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# Life Lessons, Part I

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*Making Magic*  
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About a year ago, I wrote an article entitled "[Topical Blend #1: To Err Is Human](#)". For the three people out there that haven't seen it yet (I believed it's the most self-referenced column I've done that doesn't include [color philosophy](#), an explanation of [bad cards](#), or a link to [fifty links](#)), in it I connect ten of my top ten design mistakes with my top ten dating mistakes. The large and overwhelming positive feedback I received on the article stressed how much you enjoy when I connect my personal life with my professional one. (And if you don't like that, I'm warning you now so you can stop reading.) Today's column is my spiritual continuation (Part II of the "Mark Chronicles" if you will).

Instead of dating foibles, I decided that today I was going to take a look at ten key moments in my life where I learned a valuable lesson that helped shape how I look at life and, by connection, how I look at design. (Note that I'm avoiding the dating ones, since I already did that in the previous column.) As I've said many, many times, I'm a holistic thinker. I don't believe that people can successfully compartmentalize different parts of their life. If something affects them in one place, it is inevitable that it spreads to all aspects of their life.

Today's column is going to demonstrate this point by revealing an important lesson - a life lesson if you will. I will then show how that same lesson affected me as a designer in some tangible way that visibly affected **Magic**. I will do this ten times. Sound good? You'll notice that today's article is Part I. That's because when I finished writing this thing, it turned out to be a little wordier than I anticipated. This means that Lessons #1-5 will be today and #6-10 will be in two weeks.

One last thing. Last time, I ordered my stories in a non-chronological order. Not today. Today (and in two-weeks) is going to take you from my life in middle school and run straight through the birth of my twins. So if you're all ready, let's pile into the "Way Back" Machine and set the dial for 1979.

## Life Lesson #1

I've made mention in other columns that I didn't have the smoothest of childhoods when it came to interacting with my fellow classmates. Here are the forces that were at work:

1. I was small. Up until adolescence, I was literally the smallest kid (not boy, mind you) in my class.
2. I was male. I bring this up only because I think this fact is a contributing factor to the next paragraph.
3. I was smart. As I'm sure many of you are painfully aware, intelligence is not something all that rewarded by one's peers at the grade school level. Bullies, of which most are male, seem to find it particularly threatening, especially in other males.
4. I was emotional. And by this I meant if I felt an emotion, I showed it. This fact hasn't really changed at all, but embracing my "red side" isn't quite the bully magnet in my adulthood that it was in my youth.
5. I felt no compulsion to try and fit in. I don't know why, but I just didn't see the reason to do or say things I didn't want to do or say. (See, stubbornness starts young.) The offshoot of this was that I didn't have a lot of friends.

Add these qualities together, and you get a walking target. I was easy to pick on. I had few allies. And I always gave bullies an entertaining response. (By the way, quick tip for any of my younger readers dealing with bullies – the response is what bullying is all about. If the bully doesn't get an entertaining response, he grows tired quickly and moves on.) It's important for me to point out that when I say bullies, I'm not just talking about the kids that chased me around the playground. The psychological and emotional bullying is actually far worse. (Although don't get me wrong, I wasn't too keen on the physical bullying either.) Most of my grade school years were spent with others making negative judgments about me, and for many years I took those comments to heart. Until sixth grade, that is.

So one day in sixth grade, I got very sick. I don't know what exactly I had, but it's the kind of thing that most kids would latch onto as a free day at home. I should note that home was my one safe port. The reason I got through my childhood was because of this. No one can keep up their guard indefinitely. It's crucial to find someplace to be yourself without being guarded. Hopefully, that can be your home. If not, find one – it's very important to your emotional well being. Is that the life lesson? A life lesson, yes, but not the one that's about to dawn on me.

Anyway, I had a fever of 103 and any sane person would have stayed home, but I had a science test. Being the goody-two shoes I was, I felt like I had to go to school. The science class was right after lunch, so all I had to do was make it through that class and then I could go to the nurse's office. But, if you were paying close attention, I said the class was after lunch. Flash forward to the lunch line. I'm standing in line waiting to eat. I don't know why. I was in no shape to actually eat school food, but I did what I was told and during lunch you stand in line. I was feeling dizzy so I was leaning up against the wall when Tracy (as with "To Err," all names have been changed to protect the innocent and not-so-innocent), a rough and tumble tomboy from my class, cuts in front of me.

Being that I was deathly ill and didn't even care about the food, one would assume that I just let Tracy cut in line. But no, it was wrong and thus I said exactly that. Weakly mind you. Tracy turns to me and says something along

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the line of, "What did you just say?"

To which I repeat that she cut in line. She then glares at me and starts in on her act where she looks tough for her friends. I'm far too dizzy to concentrate on what she's doing. Here's what I remember. After some posturing, she says, "Are you going to do anything about it?" and I say, "Yeah, I'm asking you to go to the back of the line."

And without warning, she punches me in the face. I, of course, go down like a ton of bricks. I'm so dizzy, I can't get up. Teachers come and carry me off to the nurse's office.

Things can't get much worse for a sixth grade boy than getting beaten up by a girl. (I'm not trying to imply any sexism mind you; there are just stigmas when you're young and for a boy, being beaten up by a girl is one of them.) Now remember, before this all began I was a social pariah. They *already* made fun of me. The backlash that followed was the worst I had encountered. I found myself falling into a deep depression. They say the one advantage of hitting bottom is that it's all up from there.

So one day, someone teases me and I run off. I'm sitting on a grassy hill behind my middle school crying my eyes out when for some reason I decide to start analyzing the situation. Why was I feeling so horrible? It wasn't the cafeteria incident. I'd lived through so many embarrassing moments in my youth that I knew I'd get past it. No, what made me feel the worst was how I felt about myself. I didn't like myself. Why? It wasn't because of anything I did. I generally felt strong about my beliefs and knew I was a good person. Why did I feel so bad? Because "they" told me so. All the people who had taken to picking on me were constantly sending me a message that I deserved what they were doing to me.

I felt bad because "they" told me I should feel bad. According to "them" there was something wrong with me. Except, I liked who I was, and my family liked who I was. My friends liked who I was. Why was I judging myself based on the people that didn't like me rather than the ones who did? *That* was my mistake. Understanding this dynamic led me to my first, and in some ways my most important, life lesson –

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**Judge yourself (and your ideas) by the people that care about you. Don't give that power to people who are not invested in your well being.**

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Understanding this turned my life around. It made me happier. It made me healthier. It centered me in a way that has done nothing but make my life a better experience.

So what does this have to do with the design of **Magic**? A lot. The same principle holds true on every card I design. When I make a card, I have to understand who the card is for. Who do I want to be invested in it? Once I figure out who my audience is, I have to keep from being distracted by other audiences.

For example, let's say I'm designing a card for Timmy. If I believe I'm going down a path that Timmy (or at least some part of the Timmies) will really enjoy, I don't let the Johnnies and the Spikes of the world sway me from my design. Johnny might find it boring. Spike might find it pointless. I don't care. If the card is for Timmy, it doesn't matter how the non-Timmies feel. And yes, I do try to find places where I can make cards that overlap different psychographics. My point is I don't avoid making a card that's hated by someone if I feel that it will be loved by someone else.

This is a very important part of card design. If you try to make everyone happy, the vast majority of the time you make no one happy (and yes we do have the occasional Timmy/Johnny/Spike card, known in design as a

"hat trick"). Design is about understanding your audience on a card by card level, and making sure that for each card you put the power in the hands of the right people. Understanding this has made me both a happier person and better designer.

## Lesson #2

One of my great joys of working for Wizards has been the travel. I've always wanted to see the world, and working on **Magic** has literally taken me across the globe. I've been to over twenty countries and to every continent except Antarctica. However, back in eleventh grade this wasn't the case. Other than a few trips to Canada and a short trip to Europe, I had never left the United States. The summer of my junior year that was all going to change, because I had signed up with an organization called AFS to spend my summer living with a family in another country.



Most kids might be focused on colleges the summer of their junior year, but not me. Although I had absolutely no idea where I wanted to go, I was pumped to experience the opportunity of a lifetime. I had filled out all the paperwork, done the necessary interviews and was waiting to learn what country I was going to be assigned to when something unexpected happened... I got a letter in the mail that told me I had been rejected. It didn't say why. It just said that AFS had chosen to pass on me.

This could have been where the story ended, but I'm not one to give up easily. It took over a month, but I tracked down the cause of my rejection. It turns out that one of my interviewers didn't like me. While the rest of the panel gave me enthusiastic thumbs up, he did not. I was essentially blackballed by one person. Luckily, I found out that

I could apply for a second interview, which I did. I took every precaution to make sure that the second interview went swimmingly. And it did. It took several months, but I was back on the list.

Then I waited. And waited. And waited. My fellow classmates all got assigned to countries. Finally, I got a letter that said that they simply were unable to place me. They had run out of host families. Sorry. No exchange program for me. I was pretty upset, as I had put a lot of energy into earning the right to go and I had worked up a great deal of excitement.

In the end, I got a last minute job working at a day camp and spent the summer not living overseas steeped in another culture. I *might* have moped a bit about this. So much so, that my mother decided to try and cheer me up. She and a good friend were giving a presentation at a seminar in New Hampshire. Her friend had a daughter my age and they were planning to drive up through Boston so they could look at a few colleges. As I was really at a loss on where I wanted to go, my mother felt that this might be a good chance to check out a number of schools. (Boston, I believe, has the highest concentration of colleges in the country.) Why didn't I tag along?

One of our stops in Boston was at a college called Boston University. My mother's friend's daughter wanted to see the campus, as there was some outside chance that she could get a sports scholarship. They had set up a meeting. That meant I had an hour to kill, so I wandered around campus. It was during this random stroll that I stumbled upon the College of Communications. I hadn't even heard of the school, but I was interested in communications (I hadn't accepted yet that I wanted to write for television, but that life lesson's next). I took an impromptu tour and I fell in love with the place. And that is how I discovered what later became my alma mater.

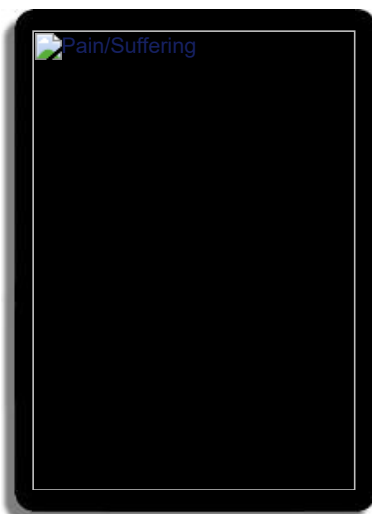
As I left the building with many pamphlets in hand, I had the following observation: Finding this school was a godsend, but the only reason I was here was because of a chain of events that only happened because something I wanted so badly, didn't happen. Which leads to the next life lesson:

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### Things happen for a reason; Even disappointments can be opportunities

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As I look back at my life, it's amazing how many of my biggest disappointments led to some of my greatest triumphs. As you'll see a few life lessons down, the biggest step that led to my job at Wizards was the direct result of an unhappy incident.



So what does this mean to **Magic**? It means that designers have to learn to roll with the punches. Often in design, a designer comes up with an idea that they love that doesn't work out for reasons having nothing to do with the design itself. When this happens, the designers have to learn to have faith that the good ideas will eventually float to the top. An idea that doesn't work out in the present will find a home in the future.

My favorite example of this is the split cards. If you haven't read [my column of their origin](#), let me sum it up here. The split cards were originally designed for *Unglued II* (not *Unhinged*), a set that was put on permanent hiatus. Believing that we would never see another *Un*-set, I convinced Bill Rose to put them into the design for *Invasion*.

The split cards are my favorite mechanic I've ever designed for **Magic** (with hybrid being a close second), and *Unglued II* being shelved was one of my greatest disappointments. But if *Unglued II* had lived, the split cards might never have found their way into tournament-legal **Magic**. I fought for them so hard in *Invasion* (and as my column explained, it was quite a fight) because I believed it was their only chance of seeing print.

The influence of that event had a domino effect. The popularity of the split cards really made R&D think differently about how we could approach new ideas for the game. Which, in turn, made it much easier for me to sell many of the ideas that followed and, I believe, in many ways paved my way to be Head Designer. Just like my college, it was the wrong turn that helped me find my way.

## Lesson #3

The irony of my entire college admission process was that Boston University (BU), my first choice for college, ended up being my safety school. Because I knew I had the grades to get into BU, I tried applying to some colleges that were a little more of a stretch. You know, to see if I could get in. I got into every school I applied to, but ended up exactly where I knew I would the day I took the one-hour stroll through campus.

For my readers that have not attended college, the way college works is that half way through (a.k.a. junior year), the college makes you decide what exactly you're there for. What are you majoring in? The freshman and sophomore years are used taking basic requirements and getting your feet wet so that you can figure out what it is you want to do with your life. (A little trivia sidenote – there was a study done several years back that tracked the most stressful times in people's lives. Picking a major came in the top five.) Now, I knew that I was interested in communications. I mean, after all, who doesn't love a college where watching television or going to the movies is homework. On the other hand, I hadn't decided what I wanted to do in communications.

Actually, that's not quite true. That was the lie I told myself. I knew what I wanted to do for a living - I wanted to create television shows. I had been writing since I was little and I knew that I loved the process of storytelling. I



also knew that I thought television was the coolest medium ever to tell stories. You see, in television, you're not creating a single story, but an environment that allows the telling of many stories. (Perhaps you start seeing why I was put in charge of the Creative Team.)

So what was the problem? Why didn't I just admit to myself that I wanted to write for television? Because I had done some research on writing for television and what I learned was that it was a very hard business to break into. I was afraid to dream of something I possibly couldn't achieve.

What changed my mind was a conversation with one of my professors. Professor Yelger taught the Intro to Communications class that every College of Communications freshman had to take. His reputation was one of a smart, but very stern professor. Getting an A- in the class was one of my greatest accomplishments in college. Each year he took time during the first semester to meet one on one with each student. This was a daunting task, as his class including every freshman in the school, but he felt it was important to hear what each of his students had to say (the same reasons I go out of my way to read all my e-mails).

I arrive on time for my appointment. I knock on the door. He invites me in and asks me to sit. After a little small talk, he asks me why I'm in a communications school. I tell him because I'm fascinated by communications, television in particular. In fact, I say, it's my dream to write for television. Am I planning to pursue television writing as my major? I wasn't sure yet. Why? I explain about all I had learned about how hard it was to break into the "business". The professor looks at me and says the following:

"I'm fifty years old. I've been through a lot in my life. But if there's one thing I've learned it's this:

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**You seldom regret failing. You always regret not trying.**

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He continued: "So many people don't know their dream. The fact that you do is a blessing. Don't waste your energy fighting your dream. Embrace it. If it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out. Trust me, you'll get over that. Never trying will haunt you the rest of your life."

Then and there I embraced my desire to write for television. This lesson also carries with it a sub-lesson. It's not your job to figure out all your own life lessons. Learn from those around you. Soak up the wisdom of the people that have already experienced what you have yet to do. Just because this life lesson was given to me on a silver platter makes it no less important in how it's affected my life.



Time to turn back to **Magic**. How does this life lesson affect design? In a very important way. Whenever I sit down with a new lead designer, I say the following: "Don't worry about what can and can't be done. Figure out what you want. If what you want proves interesting enough, I promise you, you'll find a way to make it work."

My example for this lesson is the hybrid cards. When I first pitched them, I didn't get the positive response I expected. While my thoughts were filled with all the possibilities of the mechanic, many others were worried about execution. How can we let the players know how the card works? What kind of aesthetics would the cards have? What would the cards mean to the rules?

My answer was that I didn't care. Yet. Let's make some cards and see how they play. If we ended up liking them, I promised we'd find answers. So we played them and 'lo and behold, they lived up to their promise. Once everyone was aboard that the cards were fun and interesting, we found creative solutions. A card frame was found among a rejected proposal to change the multicolor card frames. The mana symbols went through numerous design tweaks. And the rules manager rolled up his sleeves and found a way to make it work.

Our research shows us that hybrid has been a smashing success. All because we took the attitude that trying always trumps not trying.

## Lesson #4

Soon my life would take me to Los Angeles, but first, I had to finish college. This next lesson, interestingly, enough, also happened my freshman year. Like most freshmen, I was assigned a roommate. His name was Peter. Peter was also in the communications school. He and I quickly became friends. That said, living with Peter did have its challenges.

For starters, Peter was into music. By "into," I mean obsessed. He could not be in the room without his stereo being on. Now I'm pretty easy going with my music - I can listen to just about anything, and Peter's choice in music, while a bit new to me, was just fine quality-wise. Here's the problem. Not only did the music have to be on, but Peter's choice in the music always reflected how he was feeling. His stereo was a hi-fi version of a mood ring. When he was happy, we listening to upbeat, fun music. When he was stressed, we listened to frenetic music. And when he was depressed, we listened to some downbeat stuff.

So far I was still fine with everything. The hard part was that Peter was depressed most of freshman year. And that meant a lot of listening to the Violent Femmes (who at the time only had two albums). Don't get me wrong, I actually like the Violent Femmes. You know, in moderation. The thousandth time I listened to the lyrics, "I feel the rain / I feel the rain / Gotta kill the pain" I related more than I should.

Even with the music thing, Peter and I got along wonderfully. I just listened to my music when Peter was out and learned to enjoy many of Peter's favorites (he introduced me to Elvis Costello, so at least some kudos have to go his way). Things were going okay. So much so, that we decided that we were going to room together for sophomore year. But that was before "The Incident."

Peter and I were freshmen. In college. That meant that we never went to bed before two a.m. Most often, we went to bed far, far later. The problem is that as low men on the totem pole, freshmen get the worst classes, a.k.a. the ones at 8 a.m. This meant that there was a lot of napping going on in our room. Now, I'm a sound sleeper. If I'm tired enough, I'll sound out the jackhammer. Peter, on the other hand, was a light sleeper. So much so that even typing would keep him awake.

Why is typing so relevant? Because it was college and there was homework. (And this was back in the days before laptops.) Now Peter liked doing his homework late night, but I found myself too wired (I'm a night person) at that time to work, so I preferred doing my homework in the afternoon. The problem was this was when Peter slept. I think you can see the fight that ensued. Peter claimed that he had a right to sleep peacefully in his room. I countered that I had the right to do homework in my room. At an impasse, we turned to our mutual friends.

We each explained our side and asked their opinion. Every one (except one friend who refused to get involved) sided with me. Peter said, "Fine!" and stormed off.

And as simple as that, the issue appeared to be resolved. Whenever I wanted to do homework, Peter found other rooms to crash in. I also made extra effort to try and work around times he was sleeping. Problem solved. Or so I thought. The week rolls by and I slowly realize an important little detail. Peter had stopped talking to me. So I approached Peter and said, "It appears that you're not speaking to me. Why?"

"Isn't it obvious?" he explained and stormed off again.

It is obvious why from this story because I started by telling you why, but in the moment I was honestly confused. I thought we had resolved the homework/sleeping issue. It was only when I sat and thought about it that I realized that Peter had responded to The Incident by not speaking to me. More importantly, I realized something else. The relationship with Peter wasn't good for me. Staying his roommate was unhealthy.

The problem was that the lottery was days away. Everyone had essentially paired up. Luckily, one of my friends was still looking for a roommate, but ditching Peter now (and I knew Peter would have a much harder time than I in finding a new roommate) was going to be a major blow to Peter. Much, much worse than typing while he tried to sleep.

I was very torn by the decision. I didn't want to hurt Peter, but I knew that rooming with him was just bad for my own mental health. That's when the following life lesson became apparent to me:

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### **It's not my job to look out for the welfare of others at the expense of myself**

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So I dumped Peter as roommate. He was quite upset (although I did help him find a new roommate) and it essentially ended our friendship. It was a giant step for me in my own personal development. I'm essentially a nice guy, so doing something that I know hurts someone else is hard. In the end, I realized that Peter was very much involved in my choice. My decision was a direct result of his actions, and my welfare, in the end, needed to be more important to me than his.

What is the **Magic** design spin on this lesson? It is this. **Magic** is made up of many components, be it color, rarity, card type, mechanic or expansion. When you're designing, you are always able to divide up your work into pieces, and as a designer, it's crucial that you understand what each piece wants and needs. The other pieces will fight over the same scraps, so you need to be able to identify what is important to each section.



Let's talk a little more concretely. Let's take a multi-color set like *Invasion* or *Ravnica*. Multicolor is hard to design in that it has a lot more restrictions than monocolored cards. What this means is that design has to give leeway to the multicolor cards. If a multicolor card and a monocolored card are fighting for the same space, barring a special

exception, the multicolor card needs to win the fight because it's more important to the welfare of the multicolored card.

Oftentimes, playtesting will show that a certain color is lacking in a certain area. To fix this problem, design often steals from the color that is least lacking. The idea being that the welfare of the weak color supercedes the need of the strong color. This might seem easy when thought of from a distance, but learning to drop a beloved card because another color/rarity/mechanic/expansion needs a piece of it is quite hard in practice. The key is knowing that the choice is, in the long run, the healthiest for all involved.

## Lesson #5

My next lesson was hinted at in my column "[A Different Worlds](#)". (In fact, in it I hint that I was going to write this very column.) Let me set up the situation. I've been in Hollywood for five years. I've had some success (yes, the obligatory "Roseanne" reference – I was on the writing staff on what was at the time the number one show on television – not bad for a guy that was worried he'd never make it), but I was in between writing jobs.

For those of you unfamiliar with Hollywood, it's a town where you never know if you'll be employed tomorrow. As a result, you're constantly scrambling to try and set up the next thing. Following the luck that was "Roseanne" (that story will have to wait for another column), I had my biggest bit of bad luck. My agent, the one who helped get me the pitch for "Roseanne" that I turned into a staff position, decided she wanted out of the business. She did so right before the staffing season that followed my time on "Roseanne". Without getting into the details of how a writer gets work, having no agent during the period where all the shows acquire their writers for the following year is a Bad Thing™.

I lost my momentum and found myself back at doing individual pitches. Interestingly, my next agent (the one my agent worked for) was also the agent for Marc Cherry, now known as the creator of "Desperate Housewives". I found out during an interview with Marc that she later went to jail for embezzling thousands of dollars from him (after I left LA to come to Wizards).

The big downside to doing pitches for individual scripts, as opposed to being on staff, is that it's quite lonely. I sat in front of my computer every day all alone in my apartment. Because I was going stir crazy, I decided to get a job that would get me out of my house. The money wasn't the primary motivator, as I had been living off my "Roseanne" money. What mattered most was that I wanted it to be something I enjoyed and I wanted to interact with people. So, I got a part-time job in a game store (The Game Keeper interestingly enough is the game store chain Wizards would buy years later).

It was while working at this game store that I learned about **Magic** from customers that came in asking for it. (I would later track down the game at a local game convention and then convince my store to start carrying it.) I worked at the game store for slightly over a year. During my time there, I was a super star employee. See, I knew games and I'm a people person, so even though I only worked twenty hours a week, I sold more than anyone else in the store, and often more than anyone else in the district.

Yet I still managed to cause trouble. You see, the Game Keeper had a one-sheet list of rules. One of them was that employees couldn't wear tennis shoes. Being a diligent worker, I bought some non-tennis shoes (other than shoes for my suit, I hadn't owned any before getting the job). I quickly learned that standing all day without good arch support was a recipe for pain. Mind you, the entire rule was rather stupid. Most of the time you were behind the counter where they couldn't see your shoes. And the few times you stepped out, it was clear that no one bothered to see what kind of shoes you were wearing. I told my manager that the shoe policy was literally causing me a lot of pain. He said he didn't mind if I wore tennis shoes. So I did.

One of the quirks of retail is that managers tend to come and go with the wind. During my tenure at the game store, I had seven different managers. Many didn't care I wore tennis shoes. Some put up with it solely because I was such a good salesman. Only one demanded that I stop wearing them. I told him if I had to stop wearing my tennis shoes, I had to quit, as this job was more about doing something I enjoyed than the paycheck. Knowing I was valuable to the store, he backed down.

Then came the seventh, and for me, final manager. The very first day he worked, he took me to the back and told me I was being let go. This stunned me. The previous week I had had more sales than anyone in our district. As a *part-time* employee. I was way overqualified for the job - only my enjoyment of it kept me there for what was some sketchy pay. To this day I don't know why he let me go. I can only assume he somehow learned about my "shoe issue" and pegged me as a troublesome employee.

The net result was one of depression. It wasn't so much that I cared about the job as that I had never been fired before. And, apparently, for no reason. (He never mentioned the shoe thing.) What does this have to do with 1994 Gencon? The event was two months away when I got fired. Shaken by the firing and frustrated by the stagnation of my writing career, I was looking for things I wanted to do. The one other thing going on in my life was **Magic**. At the time, I was writing the puzzle column (**Magic: the Puzzling**) for *The Duelist*. It dawned on me that I knew Kathryn Haines, the editor of *The Duelist*, was going to be at Gencon. If I showed up, I might be able to get more work writing for *The Duelist*.

Here was the rub. While I had money squirreled away from "Roseanne", I had to be financially very cautious, as I didn't know when I would get my next writing gig. Add to that the fact that I just lost my only other source of income (while the job didn't pay well, it was something) and a trip to Gencon seemed an extravagance. I decided to track down the best airline ticket I could find and make my decision then. Unfortunately, the best I could do wasn't too good and it was clear that attending Gencon was going to mean some financial risk on my end. To make matters worse, I had until the end of the day to even get the rate I had found.

After some soul searching, I came to the following conclusion:

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## If you want things to happen you have to take the initiative to make it happen

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Yes, there are stories about people who have fortune stumble upon them, but they are the exception. The story behind almost all successes is that the person behind them strove to make something happen. My coming to work for Wizards wasn't a string of good luck. I sought out Wizards to do the puzzle column. I traveled to Gencon to get more writing opportunities. I sought out extra freelance work from other sections of the company. I told R&D I was willing to move to Seattle (more on this in two weeks). At each step, I figured out what I wanted and took steps to make it happen.

How does this tie into **Magic** design? "Making it happen" is what design's all about. When I became Head Designer, for instance, I made a concerted effort to start doing block planning. *Ravnica* didn't fall into my lap. I found the guild model because I was looking for something that could tie the whole block together. It was my desire to give the block identity that caused me to seek out new ways to connect a block together in the first place.



It's very easy after something's a success to recognize its value. The trick for a designer is seeing the potential before it exists, and a crucial part of being able to do this is having the foresight to understand that you have to make it happen. Let's continue using *Ravnica* block as the example. When I signed on to the guild model, I realized it would mean that I needed to find a way to make it mechanically relevant. Thus, I started from a premise that it had to be relevant and worked backwards.

Separating the color pairs into sets, having ten smaller keywords for the block, not having mechanic evolution - each one of these steps was a major break from how blocks are designed. But being focused on my end goal allowed me to make the leap of faith necessary. And like my trip to Gencon, the dividends of the choice have been plentiful.

## Five Down, Five To Go

As I stated above, I originally planned this to be a single column, but when I got to the halfway point (now), I realized that I had a little too much to actually fit. This means that in two weeks (next week is a theme week), I'll be back with the conclusion to "Life Lessons". I hope you've enjoyed it so far and I think you'll find the next installment just as interesting. As this column is so personal, I'm particularly interested in what you all think of it. If anything I've said has resonated, please drop me an e-mail. I really will read it.

That's all for today. Join me next week when I prove that passionate intellect is a good thing. Or is it?

Until then, may you have the chance to absorb the wisdom of others,

Mark Rosewater

*Mark Rosewater is Head **Magic** Designer. What this fancy title means is that he's in charge of **Magic** design. This gets him a lot of mail (which he actually reads). When not alternatively destroying and saving **Magic**, he likes to spend time with his family, do stereotypically geeky things (play games, read comics, watch a lot of science fiction, etc.) and write about himself in third person.*



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