

This is a guide for organizers within the Time Well Spent / Livable Tech movement. It has four sections. **It's a living document, so share your local groups' improvements.**

Why Do We Gather?

We believe that, just like a city shapes the lives of its inhabitants, software shapes the lives of its users. Therefore software design, like city planning, is a domain of great responsibility. There are times when what's best for a company in the short run is not best for users or for society. It is hard for an individual in a company to navigate these situations, or even to see them clearly. For this reason we gather—as designers, engineers and product metrics people—to discuss the potential and actual impacts of our choices, and to support one another in working for the software city we want to inhabit.

What Creates a Community?

Three value propositions

- The reason for gathering given at the top—that, “software design, like city planning, is a domain of great responsibility” and that we need to “support one another in working for the software city we want to inhabit”—is the reason given to gather for people who are just being introduced to our movement.
- But there is another reason to *stay* in the community: Growing in terms of our values, and in terms of our ability to understand and respond to the breadth of users' values—is the great adventure of our lives. It means taking on challenges in ourselves, our careers, and our organizations that we never expected. So we support one another also in this: the continued challenge of personal growth because we are always leaders in our companies and for the users we serve.

Three types of leaders

The most delicate aspect of our community is its vulnerability and thoughtfulness. It is hugely challenging and brave to acknowledge the scope of our negative and positive impacts, working in tech. To set the tone as one of vulnerability and thoughtfulness, we need members who have clear, personal stories of ethical conflict in tech to come to every meetup and tell their story. We probably need at least three of these people in every city, because we need to make the general point that it's important and okay to be thoughtful about our true impacts, rather than any more specific point.

Good communication

In messages, try to do one or more of the following:

- emphasize shared values,
- show them something amazing from the community,
- activate their curiosity
- lead with open design questions, not with solutions

What Do We Do at Meetups?

Starting the Event

- It can be nice to open a meeting by asking for **short personal stories** in which there was an ethical conflict in choosing a design or a metric. For instance, when one design maximized engagement but it was somehow manipulative or worse for users. Or when a metric was chosen because it looks good or is easy to optimize rather than because it measures value delivered. *Keep it to 2-3 minutes per speaker.*
- It may be nice to read an abridged version of quotes by Neil Postman / Aldous Huxley¹ (our emphasis in bold).

The Redesign Game

When the group wishes to practice empowering design, or the development of deep metrics, the following may be a good structure:

1. Review the basics. Someone can go through the [companion worksheet](#) and gather from the crowd new examples of unnecessary concerns, weird thinking styles, and distorted ways of relating to people, to refresh everyone on the terminology we've found useful. It is also useful to remind the crowd that to design our lives and relationships through technology is an unfamiliar activity, very different from designing screens. E.g. "We didn't

¹ “What **Orwell** feared were those who would ban books. What **Huxley** feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. **Orwell** feared those who would deprive us of information. **Huxley** feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. **Orwell** feared that the truth would be concealed from us. **Huxley** feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. **Orwell** feared we would become a captive culture. **Huxley** feared we would become a trivial culture [...]. As **Huxley** remarked in Brave New World Revisited, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny **“failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions.”** In 1984, **Orwell** added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In Brave New World, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, **Orwell** feared that what we fear will ruin us. **Huxley feared that what we desire will ruin us.”**

come here to do traditional design – laying out rectangles, interactions, or other things we’re already good at. This is a new practice.”

2. Identify some lifestyle distortions. Some members of the group will volunteer to be “users.” These people will take a moment to write down a description of how their lives have been distorted by some software: whether they find themselves using software when they would rather be offline, or communicating and relating in different ways than they might like, etc. They use the “unnecessary concerns, weird thinking styles, and distorted ways of relating to people” terminology in describing these distortions.
3. Circulate as designers and see how to repair the software. The remainder of the group will play the role of designers trying to repair the software and eliminate these distortions, aligning the users’ technology use with what matters to them. Designers may interview their user about their lives and usage and about how the user *wants* to relate to friends, what they *want* to think about, etc.
4. Capture the best work. If promising designs arise, there should be someone in the group whose job it is to capture them, in paper prototype form, for the shared dropbox folder of the movement, and to notify others in the movement to tweet about them or to arrange things so that the redesigns are likely to be considered by the companies who make the redesigned software. Some members of the group may want to take on the task of further refining the designs for presentation in a gallery.

Chit-chat

Career stuff. Part of the function of our movement is to identify companies which are friendly to this kind of design and measurement, and to help them staff up with people who know how to do it. Look for companies that aren’t advertising-supported and who have leadership who understand that technology can be bad for people and still be used. We can do this by asking at the end of the meet-up if anyone works for such a company.

How to lead

Be open to hopelessness

During the storytelling or the training game, it may arise that someone brings up an area of ethical conflict in design or in metrics which feels hopeless. For instance, it may seem hopeless to consider how a public advertising company could be reformed, or there may be a vast social problem like the relationship between internet porn and sex, which seems unapproachable. It is our practice to collect these rather than ignoring them. We believe that often only after an extended period of hopelessness, doubt, or despair may we start to see ways forward.

Motivated group members may wish to take these collected hopelessnesses into a separate group process, perhaps a [hyperactive listening](#) session, or a doubt club [TBD].

Prep people before and after a meetup

- Before meeting, invite participants to watch one or both talk(s) on Time Well Spent [[Joe's Empowering Design talk](#)], [[Tristan's Wisdom 2.0 talk](#)].
- Before meeting, invite participants to identify good/bad examples of screens in their life that distort the way they spend time, their relationships, and things they think about.