INTRODUCTION

WHY THE HEART OF UX?

In the center of the Pacific ocean, the Hawaiian islands rise impressively from the surrounding vast blue waters. In the center of this archipelago chain sits Molokai, the island known to native Hawaiians as the Island of Powerful Prayers. It is one of the most lush, abundantly beautiful places on earth, surrounded by waterfalls and high sea cliffs. The prayers and dreams we've experienced there both attending and leading multiple retreats have focused our efforts and have helped our deepest work to surface. It has helped us to remember that connection is at the core of everything.

It is there, in the center of the center, that this story begins. You see, the most powerful movements start from the center, and in the case of User Experience research, this is also true. At the very center of product development and design lies the practice of UX research. Research informs design and product teams about people's behaviors, desires, fears and needs. It is the beating pulse of effective design, and is at the heart of all successful tech companies. Right at the center of UX research is what we call The Heart of UX—the ability to connect.

Why do we assert that connection is so central? Every tool, platform, piece of software or hardware started in someone's mind as an idea and then took form as a design. This design's purpose is to make a connection. Whatever the purpose of the connection, to effect a purchase, persuade, inform, or entertain, it's a connection at its core, and in this arc of fulfillment between the idea and our usage, the design is given life, if only for a moment.

This is the basic relationship between the user and the experience that we colloquially condense as the User Experience, and like all relationships, it takes work to get it right. So how do we make connections that are both lasting and meaningful? The most direct path is through the skillful practice of UX research. It provides foundational, grounded evidence from which to design and develop experiences. Lacking this foundation, design can only be performed using best guesses and personal perspectives, rolling the dice and hoping things will work out — but we all know that great designs are rarely the result of chance.

There was a time not long ago when stating this assertion was met with substantial resistance. It felt like we were constantly trying to convince others of our legitimacy. With very little in the way of patterns to follow, over the last 20 years we as researchers have dreamed and grown a substantive craft of what we know of as UX research. Working together, from a place where almost no one knew what usability even was, now we're here: researchers from all over the world share a common confidence, culture and lexicon around techniques, principles and terminology.

Correspondingly, we've earned the respect of those within the walls of tech giants, many of whom rely on our empirically driven insights and as a result, boast robust teams of talented researchers.

While our hard work has earned us a well-deserved seat at the table, we wrote this book because the technology that is ever more a part of our lives is currently evolving in new directions we've only imagined possible. As a result, it's time for us as UX researchers to take the next step in our co-evolution. It's time we join together, level up and forge a new path forward.

The Connected Researcher

We call this new path the way of the Connected Researcher. Who is a Connected Researcher? You may work with some of them already. They're people who are able to interview their research participants in a way that most people can't. They can sense when a person is experiencing a subtle frustration that belies their consciously-spoken words. They can probe deeper into a person's outer narrative, finding the bits of their authentic personal truths that otherwise would lie undiscovered. They can sit with a person who may be anxious about being interviewed on camera and in front of a two-way mirror, and help calm them — intentionally co-regulating them with their own serene nervous system.

When you watch a Connected Researcher work, it's captivating. It's like watching a master artist at their craft, divining each next stroke of conversation from the formless field of possibility. The participants who they work with say things they would normally hold back. Often the restraint comes from a fear of judgment or hurting someone's feelings with what they really think.

These researchers also take their unique skill sets outside the lab. The Connected Researcher is the most calming presence in the room. They know how to make contact with the leader of the development team and help her feel heard. They help the overclocked product manager remember to breathe in the midst of high

stakes and a fast pace. All of these skills improve teamwork, innovation, and ultimately result in a much better product.

They also have a community. Researchers work together, united under a common goal of ensuring that people outside of the organization have a seat at the table in the design of the technology that is being co-created with and around them.

Most importantly, the Connected Researcher is in connection with themselves, linked to their own bodies, their own minds, and their own hearts. This connection to self is what really gives them what appear to be superpowers. They know when someone is saying something they don't actually feel comfortable saying because they can feel it, based upon their own experience. They wield empathic abilities that come with great responsibility, and they do so with a sense of ethics and genuine care for the customer, their team and the broader community.

Although it may look like magic or some innate, relational gift, this level of mastery is completely attainable. After learning the skills and techniques presented in this book, and much practice, you will gain the knowledge and practical skill set to be a Connected Researcher.

Origins

The Heart of UX is a framework that will help you achieve greater connections in ways you may have never experienced before, as a researcher and in your life. It is based heavily on our many years of direct experience as UX researchers in industry. It is also greatly informed by our ongoing studies and practices in interrelated teachings, some rooted in the disciplines of emerging neuroscience, others more empirical or spiritual. Some of the teachings you will see in this book (among others) are adapted from or influenced by:

- Hakomi Mindfulness-Centered Somatic Psychology
- A General Theory of Love
- Appreciative Inquiry
- HeartMath
- The works of Dan Siegel
- Flow States
- Zen Buddhism & Meditation

As researchers, we are not therapists. But we are tasked with being with people, lots of people, day in and day out. It is our job to hear people's stories and actively feel their pain and understand their perspectives. Some of the people we speak with

may be struggling or going through difficult life events. We understand that empathy is much more than walking in the other person's shoes. Our hearts and lives are affected by the stories we hear, and the data we bring back to the product team. We know it is our job to convey these stories, not just about how they couldn't find a product on a website, but their underlying motivations, needs, and unmet needs. To that end, we've also included resources in this book to provide the support and self-care you may find helpful on this journey of self-discovery.

We hope that you will use these skills as a means of making technology more human-centric and more heart-centric for all of us.

Let's begin.

The Heart of UX second edition is currently in production with Kendall Hunt Publishing and will be available for purchase from all major outlets in the Fall of 2020.

If you would like to purchase the first edition, please visit the products page on the [Heart of UX website](#) and we will gladly mail you a copy.