

Dr. D'wayne Edwards on Fueling the Future of Footwear

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SPEAKERS

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards, Olga Stella

Olga Stella 00:00

Hi. I'm Olga Stella, the executive director of Design Core Detroit and the Vice President for strategy and Communications at the College for Creative Studies. Thank you for joining us for season three of the Detroit City of Design podcast. As stewards of Detroit's UNESCO city of design designation, we aim to raise your awareness of how design can create conditions for better quality of life, and economic opportunity for all. In Season Three, we will hear from thought leaders who view our world through a lens of empathy and applied design thinking to address some of our world's most pressing issues.

Olga Stella 00:45

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Olga Stella 01:07

I'm excited to be here today with Dr. Dwayne Edwards, design educator and founder of Pencil footwear Design Academy based in Portland, Oregon. Pencil was founded in 2010 to provide its students the opportunity and knowledge required to become professional footwear designers through a rigorous learn by doing curriculum in partnership with the industry's top brands and retailers. Over the course of his 31 year career, Dr. Edwards has received numerous Design Awards from Red Dot to Mercedes Benz, he was named one of Fast Company's 100 most creative people in business, has accumulated more than 40 patents and designed more than 500 styles for premier athletes like Michael Jordan. In 2019, Dr. Edwards received an honorary doctorate from Art Center College of Design, based on his career achievements. Well, I am so happy to be talking to you today, Dwayne, I've just enjoyed getting to know you over the last couple of weeks and learning more about Pencil. And it was just happy to have you on the podcast today. Thanks for joining us.

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 02:08

Thank you very much for inviting me on. Heard a lot of great things about you and the podcast. So I'm excited to be here.

Olga Stella 02:14

Thank you.

Olga Stella 02:15

Well, I

Olga Stella 02:16

know one of the things I think would be helpful as we get started is for our audience to know a little bit more about your journey into footwear design, and you know how you became a footwear designer.

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 02:26

Well. So I'll try to spare you the long version. So the short version, when I was 12, that was when I drew my first shoe because I used to love to draw football players on baseball cards. And I saw a shoe for the first time. And I fell in love with just the odd shape. And the idea of degree of difficulty it was to draw them. And then that just led to all through middle school, all through high school, I was I was kind of known as the shoe guy, because I would always come to school with custom painted sneakers that I would custom, customize myself. Now this was in the mid 80s. So customization wasn't even a thing. The idea of a sneaker head wasn't even a term. But it was just something I always wanted to do, because that was my my mode of transportation because I didn't have a car. So you always had to make sure your feet were right. And that is what I thought that I would want to do for the rest of my career. Or I'm sorry, rest of my life. And I remember going to my guidance counselor in high school, and saying, Hey, I finally figured out what I want to do, you know, once I graduate is to become a sneaker designer. And she was like, You know what, why would you want to do something like that? You know, no, no black kid from Inglewood High School will ever become a footwear designer. And so that devastated me as a kid, but I understood what she was trying to tell me. But at the same time, I use that as kind of motivation to prove her wrong. And graduated from high school, youngest of six kids raised by a single parent, unable to afford to go to college, and ended up getting a temporary job at a footwear company filing papers, shortly after graduating from high school. And they had these wooden suggestion boxes and every department in the company was looking for ways the employees would give them ideas to make the company better. And since I knew I was only there for a short period of time, I would put sketches in a suggestion box on these little three by five index cards with the idea of hiring me as a designer because I could make better product. Did that for six months straight and the owner called me into his office and offered me a job right after I turned 19 years old.

Olga Stella 04:44

That's an awesome story. And it just proves, you know, it just demonstrates so much this idea that you know, talent is distributed evenly but opportunity is not and you went and you seized your opportunity. Yeah. And so as developed...I know, at one point in your career in there in the early part, I think you've you've said there were only three African American footwear designers, you know, in the industry, how did your creative process evolve? You know, and and just maybe just, you know, how it evolved in your career leading up to founding Pencil?

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 05:22

So when when I started in 89, I was the second designer that that I was aware of, again, this was post Google, right. So we didn't, I couldn't just look people up. Right? Couldn't do that, but I heard of a guy named Wilson Smith, who was up at Nike, and he started in 86. And so we knew of each other through other people. And I think my advantage was, I was I was young, I was 19. And so I was really the target consumer. And so a lot of times, you know, my first five years in the industry, I was really designing for myself, because I was the target consumer for the brands that I was working with. And that really stuck with me, because it made me understand as a as a designer, you have to become the person you're designing for. and I treat it much like the way an actor or an actress, you know, plays a certain role. I think designers also play have to play that same kind of that same kind of role when they were designing for something or someone specific. So I was always able to morph in whoever I was designing the product for, and that really became, for me kind of my what I would call one of my superpowers of being able to lock in no matter, you know what the subject was, if it was a basketball shoe, if it was just an outdoor boot, if there was a casual sneaker, if it was a writing boot for me, and like I was able to lock in and really understand what that person needed by becoming that person. And so that really became what I feel one of my competitive advantages is that I really studied who I was designing for, and really took it to heart.

Olga Stella 07:08

And so as your career progressed, and you know, I know, design, we've you know, one of the things that at Design Core we've really focused on is, you know, the how to create a more diverse pipeline of talent, so that designers are designing products and experiences and systems that benefit everyone that everyone can participate. And you need that diversity of perspective and experience, you know, to do that, and the design fields are notoriously not diverse. Right. And some of that, like in architecture is more... is better documented than the maybe in other fields like product design. But as you as you got to a certain point in your career, and you decided to found Pencil, maybe if you tell our audience a little bit about, you know, just what were the key elements, as you were thinking about what Pencil needed to be, and how you hoped it would change the the talent composition in the in footwear design, but I think and design in general.

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 08:12

Yeah, well, you know, I know, I recognized early on that, that brands, they knew everything about their target consumer, especially the ones that I worked for, and a lot of times they were young black kids. And but yet there weren't young black kids working in the offices, but they were the target, you know, from from all the marketing campaigns and consumer focuses. And as as I went on to, to Nike and to Jordan, it got a lot, it got a lot bigger, right, where the marketing budgets got bigger, and the endorsement start to kick in. And I just noticed how the brands only saw us as one way. They only saw diversity through the lens of making money, not contributing to a company and contributing to the organization. And I started to understand like, Well, you know, what, what's the what's the point of me doing this job because I feel like I'm not doing anything to advance the idea of getting more people in industry who looks like me, and I challenged the company I was working with, is to treat us the same way you would treat trying to find the next great athlete. You know, why don't you invest into these kids when they were in high school and show them what opportunity looks like beyond just buying

something or telling them that they could become a basketball player, football player or a musician because that was the only reference that these kids saw from these brands. And once challenging them to let them know that these kids have more value to them beyond buying product. Then that started to change the perception of what was possible, at least for more diversity within our industry. But it was it was really it just needed someone to focus in on it. It was it was something that the industry lacked industry didn't know how to do quote unquote, say they didn't know how to do. And they still say they don't know how to do it to this day. But it really just means does someone need to focus in on it and Pencil to me was is really that the school I wish I was able to attend as a high school kid. And the school that I would hire from as a as a working professional. And we meet kids where they are, you know, for us is not about if you have a college degree, it's about if you have talent, and you know, I didn't, I didn't have a college degree, but I had the talent to get into the industry. And you fast forward many years later, there's so many kids out there that are talented, but they don't have a voice, they don't have an outlet. And we try to become that outlet to increase the diversity in our industry, at least just to show the industry, what it should look like, what it could look like and the implications of what what would happen if you actually did focus in on it.

Olga Stella 11:02

For students who might be interested in going to Pencil or participating in a Pencil program, what can they expect, what is the approach like - the learning approach?

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 11:12

We fundamentally I want to emotions when you're finished, either you're gonna never want to do this job, or you're going to fall in love with it. And what I mean by that is we work you the way you would work at a real organization. And so our programs are intensive. And so we we do four weeks, but it's 12 to 14 hours everyday straight. So that's that's equivalent to a 16 week semester at a traditional college, we do it all in four weeks. And we structure it that way because when you work professionally, at least in the footwear industry, there are times where you pull all nighters, there are times when you do have to work those long hours. And we want to condition you just like an athlete trains and prepares for that moment, we look at Pencil the same way we want to condition you prepare you for that moment, when you do have to rise and deliver. And so it's it's intensive, like I said, it's though it we show you exactly the way you will work, we give you real projects, the brands, you know pay for the students to attend, so it's free. And at the end, a few things happen, you can either turn that into an internship, you can turn that into a product that goes to retail, in some cases, students get paid by the brand for the work that they've created. We want to change kind of the the way that the perception of what education looks like, especially when it comes to design and product companies, where we want to flip it around a bit to really showcase the talent that is out there. So the brands can understand there's a new outlet for getting the same results. And these results are based on exactly the way they work. So all of our kids have less break in time when it's time for them to be employed.

Olga Stella 13:01

I know in some of your prior talks, you've talked a little bit about just the importance of you know, global perspectives, and within the school and competition based learning and, you know, how do these, how do you weave some of these things in, you know, when you think about when you've as you've developed and evolved the Pencil model?

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 13:21

It honestly really organically. You know, just like when you work at a company, you don't, you don't always work with people you grew up with or from the same state, or, you know, from the same city or from the same country. So all of as you mentioned, all of our programs you have to compete to get in, because there's no fee. We don't we don't show any favoritism, where everyone submits a concept to be your barrier of entry. And we make the selection globally, where we try to align our programs that consist of anywhere from 18 to 35 kids at one time, where we try to make sure that diversity is not just in race, but sex and geography. Where if it's if it's US based, we make sure people are all from different states, if it's global, we try to spread it spread it around as well, because what we found is that is the makeup of a large global company, it's going to have that diversity within that mix. And we want kids to see what that diversity looks like. So they can understand how they can learn from some kid that's if the kids from LA versus a kid from New York or kid from Detroit, or a kid from from Amsterdam or Holland, I mean, Denmark, you can see that diversity in the way that they think. And you can see that diversity in the way that they live. And the idea is to create this fellowship of energy that exists in the room. Where that's really for us is really what diversity is about the diversity of not only just sex, I mean race, it's also diversity of thought and experiences. And when you put that together in the same room, then you're going to get out a different end result versus it being all the same.

Olga Stella 15:02

That's right. And it seems like the the your industry partners really respond to that. You know, you've you just go on the Pencil website and you see the myriad of brands that you've worked with, you know, what, what do the industry partners say? And what, you know, why is that partnership, important to you? You know, I guess ... Why is Pencils' partnership important to them?

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 15:26

So for for us our partnerships with our brands is proof that we're doing the right thing, and we're doing it the right way. Where this is our 11th year, and we've never asked a brand to work with us, every single brand that is posted on that site, they came to us. And it was based on the results that we that we, that we received from from all of our programs. And that to me was super critical, because I wanted to always provide the brands a return on investment. Because the education is free for the students, that means the brands have to pay for the student to be there. And I've always being in the corporate side understood the idea of what ROI means, especially when it comes to employees. And I wanted to bring that to the education side, because I know that's how the brands think. The brands think in that in that ROI mindset. So the way we teach, because it's the way that they will work the brand, see the value of it immediately. And then once once the programs are over, as I mentioned that the brand, nine times out of 10, they will hire someone whether it's full time or part time or sorry contract or even internship. So they're getting that ROI by working with us because we're producing the results that they actually desire. For us, that's our accreditation, where our accreditation is the brand validation, the brands are validating that we're doing it the right way according to what their standards are and what they would hope to hire from. And for us that is our goal is to make sure that we are the voice of the industry. And that our industry sees us as a relevant education resource.

Olga Stella 17:10

And in the design industry is still a pretty heavily credentialed industry, you know, you most of the positions, you know, least on paper require for your degree and, and Pencil's really breaking the model of that. So when you think as you work with, you know, institutions of higher education, and as I'm sure we'll have educators and students, you know, listening to the podcast, what can higher education take away from the Pencil model? Well, you know, and how can you know Design Core is part of a college the College of Creative Studies. What can we start to learn from the Pencil model, you know, to help to help make higher education more accessible? And, and and to increase the ROI to students?

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 17:52

Yeah, well, you hit it right on the head. But the first part is it being more accessible, you know, often, you know, I talked to Dean's letting them know, they don't, they don't necessarily have the best talent, they just have the talent that can afford to attend their college or university.

Olga Stella 18:09

Absolutely.

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 18:10

And I said, you have to figure out that you got to you have to get talent in here. Whether they're scholarship and or they can it can afford to pay it because that is why the brand will continue to support your college is if you're producing the talent that they would like to hire from. And if you're not doing that, or if you see those those industry partners start to dry up, then you have to change your process, and you have to change your approach. Now education doesn't always do that. It's kind of a it's kind of a stuck model in some ways, because it's it's it's about tuition, which I completely understand. But in order to get the corporation's support or additional support, they do have to change the curriculum around. And they do have to have these smaller, more intensive sessions. Because a the students want it, the students don't want to be there for all those four years, where they want it quicker. They want it faster. They want it very specific to what they want to get into. Now part of that is their attention span of how they're living today. But it's also the brand's attention span to because the brands are about results quarterly. And if the brands are measured quarterly, then sometimes it's difficult for them to wait three, four or five years for a talent to be available for them to participate in their quarterly earnings. And so because the corporations are working off of a shorter scale, the schools will need to start operating off of a shorter scale, because the brands need that talent in order to actually produced the results that they've been asked to produce based on you know, honestly the stock market. And so for us, we're modeled based off of a corporation and I approached creating Pencil through that lens of if a corporation created a school, what would it look like? And it would look like the way that we do it, which is shorter, more intensive and directly connected to the job that they're looking to apply for.

Olga Stella 20:14

Beyond the the accessibility of higher education, the tuition barriers, what, you know, you've talked a little bit about the lack of awareness of careers and design in, you know, in more diverse populations and African American communities and, you know, and in other communities where design is just typically not been represented. And, you know, how do you talk to parents? How do you talk to students, to help them understand what the opportunities are in the design profession?

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 20:45

You know, it's it, you did hit on it, it's, it's actually having that conversation with the parent. Somehow reaching them to let them know that design doesn't equal broke. Where, if you if you have a parent that is not aware of the differences between art and design, they'll just chalk everything up to art. And, and in some cases, art still equals broke, because it's a different process than then design. Where I think the first stage of it is just under helping them understand the differences between the two. And then the opportunities on the design side that are different than on the art side. Where the companies also have a huge obligation as well, where the companies need to also explain to the the parent and the kid, that these are all the jobs that are available within design, because the companies don't share that information. They don't share in that simple, the simple breakdown as if you were go to a career fair or a job fair. I've been to several of them at churches in black communities. And I've never saw my job up there.

Olga Stella 21:50

Right.

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 21:51

And that was is heartbreaking. Because I know, I know that kid is not genuine, they're more genuinely interested in the topic of sneakers or fashion or design. But they really don't know what it is. They have an idea, but they really don't know. And so I think what what schools could do better is if the brands don't share it, then the school should share it. The schools should create their own job boards, and breaking down the careers and how those careers align with the majors that they actually offer. Where then you can see more of a clear path. Right now, I don't think you can go to a school's website and see a list of the careers and then see the majors that are directly aligned to those careers. And then the companies that specifically hire for those jobs. If that doesn't exist, right, yeah. Then how do you you're expecting the parent and the kid to connect all those dots? They're not going to do that.

Olga Stella 22:48

That's right. No, that's right. And I and I, and as you you've worked with so many students over the years, I know just the efforts that Pencils had in diversifying, you know, went from three to almost 200, you know, footwear designers of color, right? And because, in large part due to Pencils' efforts, what are those, those jobs, where, where are the point, the opportunities within the brands, the designers are bringing value and really creating careers for themselves?

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 23:18

You know, it's really in the natural daily things that they do. And so what I mean by that, from a sneaker point of view, the kid who can see a product and say it would look better if it had this color, or it would look better if it had this, this material on it. Or I would look better if these lines did this or did that, or it look better if it performed this way, those are all jobs. Those are all jobs. And kids do that. Now they do it virtually online before when I when I was younger, you would do it at the sneaker store. But they they do they basically make the assessment of what could be better, not knowing that color design is a real job. Not knowing that someone who picks colors for the shoes is a high paying job. Or someone who selects the materials for it is a is a high paying job. Someone who decides what type of product to create, that is also a job where the kid sees it and does it naturally. And you have to you have to feed it

to them in that easy digestible way they experience the product. Once you show them like hey, you know what, like, you can do geometry using sneakers. Come on, everybody's gonna be better at geometry if you show them how to do it through sneakers. Or if you show them how steam and stem are connected to sneakers, there's going to be much more of an interest from those kids to actually look into those subject if they know that there's this object that they have in their closet and on their feet that they can learn from. That's way easier to get a kid to pay attention and stay focused, versus the older traditional ways and methods that high schools do, and then also colleges do as well. It's really showing it through the lens of how they look at it.

Olga Stella 25:13

But so putting though the talent that you say you want putting that really at the center of what, you know how you describe what it means to be a designer, and what these opportunities look like.

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 25:25

Yeah, if they just need to know they can be something other than picking up a ball or picking up a mic.

Olga Stella 25:31

Right? Yeah. Or a hammer or? Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know. I think we we set low expectations for kids just and don't see no, don't don't see all the the natural creativity, the natural problem solving, that kids, especially kids who are coming from challenged backgrounds, you know, every single day, they're they're trying to figure out, you know, how they're going to get to school, how they're going to, you know, do different things in their life. And there's an ingenuity and resourcefulness there that I think any any business would want.

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 26:07

Oh, yeah, absolutely. At the same time, they, the companies, and the kids have to understand too, is, you know, for me when I was when I was coming up, I lived in Inglewood, California. But I work in Marina Del Rey, California, which is technically only about 20 minutes away, but it's like night and day. So I'm living in two different worlds. Daily, daily, I'm living in two different worlds. And that's hard. It's taxing. Because you live in one world, that you when you go back home, you can't really share what that world is like, because no one can understand it and relate to it. And then the world at and on the corporate side, you can't share where you come from, and the daily struggles that way, because no one there understands it either. So what ends up happening is the kid usually gets pulled back into the other one that's more comfortable for them. And that's usually the pull that happens is, that's the one that you're most comfortable with. That be that's the one that really pulls you back in unless you really have the mindset to you want a different life and you want to do something different, and you want to be uncomfortable. Most people don't have that that level of discipline to say, you know, I love this world, and I love my friends and my relatives, but I need this over here in order for me to do better. And quite honestly, your friends and relatives, they should push you out. Because they want you to do better. But a lot of times those kids don't have those that that encouragement. And so they just fall back into the same traps.

Olga Stella 27:43

Well, I think you've just kind of proven the statement of culture beats strategy, right? Our culture eats strategy right every day. And and you know, it's hard to you can have all these strategies around recruiting diverse talent pipelines, but if there isn't a culture that then supports diversity of perspective, diversity of background, but you know, you're not, those strategies aren't going to work.

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 28:06

Nope, not at all.

Olga Stella 28:07

Yeah. You know, I've just loved learning more about you, Dwayne, and your just your career and your own journey and design. And I one of the things that we think a lot about, and definitely don't have the answers towards, I'd love to get your thoughts about Detroit itself is, you know, an important African American city in the United States, and with

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 28:28

One of the biggest ones,

Olga Stella 28:29

Yeah, well, and and just historically. Historically, we have made our mark, and a lot of what is special about Detroit, is due to African American culture and leadership here in our city. And as someone who has been deeply involved in industry, like where the money's at, you know, what your thoughts are about how do where people get to have a piece of that, and start to build not just career but actually start to build, get some wealth right, out of the design industry?

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 29:01

Well, I mean, it's, it's, it is education. It's, you know, we, you know, black people are one of the largest consumer groups on the planet. And we don't always know the whole story or the rest of the story. Meaning, we still have that consumer mindset, where we don't know the rest of the story of where that where that product came from, you know, who financed it, how did that work? Like, all of those things are still hidden. Even though if you dig, you can find it, but it's still hidden. And I think not only just Detroit, but all inner cities need to do a better job of revealing the rest of the story. But specifically the Detroit again, it goes back to living in those two different worlds, right where, if a kid is in a deep, deep and inner city of Detroit, they may not go past two or three miles or four where they grew up at. And so you have to lure them out of that place so they can see the rest of the story. And if they're able to see the rest of the story consistently, then then that habit of the lack of awareness will start to change. Where, as you pointed out, I mean, Detroit has a deep history, it has an amazing, you know, kind of design community is just, it's hidden in plain sight. And I don't think enough is being done to pull those kids out of their environment. So they can see the other the rest of the story, where I think that's really one of the bigger unlocks, and one of the bigger opportunities, you know, specifically say for school for like CCS. You know, CCS has the one of the largest groups of black footwear designers to graduate from any school in United States or any school in the world, actually. And if people in Detroit don't know that shame on CCS, because that's pivotal and critical for their visibility of what's possible. And if those kids who live in that city don't know the success rate of black kids, other black kids who have have graduated through CCS and what they're doing today, that's, that's partly on CCS, and that's partly on

the DPS system as well of, of sharing those insights. I mean, that that should be an annual conversation or, or bi monthly conversation, of just highlighting the success stories, because right now, the success stories still exist in the entertainment side and the sports side.

Olga Stella 31:45

Yeah

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 31:46

If you keep seeing those two things, then that's all you think you're gonna be.

Olga Stella 31:51

That's right, No, you're right. Given my new role at CCS, I have a better understanding of what some of the blocks are to telling that story in a better way. But there's still you're you're 100%, right, that there is still there's a kind of a moral imperative, right? If we want to, if we want to have different outcomes, we've got to do different things. And I think, you know, you're right, you're 100% right. One of the things that we've tried at Design Core we do do is we have a member network of design businesses. We highlight a wide variety, but they're primarily service based businesses, you know, graphic design companies, and architecture, you know, architects and interior designers, and we've tried over the years to really have, you know, to have more makers to have more product based businesses involved. And I think we're still trying to figure out for those startup product based companies,

Olga Stella 32:48

what,

Olga Stella 32:48

you know, what the, what the right level of promotion, what the right level of services. So maybe just as we as we, as we wrap up, just your thoughts around, you know, for folks, or who are, maybe they've got the design training, they have ideas for products, you know, what, what are the the most important ingredients, if you're going to be as a startup, um, you know, in in the design world, if it was a product based business, you know, what, what should those companies be be focused on?

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 33:19

You know, being an entrepreneur is is super hard, and I wouldn't suggest it for anyone. Unless you're willing to lose everything, don't do it, because it becomes a hobby at that point end up wasting more money.

Olga Stella 33:34

Yeah, we say the same thing to our clients every day.

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 33:38

It's just not it looks sexy, but it's really not. I think that entrepreneurs miss the idea of, of brand equity, versus making money. And the brand equity piece could lead you to money. Meaning, through association through collaboration, you elevate your brand, you elevate your status, and then the money will come, right. I think sometimes the curse brands have, entrepreneurs have early if they have money,

because if you start with too much of it, you're going to waste it. In my opinion, because I think not having money makes you a lot smarter of a person, it makes you more resilient. It makes you want to figure out how am I going to get this when I don't have this? And I think one way of attracting entrepreneurs, I mean, money still talks, right? And you know, what would be really interesting is if you had your own version of a shark tank setup for young entrepreneurs in the city of Detroit, and you almost kind of trick them into Okay, now this is also an entrepreneur camp. You need to have this, this, this, this and this to be successful. And then oh, by the way, once you do all those things, then you come back and then we'll put you in front of people who have the resources to make you a more successful business, right. But it's not always just about money. It is a lot of times about resources, whether it was legal services, whether it is brand strategy services, marketing services, these are all things are most of the time is overlooked by entrepreneurs. And they don't present themselves to the world as best as they should. So therefore, they don't get opportunities. And they never know why. They never know why someone didn't look at them versus looking at someone else. And in a lot of times, if they have no real design background, or understanding from a bigger perspective of what brands it looked like, they fall into that trap of falling in love with the product or the object that they've created, and not looking at the holistic brand and approach that they're looking to deliver that product. So I think being able to lure them in with this idea of being in front of people with money. But then once you have them captive, now you take them through the rest of the steps that needs to that they need to go through to make themselves look good enough to go outside, I call it. Where I hope everyone brushes their teeth and washes their face and does something with their hair and they look presentable when they go outside daily. Most of the times brands don't do that. Entrepreneurs don't do that. Their brand doesn't look presentable. And that's usually the reason why they don't progress is because they don't have the visual look. And then back that visual look with the proper approach and plan and strategy to be successful. They're just focused on the product. And especially as a designer, because you think this is this is it, and you forget about you know, the basics. And so I think that's one of the struggles that entrepreneurs have is that they they don't look good enough to go outside.

Olga Stella 36:58

Stay home.

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 37:01

Right, until you're ready to come outside.

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 37:03

And they don't know what that looks like. And, and so they have to they have to be shown what that looks like.

Olga Stella 37:09

Right. No, I think that makes a ton of sense. And I appreciate your insights on that. Because you've seen the business and what it takes what you know what it takes to succeed every day. So at Design Core, you know, as the stewards of the UNESCO city of design designation for Detroit, we've been really focused on, you know, Detroit, not only as a place that practices design in an inclusive way, but also fosters diverse design talent. And I'd love to just get a sense from you D'Wayne about what kinds of opportunities, you know, for talent, you see, you might see in Detroit.

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 37:47

Well, I mean, you know, Detroit has come up for me last three years, consistently. Starting with a former student of mine, who's been trying to recruit me to Detroit for the last three years. And, and I explained to him, Hey, it doesn't make sense yet. Because I'm thinking about just the footwear side. And there's not enough footwear industry, you know, for in Detroit. And then Don Tuski, the president of CCS, we used to work together here in Portland, because he was the president of a school that was about a five minute walk away from Pencil. And I remember once he came into town, I think he was here a good month. And then he finally reached out to me and he said, You know, I keep hearing your name come up, because he's Portland's a footwear City, where you know, the Nikes, the Adidas isn't Jordans of the world are here and the Columbias and they are all saying, hey, you should talk to DWayne. And so we had a good working relationship. And then he decided to leave and go back home to Detroit. And so

Olga Stella 38:49

Yay for Detroit.

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 38:50

Yes. So within a few months of him being the president of CCS, I get the email and the text message, hey, you know, what, what can we do to get you to Detroit? So now I have two people recruiting me to Detroit, through through different lenses. Right. And so, you know, as I start to look at it, and you know, yeah, there's Wolverine Worldwide out in Detroit, who's a pretty massive footwear company and leather supplier. But there's also other great design companies out there far as Carhartt, and, and Herman Miller and GM and Ford. And so it starts to starts to make a little bit more sense. I think for for us what we're looking to do is, is is really find a another home, whether it's expansion or even, you know, fully packing up and leaving to be a part of a growing bigger and and more diverse community that's willing to grow and really be a part of building a city. And so Detroit is looking a bit more attractive. W I will say, you know, Don and Alan have done a really good job of, of the recruiting process. And feeding me monthly with the goodness of what's going on in the city. And then being able to visit Detroit. You know, I do understand now what they see. And and there could be a possibility that we could show up there for sure.

Olga Stella 40:16

Well, I know we would welcome you with open arms Dwayne, so. Okay. Well, DWayne, I have so enjoyed our conversation today and learning more about Pencil and what you've accomplished, you know, so far, and I, and I would just maybe, as you know, we have a lot of different types of listeners. But for those aspiring designers out there who may be, maybe they're not not currently enrolled in a program, or, you know, they're there, they haven't quite figured it out. What is your.. what's your advice for people who want to get into the industry?

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 40:52

Well, the first thing I would say is the industry doesn't need more than industry needs better. And I say that to say that if you're if you're planning to get into the design industry, think about being the designer that inspires others. And what I mean by that is, each of us are inspired by different people, for different

reasons, is hopefully you start to discover what your reason is, what is the reason why you want to go into design? And how are you planning on creating a product or making your imprint within this industry, that will help elevate the industry and look at ways to inspire others, where most of the time you know, people just go into it just because they see opportunity. Those opportunities fade, those opportunities pop up and disappear. Where if you're focused on really honoring the craft, and really focusing on elevating the industry, then at some point, the things that you create, and the companies you decide to build, the relationships you start to establish, that will inspire the next version of you. And I just ask all the young kids to think about, you know, what can they do to create a path for the next generation of them? Because as too often what we don't think about, we don't think about how can we make the process more clear for the previous version of ourselves? And that's really always been my goal from from the beginning is I've always said I want to leave this industry better than than the way I received it. And if I can leave it better than the way I received it, then I feel like I did what I was supposed to do within within this industry.

Olga Stella 42:41

Ultimately, I think you're definitely doing that. And I've just again been so happy to talk with you today. For our audience who wants to learn more about Pencil, we'll have information in our show notes and look forward to seeing more about what happens as Pencil grows and evolves.

Olga Stella 42:56

Thank you, DWayne.

Dr. D'Wayne Edwards 42:58

Thank you very much. And maybe I'll see you in Detroit soon.

Olga Stella 43:02

I hope so.

Olga Stella 43:23

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