By

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Working in User Experience consulting has been likened to being a Unicorn: You are a unique and rare creature who is empathetic, creative, constructive, fast, and effective. At Blink UX we are very selective regarding who we hire and are always on the lookout for top UX talent. Recently we received an email inquiry from a budding designer looking to learn more about what it's like on the inside. Two of our Interaction Designers, Claire Carlson and Tristan Plank, hopped right in with their answers to the questions below:

> *Over the past several years I've developed a growing interest in UX design as a career. It seems like an exciting path, and I'm curious to learn more about it. If I may, I'd like to ask for your expertise and insight in answering a few questions about UX design as a career.* —***Future UX Designer Extraordinaire***

What skills and competencies does the ideal candidate for employment with your company have?

Claire:

- Be collaborative and proactive – this means going the extra mile and getting help from peers to ensure your work is the best it can possibly be.
- Have experience working as a partner with clients – communicating the rationale behind your recommendations and being open to other people's recommendations. Knowing when and how to guide clients away from design decisions that don't align with project goals.
- Map design decisions back to user goals and goals of the client team.

Tristan:

Calling out ideal skills and competencies would probably depend on whether we are talking about a research or design position. But even beyond these two roles, I would say that the "meta-skills" necessary for Blink UX would be something like the following:

- A natural consulting personality – able to deal with rapidly changing situations, adaptable, personable, eager to help others achieve their goals, while still having the confidence to gently push back when necessary.
- A high sense of empathy, both for clients and end-users – I firmly believe that you cannot be in the UX business without empathy. It underlies everything we do and why we do it.
- A strong attention to detail – whether you are a designer or researcher, the work you do and what you deliver to clients needs to be professional, as we pride ourselves on being the best in the industry.
- Humility balanced with confidence – you really can't approach a project with any assumptions. Humility is critical throughout the project lifecycle, and a lot of what we do is challenging assumptions and testing them. With that said, you also still need the confidence to make recommendations and trust in the experiences that you have had and what they have taught you, be it with technology or end-users. You also need to be able to absorb feedback gracefully, weigh its worth, and synthesize it into a constructive path forward when you are designing.

What kind of industry-specific training or education is preferred?

Claire:

- Blink requires that you have some kind of relevant advanced degree, but it can be many different flavors of education and expertise. Good UX design skills can be developed in many ways. Blink looks at your portfolio and your skills as the main test to determine your ability.
- Most Blinkers have graduate degrees and many of them Ph.D.'s – More than a handful of the Masters' degrees are in Human Center Design & Engineering from the University of Washington. The Ph.D.'s are a largely a combination of Cognitive Psychology and Learning Sciences.

Tristan:

I can only speak to the design side, but I would say...

- Knowledge of industry-standard wireframing tools (Omnigraffle and Axure, for the most part).

- Broad knowledge of usability conventions.
- Industry-wide design best practices.
- Intimate applied knowledge of (and the ability to speak about and use) the user-centered design process.

Is there an attitude, personality type, or perspective that an ideal candidate for a UX designer should possess?

Claire:

- Empathy! Thoroughly try to understand where end-users, peers, and clients are coming from.
- Positivity – the best part about Blink is that everyone is extremely positive. While this makes for a pleasant work environment, it also helps clients feel like you're on their team.

Tristan:

A natural consultant, confident yet humble, with humility and a strong sense of detail. I might also add that it's really important to be able to enter a project/situation with the ability to be able to absorb everything you can, and do your homework to bring yourself up to the level of knowledge needed to perform the project.

What makes someone successful in this industry?

Claire:

- Absorb as much as possible – from peers, projects, clients, books, events, and conferences. Just aim to be at the bleeding edge of tech in general.
- Having opinions based on your own experiences using technology – this goes with the above because you need to know your stuff to be able to be knowledgeable based on your own experiences, not just on what other people are saying about something.

Tristan:

Experience is pretty critical – you can go to school for it, learn a lot, design some stuff, and that's all great, but nothing will ever be as good of a lesson as hands-on experience. You learn more in six months in the industry than you will in two years of school (not that school isn't still important – it's just a different side of the coin). I think it's also important to keep up with the latest and greatest in technology and user experience in order to be successful – you need to be consistently looking ahead and weighing upcoming trends/technology/whatever with what has been established and deciding if/when to apply new approaches and patterns.

What do you personally love about this industry? What do you dislike?

Claire:

- In terms of consulting – I love that I'm able to learn about so many different industries. One month I'll be focused on a real estate website and the next month I'll be working on a travel app.
- I love the problem-solving aspect of UX design – redesigning a complex system (app, website, etc.) feels like a puzzle that you're trying to solve.
- Don't love – There is still a strong need to educate people on what user experience is, why it is valuable, and why it's different from visual design. It can be difficult to associate ROI with a better user experience and thus communicate value to key stakeholders.

Tristan:

It's immensely satisfying to work in a field that prioritizes people and their experiences and works to make the world a better place through user-centered design. I also think this industry is filled with ridiculously talented, personable, empathetic people, which makes it easy and fulfilling to meet new people and learn from them. It's hard to say I dislike anything about this industry… if I had to say there was something I disliked, I suppose I would say that I don't like it when UX is used as a buzzword and an organization doesn't actually prioritize it. Perhaps this is due to a lack of knowledge about what UX is and what it entails, but it can be pretty frustrating to hear organizations talking about their prioritization of UX, while their products speak the exact opposite.