



Intentionally Designing a Church Experience | An Interview with Mat Duerdon

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Let's be honest, few humans enjoy meetings, and many feel trapped in meetings. As leaders, we don't want to burden those we lead, but meetings can seem to do that more often than not. We wanted to address the pain of meetings through the meetings with saints, library. Here we have 15 plus presentations dedicated to improving the meetings we run. We have experts in the field addressing topics like getting people involved in meetings, staying on task, dealing with conflict and meetings and a ton more. We'd love you to explore the full meetings with saints library over 14 days at no cost to you. You can do this by visiting leading-saints.org/14 that's leading-saints.org/14. We'll also give you access to all of our virtual libraries, the educate about other leadership topics. It's really good stuff. So visit leading-saints.org/14 or click the link in the show notes. Hey, if you're a Newbie to leading saints is important that you know what is this leading saints thing? Well, leading saints is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping Latter day Saints be better prepared to lead. And the way we do that is through content creation, so we have this phenomenal podcast. We have a newsletter. We have virtual conferences, so much more. At articles on our website, I mean, I could go on and on, right? And we encourage you to jump in, check out leading saints, go to the search bar at leading-saints.org and type in some topics and see what pops up. We're just glad you're here to join us. Today I'm on the campus of Brigham young university and I've wandered into the office of Matt durden. How are you met? I'm doing great. Yeah, happy to chat with you. This is cool because one of your students, Matt Armstrong, who's just in the leading saints audience,

sent me an email and said, hey, you got to talk with Matt dirt and BYU about all sorts of stuff with creating experiences and tie it into leadership and it happens. And now here we are. That's right. So the audience should know you should email us at leading saints dot org slash contact and your suggestion may actually come to fruition lies today. So listen to your listeners. That's right. That's great. Wow. Wow, that was deep. All right, so when people ask you, what do you do? How do you respond? So I teach classes on how to intentionally design experiences. That's cool. And in the business department, I believe. Yeah, so I'm in the business squabbling in the department of experience design and management. So I teach experience design to students who are studying that topic, and then I teach similar courses in the MBA program. And any place else will let me on campus, I do some stuff for the honors program. I've got a colleague and I who teach and experience design focused curriculum at the London center. And so I think everything is an experience. And so you can really apply the principles in a lot of different spaces. Nice. And you've had opportunities to serve in various leadership capacities in the church, even, right? Yeah. Cool. Yeah, so a couple of bishoprics and young men's presidencies. And as we talked previously, the church delivers so many different types of experiences, right? And so I think there's lots to talk about when it comes to experience design and leading in the church. Yeah. Well, this will be fun. So I didn't even know this was a thing. Like a science or think that whole departments are dedicated to as far as experiences. In the business world, companies are always hyper focused on experiences for whether it's a hotel or the interface of an app or whatever it is. I mean, that's a big thing. Yeah, and this is definitely an emerging space and we're a unique program. I think it's really the convergence of a lot of science that's gone in to try to understand human experiences and what makes certain experiences better than others, right? I mean, Aristotle talked about this if you think about it, we received guidance through the scriptures about the types of experiences we should have to thrive and be happy. And there's also been, I think, over the last three or four or 5 decades, a lot of work around human centered design. And not just designing solutions that you think would work, but really understanding, okay, who are the people that I'm trying to solve a problem for, and how can I collaboratively solve that problem with them? And then the other sort of trend is over the last really two decades. So there's a book that came out in 1999 called the experience economy. And Joe pyne and Jim Gilmore, who are the authors, made this argument that we were going to see a change in the primary driver of the economy. So you go back a hundred years and commodities goods drove the economy and then manufacturing and then services. And they made the case that experiences were actually going to become the primary driver of economy. It's not just the goods products and services, but it's the experience that is wrapped around those that really is a competitive advantage.

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And I think their prediction is really come to fruition, right? You hear the word experience, whether it's customer experience or employee experience or a patient experience, throw it all over the place. That doesn't necessarily mean that people are intentionally designing experiences, but just that awareness of yeah, I'm loyal to a brand, not just because of, you know, you think about Costco and Sam's Club, right? In terms of a net promoter score, Costco is higher, they're the same store. They're doing basically the same thing, but there are certain aspects of the Costco experience that draw more people through those doors. Yeah. And it's the churros, right? The hot dogs and the chicken all kinds of different. Even the samples. And that was through COVID. You sort of walked through Costco. This is not the same store. Yeah, exactly. 'cause I want to try some strange food here. So you have this emergence of like, oh yeah, we know what makes a good experience. We also know how to collaboratively design things from a human centered perspective, which is really important because you and I are having the same experience here chatting for this podcast, but we're both going to walk away with a different individual experience, right? So that's why you think about a church congregation. We all sit in sacrament meeting together, but we all walk away with a 180 different experiences or stories that we would tell about our sacrament meeting experience. And so as an experienced designer, you have to understand design principles, but you also have to understand people and what make them unique and have it a willingness and a desire to have empathy for the people you're designing for because it doesn't matter what you think is a good experience it matters what the people who are having the experience. Yeah, and that's such an interesting dynamic because it's easy for a leader. I remember times when bishoprics or whatnot where you feel like we're running pretty good award here. I mean, people show up and you know, there's always going to be individuals who don't come as often as others, but we run a tight ship around here, but if you don't ask the individuals saying, is that your experience? You may hear something different, right? Yeah, totally. And I think the way that we are organized is wards, I think, is so wonderfully unique. And many people have written about this, right? It's different than a lot of denominations, right? Where you have this sort of geographic way that we're organized, we end up rubbing shoulders with all kinds of different people at church that are different than us, right? Even here in Utah valley, right? There's a lot of different opinions and attitudes and backgrounds in award. And it's really easy to just fall into the assumption that everybody experiences things the same way that you do. And it doesn't take too much asking around to realize that's not the case. Yeah. And when creating a experience do you is it fair to say human nature wants to default to the practical? For example, winter COVID where Zoom church was introduced. Streaming church, whatever you want to call it. And a lot of people are saying, well, that was great, very convenient, very practical. I can give you a list of reasons why we should keep doing that. And some leaders are like, no, no, no, you got to come to church and we're going to create an experience here. Easy to just default to practicality when it comes to experience. I think it sort of depends, right? But I think let me draw a parallel to how organizations are grappling with employee experience right now, right? So many, many people worked from home during COVID. And now you see organizations trying to figure out what happens next. So Elon Musk recently came out and said, everybody needs to be back in the office, right? Like if you're not here, you're out of here. Other organizations have said, yeah, we're going to have some type of flex policy or it's going to be all remote or it's so you see all of these different opinions. And I think we've had similar conversations in the church and wars,

right? And I think rather than just saying, it needs to be one way or the other, or this is better, or this isn't. I think a question to ask is, what type of experience is best for which type of channel? In terms of like we have multiple different delivery channels. And most experiences are multichannel, right? You think about how often you use your LDS tools app or you use email or the word newsletter or ministering. There's all these different ways that we interact as members. And so I think rather than just defaulting to what's easiest or let's do what we've always done. It's asking the question, okay, what's the job we want this experience to do for us? Leaning on Clayton Christianson's job to be done, like really to think about that. Like, what's the job of an in person sacrament meeting versus zoom service or any of these experiences, right? There's church meetings that could be the best channel is an email.

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This is all information, right? But when you're in person, you can do different things. And so you should do, you should use the experiences intentionally. I guess is what I'm saying. Yeah. So maybe just a crash course on some of this. Bishopric or elders quorum presidency. Where do they begin to start formulating a positive experience while considering all the jobs that need to be done? It's easy to default to just what we think or like you said you got involved with everybody. So let me just walk through a couple of, I think, generalizable procedures. So I usually like to start by asking, what do we want people to say at the end of this experience? If you think of what is produced from experiences or memories and stories, right? So being able to have an explicit statement that you had hoped someone would say at the end of a sacrament meeting at the end of award council at the end of a youth conference, what do you hope that someone would say? And then that gives you a target to sort of hang all of your design decisions on. You say, okay, we want people to walk away and say, I take a youth conference, for example. I know my peers better or I know that my adult leaders care about me or I've increased by personal witness of Jesus Christ is my savior. And I think if you can identify a couple because I think we also run into problems when we try to have an experience, do all things, right? And then it just gets sort of watered down and does it become anything. So to really focus on, okay, what are a couple of things that we really hope people will say. And then Walt Disney said everything speaks in an experience. And hopefully, you want things to speak in harmony, right? So if you think, okay, we want people to say, at the end of word counsel, I have a clearer idea of individuals who have needs and how I can serve them. Whatever you want. Then everything you should do, every aspect of the experience, and you can even get into the minutiae of the setting and the lighting and what we've said in emails beforehand that you just think about all of these things, like how does the agenda of the meeting nudge people towards saying what you want them to say? How do the songs and sacri meeting nudge people towards what you want them to say? Just evaluating it. It's almost like a clothesline. You're hanging all of your design decisions on. So I think that's a first place to start is like, do we know what we want

people to say at the end of the day? So let me ask you a follow up with that. I see this a lot where people say, what would we want people to do? We want to bring them to Christ. And so they use this broad it feels good saying that, yes, is there like an extra step to make sure that we articulate exactly what we want because do we want people working out saying I feel closer to Christ? Like, yeah, maybe, but it seems almost too vague. So that's a great, great point, right? It needs to be specific enough that it would allow us to differentiate between different things that we could do in the experience, right? Because I guess you could say that for everything we do in the church, whether it's youth conference or sacrament meeting, but there needs to be some type of differentiation or goal level. And I think that comes from also knowing your audience, right? Like what are the needs so I'm currently serve on the stake high council and we go and speak in different words and sometimes you get an ask. Like, oh, will you talk on this topic or talk on this topic? And I remember emailing back and forth with the bishop, whose word I was going to go speak in, and I loved it because he was so specific like he knew his members so well and he was so passionate about it. He's like, members of my ward really need to understand this aspect of repentance. Like I'm hearing all of these conversations and he just knew his people so well that his like it was a very easy talk to give because he basically told me what I should say to a certain degree because he had empathy he knew what their needs were and that should really drive, right? Like what are the needs of the people we're trying to serve? And what would they say if we met that need? And so I think your point is a really good one. It can't just be like, that was fun. Oh great, youth conference was a success. People had fun, right? Like what are the needs that our youth have and what are the types of things that they would say if we met those needs. So that gives me maybe a wormhole to jump down, I would guess in the secular world businesses are constantly doing customer feedback reviews, surveys and whatnot like, is that something we should have some, not that you're encouraging people to leave a comment card after every sacrament meeting or whatever. But how do we take a temperature as far as what the need is? I totally think, yeah, maybe not. I think there's a lot of different ways. I mean, it can happen, I am a fan of surveys, right? Like I think during I thought during the pandemic was really interesting, we saw all words respond in all kinds of different ways.

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And there was times where I thought, man, if we just had a little bit more data from people in the ward and the stake or that we could figure out what people wanted to do within the bounds of guidelines that were given. And so I think it's important. There's also what can be what can be tricky is we have, we all have functional needs, right? I need to eat food. And I need to wear clothes, right? And then we have underlying emotional needs. I need to wear clothes that fit my sort of personal brand or convey this, or I need comfort food right now. That's what I need, right? And so I think talking more about this idea of needs is understanding what are the not only just

the functional congregational needs, but what are the underlying sort of emotional needs that are like, oh wow, this is really, this is what's really happening. This is what really people, yes. Yes, they need they need to have a testimony of Jesus Christ, but why particularly this 13 year old girl? What aspect of her testimony of Jesus Christ? Does she need a lean on the most right now? And I think when you're identify those needs, I heard a great analogy one time that if you identify a good need, it usually does it change over time in history, but solutions change. So from the beginning of time, people have needed to store information, right? And so first that was just stories and then clay tablets and stone tablets and gold plates and brass plates and eventually we had printing presses and books and then we got floppy disks and smaller disks and zip drives and now we're like cloud storage. And at some point along the way, you said, okay, like zip drives. That is the end all be all, we will always just use zip drives, right? You become obsolete. And I think sometimes that can happen in the church too, right? Where we say, okay, the end all be all. I don't want to say anything that would offend anybody. Insert youth activity or insert sort of tradition particular lesson of tradition. Yeah, it's like this is the thing, right? And it's not the case. I mean, that's why we've had war teaching and home teaching administering. The need remains the same, and the church is made modifications to the experience to meet that need over time. And so as far as gathering this information as far as because I feel like a lot of leaders, they'll just because you don't need a survey to get data per se. You can perceive other things and sometimes you see it with maybe a bishop who's like, I'm up to my eyeballs and confessions about pornography and this 5th Sunday we're going to do that on our feed lesson, right? But is it an industry standard and I get where blending some different worlds here. But it's fun. Are there businesses out there that are just foolish not to take some type of survey or ask people directly? I mean, is there a science or what am I getting out here? There's so many different ways to gather data, right? And I think best practices and industry would be you're trying to gather both qualitative and quantitative data, right? The quantitative data tells you what happened and the qualitative data tells you how or why it happened. I had a professor who's now retired here at BYU and I did my master's degree and to emphasize this point he talked about, whether this is an adjunct or a story, I don't know, but of these small rural town in Utah, you know, late 1800s and people sort of talking in the mercantile store about the critiquing decisions made about getting saints across the plains with hand car to being like, you look at all of the people that died and this and all of these problems and then this individual speaks up and says, that's true, but I was on one of those handcart tricks and that experience changed my life and it will have generational impacts in terms of the faith and he goes, you could just look at the numbers and be like, this was a bad decision. But then you could look at like the qualitative impact it had on people's lives and the generations that have been impacted by the stories of faith that came from that. Those are two different stories. So sort of a tangent, but I think any data is better than no data. And I guess the one thing that I would say is, as leaders in the church, I think we can so often be caught up in just managing logistics, right? Because there's so many logistics to handle. Who's teaching this lesson? We have to run our PPIs. We've got to get this camp ready to go. And we can just not have much time to just talk to people, right? President Eyring talks about when he was the president of Rick's that his home teacher who was just a good old salt of the earth potato farmer who had no experience with higher education came to him and said, how I've received some personal

revelation that you need to get out of your office and just go talk to your employees, go talk to people around campus.

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And I'm probably not like perfectly describing this. So everybody, but he talks about how what an impact that had on him. And he started doing that. Just wandering around campus talking to students, talking to custodians, talking to faculty, and how that had immense impact on how he behaved as the president, right? And so, I mean, I've gone off on a little bit of a tangent, but I think just like whatever you can do to understand the people that you are serving. I think that just, that's like raw material that the lord can use to give you revelation. And I think it just comes down to just asking the question, what do we as a bishopric or presidency? How do we collect data? How do we know what we assume? And is there anything more we could do to get better data? How many times do we sit in a presidency meeting or a word council and it's just us sharing our opinions about what we think somebody might need? And I think when ministering works correctly, we have access to information and feedback from people. But I think just getting out and talking to people because then you can say, okay, here's the need. Let's think about designing experience that's going to meet that need. And I have to say to, sorry, this just pops into my head that, please. When we talk about designing experiences in the church, I get a little bit, I don't know what the right, I feel like I'm obligated to say that doesn't mean creating new experiences, right? Because out with the old. I think that's always like, oh, let's come up with the new program. Let's do a new thing. Let's say it's like, no, how do we just make the things that we already have, you know, better, right? Because usually we're probably not running everything the way that we should, or we don't need new programs, right? The ministering program does a lot of these things if it's just done right. So I felt like when I've been in the message that I'll pound in word counsels, I was like, no, I don't need a new program. Let's just use what we have to think about how we, you know, how we improve the experiences within the context. Yeah, that's interesting because sometimes there can be a lot of energy behind something new. Totally. But at the same time, it puts a lot of stress on the leader himself, but those that he leads with, or she leaves with it. I'm glad you mentioned that just to say, what if we just took a relief society and looked at it and said, how can we improve this by 1%? Totally. Right. Right. Yeah. Not exactly. Exactly. That's really good. Some atomic habits reference there. How do we just make this little tweak, right? And it can be simple things. I had a stake president who had a list, I love this. He had a list of like 15 or 20 hymns. And he goes, I'm not going to enforce this, but I think these are the only hymns we should ever see in church. Because he believes so powerfully in the ability of song to bring in this spirit or singing to bring in the spirit, but he goes, if you sing a song that nobody knows, it's not gonna be the same as if you sing, you know, insert, I believe in Christ or something. Exactly. Yeah, but that's a great example of here's one aspect of the sacrament meeting experience that we can just leave to sort of random

selection of hymns or and say like, here's ones that we know will bring in the spirit. How do we tie them into what the messages are going to be? And we've all had experiences where we walk down. You feel like, wow, that all connected. Everything was connected. And that was awesome. And then other times, like, I have never heard that him before. And nobody else did and it sounded horrible. I got to have that list whoever that is. We got to track him down and get the list anyways. I'm just kidding. The list of no, I love that you just saying this out loud and you actually have a list of like passed out to everybody and I guess every word has a list and maybe it's too long but just own it and say we got a list and there's all we're doing. This is sort of where the tension in this discussion is that we have these models. We have these experiences and like you said, we're not saying get rid of the old ones and just do new ones and that's the secret to everything. But sometimes there's this pressure on maybe a bishopric to make these experience models work for everybody in the ward. And I often joke and weep at the same time when I hear I can just feel the stake presidency sitting on the stand of the Saturday evening session of state conference and judging their level of leadership by how many people they can get in the views of Saturday night session. We're here. And so we sometimes have these measuring sticks of sometimes lead to guilt trips of like everybody needs to be.

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It's got to be a really important Saturday night evening session. You've got to be there. There's blessings in heaven if you're there, right? Right. Or just some of our long traditional ones of weekly church attendance and I think we've all interacted with people who are just like, I just connect with Jesus better when I go up to the mountains on Sunday and ponder and meditate or whatever and there's nothing you can do bishop to spice up sacra meeting to make it more enjoyable for me. And you're like, but the renewing ordinance of the sacrament. And we want to sort of shake them like nobody just got to do it. What do we handle that when maybe the data shows like, you know the second hour of Sunday school just isn't working for me. And I'm just going to go home and no offense to anybody, but that's what I'm doing. And it's my job to ask you impossible questions. This is your impossible question. No, I just think, again, we have multiple, you know, the core, that person still has the need to be saved. So we can say, okay, and we got to get them into sacrament meeting. So we can save them, right? So they can have the saving ordinances. But that need to be saved, right? It is also connected to needs to be connected to the body of Christ and need to feel like they are a children of a child of heavenly parents. And so you think about like, I may not be able to meet all of their needs, but what are some needs that I can meet? And you may have somebody who's less active who just needs to feel like they're bishop doesn't judge them, right? And that may be a place to start, right? Like what's an experience that you can provide somebody to just help them feel like they're seen as a child of God and then that's enough. They aren't suddenly better, a better person because they showed up to Saturday evening. Stay conference or even church, right? Like just that they

are that they are loved. And I've seen church leaders do, I think really great things to just help give people space and opportunity to have experiences where they're like, oh, I'm a valued member of this community, regardless of whether I show up on Sunday or not. Of course, we want them to, right? Like I had a bishop that I served with, who instituted what he called 59 minute service projects, which he had seen in another ward where it's like every Saturday morning from when the weather is good from April to November, we'll have a 59 minute service project in the neighborhood. And it's 59 minutes because everybody is concerned about the service project that goes on for four hours and this is guaranteed to be guaranteed to be 59 minutes. You drop your rakes and everybody walks away, right? Symbolically, of course. But this was really an effort to then reach out to people in the neighborhood who, whether they are attending non just say, hey, this is an opportunity to sort of come together. And I thought that was a great example of we have a need to just connect his neighbors and we know that service brings the spirit and can we just get people to come out. And then made some really intentional design decisions and say, okay, we know a pain point is like service projects that go on forever. This will be a tight focus. We will name it explicitly 59 minute service projects and then it just creates a space for people to sort of come together. And so I think that's an example of something that connected people and maybe for some people was a starting point and be like, oh yeah, this makes me feel more comfortable to be part of a official congregation. Death selling off of that as far as creating an activity. We're going to do award activity. Are there even in that experience? Are there any hard and fast rules like have a clear expectation of time or anything like that? So I like to think about experiences occurring all experiences have three phases. You have an anticipation phase, a participation phase and a reflection phase. For any experience. And those phases may be longer or shorter, depending on the experience. So before you go to church, right, there's that anticipation phase that's going to be different depending on whether you have to teach a lesson or you woke up early or it's fascinating or whatever, right? And people are anticipating the experience when they come and participate and then to some degree or another, depending on the experience they're going to reflect on what happened. And so I think first of all, just recognizing it's not just the ward activity that you're planning, you're planning what leads up to it and then what you want people to do with those memories and stories from that experience afterwards. So I think about it in terms of holistic experience design, like are we considering all of the, I'll call them touch points that people are going to go through that are connected with this experience, right? And you often see that in youth conferences or tracks where they have these firesides that build up to it or come meet your mon pa or whatever right and so that's like an example of an anticipation.

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Yes. Exactly. Exactly. So if you think about just for reward activity, okay, people's attention is a limited resource, right? Yeah. So you think about experience design is attention designed to a

certain degree. So good experiences ask for people's attention at the right points, right? And then respectfully, minimize the amount of tension attention needed at different points. So just from a, you know, thinking about that anticipation phase at a minimum, you want to make it really clear logistically what's happening, right? I think parents, we've all had this experience with youth activities where it's like, wait, what's happening tonight? June, do you know what you're doing tonight? Like, I haven't gotten a thing, and then I'm like, oh, I got an email over here, right? So suddenly there's like all of this hubbub about what's going on. That sort of saps that attention, right? So I think when information about, let's say a word activity is really clear. It's way out in advance. I've got it on my calendar. I know what's happening. I know where it is. I know why we're having just all of that information is really, really helpful. Additionally, if we can get people to anticipate it emotionally in positive ways as well, that's helpful, right? So whether that's people are excited or curious or whatever it is, just thinking about how can we help people anticipate this in a positive way. One in an easy way, but to in a positive way, right? And sometimes that's really easy to do, for example, youth trek. We're going to go to this place. You're going to dress up like this and we're going to have good food. But what about the more mundane or routine of a sacrament meeting? Again, impossible questions. But how would you maybe take a sacrament and create anticipation? Well, you know, I think there's a lot of different ways to do that. I mean, we know what's going to happen at accurate meeting to a certain degree, right? We sort of know the steps that are going to happen. But I've seen where wards will have, you know, you might have an annual theme or a monthly theme where you're like, oh, like this month, I know all of the talks are going to be on this topic, or maybe that there's, I mean, we also are hardwired to pay attention when things are novel. And so within the bounds that we can, thinking about ways to increase the novelty, right? I mean, I had a mission president who told me, no, this was F Burton Howard was in the area authority presidency when I was on my mission. I'm hoping I'm a I'm quoting him correctly. But I remember him saying that he had an interaction with president packer and asked him, I think this was when he was a new general authority saying, you know, president packer, if you could go back and be a bishop now, what would you do differently? And president packer said, but he would say, I would have a list of all the people that I would never ask to pray or speak in church, and it would be the bishopric, elders corn presidency, relief society presidency, like anybody who is in any leadership position. I wanted to ask to speak. And I would just have people who are on the fringes and who aren't in the limelight and those are the ones that I want speaking in Zachary meeting and saying prayers, right? Because if we go every time and it's like, well, it's president so and so again, so I think what are ways it's like to just increase that novelty, right? It's not that you're even sending out an announcement beforehand, but you've created a culture and a culture of this experience that I'm not quite sure what the bishop was going to do this week. Yeah. Yeah, I want to go and see how he's going to do. It's going to be speaking this week. I've seen wards. And this can be different every word, right? There are awards where you go because you want to go, but also because you know like the word choir is amazing, right? And they're continually like at our state conference this week. What was the song? I can't remember what the song was. But they had like two people playing trumpets. And it was beautiful, right? It was at first I thought it was like, you know, because some of the organs can do fancy things. I don't play an organ, but I'm like, is that like special keys? But then I looked and there's like two people, but they probably weren't, they were probably I'm probably using the incorrect term for whatever they were. But it was just

such a cool island that never seen that in church before, right? And so I think like novelty is of course one, but then developing like patterns or theme or just things that make it unique and different. Or we take like award counsel, we know what's going to happen in award council and sometimes speaking personally, sometimes I would have anxiety before word counsel because I'm like, are we going to get through the agenda? Are my action items even on the agenda? Is this just going to turn into a long conversation about some sort of topic that isn't going to lead to action items, right? I've also been toward counsels where we talk about people and at the end of the meeting, we have action items of things to actually go and do, right? So I swing between wasted time, anxiety, and feeling empowered to go administer.

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And when I've been on board councils where I know, this is going to be running away where I'm going to leave, like with things to do. And it's going to be exciting and revelatory. That's awesome. I anticipate those beatings. And there's others where it's like, oh man, we've been there. And what I'm learning from this is to create that and anticipation really is just being overly intentional with asking a question. What do we want people walking out of here saying? What do we want to accomplish? What do you want them to feel? Whatever and being super intentional about that meeting and then that anticipation organically. And then once that participation, you're just intentional, right? Like I've been in meetings where we're supposed to have a spiritual thought, I guess. So we have one, and it's like 20 minutes long, and I'm like, we haven't even started the meeting, and it's like a half an hour has gone. This is an hour meeting, right? And I'm just like, oh my goodness. Yeah, so it's paying attention to like, okay, we want to have we want to have a spiritual thought to bring in the spirit. Let's talk to the person beforehand and say, this needs to be two minutes long, right? And that elbow you. Exactly. So again, I talked about this idea that everything speaks in an experience. You've just got to go through and say, what do we want each thing to say? And you may not be able to get overwhelmed with the minutiae. But just a little just a little sprinkling of intentionality and courage to maybe not do things that you can't figure out why you're still doing them or to do things that you haven't tried before because you think it will nudge people towards being a little bit more intentional. Yeah, yeah. Another component to this thing see that I remember being in that bishopric word. We got to be in the sacrament meeting in 5 minutes. We got speakers, right? And so there's this feeling of like, okay, listen to this cute podcast and that's saying these things about being intentional. I can barely like I'm just so busy with the administration and things. And so that may be you may say, well, maybe we need a group of people who are helping us be intentional. We're delegating this to rather than I would say good experience design or even great experience design is 90% creating really smooth running ordinary experiences. Just things that are like, okay, this is like, because we don't want to be transformed every moment of our lives. We don't need everything to be meaningful and transformative. We'd be like worn out. Very quickly, right? So it's thinking

about how does so that I as a bishopric member, we've got processes in place where I know I can sit down 5 minutes, ten minutes before the meeting starts and just be present because I'm not worried about somebody going to speak or who has lessons or all of those things. So I think processes and patterns allow brain space for revelation to happen, right? And so a lot of it is, and the processes and patterns aren't exciting, always, right? They're not like, oh, this is a new program, but can you create processes and patterns so that you just have brain space to be in the moment and receive revelation and know like, oh, this kid over there, this is what they really need, and then you can think about what do we do next week to provide them experiences to be meaningful. So I think ordinary experience design is super important. Yeah. And that makes me think of some interviews I've done with leaders. I think one bishop in particular, he went, he minimized an extreme level like and we're not going to do any word activities, but we're going to have the most exceptional sacrament meetings. Say goodbye to the chili cook up. Not having for a while. Because we're going to refocus and just really hyper focus on sacrament meeting. And that will build anticipation. And then once you get that sort of going, then you can say, and each ward and each leader and presidency, they're going to have their own styles, right? And their own things that they're going to be inspired to do. But I love the idea of whatever we're going to do. Let's do it well. And we'd rather do a few things well than a bunch of things poorly. Nibali had a quote about overzealous members that were more, wow, what was the quote? Something about members are willing to get up at 6 a.m. for a bad meeting, but it was great Hugh nibbly. I'm slaughtering it. But this idea of just being busy and doing a lot of stuff isn't always the best approach. Right. And so anticipation was the first phase and then what was the middle participation? So anything else as far as participation when creating an activity or an experience? I think just some of the things that we've talked about already, what is the need that we're trying to meet for this experience? And if you can articulate that, then you need to think really hard whether or not you should be doing that thing.

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What is the actual need, right? Because it feels good to be busy in a church calling, right? Maybe. But to feel like I'm doing something. I'm contributing. I'm contributing, right? But it's like, well, what is the purpose of this? And then like we talked about before, like, what do we want people to say at the end of this? And then ask them, is that what did you think about the meeting and what did you think about this activity? And so I think just those things that everything speaks, what's the need and just say, and it could be as simple as taking post a notes, putting them up on a board to represent the different parts of whatever it is. Ward activity, a meeting, and just being able to visually see almost like in a storyboard type of way, like these are the different things that are happening. And you can do this in terms of, okay, this is aspirational. This is what we want our saccharum meetings to look like. This is what we want word counsel to look like. And then do sort of a current state version of that of like, what does it

actually look like now? And you could even going back to data collection, talk to different members of the word council and say walk me through your experience at ore council. What are you thinking and feeling at these different points along the way? I think you'd get a lot of interesting information. If you just did that like primary president, tell me about your war council experience. Elders corpsman president, tell me about your experience and to see to see where the peaks and pits are of an experience. Yeah. And then the last one that it was reflection reflection. And I think generally speaking, and these are human nature problems, it's not just our church community. I mean, you'll see this everywhere, but generally speaking, I think we somewhat hit the target of anticipation. We somehow hit the target of participation, but reflection often is completely missed because totally. Energy's drained. We're off track. I really want to see these kids again. But I got to go home. I sent the same number home that came success. Mission accomplished. And we're done. Or even a Sunday school class where it's like, oh, time's up, named Jesus Christ, amen, and all right, what's the next list? I'm going to start preparing that. But this reflection component can be some of the most powerful as far as putting in the bed and actually seeing progress. So talk to us. Okay, so I'll try not to go too off on this because I totally agree with you on this. And I think there's a lot of things to be able to talk about here. First you can think about it is sort of an agricultural parable or example. You think about anticipation is when you're preparing the ground and you're getting rid of the weeds and plowing, participation is when you start planting seeds and watering those things, hopefully start beginning to grow. And then the reflection phase is when you actually harvest the thing you're trying to grow, right? But so often, we just leave, right? We're like, oh, great. We did this whole thing, and we did, you know, I taught the youth or are we ran this meeting, or we did trek? Good things happened, and then we just leave. And the reason why that is so dangerous is if you think about an experience. So I'm going to bounce around here a couple and try to keep a coherent line of thought. But so have you ever heard of the Joseph Campbell's hero's journey? Okay, so men of the thousand faces. Yeah, exactly. So basically, this is a structure that many stories follow. Star Wars is a perfect example. Yes. Or Lehi's family leaving Jerusalem, right? So we have this story of somebody leaving their ordinary world going into an extraordinary world that's different, having trials and challenges and learning things. And then going back home new and changed. And so the change while it may start during that journey, whether or not it sticks happens once they go back home, right? So they may be changed momentarily as the hero on their journey. But if it doesn't stick, then it's like, well, that was a cool experience. So if you think about this in terms of an experienced design, it's the same process, right? When we ask somebody to come toward counsel, we're asking them to lead their ordinary world, transition into this different world that we've created and then to go back home again. And it's hard, it can be hard to transition in and out of experiences, right? I think missions are a great example, right? Missionaries come home and they've changed, but maybe where they're coming back to hasn't changed and figuring out like, how do I bring everything that I experienced on my mission and bring that back home? For a lot of missionaries, that's a real struggle, right? Because the reflection phase is complicated, right? We're not just in this space where we can just focus on the experience that we're having. We have these memories and stories that we bring home with us, but how sticky those are it depends, right? And so if you can think about ways to help people transition back and still take their memories and stories with them, I think one you owe it to

people if you provide them an experience to think about how you help them curate their memories from the experience.

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And two, you're going to have a much greater impact of whatever that experience is. Because we so easily just get caught up in our everyday lives. If it doesn't take a lot, I mean, we know from research that we've done that people who reflect more on experiences and this is not really groundbreaking, but it is to actually have data on it that the impact of that experience lasts longer. And some people just do this naturally. Some people are naturally good storytellers, right? And they just, they're just, they're good storytellers, they're good journalists. They're able to articulate what they've learned from experiences to themselves and others. And they have people who will listen to them, right? But what about people who aren't? One way to think about the reflection phase is how do we help people be good storytellers. How do we help them articulate what they've experienced, and then how do we give them opportunities to tell that story to others? So teaching you Sunday school, it could be easy as here's a card with our two points that we talked about. I want you to go tell this to your parents. And I'm going to call you tonight, right? And those extra steps, I think just can move something to be from being routine to being something that becomes really sticky. So case in point, I have a 43 year old lifelong member of the church. I've been in lots of Sunday school lessons. And I had a leader, brother Spencer, when I was in the teacher when I was a teacher in teachers quorum, who did some very simple things that just, I still remember today, right? So he gave us all marbles, just marbles, and told us that and we had this lesson about God's laws and scientific laws and how they're all connected. And he said, you know, as long as you drop this marble, and it drops like gravity's in effect, which means God's laws are also in effect. Just a simple thing. So great. He gave us this, which is memorabilia, which can help us remember things, right? It's like, oh, this marble is like this lesson that brother Spencer taught us about. But then he said, keep that with you and I'll follow up on with you. And if you have the marble in your pocket, like there'll be a reward there. So I'm sitting in seminary and the seminary secretary like sticks her head through the door and says, hey, is Matt durden in this class? And I'm like, yeah. And she's like, do you have your marble in your pocket? And I'm like, yeah, and she's like, okay. And when I got home that night, there was a pizza at my house. Now, you don't have to buy everybody pizza. But I was just amazed at like the follow through, and he did a variety of things like this. And the fact that you can tell the story of 43 years old. Oh, and I kept that. I remember when I lost that marble, I think as an undergraduate student. I was pretty upset because I kept it in my pocket for like years. And it was always this memory of the importance of God's laws, right? And he just gave me this thing that was a reflection piece of memorabilia and followed up with me in a couple of ways and I think about brother Spencer all the time. I'll never forget the being in seminary and being like, yes, I'm feeling super awkward that I'm like, what are they talking

about? So how do you? I mean, if you're going to put a bunch of effort into an amazing whatever, right? Like what are ways that you provide members opportunities to reflect on it and help them tell those stories. So it's almost a question that you're asking yourself as a teacher that you're preparing. How am I going to help these individuals take this principles outside of this classroom? Yeah. And that may look like that story you just told or it can be literal reflecting where maybe the last 5 minutes you're saying what's one phrase that comes to mind about what you learned today or a word or maybe journal for three minutes about sure. Yeah, like think about based upon what we've talked about like what's one thing different that you can do this week. And then actually follow up on that. Do something. So it takes a little bit of extra work, but you figure if you put in all of this time to prepare and experience, can you put in like 5% more to follow up on it and reflect on it. And think about ways that you can do that. I just think we all have so many experiences, but it's often the ones that there's just something about it that we just returned to and think about and that we tell stories about. And so people will talk about the fact like how do you design an experience to be a good story? And that can also be sort of a helpful way to think about it.

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Awesome. Anything else with these three phases of a experience that I think it's just helpful to be able to step back and say, okay, it's not just when people walk through the door. It's what's more important is before they come and then what they do afterwards and connecting all of those things together. Yeah, that's really helpful. So before we wrap up, I want to ask about this concept and it's sort of been perpetuated in our religious culture and I'm sure it's elsewhere. But this feeling of being pinpoint general conference talk stories that go to this where it's like the onus is on the participant of you didn't enjoy Sacramento meeting well maybe you should come with a better attitude and more prayerful heart and then you will enjoy it. Sometimes we put the onus on the participant too much, but is that okay? What are your thoughts on that? Well, we talked about this already, all experiences are co created. So it is this, it's not just one person having experience or one person just saying, here's your experience and handing it over to them. So we have to recognize the fact that if I'm at church on my phone, I'm not having a church experience, I'm having my own designed wordle experience or whatever it is, right? So yeah, people need to be engaged, but going back to this idea of anticipation participation reflection like, what can I do to help make it easier for people to engage in the way that I want them to, right? So that's might be in terms of if we're talking about a meeting that we've given really great prompts to speakers that are coherent and given them guidelines in terms of how long we want them to talk for and the things that we want them to address and et cetera, et cetera, we are making sure that the HVAC system works. So it's not too hot or too cold in the building. We are making sure that people who don't know as many people in the ward have individuals who are like looking out for them to sit by them, right? You think of all of the host of

reasons why people might get distracted in a meeting. And what can we do to make it easier for people to engage? Because if someone's distracted, just telling them to pay attention, yeah, maybe they'll pay attention, but in a disgruntled type of way. Like how do you just remove distractions and make it easier for people to focus on what's actually happening. And that could be like getting your AV system fixed so people can actually hear people at the podium. Or it may be a host of different things. So that people can just pay attention, right? And then if it's a good experience, you know, if you've thought intentionally about the different steps, you increase that likelihood that somebody is going to voluntarily pay attention, right? I mean, I think president Kimball was right, right? We can like, it's up to us. Ultimately, what we gain, but man, we live in an increasingly distracting world. And so I think just recognizing the fact that, yeah, it's hard to pay attention. So how do we, I mean, we were a 90 minute ward for a long time, or 90 minutes in our stake for a long time before we switched to two hours. And the first time that I went back to an hour long Sunday school, I was like, oh my goodness, this is a long meeting. Now we have some really great Sunday school teachers in our ward, but I can't imagine sitting through an hour long Sunday school lesson of just the teacher talking, right? So I'm so grateful that we've got teachers who are asking questions and sometimes we're in little groups and then we're like breaking out again and then their stories and there's things because I thought, man, I think there's a good period of church history where this was just sort of another hour long. Preaching period, right? Yeah. And there wasn't much to do back then, right? Yeah, so it was like we might as well. What else am I going to do, yeah? Yeah. That's really helpful. So as we wrap up, I got maybe one more question for you, but I feel like we have to hold true to these principles. And then I'll build some anticipation for this interview. I will put some things on social media in the news. Yeah, I see you're a marketing guy. And now we've had this we've participated and hopefully it's been a good experience. Any reflection or what reflection could we give to the listening audience to further enhance their experience with this episode? You sort of referenced some of these things already. But I think just if any ideas came to mind, write them down now, right? And try to do something with even it's just like one thing, right? Many of us consume a lot of podcasts and just consume a lot of content. But very little of that content moves us to act. The definition of transformative education is future intentional use of that content, right? So if you don't do something with content, then it was nice, right? It might have been nice in the moment.

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It's a distraction, but I think we've had a transformative learning experience when we actually say, I'm going to go do something. And then that thing that we do makes whatever we're doing better. So if you've had something come to mind, write it down, we're committing you, will you go and act on that idea you had? Awesome. Well, Matt has been awesome. I've learned so much. And we've been super fun chatting with you. Thank you. Yeah, these are fun principles and

science, right? Last question I have for you is just as you reflect on your personal experience as a leader in the church in various capacities, how is being a leader helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ? I think it's helped me be grateful for anybody who serves in the church and also I think over time I've become less critical of myself and other leaders just recognizing the fact that we're all volunteers and Christ heavenly father perfect individual. They could just do this all on their own. So they're not expecting perfection for us. They're expecting messiness that's going to be taken care of by their grace. And I think there's times when I've been in leadership positions where I become stressed with the welfare of people that I'm serving or my own ability to do things. And I feel less and less not that I'm getting lacked today's call, but I don't get it stressed about being perfect, which because we all fail. And so I'll continually tell people that I'm serving with them. I'm like, we're just volunteers, right? That doesn't mean we sort of just mail in an effort, but just have some grace for ourselves and others and recognize that Christ is going to make up the difference. We'll do our best. He is the one who's going to save people our efforts are helpful in terms of our own progression and just learning and growing. But I think to tie it back to this conversation, I see our heavenly parents as the best experience designers ever, right? They knew that we needed to have an experience. They couldn't just tell us stuff. I mean, they told us a lot like we learned stuff in pre mortality, but I said, you need to come have an experience and try things and fail. You've got to save your, so that's taken care of. You're going to be able to progress. But you need to go have experiences and the cool thing is that the experience is the same for everybody, but it's also perfectly customized for each of us. Regardless of where we are, we have a pathway back and I just think it's the most beautifully designed experience, and knowing that, I think as a leader, I can say, I'm just going to do my best and I'm going to try to be innovative. I'm going to be trying to be christlike, but I'm going to try to have grace for myself and others too, because it's going to be okay. If, you know, we don't have the perfect word Christmas party, or whatever. That concludes this episode of the leading saints podcast. We'd love to hear from you about your questions or thoughts or comments. You can either leave a comment on the post related to this episode. LeadingSaints.org or go to LeadingSaints.org/contact and send us your perspective or questions. If there's other episodes or topics you'd like to hear on the leading saints podcast, go to LeadingSaints.org/contact and share with us the information there. And we would love for you to share this with any individual you think this would apply to, especially maybe individuals in your ward council or other leaders that you may know who would really appreciate the perspectives that we discussed. Remember, solve the burden of meetings by visiting LeadingSaints.org/14 and getting 14 days access to the meetings with saints, virtual library. It came as a result of the position of leadership, which was imposed upon us by the God of heaven who brought forth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and when the declaration was made concerning the only true and living church upon the face of the earth. We were immediately put in a position of loneliness. The loneliness of leadership from which we can not shrink nor run away. And to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability