

# Helping New Designers Contribute Earlier

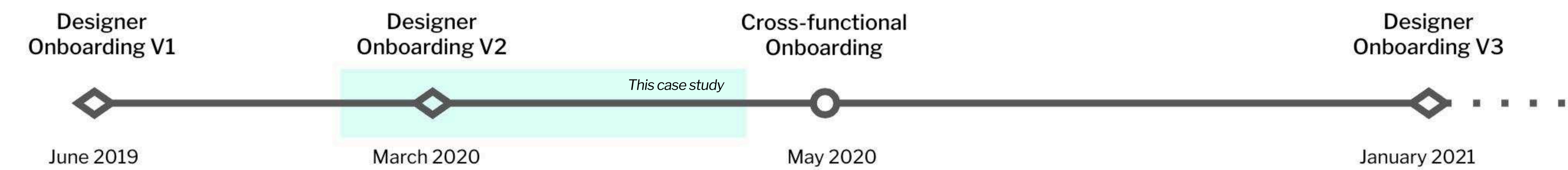
Focus on the multipliers

Measure impact = better outcomes

Automattic, 2020

Role: I led, organized, & produced all programs within this initiative.

# I led our Designer Onboarding program.



## Who was involved?



## What we knew to be true:

- Hiring goal: 30 designers in 2020
- Each team and product division is responsible for their own onboarding.
- We only had the bare essentials in place for onboarding designers.

## Challenges

Often **6+ months** before new designers are able to “ship” or feel proud of something

There is duplication of tasks for each new hire across different teams and Design Directors. This creates inefficiencies and inconsistencies.

Design Directors lack the time, resources, and sometimes knowledge to onboard new designers well.

# **I accepted and leaned into a constraint: The design teams themselves were best equipped to onboard new designers.**

## **Goal**

Decrease time for a Designer to be able to contribute 100%

## **Framing questions**

How Might We support Design Directors in onboarding designers.

How Might We enable designers to be full contributors in 3 months.

# Deliver timely resources and reminders to key players.


I utilized a Slackbot tool, Donut, to schedule and send timely messages in Slack based on a designer's start date.


Monday, Week 3

Work Day 11

to: Team Lead

9:00am

 donut

 [@{New Hire}](#) is starting their first day on their real job after support rotation today! This would be a good time to schedule your regular 1:1s with them and start discussing expectations.

Schedule regular 1:1s.

Complete

Dismiss

Review designer and team/project expectations and answer questions.

Complete

Dismiss

Add to project Slack channels and to any calendar events.

Complete

Dismiss

Assign & communicate first win project.

Complete

Dismiss

Give an intro to p2, team work habits, hangouts, status updates, etc.

Complete

Dismiss

Snooze

▼


Next reminder in 1 day

Thursday, Week 3

Work Day 14

to: New Hire

8:00am

 donut

Earlier this week I sent our [Designer Onboarding Guide](#). There are a few tasks within it that we wanted to confirm you've done. If you have questions about any of these ask in [#designex](#) .

Follow Designomattic P2.

Complete

Dismiss

Set-up all needed design tools.

Complete

Dismiss

Snooze

▼

Next reminder in 1 day



# Provide guidance for growth, based on stage.

I created a 1:1 guide for Design Directors to reference important considerations at each stage of onboarding including suggested questions to ask.

AUTOMATTIC

Design Director Handbook

For those who lead design at Automattic.

Home

How We Lead Design ▾

Role and Expectations

Overseeing Design

Guiding and Mentoring

Owning Projects

Talent Management ▲

Defining Talent Needs

Onboarding New Designers

1:1 Guide for Onboarding New Designers

Offboarding a Designer

Performance Management

Professional Development 🚩

Building Team Culture ▾

Setting Up Team Rituals

Design Critique

Leadership Resources

1:1 Guide for Onboarding New Designers

During a designer’s first 3 months, it’s recommended to hold a 1:1 every week. After that, adjust to a schedule that feels comfortable for both of you. [More on 1:1s at Automattic.](#)

Below is some guidance and ideas of topics to discuss at different points during a designer’s first year. This guidance assumes no major performance issues have popped up. If there are, focus your efforts on addressing those issues first. [More on Performance Management.](#)

Month 1

Weeks 1-2

The first two weeks should be reserved for focusing on support introduction call to welcome them if preferred. If you do, keep them, getting set-up, and their support rotation. During their first expectations about attending any team functions or meetings. exclusively on support, but use your discretion.

Week 3 (first week after support)

There is a lot of essential knowledge sharing this week as well as a first project. You will be talking with and directing them multiple period. However, be sure to also reserve time to connect directly to be able to share with you.

- Try to understand how they prefer to work, and share how you do well. If you want some inspiration, you can [consider these questions.](#)
- Debrief their support rotation with them.

to: Team Lead

8:00am

donut

Suggestions for your next 1:1s with @New Hire

They’re really digging into their core role. Their questions and need for guidance are likely at a high point. Your 1:1s are a great time to address those questions, insecurities, and adjustment pains.

Some questions to ask:

- How is [project] going? What could we do to make it better?
- What are some things blocking you from doing your best work?
- What area of the company would you like to learn more about?
- Are there any roles in the company you’d like to learn more about?
- What challenges have you come across thus far?

[More 1:1 advice and suggestions](#)



## Resources

# Ensure Early “Wins”

We defined the concept of “first win” projects and I coached Design Directors on creating first projects that were scoped small enough to give timely confidence boosts.

## Planning the “First Win” Project

For new employee's one of the best indicators to long term success is the ability for them to contribute quickly and feel they're making an impact right away. It's a great antidote to imposter syndrome. To achieve this consistently requires intentional planning on our part.

We can jumpstart this by defining what we like to call a “First Win” project. It's an approach to intentionally planning the first thing a new designer works on to get them their first win: something tangible they can point to, claim ownership, and feel proud of.

### What makes a good first win project?

- Can be completed in two weeks.
- Represents work they will be doing regularly, just scoped down.
- It's centered around a real deliverable that will go live or impact the business (ideally something is shipped to end users).
- It has clear, well-defined parameters.
- Is generally free of blockers such as technical constraints or organizational/political baggage.

### Common mistakes to avoid:

- Avoid making something up or giving them a project that is different than the type of work they'll typically do.
- Stay away from projects that have political, organizational, or infrastructure issues associated with it that may slow or halt progress. A good way to avoid this is to make sure it's already on your roadmap and has stakeholder buy-in.
- Be careful not to over-engineer the project assignment or create new processes that your whole team doesn't use. Don't create a very specific design brief to give them, unless this is the common practice on your team before any project.
- Avoid assigning future projects or backlogged projects that are contingent on development resources to ship.

### Ideas for creating a good First Win project

- Define what you expect them to work on in their first few months and work backwards from there.
- Consider design maintenance, bugs, or other low-hanging fruit.

Community

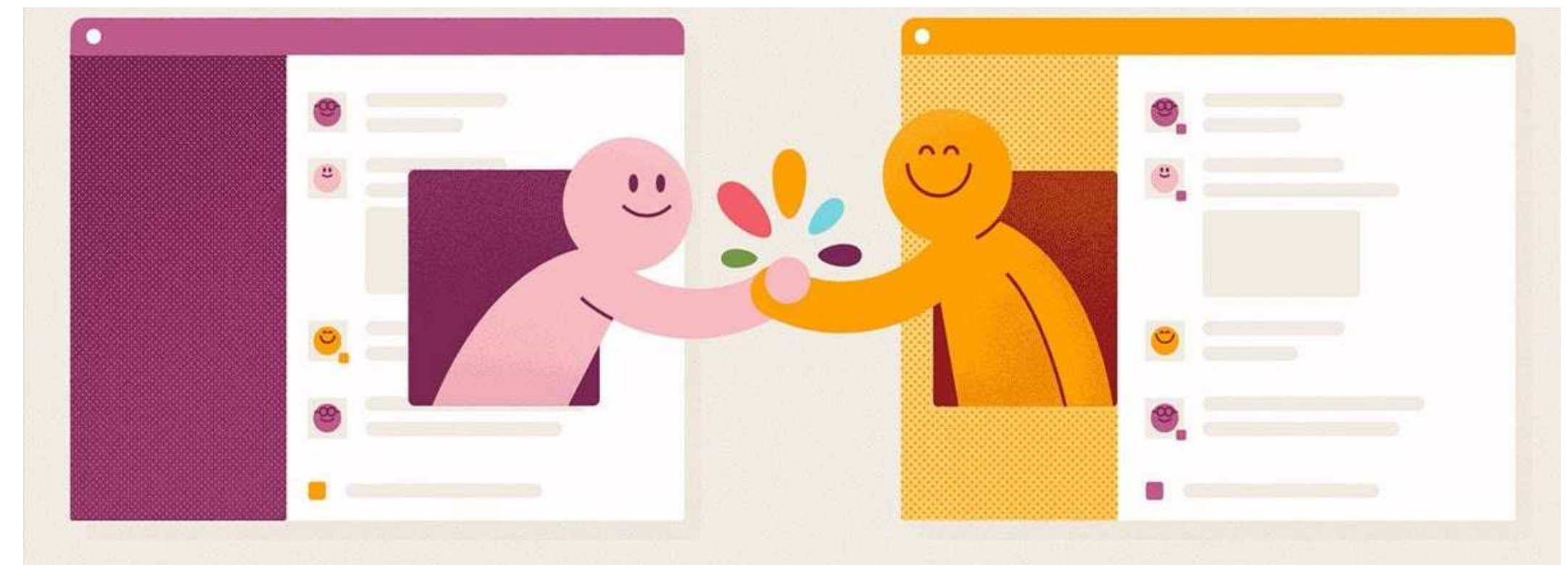
## Creating community & safe space among new designers

### Slack Community

A #new-designers Slack channel allowed new designers to connect with each other.

### New Designer Cohorts

Grouping new designers into cohorts based on start date enabled us to more efficiently onboard while creating community among new designers.



Source: Illustration from Slack.com



# Check-in on progress, understanding, and satisfaction.

DesignOps checked in with the new designer and their Design Director periodically.

## Week 1

Intro chat with new designer

## Week 6

- Designer check-in survey
- Design Director check-in survey
- Live check-in with Designer
- Async check-in with Design Director

## Week 12

- Designer check-in survey
- Design Director check-in survey
- Live check-in with Designer
- Live check-in with Design Director

Governance

Check-in on progress, understanding, and satisfaction.

Start Date	Design Performance			Collaboration Performance			Organizational Understanding		Onboarding Support		
	Design Productivity	Design Quality	Team Collaboration	Org/Dev Collaboration	Communication	Can operate autonomously	Product understanding	Design in a Remote Environment	Do they feel supported by their DD?	Design Onboarding Experience	DD Onboarding Resources
10-Feb-2020	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow
17-Feb-2020	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
30-Mar-2020	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green
27-Apr-2020	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green
11-May-2020	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
1-Jun-2020	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
8-Jun-2020	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green
8-Jun-2020	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
29-Jun-2020	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
17-Aug-2020	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green
14-Sep-2020	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green
21-Sep-2020	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
26-Oct-2020	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
16-Nov-2020	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
28-Dec-2020	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
1-Feb-2021	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
1-Feb-2021	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
1-Mar-2021	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
15-Mar-2021	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
3-May-2021	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
12-Apr-2021	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	N/A
26-Apr-2021	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green
3-May-2021	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green

Red, Yellow, Green status check based on surveys and 1:1 check-ins.

3 Month Check-in

The following questions help to inform what's next for you in your development as an Automattic designer. They also help inform how well our onboarding program provides designers with the essential knowledge and experiences. DesignEx will reach out soon to schedule a check-in call.

During your first 3 months, what went well? \*

During your first 3 months, what could have gone better? \*

How are you feeling so far about: \*

Very Poor

Poor

OK

Good

Very Good

Communicating within A8c

Collaborating with your team

Understanding the product and org structure that surrounds it.

Check-in surveys sent to both the new designer and their Design Director, followed up by 1:1s with each to dig deeper.



# Meaningful Outcomes

- › Time to **shipping** at least one meaningful product improvement reduced to **under 8 weeks**.
- › The check-ins created a perpetual feedback cycle, informing future programs across Designer Experience.
- › 3 synchronous check-ins were not necessary and not sustainable.

“After 3 months in, the best part is that I feel I am bringing value to our projects. Either through feedback, elevating design, coming with a fresh perspective, they are all well received. And I absolutely love that this is communicated to me as well”

Product Designer, WordPress.com Design Team

“Designer on-boarding was great and everyone in the team has been really supportive, friendly and welcoming. It's been really easy to get up to speed and start working on some really exciting projects.”

Product Designer, WooCommerce Design Team