

Hello, everybody. Make a noise of some kind if you like games. Just make a noise – clap, sound –

[Audience makes various noises]

All right. All right. I'm using a hashtag for Gamestorming. I'll tell you a little bit about what that is. But the hashtag, if you wanna tweet about it, is Gamestorming, and my Twitter name is Dave Gray on Twitter.

So what is Gamestorming? What does it sound like, first of all? Anyone wanna throw –

[Inaudible audience responses]

What's that? Yeah, brainstorming, but with games, right? That's exactly what it is.

I've been a creative professional for most of my working life, or a manager of creative professionals, one or the other. Gamestorming is a term that we kind of put on top of something that's been happening in Silicon Valley since the 1970s. This is a guy named David Sibbet. He's still around doing visual thinking, visualization of complex ideas.

And what Gamestorming is about is the problem of creativity or the innovation problem. And I would describe it this way. If you are Nokia right now and you need to make the iPhone-killer, the next generation – you're up against the iPhone. You need to come up with that next thing. There is no simple, repeatable process. There's no business process. There's no linear process, step by step. There's no set of rules that's gonna get you there. And this is a problem in business, right? We have to be creative. And we haven't historically designed our businesses for creativity; we've designed them for efficiency.

Of course, we've always had design. People design cars. People design products. A lot of you – raise your hand if you're a designer or have "design" in your title. Raise your hand if you have "design" in your title but you're not sure if you're a designer.

[Audience laughter]

There's some of those. Design is, in a lot of companies, a black box. It's walled off from the rest of the organization, right? Some of us live inside the black box. Some of us like to put stuff into the black box. We put in our requests, and the creative stuff comes out. A lot of business people don't like to look into the box, though, 'cause you look in it, it's messy. What are those people doing? It's hard to tell. There's paper all over their desks, etc.

Now, but as the world gets more complex, we need to start involving other people. The whole organization needs to be creative. I think we've heard some excellent speakers today talking about creativity and the importance of that, and the importance of getting other people to buy in and engage with the creative process.

This is a woman named Elizabeth Gould. She's a researcher at Princeton. Raise your hand if you learned in school or from in childhood that brain cells don't regenerate. I learned that. Well, in 1999, this Princeton researcher, who believed that, suddenly discovered that it was not true. Brain cells do regenerate. But how could we have been fooled for so long into thinking that they don't?

It turns out that all the experiments that the scientists were doing that proved that brain cells didn't regenerate were on laboratory animals that were kept in cages and fed. They weren't stimulated. They had no reason to be creative. So their brain cells didn't regenerate. Now, it turns out animals in their natural environment, out in the habitat, when they have to find their food and hunt it down and so forth, they are creative.

Now, does this picture remind you of anything, like at work?

[Audience laughter]

Okay. Yeah. So...

[Audience laughter]

And this is the way that we've designed our workplaces, right? If we had set out intentionally to stifle creativity, to make it as impossible as we could to be creative at work, we could not have done better than the modern office cubicle, which is designed not for creativity but for efficiency.

So we need to move from the factory way of working – if we wanna be creative, that is – we need to move from thinking about our workplaces as factories to thinking of them as collaboratories, or environments for collaboration, working together. We need to break down those walls.

We need work to look like this. Anyone recognize one of the people who's been on stage today, from the back, in the baseball hat in this picture? This is what we want our work to be like, right? This is how we wanna feel at work. Raise your hand if you want more of this at work, more of this feeling in your work. Make a sound. *[Laughter]*

[Audience makes noises]

Yeah, feedback. I love it. All right, this is what we want our work to be like. If we wanna be creative, if we wanna do creative work, it needs to feel good. It needs to feel energizing. We need to feel creative. These are real people, not actors. *[Laughter]*

[Audience laughter]

All right. Again, so as I was working on this book last year, 2009, I was lucky enough to be able to convene a group of people together to my own personal laboratory,

collaboratory, to work out some of these ideas and practice them and make sure that they all work. So this is a scene from that event. These people are Gamestorming, okay?

We pulled – we got 50 people together in Monterey, in this conference center, to work on we didn't know what: design, creative thinking, work on our creativity, whatever. It was not designed in advance. I brought my Gamestorming toolkit, my set of collaboration ideas and principles, and we tested 'em out.

One of the first things we did was a game that I called Poster Session, and that is, basically we took the 50 people. We had every single person take a flipchart and make a poster that was a proposal of something that they were excited about, that they had passion for, that they wanted to work on with some other people there.

This guy decided that he wanted to work on the problem of disposable coffee cups. There's too many disposable coffee cups. We use 'em all the time. We dispose of them. They fill landfills. They're bad for the earth.

He had this business problem in mind. He thought, well, we know we can take a cup to Starbucks and refill our cup, but nobody does it. Why? So he thought, this is a design problem. I wanna fix this not by hammering people over the head, but by making it easier, right? Making it simpler, easier, more fun, as BJ Fogg was talking about this morning. Let's take it as a design problem and fix this problem.

So people got together. This is a survey, all done with sticky notes, trying to get some ideas together. This is another episode from that environment, where we did something called bodystorming. You see these people prototyping an iPhone app, right? Can you see the iPhone?

[Audience laughter]

Can you see the user? Can you see the application elements? Okay, that's what we're doing here. This is Gamestorming.

So what this guy did – and his idea was Beta Cup. He said, "Okay, I'm just gonna call it Beta Cup. I don't know what it is yet. Let's design it." So what they did was they used this technique, which is called bodystorming. They created a Starbucks within this room. So what you see here in this picture, you see this guy is the asshole. See? This is the line of people. This is the barista. We have the whole Starbucks setup.

And what they did was, as they were trying to understand this problem, they said, "Oh, we'll just set up a Starbucks, and let's prototype the experience. Let's work through it and see what kinda problems we run into."

So one of the problems was you've got the asshole in front of the line that's holding up the whole line, ordering: "I don't know what I had. It was last week. I really liked it. Remind me..." And they came up with this idea for a speedy cup, where there's an RFID

tag built in, and you wouldn't have to stand in the line. You could skip the line, just take your cup up there. Your order was all embedded in it, so forth. This was their bodystorming idea.

Now, what they did was they – so all these people who were getting together were bloggers and people who like to socialize on the Web. So they put the bodystorming video – they put it up on the Web: "Well, look what we're doing. We're trying to design a better cup." This is a story. It got tweeted around, and guess – so who's reading? Who's listening? Well, turns out Starbucks was listening.

So Starbucks says, "Wow, they're getting people engaged." Starbucks has a line out the door of people who have a idea for a better reusable cup, right? But what they didn't have, what the people who were all designing the better reusable cup didn't realize was that what Starbucks was really interested in was engaging the community around this problem. So it becomes a shared design problem more than coming up with a solution.

Now, as designers, this is something we need to get used to, that we're used to having our process, and we do our thing, and we're inside that black box, and we don't wanna let other people in. We've gotta get used to sharing that process.

So what happened was, now there's actually – it's gone from being a guy's idea in a room to – there was – they've already had a competition, there's \$20,000.00 prizes, and it's moving forward, right?

Now, what's interesting to me about this is that the design problem changed as the design process moved forward. It's like agile. We talk about agile development. It started out being about the cup, and then the design process starts to move forward, and then it becomes the system in the Starbucks around the cup. And then we move it forward a little bit further, and suddenly it's the social system around the system around the cup.

So the design problems – I mean, design problems aren't static. They don't hold still while you try and fix them, and that's where Gamestorming helps us move faster towards the kind of results we wanna get as designers.

So Gamestorming. I think there falls – it's really about getting better engagement and collaboration at work. It's about getting other people involved in your creative process. It's about opening up your creative process to them. Yeah, this is a good one to take pictures of if you want.

[Audience laughter]

I'm doing a workshop tomorrow, so you could have a whole day of it. There's social games, which are about dialogue, asking questions, role-playing, storytelling, improvisation. There are sorting games, which we do a lot of in user experience design. We've got sticky notes, index cards, voting, moving things around. And then there are

games about synthesis, which is about building prototypes, making models, sketching, making maps. And these are kinda the big bucket categories I think they fall into.

So we decided to write a book. I have two coauthors, Sunni Brown and James Macanuso. And like I said, this is nothing new. It's been going on since the '70s. This is Xerox PARC, you know, people with blackboards, people standing around talking. This is how creative work is done, right? It's social.

This is interesting because someone's designing – this is MIT in the '70s. They're designing a computer chip, and they're using sticky notes or paper, and the size of the paper relates to the size of the component. So it's another – this is kind of what I would call a sorting game, where they're trying to work out how these things fit together.

These are the Brothers Grimm. *[Laughter]* It's a lot of history today too. My point with the Brothers Grimm is solely this: I don't wanna come up here and say, "Oh, you know, my coauthors and I invented this." We kind of put a name called Gamestorming on it, but really, we see this as more of a Brothers Grimm type of thing.

There's a lot – there's really no book that collected all of – that we could find that collected all of these collaboration work practices in one place. So we sort of set out like the Brothers Grimm did with fairy tales to try and create this collection of the best practices for workplace collaboration, and Gamestorming is just the title we came up with for it.

So design philosophy. We didn't wanna make something that was complicated. We didn't wanna make something that was hard. We wanted a book – again, to riff off of BJ – I don't know if he's here – simple, easy, fun. Just make it so easy and fun to use, simple and rugged. A Jeep goes anywhere. You just get in and you start driving, right? We wanted to do that for people at work. We wanted something that was simple, rugged, reliable, lightweight, a no-brainer.

So we decided only stuff you could find in your office supply cabinet. So it's only stuff you can do with sticky notes, index cards, Sharpies, masking tape, flipcharts, the kinda stuff you're gonna have in your workplace anyway, so you don't have to spend any money.

And we didn't wanna design for a perfect world, 'cause it's not a perfect world. We wanted to design for total chaos, because that's what your workplace is like. You've got a – the CEO walks into the room, and you didn't know that the CEO was gonna walk into the room. You wanna be able to make this stuff happen on the fly quickly. So the book's got some design principles but also some tactical stuff that you can practice on.

So what is the game? What do I mean by a game? Nicole, who's coming up next, is gonna give you probably some deeper version, 'cause she's probably got a – she's got a much deeper history in games than I do. My stuff is more about work.

But think about The Game of Life. Raise your hand if you've played The Game of Life. That's good. All right. It's life, right? It's just a simplified – one ideal version of what life is like, right?

Everything is a game, if you decide to approach it like a game. A game is a world. Think about a game world. You've got – think about any game. You can pick a game in your head. Monopoly, chess, checkers. It's got boundaries in time and space. It happens over a period of time, and it happens in a prescribed space. Poker, it's around a table. You've got a goal. You've got some kind of objective. It's either an objective that's shared by the players who are playing the game, or they might be in competition with each other.

You've got rules. Artifacts – these are like dice, the Monopoly cards, "Chance," "Community Chest," the pieces that you move around the board – that let you keep track of information so you can focus on the game and not focus on tracking all the ideas in your head. And players, which I chose to visualize as little puffy spacemen.

[Audience laughter]

A game's a journey, so it's a world, but it's also a journey. It's a way to get from A to B. What makes a game different from a business process in the traditional sense is, when we're doing creative work, we don't know what B looks like. A business process is designed to get you the same result every time, very reliable, very consistent, very repeatable. But a game – you have a million possible outcomes of a game, and that's why a game can be considered a possibility generator, a creativity generator – a creative machine, if you will.

So in Gamestorming, we don't have specific, concrete goals; we have fuzzy goals. And I like to think of – if you think about the Age of Exploration, right? You have these ships going off. What were they looking for? The Fountain of Youth. They thought they might find monsters. Columbus was looking for India. And according to my research, he refused to admit ever in his whole life that he didn't find India. He was certain that it was India.

So fuzzy goals. We have to go off. Now, we're gonna find something, but are we gonna find what we're looking for? Maybe not. We have to be open to opportunities that we find along the way. Why did I put a blank slide? I don't know.

All right, so we might start out with a fuzzy goal. We have an initial goal. We're kind of aiming in this direction, and we circle around and we find something. Then we circle around and we think we're in the right – can you see that? There we go. We think we're in the right region, so we circle around. Nothing. Oh, shoot. Okay, so we have to widen our circle. Oh, now we find the rich vein, and now we circle in and we get somewhere. Okay? But it might not have been what we were looking for.

That's the interesting thing about creative work, right? The guy who invented the sticky note, to speak about one of my favorite tools, it was just glue. It was just a bad glue that didn't work very well, at first.

Okay. Some characteristics of fuzzy goals. They're emotional. People have to be passionate; they have to be engaged. They're sensory. They're tangible. A fuzzy goal, even though it's fuzzy, it's blurry, you wanna make those ideas as concrete as you can. Steve Jobs launches the iPhone before anyone can touch an iPhone, but he has it, right? You can see him touching it; it's tangible, sensory. And then the movement, as I pointed out, is progressive. You're moving – you're learning as you're going. You're learning as you're moving along.

So a game is a world. It's a journey. I also think we can think of a game as a play. The play's the thing. A play, in three acts. You could think of it like – I think of it like a stubby pencil I could sharpen at both ends. You have a beginning; you have a tangible outcome, something that you want at the end of it, your goal, and it may be fuzzy. You have something that you want, but you wanna make it tangible or as concrete as you can.

You have the people and the resources and whatever that you're putting into the game. So this is time running from left to right, getting from A to B. You've gotta open the game. You've gotta open by getting ideas on the table. You wanna set the stage, develop the themes, get ideas, get the information, get the stuff in. Just like opening the box. You're reading the instructions. You've gotta set it up, get people to the table to focus.

Then you have this period where you explore. You're in the game. You're exploring this world that you created. You're trying out various options, like the Starbucks scene that I described to you, right? They're trying it out. Well, what happens if the line's long? What happens if it's short? What happens if we're outta coffee? I don't think that's ever happened, but...

All right. We examine; we explore; we experiment. And then you close the game. You have to close the box. You have to be done. You have to know when it's over. This is when you have to make conclusions. You make decisions. You'd figure out what your next steps are, and you get to your tangible outcome that you want.

This is another – you think of it as – the three acts as one. The opening act, where you want divergence, you want a lot of ideas. Then the second act, where you wanna really develop the themes and explore stuff, where you want to create an emergent space for ideas to – the good things to bubble up. And then you want a convergent, third act, where you're closing things down and you're coming to conclusions. It gives people a sense of satisfaction. You don't wanna leave the movie hanging in the middle, right? You gotta have a – if you bring 'em in for a meeting, whether it's a half hour or three days, you wanna follow this basic idea.

Okay, so how to do it. I wanna be a little practical. Open, explore, and close – think of those as the three acts, right? Your opening act, your exploring act, and your closing act.

So how to open. These are just some things that I've learned over several years of facilitating meetings and so forth. I'm assuming that you're gonna facilitate, you wanna bring people in and get 'em involved in your creative process.

Stay loose. You can't control them. They do what they wanna do. Sometimes they come; sometimes they don't. You wanna keep yourself loose enough to get a sense of who the people are and where they wanna go. You don't wanna have your game so prescribed in the beginning that they can't participate in its creation.

Get in touch with your ignorance. Someone said something today that really resonated with me about this. Be dumb. Oh, it was Kate Rutter when she was talking about the five-minute madness and questions. Get in touch with the things you don't know. If you knew the answers, you wouldn't need other people to help you, right? So focus on the things you don't know, not the things you do know, and use – questions are a really good way to get that – to explore ideas with other people. This guy doesn't look like he knows. He looks like he's thinking, right? He's got the questions.

Light a fire. If people aren't – if people come to your meeting because they have to, like this – they open up their laptops – get 'em outta there. They're not gonna help you be creative. I mean, if it's a creative meeting, you don't need them, right? You have to light a fire. They have to be passionate and engaged. The more people who are passionate and engaged in your meeting, the better. This is what you want.

Explore. How to explore. Manage the altitude. So you gotta – if you're too down in the details, you're gonna lose people. If you're too abstract and theoretical, you're gonna lose people. This is a very simple feedback mechanism that I like. People have a red card and a green card. If they wanna go faster, they hold up the red card; if they wanna stop, ask a question, slow down, they hold – sorry, what did I say? Well, green is for go, and red is for stop. Anyway.

Watch the clock, which I'm doing right now. It's right there. 7:04. It takes a certain amount of time to get those artifacts. People wanna leave with some object, some sense of accomplishment. They're gonna go along with you, but if you get to where there's five minutes left or ten minutes left and they haven't made concrete progress and they don't feel like they're coming out of it with something, you've lost 'em. So watch the clock. Get a sense of how long it's gonna take to create the artifacts, the outcomes of the meeting, and make sure that you've got enough time built in for them to do that stuff and share it with each other.

Get physical. This is the bodystorming stuff. This is the thing I was talking about before with the iPhone. Get people up and moving. If people are just sitting around a table, all looking at each other, you're engaging their minds but not their heart and not their body. You gotta get the whole person involved if you wanna keep their energy for any sustained period of time.

How to close. This is my weakest point. *[Laughter]* I'll just tail out with you. Focus on artifacts. So, again, people wanna leave a meeting with a sense of accomplishment. They wanna feel like they got something done. Whatever it is, a poster, a picture, some code, something that's been accomplished. Focus on getting those things – in the course of the meeting, getting those things out.

I know people who have these things that – they do these things called book sprints where they actually write a book in the course of a week or a weekend. And I asked him, "How did you – why did you start doing that?" He goes, "Well, I –" Someone told me they did book sprints, and I thought they said – and they actually did it over a month, and I thought they said a weekend, so I just didn't know it wasn't possible, so I did it.

[Audience laughter]

[Laughter] All right, so focus on the artifacts, those tangible objects, whatever they are.

Remember that the end is a stepping stone, right? There's always something that comes next. So when you're closing, you don't just say, "Thank you, goodbye." "Kthxbye" – I've seen that one on Twitter. No. Remember what comes next, and always remind people, what's the next step? What's the thing that comes next after this? They need to see where they are in a continuum. Right? There's an end. But then there's another beginning, then there's another end, these progressive steps on our learning journey.

Remember that it's their thing; it's not your thing. If it's your thing – now, I'm sort of contradicting what you said, Joe, about fight for your thing and make it happen. There are times to do that too, but if you're involving other people in the creative process and you're too tied to your thing and your solution, you're not gonna get the best out of them. So obviously, this is their thing. You can tell. I'm the one sitting in the back there, just watching. It's their thing.

Time up. I have four minutes. So I can take questions or I can...?

Response: Up to you.

I'm just gonna keep going. I have one more little thing. A story of Christopher Columbus. If you have questions, tweet 'em and I'll answer 'em by Twitter.

So, Christopher Columbus, someone we all know. Either a criminal or a good guy, depending on your point of view. But the story, I think, is interesting.

So he started out in the Canary Islands, and his concept was "We're gonna go to Japan. I wanna go to Japan." Nobody knew how far it was. Contrary to popular opinion, everyone pretty much knew the world was round. It had been calculated in the year 300 BC, I think, by some Greek guy who calculated the circumference of the earth. But no one – so everyone knew the world was around, and most people knew how big it was; Columbus did not.

Okay. So you can see the map going off the end of the world. I have pictures of monsters just 'cause I like – I think these old maps look cool, and I wanted to share that. *[Laughter]* All right. I don't know if they thought there were monsters out there or not.

So here's a Columbus estimate of how far it was gonna be to get to Japan from the Canary Islands. Now, you can see by the size of my slide, you can probably see that actual is gonna be a little bit longer. This is the actual distance. This is the conventional idea, right? People thought the world – well, everyone knew the world was round, right? And they thought, "Well, this is Asia, and this is the ocean. So it's just all ocean between here and there." And this was what Columbus said; he said, "Well, actually, you know, the world's smaller than we think it is, so there's really less ocean there than we think." He was totally wrong. Absolutely wrong. Everyone else was right.

In the actual fact, there is this North and South America in there that – nobody knew, okay? This is what we mean about fuzzy goals. You don't know what you don't know when you start a creative process. You just don't know till you get out there and start doing something. You don't know what you don't know.

So a little spreadsheet of right and wrong. Size of the world: Columbus, wrong; everyone else, right. They thought he was – the reason that nobody gave him any money and the reason he had to keep going around asking for money and he finally had to go to Spain for a second time to get it is 'cause all the smart money was like, "This guy's an idiot. He's completely wrong. Don't give him money." And even when Queen Isabella did give him money, I think – she and King Ferdinand I think pretty much assumed, well, it's fun money; it's pin money. *[Laughter]* Maybe he'll find something.

Okay, distance to India: Columbus was wrong; everyone else was right. But discover America: Columbus, yes; everyone else, no.

[Audience laughter]

So who's laughing in the end? All right.

This is what I would call the paradox of discovery. You're gonna find things that you're not looking for, sometimes even when you're not looking for 'em. But if you're not looking for something, then you're not gonna find anything. And this, I think, ties into what Jeff Veen was saying earlier about being open to understanding that – not being too attached to your product or service as it stands. So don't overthink it, is what I leave you with.

If you're interested in Gamestorming, I'm doing a workshop tomorrow. There's also a blog and a wiki where we're sort of doing our Brothers Grimm thing, trying to collect all this stuff. And there's a book. And I do have those cards like Ben showed that – from O'Reilly, if anyone wants. I think the card will give you a discount on the book, if you wanna buy it. So thank you very much.

[End of Audio]