

**GOOD**  
**DESIGN**  
**PRACTICE**  
**MENTORING**  
**TOMORROW'S**  
**DESIGN**  
**LEADERS**

UK DESIGN ALLIANCE FOR **GOOD DESIGN PRACTICE**

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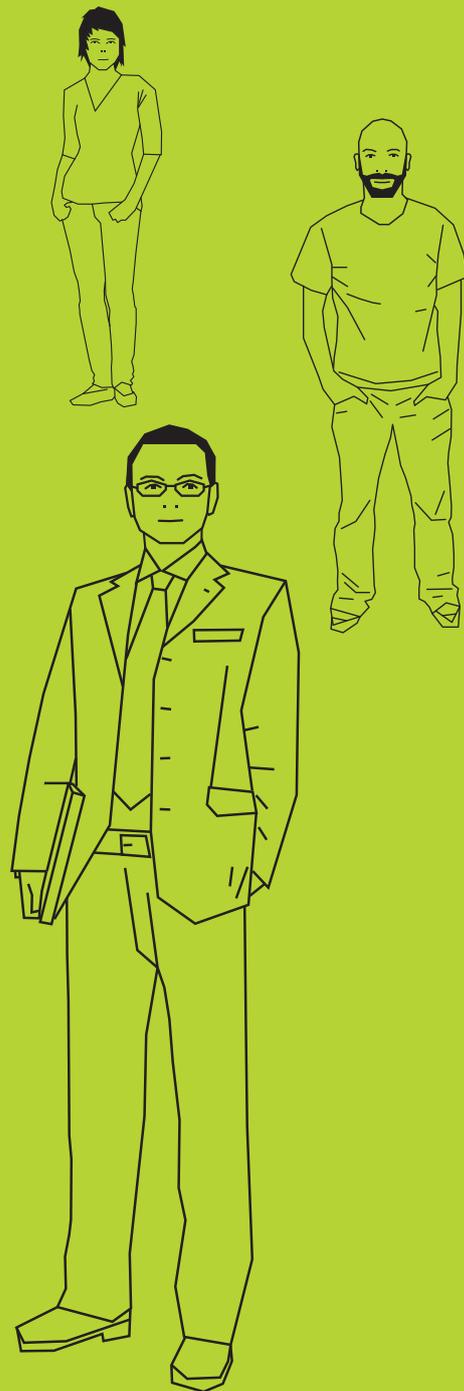
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# INTRODUCTION

## SO WHAT IS MENTORING ALL ABOUT? CAN IT REALLY NURTURE DESIGN LEADERS? HOW CAN YOUNG DESIGNERS FIND A MENTOR? AND, HOW CAN SENIOR DESIGNERS BECOME BETTER MENTORS?

From October 2007 to April 2008 the Design Council ran a pilot leadership development scheme for designers called NextNet.

As part of it, we tested a mentoring programme which paired 13 mid-level designers with different senior designer.

For the mid-level designers this was an opportunity to develop skills and leadership qualities through regular, confidential meetings with a more experienced designer. For the mentors – many of whom had no previous experience of formal mentoring – it was also a chance to develop new skills, helped by training sessions and meetings where they could share their experience of being a mentor.

This booklet shares what we learned about mentoring for designers. It may be useful if you are interested in becoming a future design leader, or nurturing someone to become one.

### IN THIS BOOKLET YOU WILL FIND:

- Tips on finding a mentor
- Helpful pointers on maintaining an effective mentoring relationship
- A list of resources if you'd like more information.

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**AS THE INDUSTRY  
UNDERGOES  
SEISMIC SHIFTS,  
DESIGNERS ARE  
LOOKING FOR  
LEADERS TO STEER  
THEM THROUGH  
CHALLENGES AND  
UNCERTAINTY  
TOWARDS NEW  
OPPORTUNITIES.**

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## WHAT IS MENTORING?

Leadership skills take years to develop – and true leaders never stop developing them. Mentoring is an increasingly popular way of doing that.

Mentors are senior and trusted confidants who help more junior professionals with their career direction. They help their protégés work out where they want to go, and how to get there. The approach emphasises questioning, listening and feedback, rather than instruction. It also involves mentors sharing insights into how they got to their position and opening up their own networks.

## HOW IS MENTORING DIFFERENT FROM COACHING?

As mentoring and coaching both usually involve one-to-one development sessions, it is easy to confuse the two. In fact, the two approaches have different goals, relationships and time frames. Mentors are friendly long-term career advisors with experience of the mentee's industry or company. Coaches, on the other hand, are impartial guides to improved performance – they help clients move towards solutions to specific issues, often within a set timeframe, and then leave.

**'DESIGNERS BECOME LEADERS WHEN THEY GROW-UP AND START TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS.'**

LES WYNN, DESIGN MANAGER  
XEROX EUROPE

**'ONLY DESIGNERS CAN BE DESIGN LEADERS.'**

DICK POWELL, FOUNDER  
SEYMOUR POWELL

**'PUT ASIDE THE IDEA THAT DESIGN IS FOR DESIGNERS... IT IS INFINITELY MORE IMPORTANT THAN THAT!'**

RAYMOND TURNER, FOUNDER  
RAYMOND TURNER ASSOCIATES

**'LEADERS REALISE THAT IT'S NOT ABOUT THEM ANY MORE.'**

ROD PETRIE, DESIGN MENTOR

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# HOW TO FIND A MENTOR

A mentor is traditionally someone with more experience than you, with whom you can develop a good rapport. You may already have someone in mind – if not, start making a list of possible people. Perhaps there's someone you admire and respect, who may have encouraged you in the past. Or there could be someone who impresses you. Or maybe there's someone you have encountered earlier in your career who you would like to reconnect with. Much of the success of a mentoring relationship depends on the personalities of the two people involved, so if you're a particularly outgoing person, say, it may be harder to work with someone who is very reserved, and vice versa.

**PEOPLE OFTEN FIND MENTORS THROUGH THEIR EXISTING PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS, SO CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:**

## **LOOK INSIDE YOUR COMPANY**

Some firms help new recruits find their feet in their new role by pairing them with an experienced colleague. Indeed, participants on our leadership pilot (including IDEO, Xerox and Engine) have established internal mentoring schemes.

Even if your company does not have anything in place formally, it's worth approaching your HR department if you have one, or asking colleagues if they could recommend someone.

In this workplace context the mentoring often takes the form of an apprenticeship, where an inexperienced newcomer learns the tricks of the trade and the political and social ways of the firm. An old hand can also help a newbie fit into their internal company networks.

## **LOOK INSIDE YOUR DISCIPLINE**

Some designers seek out experienced mentors outside their firm, but within

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their design discipline, to get an external perspective free from internal politics and conflicts of interest. An external mentor can also share valuable expertise that is not held within the firm.

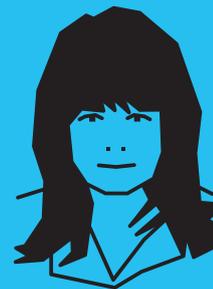
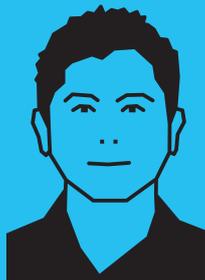
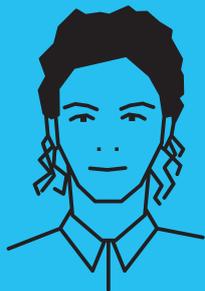
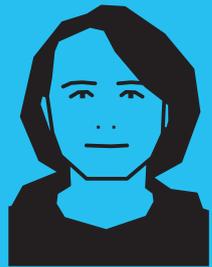
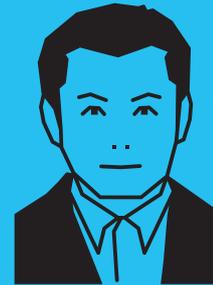
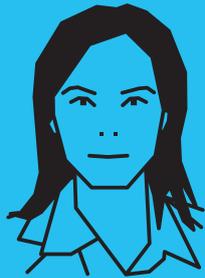
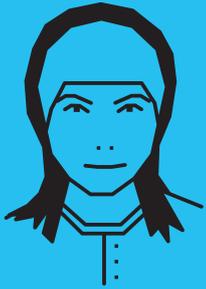
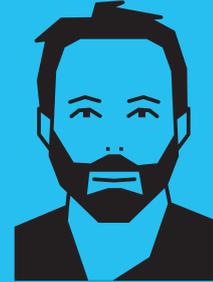
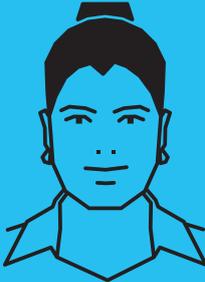
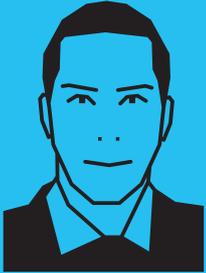
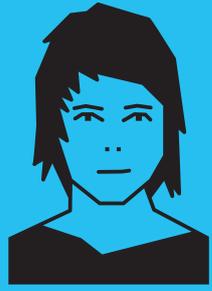
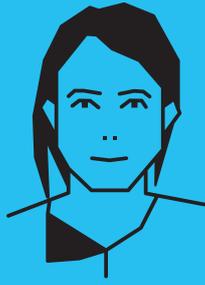
### **LOOK OUTSIDE YOUR DISCIPLINE**

Our mentoring pilot took place across design disciplines: we felt that designers would have much to learn from senior figures in parallel design industries, especially as the industry as a whole is becoming more inter-disciplinary.

And of course getting a mentor means plucking up the courage to ask them. This can be easy to put off. Don't! Outline why you chose them, and what you think you can learn from them. Even if your prospective mentor can't help you, they will almost be certainly be flattered to be asked.

**‘LEADERS ASK  
EXPLORATORY  
QUESTIONS  
AND THINK  
ABSTRACTLY.’**

**DENA MICHELLI, MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT COACH**



**‘DESIGN LEADERSHIP  
ENVISIONS THE FUTURE,  
MANIFESTS STRATEGY,  
DIRECTS CORPORATE  
INVESTMENT AND SHAPES  
EXPERIENCES.’**

RAYMOND TURNER, FOUNDER  
RAYMOND TURNER ASSOCIATES



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# TOP MENTORING TIPS

Mentoring is pretty straightforward, but it is different from just chatting sagely about design. In some ways it requires more formality, and in others it calls for the mentor to suppress some of their natural instincts and even, at times, their ego.

## HERE ARE TEN TOP TIPS WE LEARNED FROM THE PILOT:

### 1. SET THE RIGHT TONE

It's tempting to treat a mentoring relationship casually and agree simply to have an informal chat from time to time. Unfortunately, this ad hoc approach can allow things to drift and can lead to misunderstandings or disappointments.

It's wise to keep the relationship semi-formal by:

- Agreeing when and where to meet and how often

- Discussing what each of you expects
- Deciding how you are going to focus the discussions
- Making sure a private space is arranged.

### 2. MUM'S THE WORD

What goes on in a mentoring session should stay between the two people involved. It's vital that mentoring conversations rest on a clear understanding of trust and confidentiality.

Even with the best intentions, this can be hard to maintain. In our pilot, for example, a number of the mentors suggested that it would be beneficial for them to meet with their mentees' line managers – particularly at the start and end of the programme – as a form of briefing and de-briefing.

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Dena Michelli, a management development consultant who worked with us on the pilot, had to stress that confidentiality and trust were key to mentoring, and that briefing a mentor would tarnish the relationship with the mentee by possibly putting the mentor on the side of the boss.

### **3. KEEP IT UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL**

It's best to do all your mentoring face to face. With telephone calls and email – communications where there are no visual channels available – misunderstandings can easily occur.

Of course, emails and phone calls are sometimes unavoidable, so if you're using them the usual rules apply – read through your emails twice before sending them, for example. Mentors can also ask mentees to repeat what they've heard over the phone to reduce the chance of miscommunication.

The physical distance between mentor and mentee also matters. Busy professionals find it difficult to meet if a lot of travelling is involved: this was an issue that got in the way of some the mentoring relationships in our pilot.

### **4. EARS WIDE OPEN**

It's tempting for mentors to tell war stories and treat their protégés simply as an audience, rather than focusing on them and their needs. Mentoring conversations shouldn't be focused on the mentor – unless they are sharing their thoughts, experiences or opinions for the mentee's benefit.

## **MENTORS SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON LISTENING ACTIVELY BY:**

- Being fully present and focused
- Not interrupting or finishing mentees' sentences for them
- Summarising what they have heard to make sure they understand the other's message
- Using silence to allow people to think and respond thoughtfully
- Being conscious of body language: reflecting the other person's body position nodding to demonstrate that you are 'tuned in' and holding good eye contact, for example.

### **5. ASK OPEN QUESTIONS**

Senior designers tend to have plenty of opinions on how things should be – which can mean they ask directional or rhetorical questions. Mentors need to check that they are not jumping to what they think the issue or solution is. Instead, asking open, exploratory and 'tell me more' questions is better. These usually boil down to:

- Who?
- When?
- Where?
- What?
- Why?
- How?

### **6. ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE**

To build self-belief, mentors shouldn't be too harsh or negative in their feedback.

Constructive comments are vital. For example, it's best to focus comments on the mentees' behaviour (which can be changed), not their personality. Asking them to describe how they acted in a particular situation, and what happened as a result, is better than directing the conversation towards character traits.

It's also a good idea to check that the mentee has understood the feedback by asking them to reiterate what they did well and explore how they might improve their approach next time.

### 7. DON'T TELL

One of the biggest challenges of being a mentor is avoiding jumping in and telling the mentee what to do. Rather than imposing opinions, mentoring is about encouraging mentees to work out for themselves what they should do next.

The emphasis should be on encouraging the mentee to explore situations and guiding their thinking. So if, as a mentor, you find yourself starting to use words like 'should' and 'ought', stop and think about returning to some open questions. 'What do you think...?'; 'What would have happened if...?'

A number of the mentors in our pilot mentioned that they had to check their instinctive urges to direct their mentee.

**'DESIGNERS ARE NATURAL PROBLEM SOLVERS, SO WE HAVE TO HOLD BACK FROM ROLLING OUR SLEEVES UP AND TRYING TO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEM FOR THEM.'**

OLIVER KING, FOUNDER  
ENGINE AND NEXTNET MENTOR

### 8. DEAL WITH 'THE FOG'

Mat Hunter, Partner at IDEO and a mentor in our pilot, shared a useful perspective on dealing with, and being comfortable with, ambiguity for the first few mentoring sessions, which is when some mentees are still working out what they want to achieve. He talked about two key mentoring dimensions: 'Where do you want to go?' and 'How are you going to get there?' When people do not know the answer to either question, they feel as if they are 'in the fog'. Other mentors found Mat's 2x2 matrix a useful way of thinking about positioning their mentees' career situation.

I KNOW WHERE I WANT TO GO	I KNOW HOW TO GET THERE
I DON'T KNOW WHERE I WANT TO GO (THE FOG)	I DON'T KNOW HOW TO GET THERE

From the other side of the table some mentees found the openness of the initial sessions difficult:

**'IN THE FIRST SESSION IT WAS DIFFICULT TO ESTABLISH WHAT EXACTLY WE WERE MEANT TO GET OUT OF IT. ONCE WE'D STARTED TO SET GOALS IT BECAME EASIER.'**

ANDREW DEAN, SENIOR DIGITAL MEDIA DESIGNER, DIGIT

### 9. AGREE ACTIONS

Before the mentoring meeting ends, the mentee should summarise their understanding of the outcomes of the session and commit to taking some action. The mentor might ask: 'So, let's review what you are going to do before we meet again.' The mentee would then outline what tasks they are going to do, how they will tackle them and when they will be completed.

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It's then the responsibility of the mentee to get to work, and then arrange and set the agenda for the next session.

#### **10. GO WITH THE FLOW**

Mentoring relationships find their natural rhythm and life-cycle. Sessions should be frequent enough to maintain momentum, but allow adequate time in between for the mentee to reflect and work on agreed actions.

There is no ideal length for a mentoring relationship: some become lifetime friendships, while others run for only a few sessions. A number of the mentors and future leaders in our pilot mentioned that they started to run out of things to discuss by the second or third session. While in some cases this may have reflected a lack of experience on the mentor's part, it may also have signalled a natural resolution of the relationship.

**‘MENTORING  
RELATIONSHIPS  
EITHER CLICK OR  
THEY DON'T, BUT  
THE ONES THAT  
DO CLICK CAN  
LAST A LIFETIME.’**

**LES WYNN, DESIGN MANAGER  
XEROX EUROPE AND NEXTNET MENTOR**

# RESOURCES

## WEBSITES

### COACHING, MENTORING AND FACILITATION FOR CREATIVE AND CULTURAL LEADERSHIP

by Diane Parker

This report from Creative Choices<sup>o</sup> offers some basic definitions of coaching, mentoring and facilitation, and provides some guidance on how you can access the leadership development most suited to your needs. The rest of the Creative Choices<sup>o</sup> site also contains some useful professional development resources aimed at the creative industries.

### MENTORING GOOD PRACTICE

#### KINGS COLLEGE LONDON MENTORING GOOD PRACTICE

[www.umds.ac.uk/about/structure/admin/equal-opps/training/mentoring/good](http://www.umds.ac.uk/about/structure/admin/equal-opps/training/mentoring/good)

This is a useful site on mentoring and good mentoring practice that has been put together by King's College London. It contains a summary of key good practice points drawn from a range of publications on the subject. As well as advice for mentors, there are guidelines for the mentee on how to make best use of the mentoring relationship. It's a straightforward site and gives you the essentials of mentoring.

#### CIPD MENTORING FACTSHEET

<http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/lrnanddev/coachmentor/mentor.htm>

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

has a factsheet on mentoring that makes the distinction between mentoring and coaching and outlines how to develop a mentoring approach. It also proves a simple three-stage model for conducting a mentoring relationship and a recommended reading list.

#### THE COACHING AND MENTORING NETWORK

[www.coachingnetwork.org.uk](http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk)

The Coaching and Mentoring Network is a non-profit making, UK based portal for coaches seeking information and services that relate to all aspects of coaching. Although it does not offer personal advice or recommendations, it is a valuable resource that provides case studies, discussion groups and best practice information. This site also offers a referral service for those looking for a coach or mentor.

## BOOKS

### TECHNIQUES FOR COACHING AND MENTORING

David Clutterbuck and David Megginson  
Butterworth-Heinemann  
2004

This is a valuable resource for those acting as a coach or mentor. It's easily accessible and, apart from giving information, frameworks, techniques and case studies, focuses on the importance of self-understanding when playing the role of a coach or mentor and the centrality of the relationship with their 'pupil'.

### A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO MENTORING: HOW TO HELP OTHERS ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS

David Kay and Roger Hinds  
How To Books Limited, 2007

A great reference book that helps you relate to the challenges of mentoring through scenarios and case studies. You can try to imagine how you would deal with the different situations and what information and skills you would need to do so effectively – forewarned is forearmed. This book will walk you through the process and leave you educated and practised in the art of mentoring.

### THE ART OF MENTORING

Mike Pegg Management Books, 2000 Limited, 1998

Mike Pegg goes beneath the surface of mentoring and explores what it really takes to establish a successful mentoring relationship. He is keen to link the techniques he outlines to the success of mentoring and the way organisations from whatever sector can encourage and develop mentoring to improve performance and job satisfaction.

### COACHING AND MENTORING FOR DUMMIES

Marty Brounstein  
John Wiley & Sons, 2000

As with other 'Dummies' books, this is an easy to read, 'dip in' resource that shares lots of ideas on how to overcome the anxieties about mentoring, how to establish an effective mentoring relationship and how to develop the questioning approach that allows the mentee to find

answers for themselves. It's a good way in.

### ABOUT OUR PILOT SCHEME

NextNet was a pilot programme produced by the Design Council, supported by the Cultural Leadership Programme under the banner of the Good Design Practice Campaign.

### WHAT HAPPENED ON THE NEXTNET PILOT?

NextNet took an innovative approach to mentoring. Thirteen design companies took part, with a design leader and mid-level designer from each volunteering to be part of the scheme. Each company agreed to give the time of one of their leaders to mentor a future leader from another company, in return for one of their staff being involved in the programme. These mentoring relationships were set up across design disciplines, both to encourage cross-disciplinary learning.

'Small design companies are notoriously bad at professional development, and the time-bank model of managers mentoring others in return for their staff being mentored is 'pure genius' for consultancies with limited HR budgets. The staff member can see that I'm putting time into it for their benefit, rather than just signing off a training budget. Although Engine already has an internal mentoring scheme, it is incredibly valuable to be able to step outside the company and ask the questions that are difficult to ask inside the company. The cross-disciplinary nature of the programme

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was great – I personally learned a lot and it would have been awkward mentoring a designer from a competitor in the same discipline.’

**OLIVER KING**  
CO-FOUNDER, ENGINE

It also reduced the likelihood of conflicts of interest or confidentiality issues, and lowered the risk – which had been highlighted as a key concern by the participants – of mentors poaching their mentees.

‘The cross-disciplinary nature of the programme was its key strength, as it brought a lot of richness and is extremely good for the industry as a whole.’

**JULIAN GRICE, MANAGING DIRECTOR, THE TEAM**

The mid-level designers – our future design leaders – also valued the experience.

‘One of the things I found most valuable was getting time with someone to talk to, getting an ‘outside’ perspective on things, getting the view of someone with experience.’

**ANDREW DEAN, SENIOR DIGITAL MEDIA DESIGNER, DIGIT, AND NEXTNET MENTEE**

## WHO WE ARE

The Cultural Leadership Programme is a Government-funded initiative to promote excellence in leadership within the cultural and creative sectors. It runs a range of activities and opportunities to nurture and develop world class, dynamic and diverse leaders for the 21st century. For more information visit [www.culturalleadership.org.uk](http://www.culturalleadership.org.uk)

Good Design Practice is a campaign from the

UK Design Skills Alliance promoting the benefits of developing business and professional skills alongside the wealth of creativity we already have in the design industry.

By supporting design teaching and learning in schools, colleges and universities, and by encouraging designers to develop their business and professional skills, we’ll ensure that the UK design industry will be ready for new opportunities and challenges generated by the global economy.

If you are interested in finding out more about the Good Design Practice campaign and the UK Design Skills Alliance visit [www.ukdesignskills.com](http://www.ukdesignskills.com)

The Design Council is the national strategic body for design. Our mission is to inspire and enable the best use of design to make the UK a more competitive, creative and sustainable nation.

Our current three-year strategy and objectives are set out in The Good Design Plan, which is available at [www.designcouncil.org.uk/gooddesignplan](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/gooddesignplan)

## AUTHOR

Kevin McCullagh is the founder of Plan Strategic, a design strategy consultancy, and acted as Executive Producer of NextNet.

## CONTRIBUTOR

Dena Michelli is a management development consultant who helped the NextNet mentors prepare for, and engage with, their mentoring role. She also wrote the NextNet mentoring manual.

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**RAYMOND TURNER**  
RAYMOND TURNER ASSOCIATES

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CASS BUSINESS SCHOOL

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POKE

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

You can contact the Design Skills Alliance at the Design Council by email: [info@ukdesignskills.com](mailto:info@ukdesignskills.com)

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