Protagonist

Freelance Fridays
8 November, 2019

Narrative Prototyping

Using Story to Create Better User Experiences

studio

Let’s start with a story.

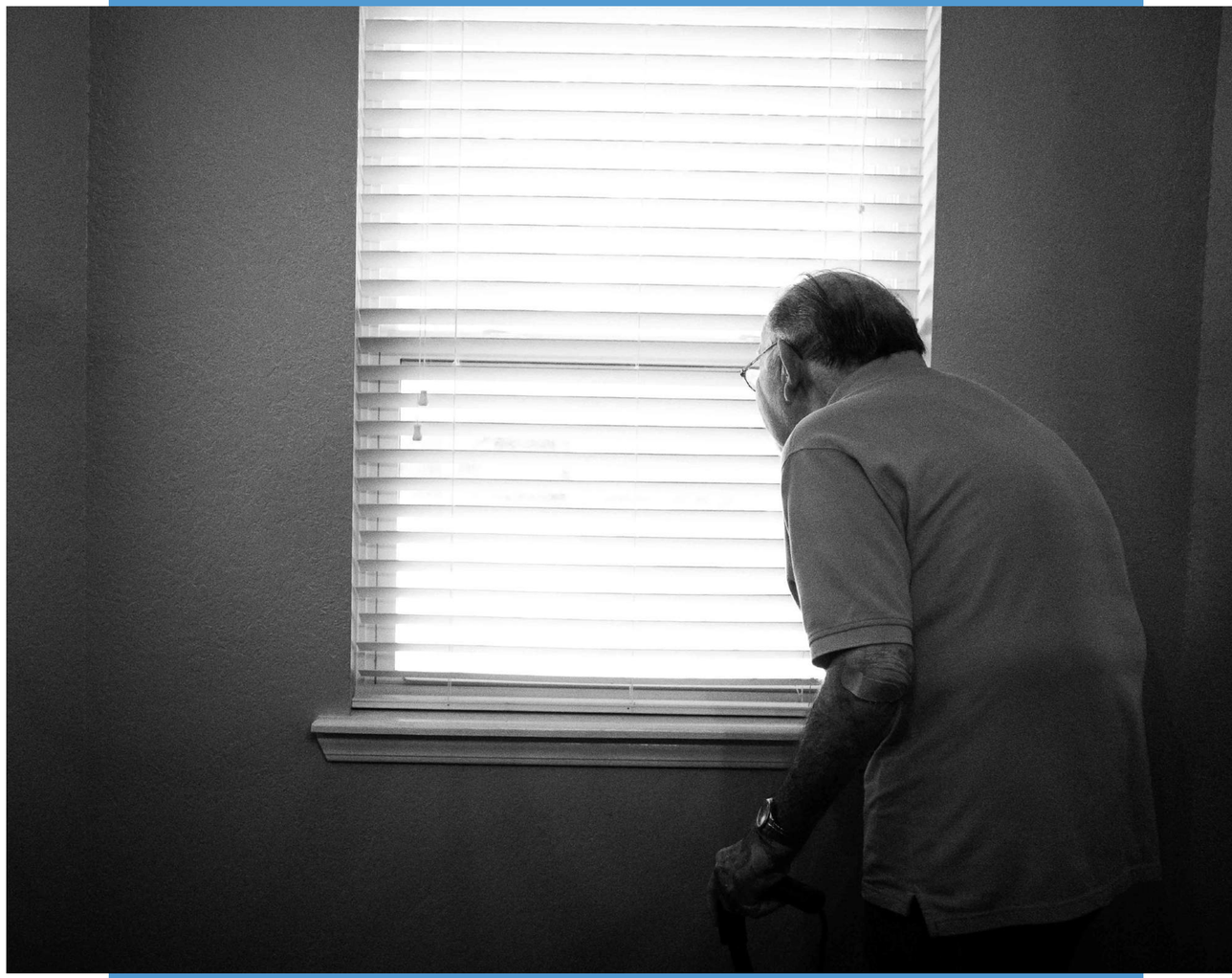


Image: Alex Boyd via Unsplash

He'd tripped on a rake handle, and called the ambulance himself...

I ended up staying for the next two weeks...

I could figure these things out one at a time, but...

I hate needing help.

...keeping me informed so I didn't go crazy with worry...

...she already had the information I'd submitted online...

Emotion and motivation as well as function.

A SUPPORT SERVICE FOR ADULT CAREGIVERS OF AGING PARENTS

With the passing of the Affordable Care Act (ACA or "Obamacare"), American healthcare companies are suddenly put into active competition, and must look for differentiators other than price.

Many adults must take on significant responsibility for their parents' health and well-being—often at the exact moment they're most engaged with careers and children of their own.

A "concierge" service for these caregivers presented a clear opportunity, and a complex design challenge.

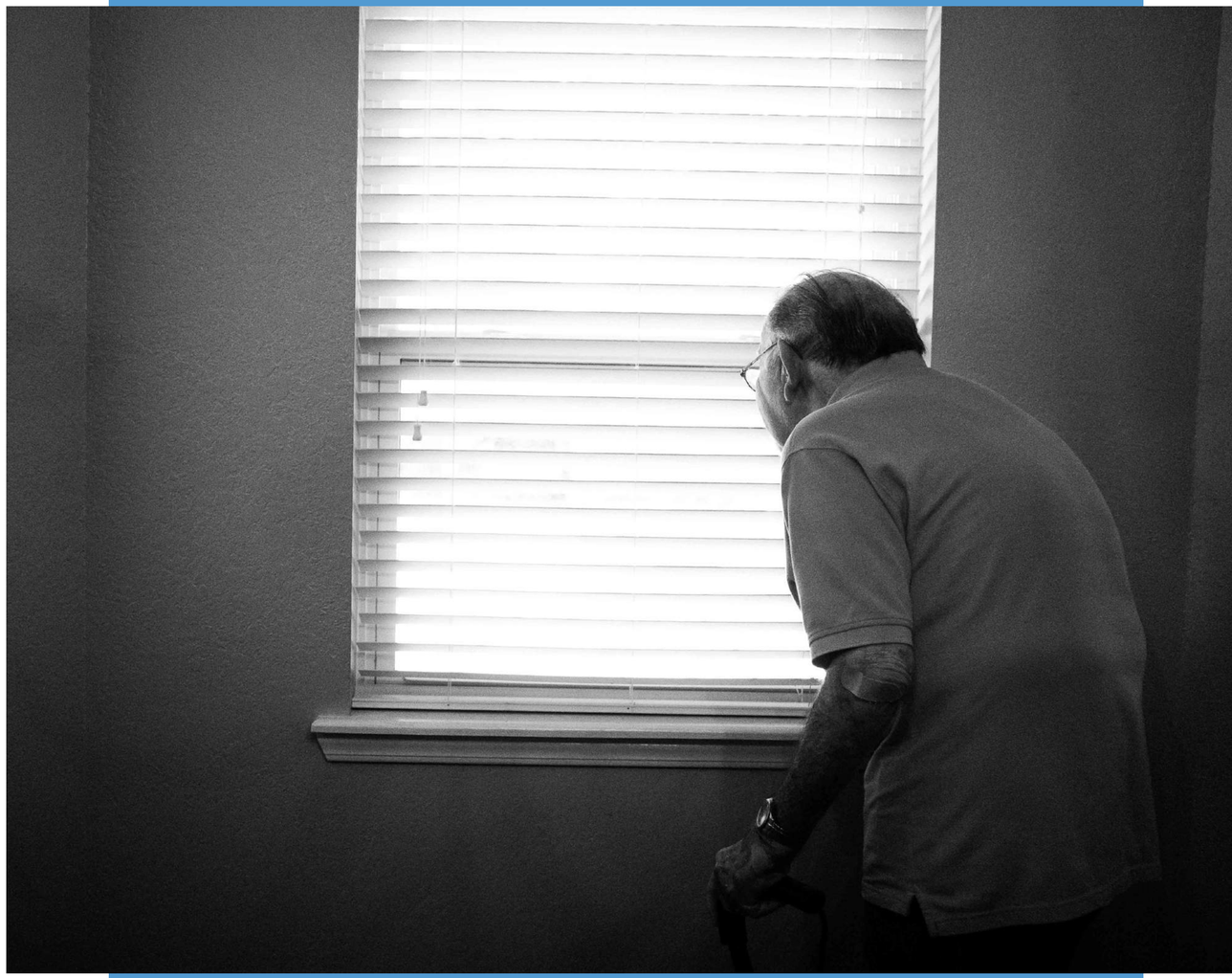


Image: Alex Boyd via Unsplash

Janet: “DIY Caregiver”

- 53 years old
- Married with 2 kids - 16 & 20
- BS Economics, Certified Public Accountant
- Flips houses for extra income
- Lives in suburban Portland
- Strong sense of responsibility to father

Information needs

- Needs advice. Her father has broken his hip, and she feels unprepared to make choices about his care and living situation.
- Accustomed to transparency, and comfortable with detail.
- Likes to review information in depth before making decisions.

Functional needs

- Broadly competent, and prefers doing things herself when feasible.
- Needs vetted professionals to take care of many aspects of elder care.
- Fairly tech-savvy, and appreciates control options on multiple platforms.

Financial needs

- Has significant savings, but also has to pay college tuition for two kids.
- More money-smart than most, but still confused by insurance and state assistance programs.

Emotional needs

- Under tremendous emotional and time pressure.
- Relies heavily on trusted partners, and is loyal to them.
- Feels a strong need to “do right” by her father.

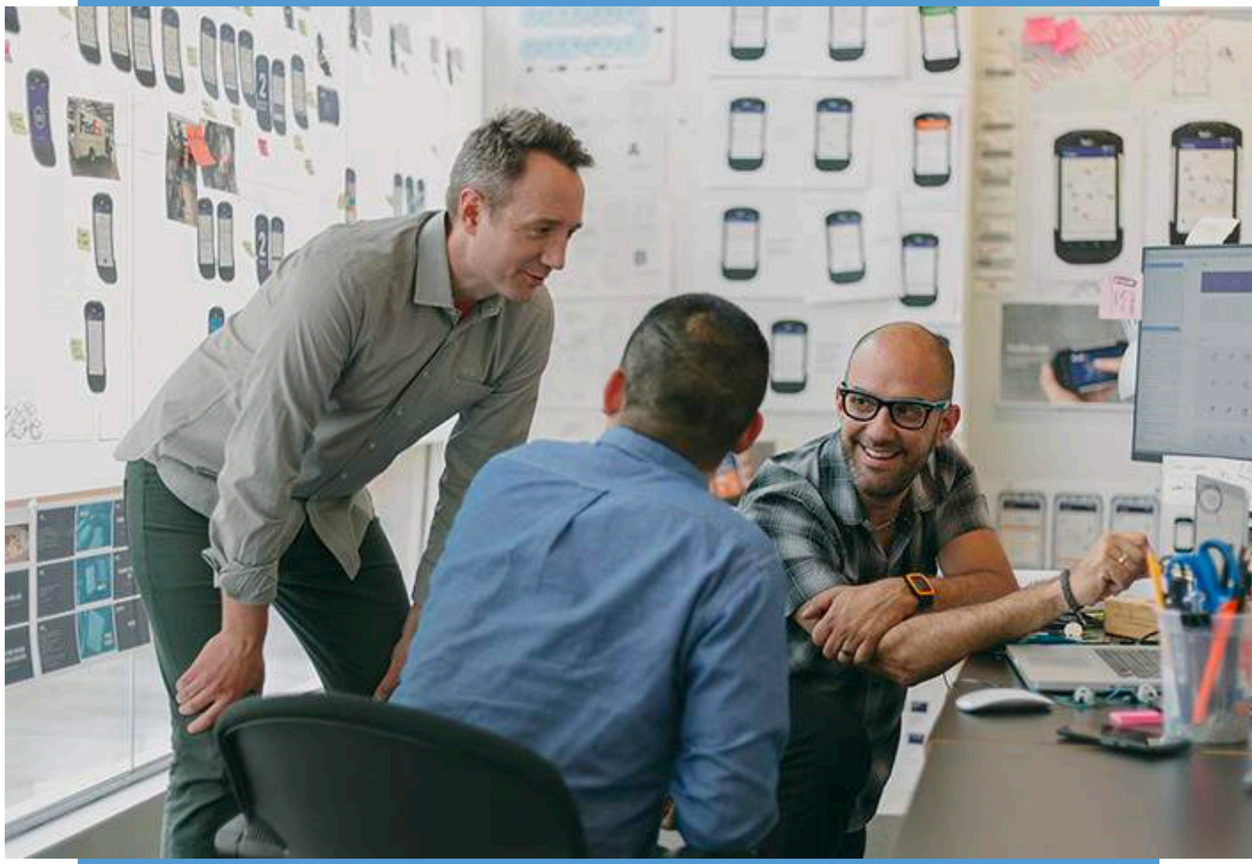
Opportunity: Provide a service that helps caregivers plan for and deal with parents’ non-medical needs.

Photo by Charisse Kenion on Unsplash

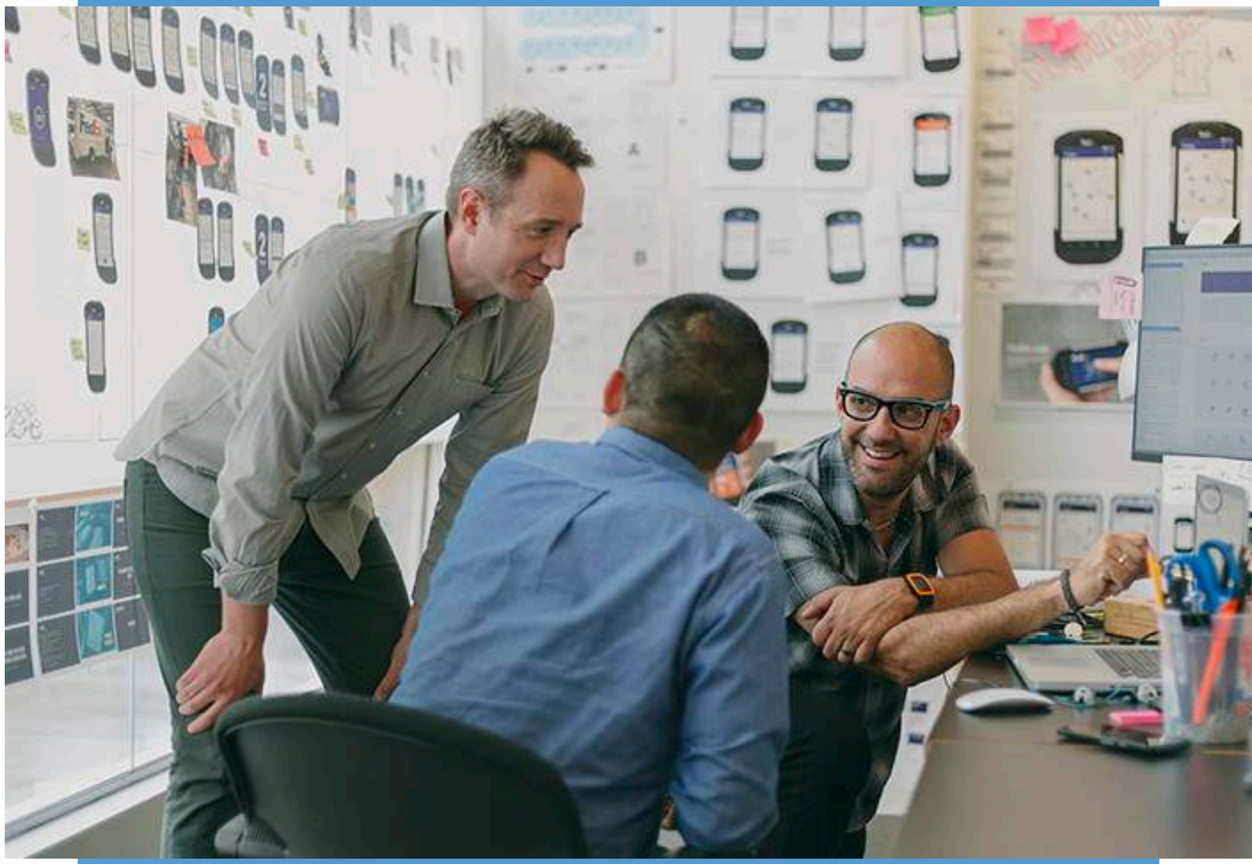
A SUPPORT SERVICE FOR ADULT CAREGIVERS OF AGING PARENTS

A typical cross-functional design team:

- a User Experience Designer
- a Service Designer
- a Communications Designer
- a User Research team
- a Creative Director
- me



“What if I just wrote it as a story?”



Pratt Institute

MASTER OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGN PROGRAM
2002-2004

More complexity.
More channels.
More opportunity.
More platforms.
More touchpoints.

More expected.

Phase the project.

|

Try Agile.

|

Try to write a better brief.

What if we just wrote it as a story?

Narrative is the Most Powerful Design Tool You're Not Using

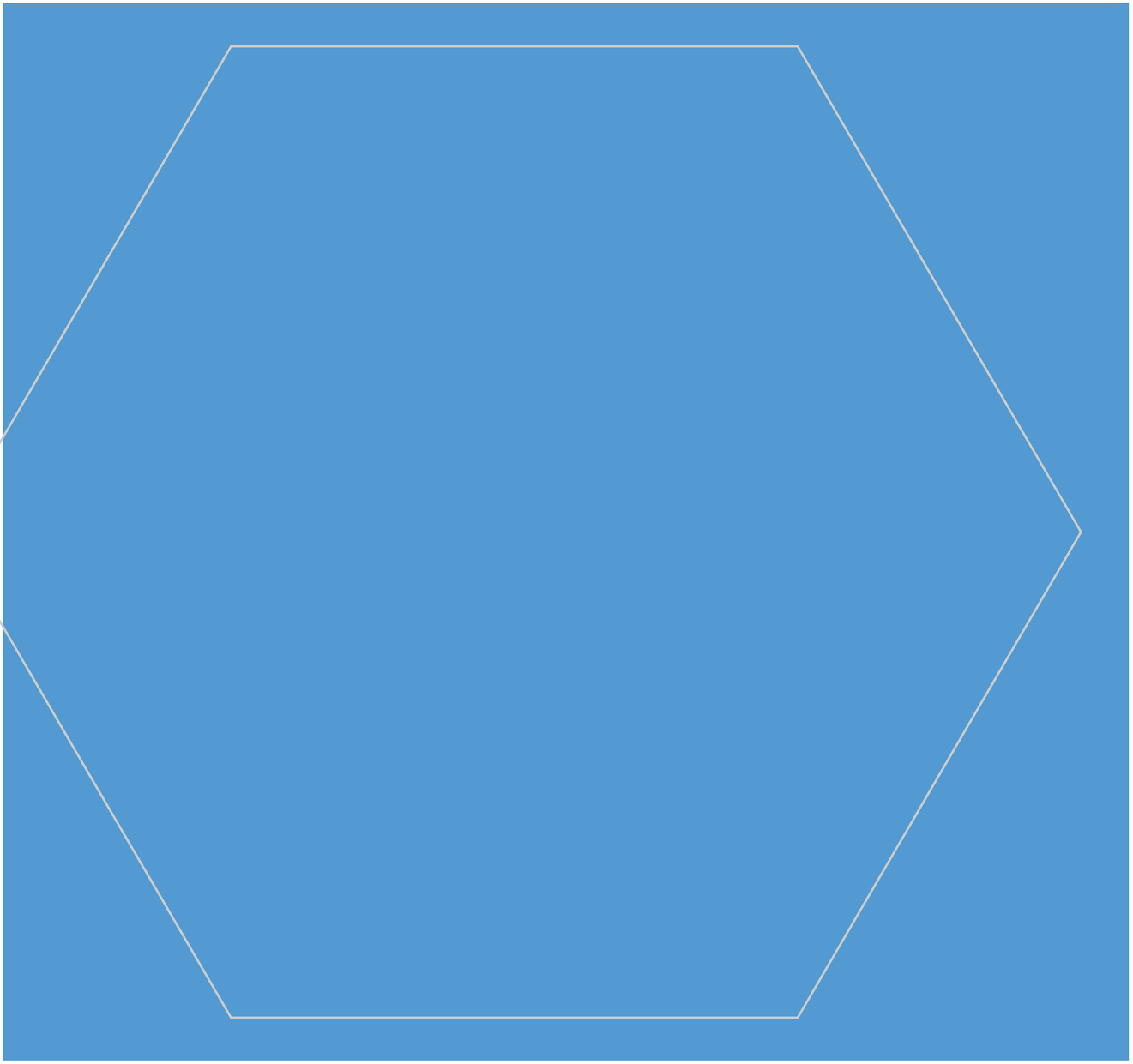
Designers love to call themselves storytellers. So where are the stories?

Carl Alviani

Jun 1, 2018 · 7 min read

What if we treated the story like a prototype?

Images: Matt Cardinal, Signal Cycles



We decided to call this narrative prototyping.

What does an approach like this get you that traditional approaches don’t?

...a phone call from Francisca...

...a financial planner...

...I was able to use the CSS website
to set up a Home Squad visit...

... a list of local contractors they'd already vetted...

... anything that's dad-related shows
up in the online schedule...

... I just clicked the "Request Transportation"
button at the bottom of the event ...

... this "tip-of-the-week" thing they send
me through the email ...

Interactive elements in context.

Better conversations, earlier in the process.

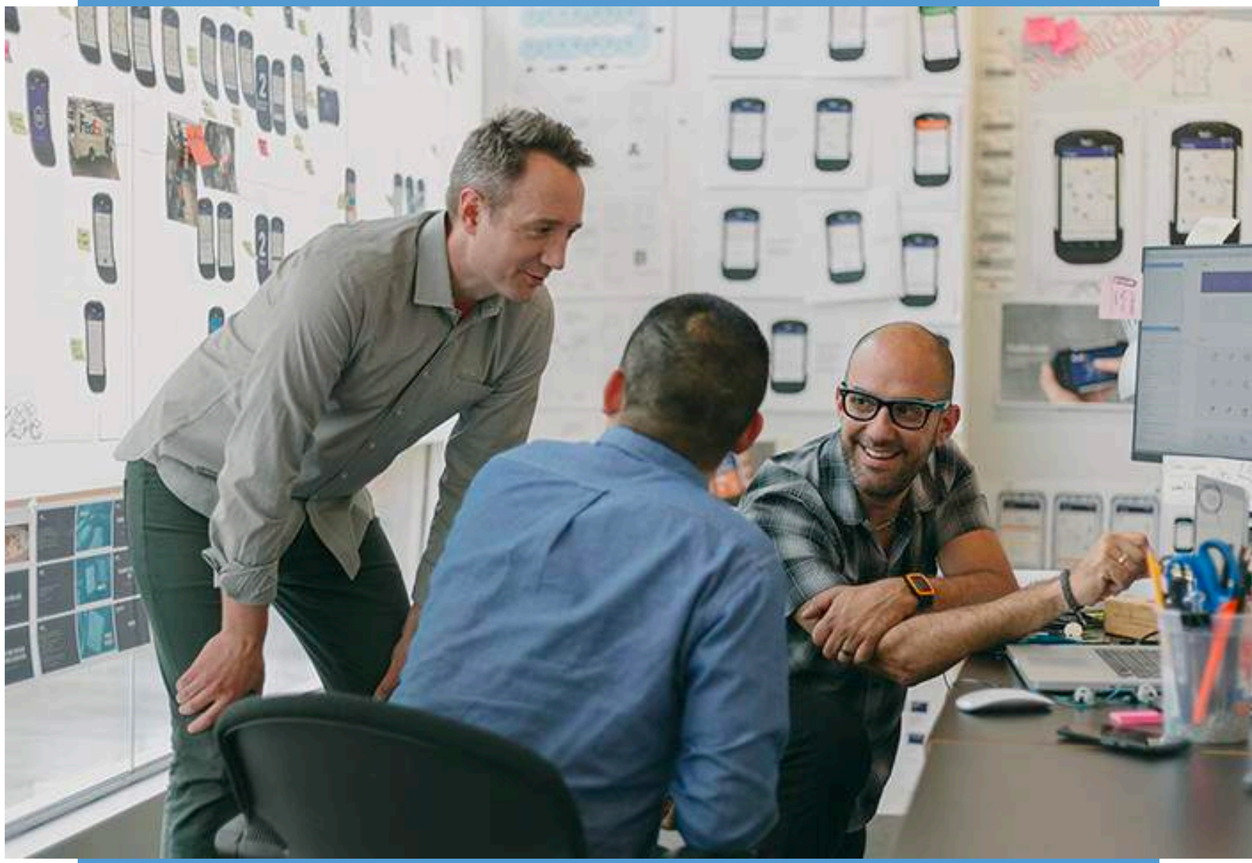
“What if we added a scheduler to the homepage?”

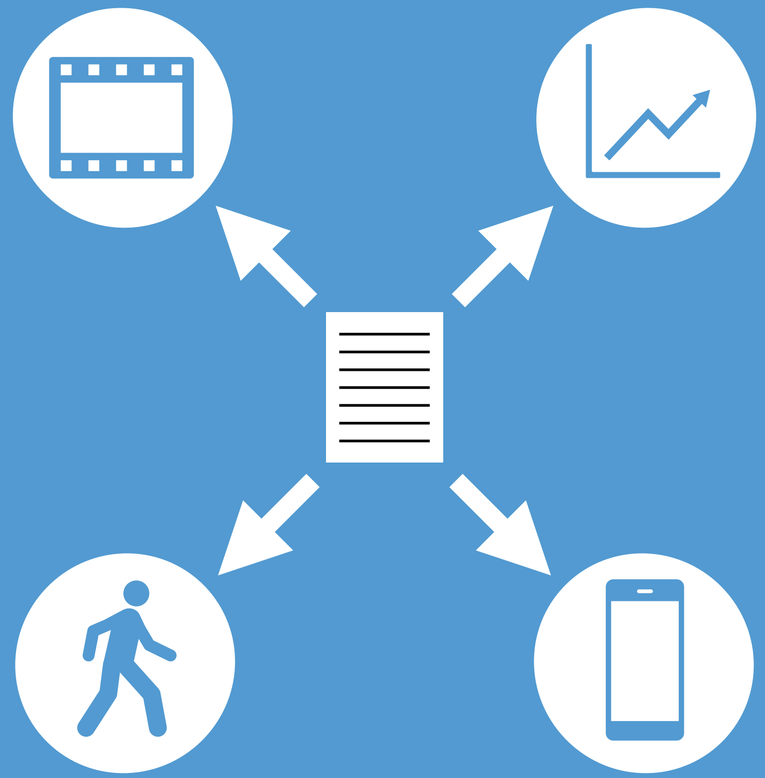
“Wait, shouldn’t that be app-based instead of web-based?"

“I don’t think Janet would actually do it in that order…”

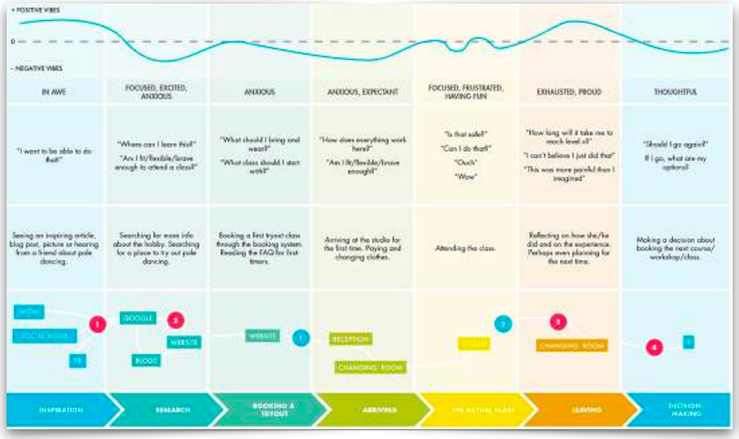
“A dashboard like that would be pretty easy to code, as long as we…”

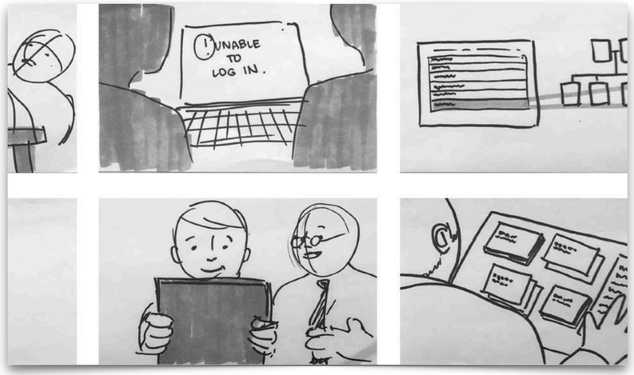
“I’m pretty sure she’d want onboarding to take place via phone conversation rather than an online form.”

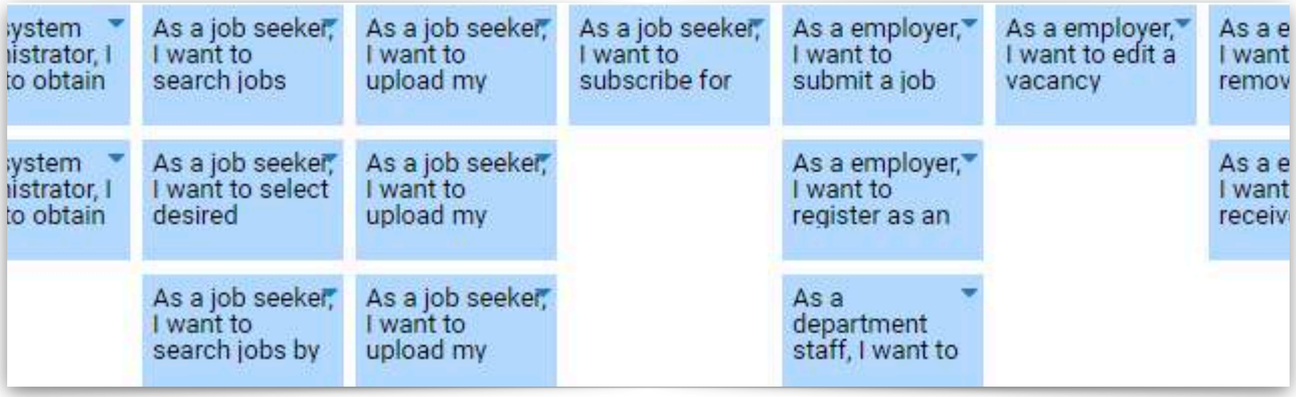




What could you make with a story like this?







NARRATIVE >> ASSETS & TOOLS

experience planning	User Journeys Service Blueprints
internal communication	Storyboard Video
external communication	Partner Guidance Marketing Content
development	User Stories UI Copy Interactive Prototypes Benchmarks & KPIs

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF A WELL-RESOLVED NARRATIVE PROTOTYPE

EMOTION/MEANING

Strong narrative makes us feel the impact of design decisions, so the results are meaningful and not just functional.

STRUCTURE

A story puts design elements in context: we can see what's gone before the focus of design, and what comes next.

FLEXIBILITY

Written narrative is uniquely flexible, able to absorb any concept, prototype, or iteration your cross-functional team creates.

CLARITY (+buy-in)

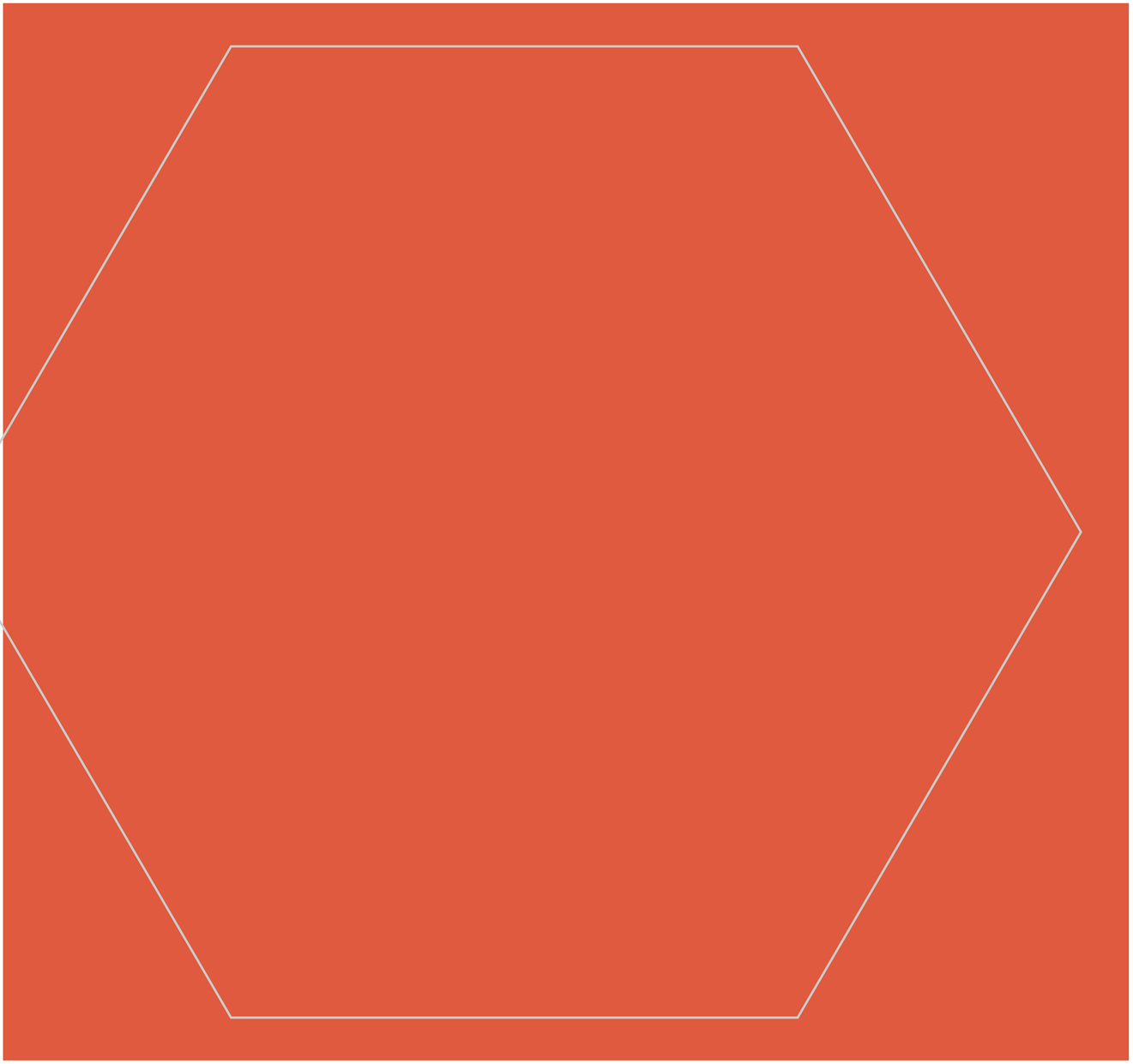
Everyone on the team contributes to the story, so everyone feels ownership. It becomes a reference point throughout the project.

RAW MATERIAL

A refined, detailed narrative forms a great basis for user journeys, technical specifications, copy decks, content, etc.

DISPOSABILITY

Any individual iteration of a story is as disposable as a sketch—and often easier to edit than a visual.



HUMANS THINK IN STORIES

Every user is a hero.

The unique power of hero-centered stories is hardwired into human psychology.

HUMANS THINK IN STORIES

Narrative is how we make sense of the world. Stories are not just a way of remembering. They're also a way of aligning and motivating.

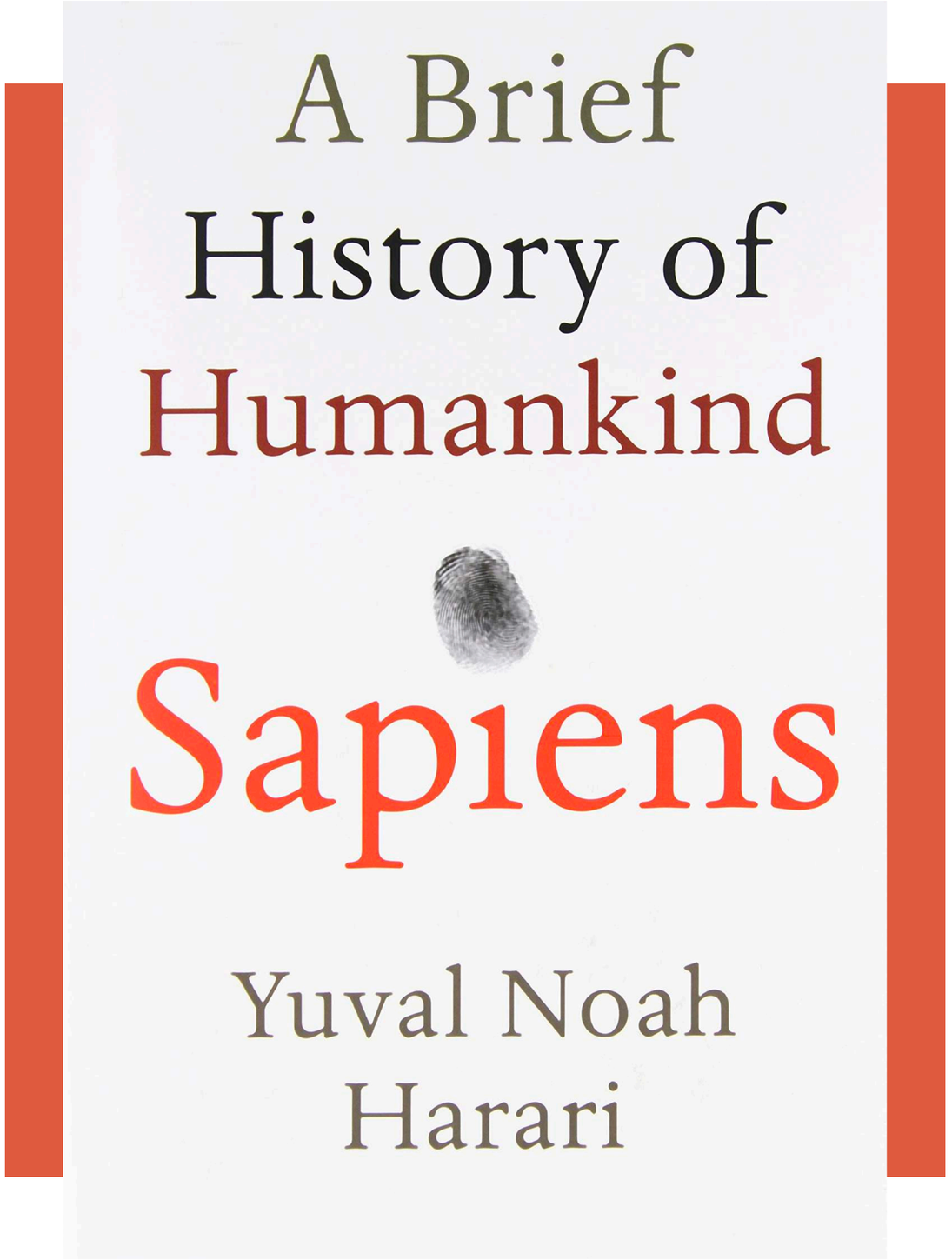
Solving problems, individually and in groups, is humanity's unique advantage. It requires creative collaboration at scale.

HUMANS THINK IN STORIES

"...How did Homo sapiens manage to cross this critical threshold, eventually founding cities comprising tens of thousands of inhabitants, and empires ruling hundreds of millions? The secret was probably in the appearance of fiction.

...Large numbers of strangers can cooperate successfully by believing in common myths.

...Just try to imagine how difficult it would have been to create states, or churches, or legal systems if we could speak only about things that really exist, such as rivers, trees and lions."



HUMANS THINK IN STORIES

If the details don’t fit the narrative, our brains will make them fit.

Given the choice between narrative consistency and factual accuracy, most humans will choose narrative every time.

HUMANS THINK IN STORIES

It's also how we make meaning for ourselves.

Information makes more sense when it fits into a narrative—especially one we can imagine ourselves being part of.

Likewise, experiences that follow a clear narrative structure make more sense: they proceed predictably, they're easier to rationalise and remember, and they satisfy a hardwired emotional need.

This is largely where "meaning" comes from.

THE SEVEN PART STORY (IMPROV EXCERCISE)

1/ Once upon a time...

2/ And every day...

3/ Until one day...

4/ And because of that...

5/ And because of that...

6/ And because of that...

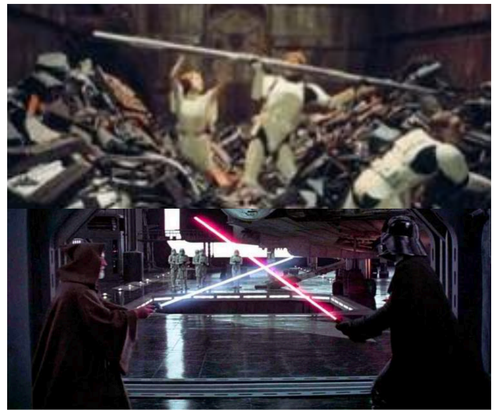
7/ Until finally...

Exposition

Incident (+goal)

Allies + resources

Struggle



Climax

Resolution

Exposition (Old Normal)

- Janet: 53 years old
- Married with 2 kids - 16 & 20
- BS Economics, Certified Public Accountant
- Flips houses for extra income
- Lives in suburban Portland (USA)
- Strong sense of responsibility to father

Struggle

To set her father up in a routine that keeps him safe, happy, in contact with family, while allowing her to continue working.

Incident (goal)

Father breaks hip.
Wants to return to normalcy, and feel that she's doing right by her dad.

Climax

Move-in day

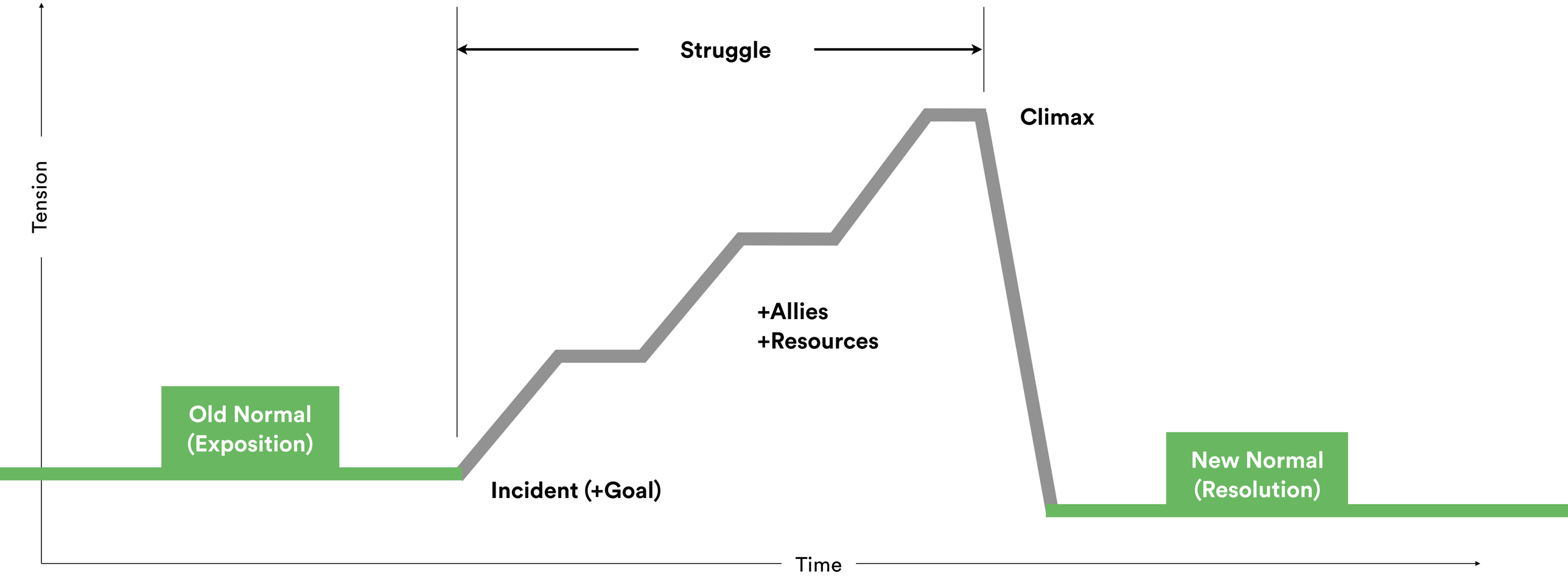
Allies & Resources

Website, app, database, printed materials
Personal Care Advisor

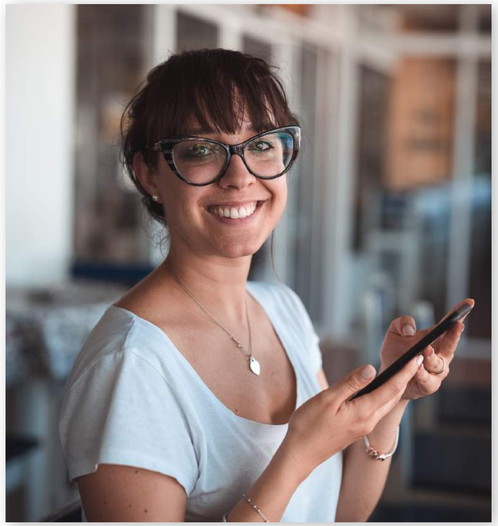
Resolution (New Normal)

Dad is moved in, family life resumes, new issues are dealt with quickly. Janet feels satisfied and back in control.

	Old Normal (EXPOSITION)	New Normal (RESOLUTION)
Janet	Active, capable working mom has a deep sense of responsibility	Dad is moved in, family life resumes, new issues are dealt with quickly, Janet feels satisfied and back in control
Luke	Frustrated, starry-eyed farm kid has a mysterious background	Death Star destroyed, Luke a hero, Rebellion saved
Boy Who Cried Wolf	Clever, bored kid spends all day, every day watching the sheep	Sheep are killed or scattered, kid goes back to work with a new sense of seriousness
Uber/Lyft	Expensive, unpredictable formal taxi system, plus a range of semi-formal car services	Taxi rides are predictable and transparent, minimal effort for the user


Struggle
Climax
Tension
+Allies
+Resources
Old Normal
(Exposition)
Incident (+Goal)
New Normal
(Resolution)
Time

EXAMPLE: CLOUD-BASED CRM SERVICE FOR A SMALL BUSINESS



Tension

Learning about CRM service, migrating customer data, creating campaign, setting up retreat.

Campaign succeeds, 30 participants.
Retreat goes off without a hitch.

+ Plug-and-play
+ List integration
+ Cloud-based
+ Segmentation tools

Runs a small but successful yoga studio.

Starts planning retreat in Turkey, needs better marketing & management tools.

Regular retreats, steadily growing business.

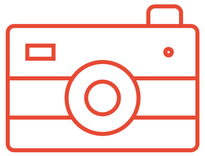
Time

vimeo.com/105940152

wired.com/2014/10/bold-vision-future-postage-stamp/

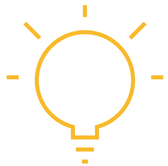
THE DESIGN THINKING MODEL—ACCORDING TO IDEO

Gather Inspiration



Inspire new thinking by discovering what people really need.

Generate Ideas

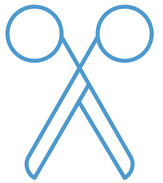


Push past obvious solutions to get to breakthrough ideas.

Make Ideas Tangible

Build rough prototypes to learn how to make ideas better.

Share the Story



Craft a human story inspire others toward action.

THE STORIES DESIGNERS TELL

Brand Story

The Organization is the Hero

Story of the unique struggles and success of the organization/business. seeks to build recognition and connection with consumers

Design Story

The Design Team is the Hero

Story of the design process and efforts to Create something extraordinary. Seeks to Impress the reader with innovation and competence.

Human Story

An Individual is the Hero

Story of overcoming an individual challenge. Seeks to create resources and allies for empowering the user.

Protagonist

Protagonist Studio is a narrative-centred design consultancy based in London and Amsterdam.

We take a “story first” approach to User Experience, Product Strategy and Content Development, that gets clients to a better product or service experience faster, with less wasted effort.

We work with organisations to craft narrative that shows where to go next.

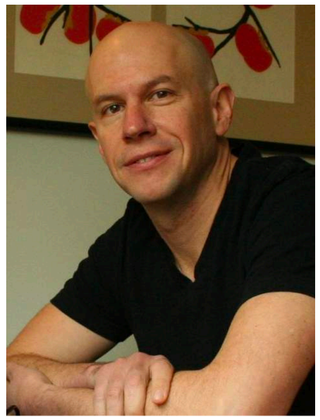
studio

Victoria Owal-Kirk, Co-Founder

Victoria has over 15 years of experience helping businesses profit from change at some of the world's most successful creative agencies. She's led strategic and creative development on products, service design, and integrated brand experience programmes for a host of international businesses, including Unilever, Lenovo, Barclay's, Kellogg's, and Bupa, as well as non-profits and social enterprises. Her training in product design gives her a knack for making things that function well, delight consumers, and make business sense.

Before co-founding Protagonist, she was Strategy Director at Isobar (Dentsu Aegis), and prior to that spent 6 years with the Ogilvy Group in Director and team leadership roles, including a secondment to Ogilvy in Bangalore to build a strategic planning capability.

Victoria holds a Masters in Industrial Design from the Pratt Institute, and has lived and worked in the US, Asia, and Europe. A no-nonsense native New Yorker, she's called London home for over a decade.



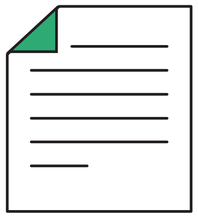
Carl Alviani, Co-Founder

Carl specialises in telling stories about the process, artifacts, and consequences of design. He's helped dozens of companies and agencies improve their design outcomes through research-based narrative, and his writing has appeared in WIRED, Fast Company, Harvard Business Review, Gizmodo, Forbes and elsewhere, on topics ranging from service innovation to urban planning and the ethics of interaction design – anywhere creative decisions affect human experience. He spent five years shaping content and marketing strategy for Ziba Design; before that, he edited and wrote at two of the world's longest-running design websites, Core77 and Coroflot.

Previously a 3D CAD modeler, a high school science teacher, and a Peace Corps Volunteer in East Africa, Carl holds a BS in Structural Engineering from UC San Diego and a Master of Industrial Design from the Pratt Institute.

Having lived and worked in New York, Portland, Sweden, Denmark and Singapore, he's currently based out of Amsterdam.

WHAT WE OFFER

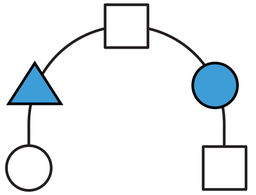


Content

From microcopy and web copy to case studies and manifestos. We help get your ideas into the world, to help win understanding and engagement from business and consumer audiences alike.

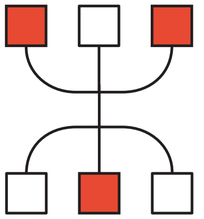
Consulting

Our team works with yours to reduce risk. We'll get you to the heart of the matter, align your team around the right solution, and chart a clear path through the complexity.



Prototypes

Working with your team and your assets, we'll craft stories that save you time and effort, and serve as a unifying reference throughout the project. We'll help translate it into workstreams and deliverables too.



Workshops

We provide the tools, templates and exercises that help you spot narrative elements in a pile of research and concepts, and shape them into something that gets your whole team aligned.

Half-day / full-day

Protagonist

protagoniststudio.com

medium.com/the-protagonist

@carlalviani
@kirkitude

Good story makes good strategy.

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