



CRAIG WELSH OF GO WELSH TALKS LETTERPRESS, BIG AWARDS, AND WHY YOU SHOULD BE THE STUPIDEST PERSON IN THE ROOM.

It's been a big couple of years for design studio Go Welsh. Between starting a letterpress studio and winning the coveted Gold Pencil at this year's One Show Design, principal Craig Welsh has had his hands full. Recently, I sat down with Craig and his colleagues in their Lancaster, PA studio to discuss where they are and how they got there—and how you can get there, too. [Eleven years ago, Craig Welsh, Scott Marz, and Corie Deshong were working together at an eighteen-person advertising agency. Craig's departure from the agency in 2001 was soon followed by Scott's, and the two then started a studio in Craig's house. Things weren't easy at first—there](#)



[wasn't a lot of work, so Scott freelanced and got another job while Craig taught adjunct and attended graduate school—but the studio kept chugging. After a rocky start, account executive Corie joined; and a few years after that, Scott returned full-time. Go Welsh was up and running. One of the studio's unique attributes is the relatively large amount of pro bono work it takes on—Craig estimates that about 25 percent of what they do is for nonprofits, which carries the perk of a little more creative freedom. Go Welsh takes on these jobs with the condition of creative veto, which they have had to exercise on occasion—but such actions are rare. “Ultimately, we just](#)



want the best work,” Craig explains. “If a client says, ‘Hey, you’re doing A and we think you should do B,’ and B is the better idea, then we’ll gladly do B. We’ve had interns come up with stuff that got published. High school interns! I think that shows people that we’re smart enough to keep our egos out of the way—that if a high school kid writes the best headline, we accept that that’s the best line.” [Designers and interns have come and gone over the years, but Craig, Scott and Corie are the three constants at the studio. At its largest, Go Welsh was seven strong—and, according to Craig, it was chaos. “It just didn’t feel like we were as close to the work anymore, because we were just telling people how to do things: how to name the files, how to organize stuff, how to back up stuff. We’re just now recovering from three years of trying to back up files the right way.” And so, through trial and error, they discovered that a staff of four or five is ideal. Being this small allows the studio to be more creative-driven; there are very few meetings where someone from creative isn’t present. “The last place we all worked together, there were account staff who handled meetings most of the](#)



[time,” Craig explains. “They’d come back from a meeting and you kind of wondered what their conversation with the client included—how’d the conversation get there?”](#) Recently, the studio’s manpower was stretched to its limits when a major opportunity presented itself: one night, Craig spotted an ad online for a retired printer selling the entire contents of his letterpress shop. Not knowing a lot about letterpress other than that he loved it, Craig jumped at the chance to add it to Go Welsh’s repertoire. It took months of heavy physical labor in the dead of winter to move several tons of equipment and supplies into the warehouse space they’d rented—and even more



months of cleaning, organization, and set-up—but once the shop was up and running, their hard work eventually paid off when Go Welsh won Best of Show in the design category at this year’s One Show with a letterpress piece. [The winning project, “Dear Bill,” was a labor of love and a tremendous learning experience for everyone involved. An invitation to Bill Strickland to speak at a Society of Design event, “Dear Bill” consists of two copies of Strickland’s book, *Make the Impossible Possible*, bound together into an accordion format and printed, one](#)

letter per page, with the message: “Dear Bill. We believe in possible. We have already reached thousands but have only just begun. We are inspired to do good things and would like your help. Please consider being the featured guest speaker for Society of Design in Harrisburg on November 18. Thank you.” Stretched out end-to-end, “Dear Bill” is over a hundred feet long. Craig believes that executing the entire 244-page project with letterpress showed a special kind of commitment that would be impossible to replicate with today’s media, which may have been what drew the One Show judges’ attention. “There’s an authenticity, a kind of purity of design that you don’t come across that often anymore. You can feel it. You can imagine the way the piece of paper was pushed against ink.” Each copy of the book takes about 12 hours to make, now that they’ve taught themselves how. Without a letterpress expert on staff, the Go Welsh team has had



to figure things out pretty much from scratch—and they’ve made plenty of mistakes along the way. “We didn’t even know how to use a paper cutter, so we ruined 5 or 10 copies of [Strickland’s] book right away,” Craig explains. Then came the printing; if the ink wasn’t dark enough, or wasn’t consistent enough, those pages had to be thrown out. In just over a year, through sheer wit and determination, Craig and his team went from knowing next to nothing about letterpress, to winning one of the industry’s most coveted awards with it. For all you future One Show winners out there, Corie has one piece of very valuable advice: “Your life is not on TV.” Adds Craig, “And

it’s not like everyone’s Facebook profiles, where every day is fantastic, and every comment that comes back about your work is like ‘you’re awesome, that’s so cool!’ There’s a reality that doesn’t match up with what this social media wave of designers is aware of.” Meaning, if you’re not





willing to tackle the less-than-glamorous work, you're not going to make it at a place like Go Welsh. "Right out of school or in an internship, we've seen an expectation of immediately working on something huge," says Corie. "We've had to say, 'If you're asked to staple something, just do it and be the best stapler you can be. Showing that you're willing to take on that kind of task while being enthusiastic about it will lead to opportunities.'" Another way to stand out in today's overcrowded creative field is to be a good listener. "You're actually part of the communications industry," Craig explains. "You're in a business that extends well beyond design. You're in a role where the most useful skill you can develop is listening. You really need to be able to appreciate the stillness and value of listening." That, and be the stupidest person in the room. "Be around people who are smarter than you are—and then listen to everything they say. You can filter out the stuff you think is junk and disregard it after the fact, but at least listen closely and consider what they have to offer. It's likely valuable. Just make sure no one works harder than you—effort always beats talent." Believing that you're capable of incredible things is the first step in working toward achieving incredible things. Success is a result of effort. Awards and recognition for your work are certainly nice and provide some relative measure of how you compare to your competition. However, they're not the most important things to Go Welsh. A commitment to contributing time, energy, and resources to the wider community is a significant determinant of the studio's day-to-day operations. "We recently



hit our ten-year anniversary as a studio and have had incredibly good fortune over the years. More importantly, our clients, especially the nonprofit organizations we've worked with, have had some amazing successes. We've helped music education initiatives, oral health campaigns for disadvantaged kids, and other groups raise hundreds of thousands of dollars." Individually, the staff of Go Welsh have also been very active in the community. Volunteering at food banks and humane societies, recording readings for people who are blind or vision-impaired, and serving on boards of directors are a sampling of some of the ways in which Go Welsh has defined its identity. "The most meaningful things are 'Thank you' notes," says Craig. One such note from a client was written in a copy of Bill Strickland's book—the impetus for the project that would become One Show Design gold.

