

Hello, and welcome. I am your host, Neil Ward, and I'm grateful that you are taking time out of your day to learn more about design educators' paths to tenure. I truly appreciate it.

On this episode of Tell It To Neil, we're chatting with Assistant Professor of Graphic Design, Denise Anderson, from Kean University in Union, New Jersey. Let's listen in.

Neil: Hi Denise, how are you?

Denise: I'm well, how are you, Neil?

Neil: Doing well. Thank you for joining us on Tell It To Neil.

Denise: Thank you so much, thanks for having me.

Neil: Absolutely. So, let's get started. How did you get into Design.

Denise: Oh, this was sort of...this was a crooked road to Design.

Neil: I love it!

Denise: So, when I went to College, I really didn't know what I wanted to do, so I was really good at Sport, so I came in as a Phys Ed Major and very soon when I got to College I realized that I didn't want to wear sweat pants every day, so I said...I'm going to become an Undeclared Major. So, what I started to do, then I became a Fine Arts Major because I really enjoyed Art. I didn't even know about Design at the time, but I really enjoyed creating things, so I, you know, I went and applied for a Fine Art Major, was accepted, and then I did two years of Fine Art and I loved it. And then another curve came and I decided to leave College for a semester and open up a Baskin-Robbins Ice Cream store.

Neil: That's a little bit of a zag!

Denise: It's a little bit of a zag but not really, and I see that there's a constant theme that has run through my entire professional life.

Neil: OK.

Denise: I had worked at a Baskin-Robbins Ice Cream store when I was in High School and now I'm in College and I was decorating the ice cream cakes, and so that was sort of a very creative outlet. The gentleman I worked for, Larry Lawrenson, worked for one of the Baskin-Robbins, and he taught me how to decorate cakes and I just had such a great experience doing that and Super-Scooper, I was making ice cream and sundaes and shakes and I just really enjoyed the business part of it because then he made me his Assistant Manager of the store and so I just...I really, really enjoyed it. Little did I know that this sort of theme would be emerging of design of business throughout my life. So, I'm in College and I just completed my second semester...second year and now I'm in my third semester and over the summer, Larry said, Dee, he said, you should open up your own Baskin-Robbins and I said, I'm twenty years old at the time, didn't have a checking account, didn't have a credit card and I was like, you know what Larry? I run your store; I could run my own store. So the short of it is I applied, there was a Baskin-Robbins, I live in Jersey City, I lived in Jersey City at the time: Baskin-Robbins was opening and they were looking for a buyer and it's a franchise and so I applied and flew up to Boston for a day and applied and I got it. I got the Baskin-Robbins. They said sure: certainly. And Baskin-Robbins put up half the amount of money to be able to do the venture and I had to come up with the other half. So the fun part about it, again this theme of business and design is that, I borrowed five thousand dollars from, like, ten people. One of them was a Priest; one of them was a refrigerator repair person that was trying to hide money through a divorce...

Neil: Goodness!

Denise: That was my sister and brother-in-law just got married and they had some money so they lent me some money and: ten people; ten people and my parents, who are my heroes of all time, they put their house up for the last fifteen thousand dollars; they put their house up as collateral for a loan that I took out. So, I basically took out a hundred per cent to buy the business but once the doors opened, I started making ice cream cakes and I started doing very well, so for me, that whole creative part of me started to be fulfilled and I was doing business and I loved it. So, while I was in Baskin-Robbins I took just a year off, I think it was a complete year off and I started going back to School part-time and when I went back to School part-time, I met someone in the Design Building, because Design and Fine Arts were together: two people. Two instrumental people that to this day have become...are my amazing

mentors of my life. Rose Gonnella and Robin Landa. And I met them and they just came to my Undergrad was at Kean University and they were so enthusiastic and excited about Design that I just sort of, all right, now I'm a Design Major; I'd like to be Design Major, so I applied to the Program and was accepted and I had another, I think it was four years, before I graduated going part-time in order to finish my Under-Grad degree. And the funny part of it is, three and a half years into Baskin-Robbins, I wound up selling the business for a couple of reasons. I tried to expand and I couldn't and I think that there was just another calling in life that I wanted, so I sold the business, came back, I had a year and a summer and I was totally immersed in the world of Design and I loved it, and that would become the next road that I would travel in my professional career.

(05:37)

Neil: So, where did you go to your, for your Undergrad?

Denise: So, I attended Kean College at the time, it wasn't a University; I graduated in the first Bachelor of Fine Art Program in Visual Communications and again, that's where I said I met Robin Landa and Rose Gonnella and just sort of became a lover of Design. I just knew that that was my calling at that point; it was just a place that I could be creative. Fine Art was great but for me, there wasn't...it's hard to make a living in Fine Arts and I know, all the Fine Artists out there are like, oh, no way, this is my calling, I could do that. But for me, because I was so much linear in my thinking of Business with Design that for me, this was the perfect outlet, to be able to do this.

Neil: So, at what point did you get the calling to be a Design Educator?

Denise: So, that was not for a while. So, now I graduate...I graduated with a BFA in Design and I went out into the professional world for over twenty years. So, my, again, another interesting path is that I've spent twenty years doing the things that now I teach my students how to do and I loved professional practice. I worked for a couple of small studios. One really excellent mentor I had along the way was David Brier. He's now out in the mid-west doing design and branding; DBD International. He was an amazing mentor. He really taught me what it was like to be an Art Director and so I did that for...maybe about twelve plus years. And then I went to Grad School and I went to, I did the program at Pratt Institute in New York City, in Manhattan location for Design Management. So again, I was at the point in my career, it was at that time 2001 and 9/11 happened and I was doing a lot of work at that point, I was

in my own business, my own design company, and at that point I was doing a lot of work for financial services firms and you know, anyone that was around doing design at that time knew how hard the industry got hit and my client projects...my projects were hit, I really wasn't doing a lot of...I was doing a little bit of work. I had at that time four people working for me. I had to let three of them go. It was a really difficult, challenging time. And I sort of fell: the person I was married to was going to Grad School and I sort of fell into...I found this Design Management Program in Manhattan and I was like, this is great. I get to do the Strategy of Business and Design and I figured it was a...I needed at that time to be able to take a break and go and learn something new after being employed for so long and working for people and I decided this was a good time, I'm going to capitalize on this period of the lull in the industry and the lull in my business and I went back to School and the Program was great because it was a...there was a couple of full weeks in the program within the two years but mainly it was every other weekend for two years and so that really worked with my work schedule and that was a really positive...and another turning point in my professional life after I graduated from Pratt. So, while I was, so again, after I graduated in 2004 so business started to pick up again in 2003, 2004 and I...I just didn't...for some reason, I felt like I needed a little bit more so again, another instrumental person in my professional life, Caroline O'Connell, was the Marketing Manager for a large pharmaceutical firm...a pharmaceutical...a financial services firm: Pershing. Pershing was...is a clearing house for a lot of the financial services firms on Wall Street, and she was a department of one. It was one copy-writer and Caroline. And Caroline said: Denise...at that point, the department's a little bit bigger...she said, I'd like you to come and manage, be a Director of the Design Department in the Fulfillment area. And there was about eleven people and prior to that, Pershing was my largest client, and so the people that I was working for now I became their boss and so I went in...

(10:43)

Neil: Oh!

Denise: Yeah, again, interesting turn. Now not only am I the boss of these people; I'm now working in a large corporation as a Director which was a very senior position in the organization.

Neil: That's quite a shift.

Denise: That was quite a shift and I have to tell you, it was a wonderful opportunity and a wonderful job but while I was there, I really didn't get to do the things that I loved to do the most, which was really run projects and the whole big strategy and the branding because there were very qualified people to do that and so I felt a little bit lost during those years and I stayed at Pershing for a year and a half and then I left the corporate environment and at that time, I just went back to my own business for a number of years and actually changed my focus. Instead of doing financial services firms, I was now working with entrepreneurs and I was doing some, just sort of some interesting projects with a lot of people that had some really good ideas.

Neil: Did those projects kind of feed you a little bit more than the work you were doing in the larger corporation?

Denise: Well they did because I was a little bit more hands-on with the strategy and the thinking and the creating, which I really missed while I was in corporate because even though for many years, I was owner of my own design firm, that I always...I was always part of the creative process in some respects. I was working with clients which I loved; I was working with my design team, which I loved, so I was part of the strategy and even though I wasn't implementing a lot of the things, I was still art directing and I was very much a part of that process and I really enjoyed that. And I enjoyed the business aspect of it too but I really missed the creative process, working in a corporate so I just knew at that point that I had to make a change and re-direct my professional life. But one interesting thing was going on all prior to this that I've failed to mention, is for fifteen years, maybe like twelve years prior to that, I was always adjuncting a class, so Kean University asked me to return as an Adjunct Professor and I taught a number of classes from fundamental courses to type courses; portfolio, the final Graphic Design portfolio course. I started teaching in the last couple of years I was an Adjunct and so when I went back into professional practice in my own business, I had to take a couple of years off because...didn't have to, but I wanted to...my partner and I had a son, Dylan, which I adore. Best design project ever! He was born and I sort of took, I started doing...I was more like in a freelancing capacity at that point. And when he was five, an opportunity came in at Kean University to teach full-time and I really at first was not interested at all. Rose and Robin had approached me and said, we have a full-time position and it was the first full-time position Kean had had in the Design Department in, I believe, like twenty and twenty-five years.

Neil: Wow!

Denise: And it was a tenure track position and there were a couple of them that I think they had two or three reqs And so, my partner at the time, she had urged me, she's like: Denise, you've got to try this. This is the most fulfilling part of your professional life and you should try it, you should do it. And so I did it. I accepted the position, I applied for the position and was accepted into the Department. And again, now...I'm working with Rose Gonnella and Robin Landa as colleagues; they're still my mentors in many respects at that time but now I'm their colleague as well.

Neil: What a dream job!

Denise: Well, it was dream, I mean yes, the best part...the best part by far is the, you know, is the camaraderie we have here in our Department, that's why our Program is so great; because we are so committed to students' success.

(15:13)

Neil: And that's wonderful to see and hear, definitely.

Denise: Absolutely.

Neil: So, let's step back a little bit. So, you mentioned that you were adjuncting for a while. So, how did you get into that? did you just cast a résumé out and be like, hey, I want to teach a class, or were you approached by somebody, or how did that happen?

Denise: Yes, so my relationship with Rose and Robin had continued outside the classroom. We had lost maybe a little bit of, what, I'd graduated, maybe just lost a little bit of, you know, time that we weren't in communication but it always circled back because it was always like, hey, you want to get involved with the Department doing this? And of course, I mentored students, so I would hire students in my design firm as interns or for professional projects so I always kept in touch with them and I believe at some point I might have been just like, hey, I'd love to teach and hey, we have need: would you like to come and teach? And sort of that's how it opened up. Which again, was really wonderful and I really recommend this for anyone that's out there, has a small business, not only giving back, so again, having interns or hiring people from maybe your university or local university or program you may teach in:

it's really great for the students because you're giving them such practical experience outside the classroom. You just can't teach some things in the classroom and students need to be part of actual projects or again, the research, or the actual execution and when I had students work for me, they would be designing with my designers because they had a totally different perspective than most of the professional designers that I worked with and I love that. And again, to be able to collaborate all together. We had a great system in my design company, Design DMA, is that we would all work on a project together and then it would be, we would meet on the project and someone would say, all right, this project is most promised but I want to take it now. So, somebody's idea would go to someone else and another person's idea would go to someone else. So, Faye would be able to work on it sort of at a different perspective and that was really great because the end-product was always stronger than what we began with and it was a true collaborative effort in that nobody...everybody owned it; it was a success of everybody and that really worked for us and it worked for our clients.

Neil: Do you bring that collaborative experience into your classroom now?

Denise: Absolutely. But the great part I think...so again, the value that I really bring to the Program is my many years of professional practice. A lot of Professors or a lot of educators, specifically design educators, will go the route of a traditional get an MFA, come into the classroom, do your research, teach your students and that's all great and we need Professors that do that because they come with this sort of a different academic teaching approach, but my approach really stems from the well of where they will live, where they will actually...their careers are born in professional practice, so that twenty-five years of working...you know, as an Adjunct, working for design firms, working in corporate America and managing an in-house Department, I bring that to the table every single lesson that I bring into the classroom, and I think that's the value that I could add to my students and to our Program here at the University and that level of professionalism that students are really required to know, they teach in School, but the bar needs to be set in the classroom to say: hey, listen. You don't submit your project on time, I'll tell you how this is interpreted in the professional world. Is that we just had a client pitch and your work isn't here. Now, the client's sitting in the conference room, we have no work to show them and so...me as a business owner would say, you know what? Maybe you're not the right person for our team: you're fired. And I think that that perspective really kind of sets students up for success, even just a little bit more practical knowledge on what it's going to be like when they leave the classroom.

Neil: Oh my gosh, I could not agree more! In your...when you were out in the field, was there...is there a favorite project that you did that you could talk to us about?

(20:11)

Denise: So, I was thinking about this and this is really, you know, I enjoy many projects; I've enjoyed a lot of the projects I did. I'm very proud of them, I'm proud of working with the designers that I've worked with, but the one project I remember, it was seven years into being a designer, seven years graduating...seven years graduating, being a designer and it was a project for AT&T owners, a special event that was going on and at the time I was working for David Brier and David said, you know what, Denise, there's a lot of work going on right now. Why don't you take this in role? and I remember, I was...I figured at that point, I had enough experience; I had worked with...enough illustrators, I had been on enough photo-shoots, I had art-directed and I remember this project, I was so proud of it. I was so proud of it and at that point, I finally felt like I was a Designer and to me, I remember just that great feeling of feeling that, and even thinking about it today I remember, can't even tell you what the project was but it was a...it was a...and I remember it had purple and gold on it and the client loved it and David Brier, who I admired as a really great Art Director; still do. He really liked it and to me I just felt like a Big Girl Designer, Neil!

Neil: Love it! But isn't that funny? I do it myself where I can tell you the color, I can tell you the shape of a box, I can tell you the typography that is on the box but I cannot tell you the name of the product!

Denise: No. It had lightning bolts on it too. So, hey!

Neil: Even better!

Denise: Better yet. Every time I guess I see like a summer lightning storm I'm very excited and memorable of my first Big Girl project!

Neil: So, with your time in the industry both working and being kind of in upper level position positions, you must have seen a ton of portfolios and you must have read a ton of cover letters. Talk to us about that. What was your experience with those books and those cover letters? Were they great, were they not so great?



Denise: So, yes...there was...so, I have, you know, all right. So I teach the final Graphic Design Portfolio course at the Robert Busch School of Design at Kean University here. That's my job. I've on that Program...or sort of...I run that Program for about eight years now, I was doing it as an Adjunct Professor. I take it very serious; it's a program that...it's just not a course, it is a program where we are helping students transition from the classroom to the professional world and I think it's...I know it's reflective of all the years of portfolios I have seen, good and bad, strong and weak and what I'm trying to give our students here is that competitive advantage over everyone else that's graduating. Where Kean University is a four-year State college; most of our students are first in their family to go to School; most of the students in our Program and the University are working at least part-time or full-time and going to School full-time, so when these students graduate, they need a job. Or they need their career to start immediately. They're not traveling to Europe for summer; they're not back-packing across America. They need a job. And so, creating strong portfolios is a priority and all the assets that go with it...a book that I wrote that came out in 2016, Stand Out, it's all about creating a personal brand, developing killer work and how to find a job in the industry and I wrote that book because there was nobody out there that wrote that book and those are three really important things students need to know. So, when you talk about portfolio: yes, that book needs to be a killer book of work directed toward the industry that they want to work and it doesn't mean projects in that industry, it merely means the passions and the things that the industry, that particular industry, is looking for in a person...

(24:56)

...so, for example, many of our students at the University here are hired in the Health & Wellness industry and they're not necessarily looking for projects that have to do with health and wellness: they're looking for really great stories that communicate an idea, clearly are using the correct touch-points and are trying to give somebody an experience that is going to get them to stop and look and remember whatever their idea is, and so...and projects and a portfolio that communicates the skills that a student wants to do in the professional world, so the student's a really good illustrator or has augmented reality knowledge in Maya or certain things, we really try to get that in the book so when they're looking for work, that it's an authentic true portfolio that communicates what it is that they love to do and just to back with the résumé and the touch-points, I always joke, and my colleagues here it's like, six months....no, if it's sixteen weeks of a semester, it's like eight weeks of those; we're working on

a one sided single-page résumé, because I tell my students that the résumé is a test; it's not only a list of qualifications of what you've done; and again, designers have visual portfolios so that résumé just needs to be a quick read highlighted, but it needs to be designed well and it needs to have great typography and the leading needs to be perfect and the margins need to be consistent and it overall needs to feel like it's part of their own personal brand identity which again, the look and feel of their overall portfolio, their business card which sometimes is the only physical touch-point somebody on the other end will see; their website, so again, all those things are really focused and our Program, especially at the end where we're art-directing, making sure they're all super-right for students to have that edge in the industry, so everybody out there: we're trying to give our students an edge, as well as you are!

Neil: Absolutely, and go to Amazon and buy that book!

Denise: An unshameful plug there!

Neil: I try, I try!

Denise: Thank you, thank you Neil!

Neil: So, speaking of that book, there's a lot of educators and academics that do aspire to write a book or maybe have a manuscript ready to go from their research, so can you talk about the publishing process that you went through for Stand Out?

Denise: Yeah, absolutely. So, you will have to interview Robin Lander because she is the author of twenty-three books and...

Neil: I would love to!

Denise: Yes, yes. Absolutely. Your readers, your listeners, would love to hear what she has to say; she is such an expert on this, as many things, but this particularly. So, how Stand Out happened is Robin, Rose and I went to...the HOW Conference in Boston, a few years ago. And we...Robin at the time was working on a book, I'm not quite sure which one, but she was meeting her publisher or publisher she had worked with, Nikki McDonald from Peachpit Press, so we had dinner that night and I was...I was

collecting materials to...I was writing materials for my course for the Portfolio course just to...personal brand, book of work, finding a great design job and at the dinner, Robin recommended, hey, Denise: pitch Nikki. And I said, Nikki, I've got this great book idea about portfolio development and there's nothing out there like this and she was interested and so I created...like a three page pitch document which again, anyone that you pitch or you could go online, you could find pitch documents in that you're trying to research...you know, what's the idea of the book, what are some...what's maybe the table of content, what is some of the content in the book, maybe a chapter...my book is broken up into three sections...and competition books, what's out there. And there could be a bunch of books out there but if your book has a different spin then somebody may be interested to pick it up because there's a need in the market as well as maybe your interesting spin may be the book that really sells the most. So, Nikki was interested. Long story short, they accepted my proposal going back and forth several times; they accepted my proposal and so then the hard part came: you had to write the book.

(30:04)

Neil: What was the timeline that they gave you for writing the book?

Denise: So basically, they...at this point, I think they asked me for the timeline, what was the timeline for the book. So the book sort of came in the middle of...maybe the end of a spring semester into the summer and I didn't have time to apply for release time so I was...I was teaching three over three that whole year, so I was teaching three courses and again, maybe a couple of sections of portfolio which would be good for the book but...you know, that's like mentoring, it's like having eighteen independent studies times two courses. It took me I think a year and a half to write that book and it was supposed to be due in July and I got an extension; I had to get an extension to the end of the year because at that point I did apply for release time and so Fall fifteen, I had release time and that's when the book was done. But the hard part of the book and not every author decides to do this because Robin doesn't do it. I designed the book myself. Not myself: I wrote the book but I had a team of people working with me for...to designing the book and producing the book so even though I came up with the initial design, I work with a wonderful woman who was my student at that time and had just graduated, Margaret Gryskalski and Margaret...she was my art director, she was such a good art director as this young student graduating and she was an illustrator and so I felt like I had to...the book could not be communicated as well as it should be unless it was designed by me. Again, design is really important: here's the whole part about design and business intersecting and in order for the layouts to

communicate well and the work and the information, we needed to design it, so I had at that...three student workers and three professionals. A friend of mine who was an art director; a woman I've worked with for many years who was my first employee, she was working as an independent, but I would write a chapter and we would talk about the layout and then everybody would go ahead and do their job and I would be writing the next chapter; I don't advise this, folks. Write the book and then design it!

Neil: All while teaching too. That sounds like a lot!

Denise: All while teaching and now I have a wonderful, what, seven year old son which I barely saw. It's not for the faint of heart folks; don't...you write a book because you need to write a book; publisher want it, it's great feather in your cap. Robin, I always say she gives birth to a book every nine months. She's amazingly prolific; I admire her tremendously for her stealth writing and...but it's not for the faint-of-heart, but I'm very proud of it. Very proud of it. I'm very proud of working with the students I work with; most of the work in that book is all from Kean graduates; these are students that I help art-direct and launch their careers and that I'm most proud of; most proud of that.

Neil: It's a really rewarding aspect of being an educator, isn't it?

Denise: Absolutely. Because it really is all about the students. And I'll tell you, I'll tell you the main reason why I became an educator and it has to really reflect, and it reflects in the research projects that I'm even doing now is that when I graduated, Neil, when I graduated my Under-Grad degree, I didn't have enough time because I did Baskin-Robbins and I quickly finished School in a year and a summer and there was no time to do internships, there was only time to finish School and I remember when I graduated, it took me three months to find a job and I know for some that's too long and others, that's not that long, but it was painful. My job five days a week was looking for a job and for a woman who had her own business, this was really painful. And I said to myself, in my professional life, if I could ever do something to make that pain less for someone, then that would be very rewarding and so for me to help direct students and again, we don't require internship in our Program but it's strongly recommended, because when students have internships, they come back not only with tremendous experience, they have a new focus in their work but they also have professional connections and that is really critical and if I had that at that time, it would've made that pain a lot less for looking for work or transitioning into my design life from being a student and from being...owning a Baskin-Robbins.

(35:18)

Neil: Yeah, I don't think you're alone in having that gap of time between graduating and finding a job.

Denise: That is really painful. So, there's a project that I'm working on right now in my research which I have not...I will be presenting on this. I presented it at the UCDA Conference but I'll be presenting it at the Design Management Institute Conference in London in August of this year...

Neil: Congratulations!

Denise: Thank you, thank you. It's called mgcsync.com and it's this alternate way for students to connect to professionals for internships and jobs. And it really is...it's a mobile website, design is a mobile website. It's all been designed by my students and myself and researched and the final stage, Phase Two of it, will be programmed by the Computer Service Department at Kean University in the Fall and it'll be fully launched by next...next Portfolio Review, which will be Spring 2020...2019. It's really this very robust place where educators, I mean, educators, students, alumni and professionals all come and can meet and collaborate and it's really for the main purpose of finding internships and jobs and the information is going to be really heavily data-based, a strong back-end database and so the information from who got jobs, where they got jobs, when they got jobs, by whom, we'll be able to use that as design educators to be able to sort of sell our Program as well as being able to improve our Program for future generations to come.

Neil: Have you thought about franchising that, because that sounds like an amazing platform?

Denise: I'm not really quite sure. So there's two ways we may decide to make it a public venue, which then we'll build the code and then any design institution could use it, that's one strong direction or we may privatize it but I'm not sure: that's to be determined in the next...by the end of this year, I'll know that, but I would love to be able to give it to everybody that they could use it because our institution, as many other institutions, or many other programs, some programs are really small so there's not a lot of resources dedicated to it. Some institutions do not have the funding to be able to offer. Because there's programs out there, software programs you could buy and do this, but we truly customized this career

tool for designers. By designers for designers, collaborating with the design industry and design professionals. So: more to come!

Neil: We'll definitely keep a look-out for it.

Denise: Thank you.

Neil: I hear that you had just recently gone through tenure and promotion and I kinda am curious to know how these projects of writing the Stand Out book and the career platform, how did that kinda count for research or service or scholarship or teaching?

Denise: So, I'm happy to report that last...December, my colleague, Ed Johnson and I, we received tenure.

Neil: Oh! Congratulations!

Denise: Thank you! Thank you. I'm excited, I'm proud, but I do have to tell you for all those non-tenured people out there, people that are applying for tenure, meaning they're in the process. So, now Kean has a process of six years and then you can apply but when Ed and I were applying for tenure it was five years. So it'd be five years and then you could apply for your sixth year for tenure, so we're lucky; we were grand-fathered in under a less period of time. These...all these things count; they all count. I have to tell you, it was sort of, when you're talking about the curves of my professional career, now when I...I had been an Adjunct Professor; and for all those out there that have been Adjunct Professors, that is sort of the easiest job, as hard as it is. Easy, because basically you're coming in, you're teaching a class, and then you leave and you're not...you don't have to be accountable for any administrative work or advising these students or anything that comes with being an employee of a university. Or a colleague in a department, design department specifically...

(40:05)

...So, I'm thinking that I would just have like three classes-worth of all of that sort of fun: but it's not. You're teaching...we teach three-three, so we have three courses that we're teaching and our courses are six hours long, which again many of you are, so we have six hour courses plus our office hours and

advisement and the short of it is, is that there's not a lot of time for research and professional development, so you fit it in. So in the, sort of the path my career, when I turned that corner, I did not see how high that hill was that I had to get over and so for all the tenure track professors out there you just, first of all, you need to find out what your institution values the most, so we have a Provost here that's all about the student. Student success, student success, student, student, student. So, what happened is all the things in my portfolio now, now my written portfolio of things that I've done, had to be all really focused about students. Now, again, we're all in the design industry, we know how to market well, so it's...you have to market yourself now. And every project or anything I put in my book was for students. So when I was doing, I was doing a lot of projects with students, just people in the industry asked for work, I would bring into my Identity course projects every semester, so it would be a school or an event or a cause that needed some branding help, so then I started not only it was about writing things or creating articles or writing books; it became about, here's what I'm doing to give students professional experience and then I would write up what I did for the students, what the project was about, what's the outcome of the project and a chunk of my portfolio became about working with students on many different projects and then on my professional projects instead of sort of independently doing them or doing them with other colleagues, it was all about bringing the students into the fold. And once that sort of way to market it, then it became like, OK, you're on board, you're doing what we're doing, this is what I value, and then it became just sort of click and play, click and play and that's how I created my book after five years, it's a huge binder of projects that were all for students. And many of them were by students that we all worked together so again, rewarding, fulfilling and tenure. So, DBIO, right?

Neil: Exactly!

Denise: Yeah!

Neil: So, what would you recommend for those that have written books? How would you recommend them getting peer reviewed or is the manuscript being accepted by the publisher, peer reviewed?

Denise: I mean, come up with a really...

Neil: What's your take on that?

Denise: Yeah, yeah. Come up with a really great idea of a book that people want to read; get opinions from your colleagues, get opinions from your colleagues in your university but the design education community is...is not that big, so I mean, get from other institutions: what do you think, what do you...and then go pitch a publisher and they're certainly going to give you feedback because they know the publishing industry better than anybody. And not only is it books but there are podcasts and like things you're doing Neil, this is great. For tenure, you need ways to be able to bring professionalism to your students or give them exposure or people in the industry. There's nothing out there like what you're doing or very little targeted toward the educators, so come with a great idea and figure out how to do it. And just do it, because at some point, ask for forgiveness later. Just do it!

Neil: Yes. And sometimes just doing it is so difficult to start!

(44:30)

Denise: Just start. But the thing is, that you got into design education for a reason: you have a mission and a vision and where I'm going to take my next road is that I am going to take my love of business, my love of design and what students want is something in the area of design entrepreneurship and we're doing that now here and I'm sort of targeting...moving some of m students in that direction or they want to and I'm guiding them but that's what I wasn't to do as a design educator and I've been very clear coming into the Program: this is where I could add the most value and would be the unique differentiator from other institutions. And it's something that our students want and something that our students are already doing and so as a proud tenure professor, that's what I'd like to do because that is where I could add value. I'm running the Portfolio Program until I find someone to transition it to. My eye will always be on that, I feel responsible for the students and want to make sure it's a great program that they're graduating. The MGC sync is all about helping them transition out there into the world that they have again, have successful careers and can collaborate with each other while they're there. You know, you have to really find what your passion is and you have to stick with it and promote it and get people on board to be supportive, whether it's a book or a podcast or student project, they all count toward tenure, as long as your institution thinks those things are important.

Neil: Definitely. So, what would you say to a design educator that says, well, I'm interested in everything, so how can I focus in on one thing when I'm interested in everything?



Denise: You have to...you can't focus on everything. You have to treat yourself like your students, or get one of your colleagues to treat...say, get hostile with the witness. You have to find out what it is that you want to do. You really do. I mean, I'm sure there's many institution where you could teach a type class and a graphic design foundation course and that's great, great for the program. But what is it as a design educator that you want to do, to move forward the industry to give your students competitive advantage. What is it that you want to do? What's your passion? What gets you waking up every day in the morning? I've been doing this in design for a long time, for decades. I love what I do. I wake up every morning with renewed interested in doing something slightly different. I never teach the class the same way. Always trying to find new ways to ignite my students' interest and that keeps me energized. I always tell my students, I learn as much from them as I hopefully impart knowledge to them. And it's a great field but you have to keep moving it forward. It's not a job; it's a career, it's a profession that adds great purpose and meaning, especially to my personal life; I love that I do it. I'm glad, you know, my wife at the time talked me into it; it's a great...it's great for me, it's great for my students.

Neil: Well, and that's what I've been finding throughout these interviews for this podcast is that the common theme between everyone is, we're curious by nature and we want to continue learning. Now, the depths of that learning are, you know, they fluctuate, but it's just a non-stop need to find out how things work or to learn something new.

Denise: Absolutely. Just talking about portfolios specifically is that...I was teaching the Portfolio Course when print books were only it. There were no websites; there was no digital portfolios. It was totally print-based and that has completely changed and you know what, next year, next Spring when I teach Portfolio again, I'm not quite sure what's going to be out there. Social media campaigns: now it's like promoting yourself at a whole other level. It changes and that's what keeps it so interesting. And enticing and curious and...I love it, I love it, no matter what, this is still my profession and tenured or not, I'm still a designer at heart!

Neil: Yes. Well, we're almost at the end of our hour. Is there...are there any parting thoughts that you would like to talk about?

Denise: You know, life is short and...days are long and...love what you do every day. Wake up every day, love what you do, love the people around you. Don't go right to the top; there's no reason to get in that elevator and go right to the top floor. The part of the journey which I love in my journey, it's a unique

one and it's my journey is that along the way, I have done some interesting things and met some wonderful people and it's the process, it's the journey that's the reward because once you get...now I'm tenured: all right, what happens after that? Now I have to re-invent what that's going to mean for myself and my students. Just the journey is the reward and don't forget...don't be afraid to zig and zag because at the end, it's really about what gives you purpose and meaning to your day. That's the most rewarding part of life. Period.

(50:39)

Neil: Yes, I completely agree!

Denise: Thank you Neil: that's why I like you!

Neil: Well, thank you again for spending time with me today to talk about your career path to tenure and I wish you the best of luck on your upcoming projects.

Denise: Thank you and to everyone out there, I wish you best of luck in your tenure process. Get involved with your people, rely on the people that have been around for a long time, reach out to your colleagues. At the end, you know, it's the best because you get to mentor students and you get to see their success and it's really, like I said, lots of purpose, lots of meaning. And Neil, thank you for having me, I appreciate it.