish Project example demonstrates that when initially distributing the iron ingots (first in the shape of discs and later as a lotus flower) they had neglected to fully understand the target audience. Once it was understood how the fish was deemed a symbol of good luck, health and happiness the transformed fish-shaped ingots received a positive welcome by the villagers that they were trying to help and led to immediate increases in blood iron levels among the community.

My take away from this conference is to acknowledge the errors we all will inevitably make, embrace them and most importantly learn from them. This will allow us an opportunity to fail forward towards a more innovative future.

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