One Knight in Product - E106 - David Bland

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SPEAKERS

David Bland, Jason Knight

Jason Knight 00:00

Hello, and welcome to the show. I'm your host, Jason Knight, and on each episode of this podcast, I'll be having inspiring conversations with passionate product people. Once you've tested this episode, if you're happy with the results of the experiment, why not head over to OneKnightInProduct.com, where you can sign up to the mailing list, subscribe on your favourite podcast app or follow the podcast on social media, and guarantee you never miss another episode again; lab coats optional. On tonight's episode, we talk about experimentation and what to do once you've had an idea for your business or product and want to find out if it's any good. We talk about some of the ways you might do that, why it's important that you do and how you might need to shape the organisation to support it. We talk about experimental ethics, the importance of experimenting with people and not on them, and how we might persuade sceptical business leaders who just want to build, build, build to come along for the ride and why it's so important that they do. For all this and much more please join us on One Knight in Product. So my guest tonight is David J. Bland. David's a former reality TV show host and published poet who started out just like me, working in a call centre. But unlike me managed to abort that career experiment almost as soon as it began with initial results looking unpromising. He then moved on to the big wide world of tech and realised there was something to this whole Lean thing and moved into consultancy to help companies move from big batches to small batches and make sure their next big thing is actually worth building. David's the co author of "Testing Business Ideas", a practical field guide for rapid experimentation, which will give us all loads of ideas for activities to do while we're waiting for our CEOs to overrule us. Hi, David, how are you tonight?

David Bland 01:35

I'm great. Thanks for having me.

Jason Knight 01:37

No problem. It's good to have you here. So your book's been out for a couple of years now, so

I'm not going to go through the usual dance of asking you how the reception has been and all that stuff. Because you know, that's old news for you now, right? But what I did notice recently, as it's part of the Strategyzer series, is there's this really handsome Strategyzer box set that's just come out... sort of thing that would look fine on anyone's bookshelf. So what's the story behind that series and that box set? Is that something where you've gone and updated the book for the release? Or is that the same book, but just in a nice package?

D David Bland 02:06

It's the same book for now. You know, the book's been out two years so I'm collecting case studies and thinking through some changes I might make to it with Alex. But the box set is more of the publisher's idea. You know, that's Wiley saying this great set of books should be packaged together. And so it's really good stack. It's literally like we say a stack of books. It's literally a stack like there's Business Model, Value Prop testing Business Ideas, Invincible Company, High Performance Teams, there's like all this stuff that like focus on different aspects, but it's all connected. It's pretty cool.

Jason Knight 02:37

So there's a little bit of money making for the publisher there as well. But it also basically makes any person basically a business person just by reading it, right?

D David Bland 02:44

I mean, it's cheaper than an MBA and the way I've written the book, it's really all the tools I use when I'm coaching teams. So I think some of the best, I get two really great pieces of advice from my editor at Wiley. One was call the book what it does, which is testing business ideas. I tried to be really cute and I was like, oh, we should call it Executing Ideas, because you're executing, but you're really executing. And it was like, no, no, don't do that. So we called it Testing Business Ideas. And the other piece of advice he gave me was, hey, just basically write the book as if you were coaching teams. And that really helped me put in the right frame of mind of how I would, you know, put the words down, because I was like, "Hey, I'm running teams all the time, and helping him through this stuff. And let me just write in that cadence and in that tone", so that really helped me. And so what you get is a little snapshot into, you know, what it's like to be coached and going through this process.

Jason Knight 03:35

But it's also a very visual book as well, very stylized and very graphical when you go through it. So it's not just like a big wodge of text. It's like, a lot of diagrams, a lot of... basically infographic style elements and that's not something that you see in all business books. It's not something that I've seen in many books around sort of discovery and experimentation. Lean Startup doesn't look like that, right? Was that a conscious decision from yourself? Or from Alex? Or was that something that the publisher pushed for? Like, how did that really visual aspect come into it?

David Bland 04:04

Yeah, that was mostly Alex. You know, this was my first big published book, you know, I tried to write other books, and they're kind of half saved Scrivener files somewhere in Dropbox, right? I have plenty of those. And it was really like almost like me relearning the writing process. So Alex, it was like Alex and Yves really doing Business Model Generation and Value Props on there. A lot of that with Alan being the head, this lead designer, right? And so the conceptual part, you know, I've written about this and given a few talks about it, but I do think there's something to be said about how do you test a book? Because we went through sticky notes to concepts. You know, Alex was really big on well, we can't have really heavily weighted concepts on one side of the spread and really light ones on the other and make it offset and I had never really thought... I never really thought about a book that way. So we iterated through the book almost like you would a product and it was really amazing. We had actually a professional illustrator from the UK, we had Owen Pomery hand draw all the illustrations. And even that whole process was like, sometimes I would say, this is what it should look like. And other times I was like, just be creative and draw something for me. And I would record myself looking at it, giving him feedback, and then he would iterate on the professional illustrations. So overall, we had three designers, we had Alan, Trish and Chris, out of Toronto, and then we had, Owen doing the professiona l illustrations. It was really amazing process to see it kind of come to fruition, but definitely a lot of time and effort and it's very intentional.

Jason Knight 05:35

Yeah, no, that's really interesting. And I think that there's something to be said, for this idea that picture based books really hit another part of the brain as well. So maybe help you to process the information in a different way, which I'm not sure if I could necessarily justify that statement. But it's certainly a discussion that I've had before with other people that have written books and try to get some visual elements in or get lots of diagrams in to really try and help that resonate with you. Because there's this whole argument that people think in pictures, right?

David Bland 05:59

It is, and I thought just the topic, I thought it would be really intimidating to people, you know, they're like going back to science class in school and going, "Oh, no, this is too much pressure for me, I don't want to work this way". And so we just tried to make it very friendly, and light hearted. And anything that felt really heavy, I tried to pull out of the book and just try to make it very relatable and not intimidating, like "Oh, my god scientific method. It's so overwhelming with all its nuances". Like I'd really just tried to make it accessible to everyone.

Jason Knight 06:27

But to avoid putting words in your mouth, what's the core value proposition of the book? Like, what problem does it help people solve or help companies solve?

David Bland 06:34

It's really helping people not to build things that nobody wants, right? So it's the idea that you're you have a vision, and you're open to the idea of it being wrong. And so I think that's why I called it testing business ideas. You know, I get a lot of feedback from the community around, well, "where you get those ideas from and all this", and maybe we can touch on that in our conversation today. However, people almost always come to me with ideas. They already have ideas. It wasn't like the idea was the problem. It was how do you shape that idea? What does it end up being? And so I personally worked at a couple startups, right. We thought we were B2C, we ended up being B2B companies, it was like, "well, that's a huge change" and our vision was still there, but the way it came to fruition was very different than how we imagined it. So that's really where I try to focus on is like, you already have an idea. That's great. That's almost like the easy part. How do you go test it against reality?

Jason Knight   07:25

Well, let's talk about where you get those ideas from, as you just mentioned yourself as well, like, I guess what we're saying there is that the book explicitly doesn't try to cover that as such. It's taking an idea that you've got the kind of the genesis of an idea, and it's then helping you to work out whether you should build that or not. But is it like there are other books in that box set that help you get to that idea stage? Or is that something that you have to kind of work out yourself? And there's not really any support for that within this kind of ecosystem of Strategyzer stuff?

David Bland   07:52

I think a lot of the Value Prop Design book helps with some of that in to an extent maybe even Business Model Generation, because you're thinking about how do you generate different types of business models? But you know, with the value prop book, they already go into, you know, Alex, who's really great at kind of visualising jobs, pains and gains of a customer, your value proposition, what are your products and services? What are your pain relievers? What are your gain creators? And how does that fit and all that. And I felt like, I started incorporating a lot of that into the book and is like, you know, this doesn't need to be in here. And Alex and I had this conversation, we actually cut it, because I had all the double diamond stuff and all this. And I do believe in all of that. I was like, "You know what, this book needs to start where people already have something to work with, and helping them shape it and test it and look at risk through design thinking". And so it was really tough for me, because I wanted to put everything in there. In reality, it's kind of like, you know, most people come to me already with an idea. And they already probably looked at customer needs, hopefully, or we're gonna find out really quickly that they didn't want to test them. So yeah, it was really tough choice for me. But it's like the material just seemed redundant. So we ended up cutting it out of the beginning of the book.

Jason Knight   08:57

That makes a lot of sense. And I think you're right that people tend to have quite a lot of ideas. Maybe we'll come back to how we actually start sorting those out in a short while. But by day, you're running Precoil, which is a consultancy, which aims to help people validate their ideas,

same kind of idea that you're talking about in a book right? So validating their ideas without wasting time and money building stuff that no one wants. And I'm assuming that your consultancy, which predates the book, informed some of the book, some of the stuff that you mentioned in the book is presumably stuff that we're using in a consultancy. And I'm assuming also that some of the stuff that you then put in a book and some of the stuff from when you researched the book, then potentially inform the consultants as well. So kind of a virtuous circle there. But is there anything that you've discovered since the book when you've been out in the field that you would have put in the book had you been writing it now?

D **David Bland** 09:43

Yeah, I think in reality, maybe like even multiple consultancies fed into this book, right? So like before, Precoil I was at Neo, which was kind of like, you know, Eric Ries Lean Startup as a service thing with Ian MacFarlane and Giff Constable and Jeff Gothelf was there, Josh Seiden and a lot of great... like Sam McAfee, Andi Plantenberg... I can go a list. It was amazing group of folks. Even that work, you know, I've been playing with Lean Startup like now it's been almost 10 years right since I started reading Eric Ries his startup lessons learn blog and going to lean startup circles. And all that even my startup experience, I think where I got drawn to that was I was really frustrated, some startups where I kind of spent the night weekend stuff building, and nobody cared, didn't really matter how much I built. So I would say even it's like been like a multiple year journey there and inform the book. And then I, you know, there's always stuff you go back and change, I feel like, the strength of evidence is something Alex and I have been really kind of working through. Because I don't think people understand the nuances. It's there in the book, but I think it needs to be more prominent. And so we reframed is, like strong and weak. And then, in reality, when we're presenting evidence to, let's say, stakeholders and people for funding decisions, we've been reframing weak as light evidence, and it's maybe sounds kind of silly, but I do think the difference matters, because it's not that the teams weren't doing work, right. It's just the light qualitative evidence generated from, let's say, customer interviews and surveys and that kind of stuff. It's still valuable, you can use the quotes there in your future experiments. But I think that framing didn't quite land. So I think I'd really come back to the strength of evidence again, and I don't know if everybody understands the dots like because we visualise everything, but taxonomy. So sometimes the dots or outlines sometimes are filled in, I don't think that felt like really landed with everybody. So I think there are some tweaks and then just loading it up with more case studies. Because I work on so many interesting things. I wish I could just talk about them. But of course, I'm surrounded by NDAs. And then it's hard for me to get my clients to even go out and speak about it, because it's all new stuff. And so I do think now that the books been out a couple years, I am definitely revisiting the idea of case studies. And I've seen more companies use it. So definitely more case studies. And I would probably tweak the evidence bit a little,

Jason Knight 12:02

but no new techniques that have kind of come about since then, are they all you kind of? I mean, you've got some 40 plus different techniques that you mentioned in the book. So they all kind of the tried and tested best ways that you still go out there and help people? Or have you kind of started inventing new ones, or portmanteaus, or combinations of those that are almost becoming different things themselves?

David Bland 12:25

Well, I think there are plenty of techniques beyond the 44. We included in the book and some of the classified is research and everything. And I'm probably a little biassed, because I frame things in experimentation. Yeah, I would say I'd spend probably a little more time on the sequencing because people literally hold up the book to me and say, These are my favourite two pages, and the entire book. And their two pages almost didn't make it in. I was at the end of the process, like, wow, is a b2b company looks through this book, how they're going to tell what experiments are b2b if you're doing hardware or software. And so I just spent some time like stringing them together. And I get a bunch of feedback on that saying, Oh, we want more of that, or do I have to follow that? You know exactly how, as you visualise it, it's like, no, no, you can create your own sequences, right. I'm just showing what I've seen in different companies. And so I probably spent a little more time than the sequencing, because I think that is sort of you don't want to just run one experiment, right? You want to run multiple overtime. Yeah. And I think I could probably illustrate that a bit more, and give people a little more context around what would make a sequence and how they could create their own.

Jason Knight 13:25

I've always found that if you represent something as a sequence, even if it's not a sequence and evolution, but a caveat on it, saying oh no, this isn't a sequence, this is just how I'm visualising it, everyone always just treats it as a sequence anyway, and you just get as much trouble as if it was a sequence in the first place. I've definitely stopped using any kind of ammo based or, you know, timeline based anything just causes more trouble than it's worth, be honest. But who should read this book? Is it aimed primarily at early stage startups? Or is it like those people that maybe pre product market fit or pre product solution fit or whatever, or other goodies in there that you could potentially use all the way up to an including Big, massive corporates and all of the things that I have to worry about?

David Bland 14:03

Yeah, so I barely have like three personas for is really informed by my coaching and my real world work, but basically corporate innovators, so even big companies, but it's usually on something new, right. So it's something before you hit product market fit, and you're trying to figure out how to create this. Usually, the companies I work with are trying to reimagine what they do in a different way. And so like, if I work with a paint company, they're trying to be a colour company. So they want to essentially put out things other than paint that are solutions that are, you know, exemplify their domain expertise. There's also startup entrepreneurs, for sure. And it's usually again before product market fit. So that early stage, and then people with side hustles, you know, sometimes there's overlap, right? You have somebody at a big corporation and they also have a side hustle. But how do you make that switch from a side hustle to you know, quitting your job and investing especially during the pandemic? I feel like so many people have been like, No, this isn't worth it for me. I'm going to start and follow my dream and of creating a business and Have my own rules, which, you know, their pros and cons do. Yeah. And it's just for them to and I say, you know, it's more about the stage less than a specific person. I think what it doesn't have an intentionally so it's I didn't put a lot of growth experiments in here, there's not a lot about how do you scale and all that. And so I do feel like

there's some other books that do address that topic. But I would say, that is one thing that, you know, if I did even kick around the idea of a follow up, you know, the growth experiments aren't necessarily included in in this volume.

Jason Knight 15:32

And what some of the preconditions then. So if we take some of the approaches from the book, or of course, the stuff that you're doing in your consulting as well, you're going into a company, you can't just go into a random company and just start running experiments, right, they need to be set up to succeed in that they need to do some things in a certain way to have the best chance of success when they run these experiments. And part of that you call that in a book is kind of cultural, I'm sure there's other enabling things that they need to do within the company only to have within the company. So are there any kind of preconditions that you would say, the company has to meet before, it's actually going to be able to do a good job of running some of these experiments, or could literally anyone do it?

D David Bland 16:07

I think with going into companies, and there's some conditions where in the book, I tried to say, you know, you have team design, which is almost like the easiest part, right? As far as, let me take different types of people and put them together. Granted, they do have to form as a team and all that. But I feel like the behaviour is a really big important part. And then the environment, which I call like, overall, like designing environment, the org. And that's on leadership style. So leadership's, and so basically, what could happen there is you have these amazing team inside an org. And we have seen this with startup acquisitions all the time, where startup gets acquired into a big company. And then there's all kinds of friction, and they can't do what they used to do. And so I've been on both sides of acquisitions, like I worked as far as acquired, and I worked at bigger companies that acquired startups, I feel like I've seen both sides of that. And the Environment Matters. Because the you can take the really amazing team and put them in environment where they can't succeed or can't move quickly, they can't talk to customers, they can't get funding, they can't use the tools that they need to use to run the experiments, because another group won't let them use those tools, because they haven't been improved. And all that, right. It goes on and on. And so when I'm coming into organisations, and I'm working more at the board level and sea level now to your last few years, I'd really tried to emphasise that it's your duty as a leader to kind of design environment where people can work this way. And so we start looking at those processes and everything. And they're there for a reason, right? You know, like, there was probably something that happened at some point in the in the org, and they put in a process to stop that from happening again. But then that had side effects and created other things. And he put processes to fix those. And then 2025 years later, it's like, nobody owns those processes that we knows why they were created in the first place. And so you have to be careful about that. But essentially, what I'm trying to do is say, can you have cross functional teams, you know, product design, engineering, bounce teams, and we all sort of agree that it is becoming modern, you know, product? And can you give them some autonomy, some funding, and enough kind of cover to let them you know, make progress and give an account of how they're making progress. So I'm probably a little biassed, in the sense the companies reach out for me are already wanting to do that. What I've stopped doing is try to go into companies to convince them that they need to do is I don't believe I can do that. I don't think I can convince people

that they need to work this way. It's usually them realising Whoa, we actually have to work a different way here. We need help. And that's the kind of companies I tend to end up working with the most.

Jason Knight 18:37

Yeah, I guess that self selection is pretty groundbreaking in a way, because you don't have to have at least some of the battles, you don't even have to prove that it's a good idea, which is, which is always the biggest battle when you're trying to transform something. But also, whilst you were talking was thinking about this idea that, for example, if you're in a larger company, or even a smaller company that's been around for a little bit, and you've maybe got a bunch of clients, and I'm thinking maybe b2b or b2c, sort of serving the enterprise. There's sometimes a real reluctance to experiment on established customers, because you don't want to annoy them around the contract renewal time. And it's always someone's contract renewal time, right? So like, you've always got this dynamic of like, well, yeah, sure. We like the idea of experimentation. But we don't have anyone to do it on because we've only got 25 customers, and they're all too valuable to start playing funny business with that. Is that something that you've come across and managed to solve? Or are there some companies with their client profile that just are going to be less able to do this sort of thing?

David Bland 19:32

Although definitely constraints, I mean, fumbling with a billion dollar corporation or making a startup doesn't have any revenue. Yeah, they're definitely different constraints. Usually the brand usually is like, I don't want to damage the brand. I work with companies that have 100 year old brand, they don't do anything that's less than perfect because it can damage the brand. And so that's a lot of the the pushback I get, but I would say something you said there that really stuck out for me that I've been trying to change in my writing and my coaching and everything over the last I would say five to 10 years is experimenting with instead of experimenting on Right. And so when you say experiment on your customers, you almost have this connotation. It's like, oh, we're just gonna, like, bombard him with stuff that they're not expecting. And they might not react well to it. And, and when I change it to with, I feel like that opens this idea that there's more co creation involved in especially b2b, everyone just expects you to sell them as soon as you start talking to them. Yeah. And so breaking that framing of No, I'm not trying to sell you anything I'm really trying to understand, is there even a need here before we go off and build anything here? So I think and I do touch on this with the ethics part in the book. And I intentionally left out experiments that I felt works like experimenting on people in almost like a malicious way, which I love the lean startup community. But sometimes I went to meetups in San Francisco, and I was like, Ooh, really, you did that? I think maybe I need to go get a shower. Now. This is like not feeling right to me. And so I do think some of the backlash, I mean, I mean, I'm open to this topic, too. But some of the backlash against lean startup has been, you're, you're just like burning through customers, you're manipulating people and all this and, and that's really not what we're trying to accomplish. It's more about, I just want to waste all my money building something nobody cares about. So how do I walk that line between not manipulating them, but also like not wasting my time and money and energy and life's work building something that nobody cares about other than me. And so I don't know, if we've quite found that balance yet. I have to say, I struggle with this internally, even late at night when I can't sleep. But what I'm trying to do is push the conversation more towards

experimenting with. And so you know, invite your customers into CO create with them go through this process. And it feels less toxic to me, when we take that approach. And you're probably not going to lose those 25, you know, customers you have, there are going to be some not all but some that will be willing to do that with you. And almost any enterprise I go into or startup, when you look at their customers, there's always like the one or two, there's like, Yeah, I'm willing to try something with you that I know is not fully baked. And those are the ones that maybe you can start with. And so it's a bigger conversation. But I do think ethics and experimentation is becoming more and more top of mind, especially as we see things get weaponized, you know, globally, and the Internet and everything. It's just very much like, we don't want to be contributing to that in any way.

Jason Knight 22:20

Yeah, but the ethics thing is really interesting. I mean, there's obviously one company in particular that I can think of off the top of my head, I know, we don't want to punch down or up onto anyone tonight. But there's certainly one company I can think of there's been in the news quite a lot around some of the experimentation that they were doing with people's news feeds and stuff like that. So I'm probably just given the game away. But like, is that something then that you feel requires some kind of oversight? Or is that something that people can just kind of handle as they go and just apply some best practices, some first principles to like? How can we make sure, aside from not putting things in a book, which obviously, is one way to try, but people can go and find these things elsewhere? Right? How can we make sure that that people are trying to do this experimentation for good and not starting to do some of these horrible dark design patterns or horrible dark prototypes? If that's even a thing to try and kind of manipulate people into thinking things or doing things that validate or invalidate hypothesis that people want to do that too?

D David Bland 23:16

Yeah, it's really tough. You know, I think you really can't control how people use what you put out there. You know, and I think we've had a lot of well intended pieces put out there over the years, and then people weaponized it, right. So it's like, here's a case study on how not to do something, let's say, on Wall Street, right? And then you have a group go, this is the playbook of how I'm going to make money. It's like, no, no, he literally wrote the book to tell you not to do this, and then people take and do it. So some of that is out of your control. But I do think just making it clear that, you know, I think we can learn a lot from the social sciences. You know, when we look at social sciences, there are some, you know, guidelines there about like, do no harm and what you should what you should follow. And so I do think if we look at Lean Startup, a lot of this experimentation inside product business, it seems closer to me to social sciences. I was having a conversation with Tendai Viki, before the pandemic started in our last kind of big in person. Workshop masterclass, we did in London, we actually didn't shortage, and we had this long conversation about, you know, this feels more like social sciences to me, you know, than anything else. And so I do think we can pull from there, and we can pull a lot of great practices, we don't have to recreate everything from scratch today, and use that as a guide. And so, but I do think, you know, I've been at conferences where people literally, they're, like, take the pledge of hold up your hand and, and say, you'll never use this for evil. And I was like, Yeah, I mean, you could do that. Some people. I even contemplated that in the book. I was like, let's put like somebody's holding up there and let's write a pledge and have people sign it as

like, is it really gonna have the effect I want because some people it's just out of your control. So I do think pulling from social sciences I do think keeping you know, how could this be misused? How could this be manipulated top of mind when you're when you're running experiments and then this idea of width versus on I think is the core of it. You know, a lot of those ones that feel like dark patterns are really you're being experimented on. Yeah, it's like, I'm gonna manipulate you to get this number higher because I'm have some kind of OKR. I'm trying to. And and so I do think the width not on it's kind of my my statement I keep coming back to and who knows, like maybe a future version the book I go, ooh, this one feels like an on and it's no, I take it out, but you know, it's my thinking is always evolving on this.

Jason Knight 25:30

Yeah, I guess the dark side of writing something like don't do this or calling attention to a piece, like you say is people kind of gravitate to that part of the book, right? It's kind of like putting sticky notes and or giving people a personal index.

David Bland 25:41

Yeah. And in the past, I have a kind of dry sense of humour. And I've created like, fake frameworks that were completely toxic that were jokes. And people wrote little mini books on them and everything. And the reason I didn't keep running with that, because I'm like, Oh, my gosh, people are gonna take this and actually implement it somewhere. And they're not gonna realise it's satire. Yeah. And so I've had that backfire me on me a few times. And satire today is really weird anyway. So I try not to put something out there is like a joke or whatnot to do it. Yeah. Anyway, I had to be really careful with that. Because I feel like you're giving somebody a how to guide of how to exploit

Jason Knight 26:14

things. And no April Fool's jokes from you. But the core value prop of the work is, as we discussed, you want to reduce vs. Test early understand whether what you want to build is actually going to resonate with users. And some people can sit there and say, Well, we already know what our users want. Let's just build that and sell it. Is that something that you've ever seen work?

David Bland 26:32

I think it works when you get it, right. And I don't know how often that really occurs anymore. Because you look back all these really successful companies, if you kind of start peeling back the layers is kind of a winding journey to get to that successful thing. Yeah. And again, I learned that first out of college, I was like, I'm gonna make millions on the internet during the startup. And then we realised we were like, not a b2c company. We're b2b. So I learned this really early on in my career the hard way, because I spent nights and weekends building things sleeping at my desk, and realised, wow, nobody cares. Like, this is not our customer no matter what. And so if you look back through how these companies evolve, I think sometimes we have this kind of, like, need for a story of had a single brilliant idea. And somebody willed it into being. And I

don't know how often that occurs. Now, if you do that and get it right, great. You're like, You're brilliant. Congrats, right? Most people get it wrong, or like different degrees of wrong. And so usually, and this is kind of a trick I learned when I was working with Eric Ries, which was, you know, what would hurt to go check? You know, cuz I watched him in a very powerful corporate officers say, I know this is the right solution. He's like, Yeah, but what if he went and checked? Like, I'm sure you're right, but can we just go check, I was like, There's no way this is going to work. And it worked. So I borrowed it from him over the years. And so essentially, there are some people that aren't going to be coachable on this method, and they're not going to want to listen, and they're going to explain away everything and all the evidence that doesn't adhere to their worldview. And I'm not going to reach them anyway. So I've learned over time to just kind of cut my losses here and go, Okay, I'm not trying to inflict help on you here. If you like, go and see if you get it right. Hey, kudos to you for getting it right. But I just think it's so hard to get it right that way. It's just like, one in a million, maybe I don't know even what the odds are. It's yeah, I feel like for your normal, like everyday people, which just have to iterate through this toy, find something that works. And that's why I think some of this content resonates.

Jason Knight 28:39

Everyone wants to be the next Steve Jobs, right. But it's also fair to say that some people have very little appetite for even the concept of experimentation, like, they like having an opinion, they lock that in very early on, you kind of touched there just now. They definitely think it's gonna work. They don't want it to be disproven, the very idea of being disproven is anathema to that sort of person. I also think this stuff sounds like it's gonna take loads of time, that we don't have time to do all these experiments, because we've got some built in stuff. Are there any techniques you've managed to use to your consulting, to actually try and defeat that type of argument?

David Bland 29:13

There are some things like assumptions mapping is something that I helped create. I first learned it from Jeff and Josh, who wrote Lean UX I worked with Neo Yep. And then I just adapted it a lot over the years, and it's really looks different now. It's still a two by two, but it's got different, you know, labels to it. Yeah, everyone loves it to it, and it's got desirable, viable feasible thinking in it. And so from design thinking, and so that's where I keep coming back to. So I'm like, Okay, if you know, this is a great idea. Okay. If I can start asking you questions about well, what's your risk? I'm sure. It's a great idea. What's your risk around desirability, like the customer? What do you think has to be true for this to work? And then what's your risk around viability? Like what are the financial thing numbers like, what does these like should we do this kind of risk? What are those you're worried about? And then feasibility like can You build a what there are you worried about that would have to be true. And I realised that people that say, there's like, I know this is gonna work, they still have stuff they're worried about. And so when I start teasing that out in that framing of desirable viable feasible, I can usually get them to a point where they're like, and this one thing, yeah, that's got to be true, but I just don't have evidence yet. And that's the thing. They know it's going to work. But they don't have the evidence yet to say it's going to work, but they know it's going to. So there's something endearing about that I get, it's like the reality distortion field and all that. But if I can get into that point where I'm just I'm not saying your ideas bad. And I'm not saying it's not going to work, I'm saying, Okay, from a desirability viability feasibility point of view, what are you

worried about the most, and then they seem to open up a bit. And then when we go to experimentation, because let's focus on that thing that like has to be true that you don't have enough evidence of it being true yet. Let's go focus there, we don't experiment on everything, let's just start there. And there's something about that conversation, that it tends to work, it tends to open people up. And I'm not judgmental, in the sense of, I usually don't tell people again, that their ideas are stupid. It's usually like, well, for this to work, what part of these three kind of, you know, themes desirable, while feasible, are going to potentially throw a wrench into this. And I've worked with so many different kinds of companies over the years, and that those three themes tend to hold up no matter what kind of company I'm working with.

Jason Knight 31:25

That makes a lot of sense. And I think one of the things that I found interesting in the book, as well as this idea of continuous experimentation, as well, which obviously trades very similar themes to things like to Lisa Torres continuous discovery as well like this idea that one way to potentially diffuse this idea that this is going to be like a big long effort that you're going to have to do and it's going to slow you down, is to be experimenting all the time. So you kind of know, the answers, more or less before time becomes a factor. Is that something that you recommend to try to build this kind of continuous loop all the time? Or is it something that you kind of have to spin up as and when you start to have these great ideas? Because I mean, how can you experiment on stuff? If you've not had no idea recently, I guess?

David Bland 32:07

Well, the risk moves around, right. So you know, you figure out desirability, and then it might move back to feasibility or down to viability and kind of moves around as you go. And so I do think once you start, it's not like, oh, we nailed it. Now, we don't want to experiment anymore. We just scale it, you gain other like other kinds of risk comes through the idea of scaling. Right. And so I feel like it moves around. I do think the idea of talking to your customers every week, which I love from Theresa Torres, I am a huge proponent of I think she's definitely influenced my thinking over the years, when it comes to just overall experimentation. You know, it's not like you run one experiment, and then unlock millions of dollars. And then you just go build the thing, you know, like, we had a webinar on earlier this year, I worked with a company where I helped them unlock like $10 million through this process. But it wasn't like, over a week, you know, it took him a while of working through it to understand, oh, wow, there's a huge opportunity here. And so I do think, you know, when I talk to people, they're just really down on this method. I feel like they're just mentally exhausted, because they're constantly questioning everything. And so I do think you have to have some kind of balance this right. So where it worries me is when if you think like discovery and delivery, right? If it's just all delivery, and no discovery that worries me and but also worry me if you're just just doing discovery, and you're not delivering anything. So I do think there's a balance to be said of like, over time, earlier on, there's more discovery and a little bit delivery. And then as you grow, there's more delivery and a little bit discovery. But I would get really nervous if it was zero at either end, right? If it was just like all deliver your all discovery, I do think you need a balance of that. And I think it's just wait, it's just part of the work, right? It's not like something you do any extra time. It's not something you do nights and weekends. It's just part of work. And we need to like capacity plan for that and just just say, Okay, this is stuff we have to allocate people to do. And we have to do this as part of our everyday work. And, and so I do think, in the messages changed over the last

10 years, and we are making progress. And I don't have to, you know, like people know what Lean startup is now they mostly know what design thinking is, too. And so I do think we're making progress there. But there's a lot of work to be done is I don't want it to come across as something you do. Just in your spare time. It is part of you know, your work.

Jason Knight 34:22

Yeah, it's about getting away from that feature factory mentality, right, where everything is just being handed down from on high. And you're just like, this is something that I've been struggling with a little bit recently as well, this whole concept of like, constant delivery through Scrum and sort of agile frameworks, which everyone's just saying is you've got to get faster, you got to get faster, you got to keep doing increments, and it's like, that's fine, but you got to be delivering stuff that's valuable, not just delivering stuff for the sake of it so completely agree that the concept of it being an optional extra is as with discovery, something that just has to be put away and that's really where the battle has to be won with some of these maybe laggardly founders and laggardly CEOs that maybe haven't quite caught up with that thinking,

David Bland 35:04

I love the Agile community. Like, I've been a huge proponent of that for years. And I think what drew me to where I'm at now, is that I used agile, like the process, right? To just iteratively deliver things nobody cared about. It was like efficiently creating waste, basically, which is like not the point of agile, right? Yeah, you want to be able to repeatedly deliver stuff that even in the manifesto talks about value, right, like customer value, not that but it's really, you need to pull this stuff upstream, and whether it's under the framing of agile or whatever you want to call it. But the idea of like, you need to iterate through the problem space to write. And I do think that's why we see this combination of like lean startup design, thinking agile, really take root in different companies. But that's how I got bought, I mean, that's how I got pulled into it. I was like, doing stand ups and doing planning and retrospectives and all that stuff. And then at the end of day, nobody cares. It was just like, nobody cares that you went through all that work. And you stood up and talked about what you were doing that day and had cards on the wall and had a retrospective to improve yourself. Like if it doesn't deliver value to the customer, they don't care how you're making it right. And so exactly, I do think that's how I got pulled more upstream over the years. But I'm a huge believer in it. It's just, yeah, it's what you're putting into that system doesn't matter. And you don't want to just efficiently create waste. You do want to create stuff that matters easily.

Jason Knight 36:21

Yeah, it's easily misused, I think, is the biggest problem. And that's something that hopefully, books like yours, but like tweezers, and all the other books out and about their Nisour topic can enjoy and help persuade people at a bit about. Now, I'm sure this is massively dependent on the type of thing you're trying to build. But if you had one piece of advice for a founder, or product manager, or just someone who had no idea, someone's got an idea with no history of experimentation. And no idea where to start. Aside from buying this handsome boxset what's one experimental technique that maybe they could start with to try and dip their toe in the water and start to get a bit of feedback and understand whether their ideas any good at all?

David Bland 37:00

Wow, there's so many. And I would normally say start because of the way I format these in the book. And when Alex and I did this was a you have discovery. And you have validation, right? And so that's the framing we chose, we kind of really took inspiration from Steve Blanks work four steps to epiphany, like customer discovery, customer validation. And, you know, I normally would say, talk to customers here. But actually, I might lean more towards the concierge experiment. And that's kind of out of the flow that I normally would recommend. Because usually, I would say, you know, do some customer interviews, do some, you know, paper prototyping, do some clickable wireframes, get an explainer video and a landing page with a call to action and like that flow, but I feel like just doing it manually, like if you already think it's an amazing idea, then don't waste a lot of money building like elaborate thing, just like try to do it manually for a bit and see what you learn from the experience. And basically, in that experiment, like concierge, because you're doing it manually, it doesn't scale. And that's okay. And you're testing all three themes. You're testing desirability, because you're testing at the intersection with customer, you can charge for it. There's this kind of weird stigma that like, unless it's a product you can't charge for that I don't really agree with that. You can charge for a thing you deliver manually, right? And then feasibility is like, Can you do it? You know, what are the things around actually performing and executing on it? And so that when I love, I feel like it doesn't get enough fanfare right later, isn't enough, enough team using that I really like that amazing experiment. But I feel concierge is something a great way to understand how this works. Because it's going to challenge you to say, is there anything at the core of this? And can I even do it manually and deliver value and charge for it and then build from there, cuz you're going to learn so much, even even though it doesn't scale? And so that's what I would normally point out, I really wouldn't do it right away. But I mean, it's a great one to use and just get kind of warmed up to the idea of okay, this is what an experiment can kind of look like.

Jason Knight 38:59

Yeah, I'm quite taken with the idea of concierge experiments. And I think that, yeah, there's obviously a lot of very valid use cases, I think that the one watch out that I always think about, and I've seen it before is when that concierge almost becomes the actual product, because they never work out how to scale it as like, they don't have like an exit plan or an exit ramp to actually get that and make it more scalable, and actually build that in a way that can be that doesn't need to have all these people behind it. So I think that's my My one concern with that. But yeah, I completely agree that as an actual early stage technique, it's a fantastic way to just work out what could happen. Because if you can't do stuff manually, with the honourable exception of things like machine learning, and even thankfully, but some of the machine learning tasks that you do, you could probably still have a stab in Excel. Like, there's it's just a great way to just work out if there's anything that's also Yeah, that's something that we can hopefully get a bunch of my listeners to take a look at.

David Bland 39:53

Yeah, I think one of the traps you were you pointed out here is that you could end up being your concierge forever. Yeah. I do think giving yourself permission to say, if I do this more than in number hours a day, I give myself permission to automate that in some way. Yeah. And so if

you set that little threshold, right, and you hit it in great, give yourself permission to like, invest time and money, maybe there's some software you can use to automate things, right. But if you never hit the bar, right, and we've seen this as some startups before, back when I was at Neo, we used to do this. And we, we mentored some startups that never hit that bar, we said, hey, in number of hours a day, if you hit that bar, give yourself permission, automate, and they never hit the bar, they never filled up their day with enough of the manual stuff. And so it's a really interesting way to look at it, you could say, well, maybe there isn't enough demand here to automate. But if there is enough, give myself permission to invest in the automation and get out of this kind of hamster wheel, I might feel like just doing the stuff manually. So I do think that's a little trick maybe to get people out of that loop.

Jason Knight 40:55

100%. I like when people find you after this, if they want to maybe find out about the next book, or the next edition of the book, when it's gonna come out or just find out a little bit more about experimentation in general.

David Bland 41:05

Yeah, I would almost never say this in the past. But you can find me on LinkedIn quite easily. I've levelled up my meme game on LinkedIn, and to quite a impressive popularity at the moment. So I'm actually active on LinkedIn. Which, wow, like going into the ER, I never thought it would say that. I'm also pretty active on Twitter still at at David J. Bland. And then I have my company pre coil PR, EC o l.com. Where, you know, you can see a lot of the offerings there. But yeah, I mean, I'm pretty active on all the socials and internet's but basically, if, if you just search David G bland, you're gonna find me somewhere either, like webinar I did 10 years ago, or something that will lead to me. So yeah, and then the books in 20 different languages isn't amazing. 20 different languages around the world. So a lot, there's a good chance, if you want the book, you're gonna find it somewhere at like, little bookstores of the world.

Jason Knight 41:58

Have you done the audio book yourself yet? Or is that still to come? I guess it's not an easy book to audio book, right?

David Bland 42:03

I have not I was thinking about that the other day. And like, what would the audio book of this sound like? So like? This one is five dots. And then three dots and then one dot and then you're going to measure this? I mean, I have a great radio voice. So I could probably pull it off. But I'm not sure that's in the near term strategy there for our publisher. But yeah, eventually, if an audio book comes around, you know, there might be a way we can adapt it. It's just such a visual book, I think it'd be really tough to pull it off.

Jason Knight 42:35

Oh, well, we'll see. If we got one more year of pandemic, you never know. That's been a fantastic chat. So obviously, really appreciate you taking the time to chat about the book and some of the themes within it. Hopefully, we can stay in touch. But yeah, that's for now. Thanks for taking the time.

David Bland 42:48

Thanks for having me.

Jason Knight 42:51

As always, thanks for listening. I hope you found the episode inspiring and insightful. If you did again, I can only encourage you to hop over to OneKnightInProduct.com and check out some of our other fantastic guests, sign up to the mailing list or subscribe on your favourite podcast app. Make sure you share with your friends so you and they can never miss another episode again. I'll be back soon with another inspiring guest. But as for now, thanks and good night.