

The Design Constitution

EDITION 1.1

ARTICLE 1 LEADERSHIP

Let's acknowledge, up front, that the Client is the boss. Though we hope most aspects of our relationship will not require "boss-like" authority, once issues about our work are raised and aired, and we are still without consensus, we both acknowledge the people funding the work have the final say.

ARTICLE 2 COLLABORATION

The Designer is not a decorator—they are as skilled at marketing as they are about look and feel. Let's agree to build our relationship on collaboration, not dictation. The Client best understands the underlying concepts, products, and services associated with their organization—the Designer has a unique, untainted perspective worth sharing.

ARTICLE 3 AUTHORITY

If there is more than one person representing the Client, let's agree to determine from the outset, which member of the Client's team has final decision-making authority. Particularly in the areas of style and tone, giving more than one person veto power often takes the edge off great work.

ARTICLE 4 KNOWLEDGE

Let's get to know our customers and prospects like we never have before: the problems they need solved and the benefits that will improve their lives. Let's take advantage of the fact that the Designer, who is often uneducated about the subject matter, can offer a valuable unfettered perspective of the situation.

ARTICLE 5 GOALS

Let's focus on goals, execution, and results. Form without function is not design—the Client hires the Designer to make something happen. Let's make that something specific. Let's begin our work together by determining what the Client expects to happen. Before the first word is written or the first layout is sketched out, let's outline those goals, in as much detail as possible and in a way that allows us to gauge when we are successful.

ARTICLE 6 FOCUS

Let's embrace the fact that one size does not fit all. Some of us buy the car because of its style and allure, some focus on its technical excellence and power, others center on reliability and cost. Let's agree to produce materials that appeal to the sensibilities of the audience, and remain open to the possibility that the solution that has the potential to get the best results may not appeal to us personally.

ARTICLE 7 AESTHETICS

It is the Client's responsibility to establish goals, to provide information, and to review and approve or reject concepts and finished work. It is the Designer's job to translate the client's story and goals into compelling words and images.

Great work results from a near obsession with detail and nuance. Done right, a brochure, a web site, a catalog, and so on, is so carefully structured, changing a single significant element can drastically impact the whole.

Rather than dictate specific changes to a design—"move this here" or "change the color to"—let's agree the Client will request a new design or a variation of the original that addresses specific problems.

Though it is helpful for the Client to point out areas of the design that they believe are inconsistent with the sensibilities of their audience, let's agree not to do each other's jobs.

ARTICLE 8 SELFLESSNESS

Let's focus on "it" not "I" and agree that pleasing ourselves is not our primary job. We certainly will strive to please each other when we can, but only if the work that results is attuned to our goals. Will the work stand the scrutiny of a different client and a different designer? That is the true test.

ARTICLE 9 CONFIDENTIALITY

It is sometimes difficult to gauge whether and which items of information are sensitive. For that reason, let's agree that all of the information we share and the content of our communications remain confidential. If either party wishes to share information with a third party, they will discuss the matter with their counterpart before doing so.

ARTICLE 10 PATIENCE

Let's not change for change's sake. We will be immersed in our work and will review it over and over again. Let's keep in mind that, in many cases, our audience will only see what we do occasionally. Our desire for change may appear long before our audience's. Let's agree not to change until we have identified a significant reason to change and have done everything we can to ensure the change will be an improvement.



ARTICLE 11

ETHICS

Real rewards are the result of ideas, products, and services that make the world a better place. Let's agree to maintain the highest standard of ethics by dedicating ourselves to honesty, clarity, and style.

ARTICLE 12

TRUST

Let's trust each other. We team up because there are some things the Client knows more about than the Designer and vice-versa. When there is no compelling reason to take a particular fork in the road, let's concede the decision to the person with the most experience.

ARTICLE 13

RECONCILIATION

Let's agree how we will mediate disputes. Every relationship, especially one that entails so much communication and so many details, will inevitably suffer problems. Let's agree to address issues freely and to allow space for each other to correct mistakes. If an impasse arises, let's agree to share it with each other first, and if necessary, to choose a mutually acceptable mediator.

ARTICLE 14

LIABILITY

Because the Client has final decision-making power, let's agree that the Client accepts ultimate responsibility for the correctness of content. It is the job of the Designer, Writer, and Proofreader to produce materials that are as accurate as possible; however, it is the sole responsibility of the Client to approve all aspects of the final work before it is published.

ARTICLE 15

LOYALTY

A Client who invests resources, time, and money in educating the Designer about their industry, audience, and organization deserves loyalty. A Designer who invests the same resources, time, and money in learning deserves the same loyalty. Unless otherwise agreed to, let's define loyalty as being honest and sincere with one's partner, not speaking poorly of them to others, and not working with direct competitors.

When changes in the relationship are unavoidable, let's agree to share the reasons for the change and to give each other as much notice as possible before the change is made.

The Design Constitution is an effort to define the *spirit* of the relationship between a Client and a Designer. It is not meant to be a legally enforceable contract, its purpose is simply to help in the establishment of the ground rules necessary to plant and cultivate a fruitful collaboration.

Want to amend the Design Constitution? To offer comments or suggestions, visit www.ideabook.com.



ABOUT CHUCK GREEN'S DESIGN IDEAS

Effective design targets a precise group of prospects, highlights consumer-centered benefits, presents solutions to specific problems, and uses unique words and imagery to move people to action. Anything less is decoration.

Chuck is a veteran designer, author of *Design-It-Yourself Graphic Workshop* (Rockport Publishers), and the host of [ideabook.com](http://www.ideabook.com): the how-to hub for everyone interested in the real-world, practical application of design in marketing ideas, organizations, and products or services (<http://www.ideabook.com>).

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