[Music]

Kristina: Hey, you know who [chuckles] I'm about to welcome to the Confab Stage right now, at this minute? You might know them as the co-authors of your new favorite book: *Writing is Designing.* I know them as two guys who have been super pals, both of me and of Confab, for all these many years. I would like to welcome to our stage/screen, Mr. Andy Welfle and Mr. Michael Metts.

Andy Welfle: Hello. We're here. [laughs] It's so good to see you. We were just talking about how if you want people to just constantly talk in your ear, we can do some ASMR.

[laughter]

Michael Metts: That would be really nice.

Andy: If you haven't figured it out yet, my schtik is to just **[unintelligible 00:00:57]** constantly make these jokes.

Kristina: The first time my daughter showed me ASMR, I was like, "That is super weird." Then she showed me the video where it's one of those ASMRs where she's like, "And now I'm going to just touch your hair and give you a little head—." I was like, "Turn that off right now. You're only 12 years old and whatever is happening on that screen, it's not okay for you." I don't know, man.

Andy: Yes, it's a lot.

Kristina: This segment is off to a stellar beginning. I'm so excited.

Andy: I assumed this would be it.

Kristina: Just listen. I'm sorry, I just have to apologize to the team at the Event Nerd. [laughter] **[unintelligible 00:01:46]** I had the live burger stream open. What is wrong with me? Okay, I'm a professional and this is Confab. There are 1,000 people watching from all over the world. Actually, maybe not 1,000, but in my heart of hearts, that's how many people we have. Hey, I mean that is how many tickets we sold, though. What are you going to do? Okay, I know.

[laughter]

Michael: What do you know, Kristina?

[laughter]

Andy: Do we take the silver?

[laughter]

Kristina: Why don't you both introduce yourselves? Tell me where you work, tell me what your jobs are, and I'm going to pull it together. Give me a minute. Go ahead.

Michael: That sounds good. I'm Michael Metts and I work for Allstate as a conversation designer. I work a lot on conversational interfaces like chatbots and voice interfaces. My second job, for the past couple of years, was writing a book with Andy.

Kristina: Two years? It was a couple of years?

Michael: Yes. Sarah did six days. That's good, don't get me wrong, but we decided that two years was little bit of a better—

Kristina: [crosstalk] Did you nod? Just get your head down on your mic. I almost burst into tears.

Andy: I don't know about you, Michael. What are you talking about?

Michael: Yes, that little fact just about wrecked me. [laughs]

Kristina: I actually laid awake last night crying tears of sorrow.

Kristina: Awesome. All right, Andy. What's your deal, man?

Andy: Hello. What is my deal? I have no clue.

Kristina: What is that?

Michael: Yes, what is happening?

Andy: By day, I am a content strategy manager of a small but mighty team at Adobe in San Francisco. We're the in-product content strategist/UX writer/content designers, all the worst people in design. That's what I do with most of my time when I'm not writing a book with Michael Metts.

Kristina: Are you guys scarred from writing a book? Are you still friends? Let's get into it right now.

[laughter]

Kristina: Are you **[inaudible 00:04:09]** each other on camera? Is this just a facade?

Andy: I literally couldn't think of anybody who is more calming and nice, somebody who's just a good facilitator at conflict resolution, as Michael Metts. Our first week, I just texted him after doing this— Somewhere I still have that text message saved. It was just like, "Do you just feel like you just wrote the worst words?" He was like, "Yes. Do you feel like you just wrote something that's super derivative and nobody knows or everybody knows already and doesn't care about?" It was our group therapy to get through it, so Michael Metts is the best person to write a book with.

Kristina: That's excellent. How about is Michael Metts the best person to write a book for you? If so, I might have a conversation.

[laughter]

Andy: Yes. The lead ghostwriter. Go through me. I'll take care of it.

Kristina: [laughs] Awesome. What was the impetus between writing this book? I'm going to scoot up a little bit. I think it's the days for gust is all someone says, like, "I know what I'm doing," and you're going to completely descend into madness, where I just show up in my pajamas and I'm just like, "I don't even know." Talk to me about the impetus of this book. I think that Lou Rosenfeld, Rosenfeld Media, was the publisher, and I think he said the pre-sales for your book were the highest of any that he's ever published. Is that a real thing?

Michael: Yes, that's what he said, so that seems good. Seems like a lot of people are energized about this topic. Really, it's spun out of the work we've done mainly at Confab. One of the first Confabs that we went to together, we started talking about how these concepts that we were learning at Confab were so important but were ultimately applied a little bit differently in the context of a team-building software or building a digital product.

We really wanted to talk more about that and teach about it, so we started teaching the workshops that we've been doing at Confab for a while. That helped us crystallize the ideas we wanted to get across in the book. The book would grow out of our passion for talking about how this applies in the context of building software and building products.

Kristina: What is this?

Michael: [laughs] Do you want to take that, Andy?

Andy: Sure. Kristina, do you want to have a conversation about job titles? Is that what this is?

[laughter]

Kristina: We're all out of time. We're going to have to wrap.

[laughter]

Andy: We really wanted to stay away, specifically, from the idea of role or job titles. The way that we frame it is our primary audience is people who write words on software design teams or digital experiences or whatever, no matter who that person is. Maybe it's a product manager, or maybe it's a designer, maybe it's a content strategist, maybe it's a translator. Secondarily, it is for people who need to convince somebody or need to be convinced about why you need a strong writing practice on your design team. That is the impetus of this, the main audience that we're trying to reach, for sure.

Kristina: If you can each take a turn, tell me a little bit about how you came into your role. As Sarah said, "Don't go all the way back to when you were three and got yogurt in your hair." [laughs] Talk a little bit about how you came to do what it is that you do.

Michael: Sure, absolutely. I started in UX at a software company called Wolfram. What I'd been doing before then was working in content strategy for a nonprofit. I never intended to find myself there, but I wanted to be a journalist and wanted to use those skills, and in-content strategy was the closest profession I could find. I found it via books. Your own book, Erin Kissane's *Elements of Content Strategy.* I just did a lot of reading and educating myself in practice.

I began to see that what I was really passionate about was designing what people were going to experience, and so I just started using words on a design team. The first UX job I had on a proper UX team was— They called me content strategist/copywriter because they really needed things written for the interface. They were pretty fixated on getting that copywriter thing in the title because content strategy, at the time, had a reputation for being a higher-level strategic discipline that wasn't involved in writing these error messages and button labels, and all these different things.

Kristina: It's a reputation that had its requirements. Since then, it's just freaking tanked.

[laughter]

Andy: All downhill from here.

Kristina: I'm sorry. I'm listening. I'm listening. Go ahead.

Michael: After that, I just started focusing on design. I've had a lot of titles since then from UX designer, conversation designer, UX architect. Information and language, and using it well, has always just been part of my work, so I can't separate the two. Then I truly believe that good writing, when it happens on a team, the writer is a co-designer of the experience with whoever else is building it, so that's really what drove me to start writing about this.

Kristina: Yes, excellent. Great. Thanks. Andy.

Andy: Like Michael, I went to school for journalism and graduated in a time when journalism was not a really hopping profession to get into. I started working—

Kristina: Unlike now.

Andy: —at a nonprofit. Yes, unlike now, which has just really sprung back up. I got into the nonprofit marketing world. I really loved working in nonprofits. I really liked a lot of pieces of marketing. It was probably 2008, 2010, right when Facebook and Twitter were just starting to become things that you use to market businesses rather than just socializing. I really dove into it then. Then I went to go work at a web agency in Indiana. Shout-out to Reusser Design in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

I started as a social media strategist. I would help our clients figure out how to use LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter to market their business. I realized I really liked the communications portion and the strategy portion, but I wasn't really huge on the marketing and promotional portion of that. My boss and I both read Erin Kissane's book, *Elements of Content Strategy.* It's free now. It's a really good book. Quickly, soon after—

Kristina: Yes. Go get it now. It is **[unintelligible 00:11:14]**

Andy: Yes. Soon after we read the big red book, we read your book. It's really good. We realized, "Hey, this is—"

Kristina: Not for your money.

Andy: Not for your money. [laughs] We paid good money for that book. "This is something that I could do and that we could sell." I suddenly became a web content strategist. I would help our designers figure out how to lay out the page, figure out the hierarchy of information. I figured out how to map that to the back end so our clients could easily put stuff into the CMSs we were building.

I didn't know that had a name; I had heard of content strategy, but I didn't know what the heck is information architecture, what is content modeling, what are all these really scary words. That's where I've learned about it and fell in love, and learned about content blobs and chunks. Pretty soon after, I went to go work at Facebook. From there, I went to go to Adobe. I pivoted into the UX writing portion of it a little bit, probably three or four years of my career.

Kristina: I do not want to devolve into a conversation about job titles. Not this time, although you have mentioned product content strategy and content design. That's a good conversation to have. We'll do that at Button in October, which is our product content conference that we're doing. You're going to be there too. You're going to come, and you're going to tell us all what to think, right? Since you're both really good at telling people what to think.

[laughter]

Andy: We're really good at telling people what to think. Yes. [laughs]

Kristina: That's not true. Let's talk a little bit about this field, the UX writing. I started out as a writer of websites. I was doing website copywriting in the late '90s, early 2000s. I remember thinking more than once during those years, "Really, I am writing for the user experience." That was part of what framing up the idea and concept of content strategy within that community really was all about.

It's interesting to me that now this title of UX writer, people are claiming it, and they are holding it close to their hearts, and they're carrying this banner, they're fighting for the title. It reminds me a lot of content strategy and content strategist a couple of years ago. Talk to me about why now. Why now are people really identifying with this title and with

this job? What is it about? Do you think it is about whether it's the job market, or what's happening within organizations, or within the field of user experience in general? Why do you think this is a flashpoint?

Andy: One of the reasons I think it's so popular is that it's really, really descriptive of the output. "This is the thing that I'm doing. This is the thing that I'm delivering." It's the writing of the UX. Product writing is also another big one depending on the organization. I think that that's what makes it so—it's just very clear. I do think that, sometimes, the downside can be that, at many organizations, writers are undervalued. They're often paid less. They have different job codes than, certainly, engineers but also designers, strategists. At the same time, it's just such a good clear title. I really like it for that.

Kristina: Excellent. Talk to me a little bit about the title of your book, *Writing is Designing.* Michael, you said right up front, "I was designing with words." I think that that phrase in and of itself to the general population, nobody's going to get. "What do you mean? A wordle? What is this designing with words?"

[laughter]

That seems to be really a core value or a significant principle upon which you really frame the book or base the book. Talk to me a little bit about why that frame is so important in your concept as you are rallying the troops around this practice.

Michael: Yes. We called it *Writing is Designing* because all the things that Andy was just saying about how writers can sometimes be valued less and their work is not appreciated as much as people even on the design team. That's awful. It shouldn't be happening because there's so much involved in writing when you do it from a user-centered focus, when you do it from a place of solving problems for people that, really, the main difference between you and someone with design in their title can sometimes just be as simple as the ability to use whatever prototyping software is hot right now, like **[unintelligible 00:16:11]**

You're practicing the same things. You're practicing a user-centered approach. You're practicing research. You're practicing strategy. Sometimes, you're even better at those things because you have an ability to be clear, to use language to help people solve problems, and do what matters to them. Beyond that, one of the things we talk about early in the book is how, if you take the words out of an interface, there isn't much interface left at all. Words are just critical building blocks.

One of the people who wrote about this that has really inspired us was Nicole Fenton with this blog post, *Words as Material*. It's a really great blog post that I encourage everyone to go read because what Nicole talks about in that post is how you're using language to solve problems for people. It's not prose or poetry. It's a really different way of using language. In the book, we really wanted to lay it all out for people and say, "Look. Here's everything that's involved. It's not simply writing an error string. There is so much that goes into it." It's a really intentional craft that companies need to start taking seriously. Many are, which is great.

Kristina: Now, who, then, is the primary audience for your book? When you sat down to write it, are you like, "We have got to establish the importance of this work in the general design community," or were you thinking, "We've got to give people a way to frame the case for the value of their work." Was it all of the above? What did you want the outcome of the— What is its core purpose? What was your core purpose? What is it? No, I'm just kidding.

[laughter]

Andy: What is my purpose?

Kristina: Exactly. That's the second part of our interview.

Michael: [laughs] I think the biggest takeaway that, at least, I want out of it is the understanding that this is designing but with a writing methodology. You're delivering words. I think I reversed that. I think it should be it's writing but with a design methodology. Everywhere, really, but especially in San Francisco, there's so many people who are writers and are trying to get into this field. They're like, "How do I write those words in the interface?" They just don't know how. They haven't worked in that environment where you're just iterating, researching, and testing, and iterating, researching, and testing.

The thing that I really want people to take away is that aha moment, that click that says, "Hey, this is designing. I am a designer. I'm a writer and I am a designer. Those things are not mutually exclusive." That's my biggest thesis statement that I want people to take away. Do you have a different one, Andy?

Andy: Same as yours. Much the same.

Michael: I was just going to say we're really grateful that a lot of people who are advanced practitioners like the book and get something from it. We intended it mainly for people who were trying to get started and trying to learn what all this was about, to help them understand that there's more to it than what you see at the end, which would be, again, that button label or the error message. There's so much problem solving and work that goes into it outside of that. We really wanted them to help see how they could practice that, and then tell a story of how it affects their work because at the end of the day, convincing people that this is the right thing to do is almost more important than finding the right words.

Kristina: Right. You know, what I really love is that the conversation around the idea of content with a big C, all the content. I feel like, a little bit, what people have been dancing around is that we're talking about the words. The words. It's the words that are, in many, many instances, the words that fuel the user experience, to your point. Without the words— Jon Colman wrote the most amazing post over at Intercom about how he did this whole visual audit of app interfaces. It was—

Andy: Yes. That was so good.

Kristina: —**[unintelligible 00:20:17]** percent were the words. That was what was actually making up the app design. Anyway, I just think that it's great that you're going in and claiming it is the word on the button, but it is also the story and the language, and whether it's plain English or otherwise, that is really getting at fueling the experience that people are having. Let's see. You have approximately 800 questions that people have asked so I'm going to dive into some of those if that's okay.

[laughter]

Andy: We'll take them all. We'll be here all night.

Kristina: [unintelligible 00:20:54] [laughs] You're going to be here all day and all night and all through the next whatever. Okay. Let's see. Let's start with Mr. Corey Vilhauer, our friend and neighbor.

Andy: Corey.

Kristina: [chuckles] I'm sorry. Is that how his name is pronounced? Corey.

[laughter]

Michael: [unintelligible 00:21:13] feeling.

Kristina: [laughs] "I'd love to hear a bit about process, if that's not too weird." Why would you qualify [laughs] a question about process **[unintelligible 00:21:28]**

Andy: You're making it weird, Corey.

Kristina: Now, I'm not making it weird. It's why he makes the big bucks. Oh, what he's talking about is co-authoring. "Co-authoring a book is a weird process." That, my friend, is true. I retract everything that I just said to make fun of you.

[laughter]

Kristina: For now. [chuckles] Pull it together. "Co-authoring a book is a weird process and I'd love to hear how you two managed writing, editing, and getting consensus about things where you disagreed."

Michael: Right. This is a very real thing, as you said. It was hard for us to get right because so much of the writing I had done in the past about my own work was in this first-person voice of telling a story from my own experience and explaining how that impacted what we're talking about. For the book, we had to switch to, basically, never speaking in the first person, really being reader-focused. We had to apply a lot of the things we're writing about in the book-writing process. We really had to be—

Kristina: [inaudible 00:22:33]

Michael: I know. [chuckles] I know. I thought I was going to a break**.**

Kristina: We call that eating your own dog food **[unintelligible 00:22:40]**

[laughter]

Michael: Exactly. It was a tough process. What it ended up looking like was writing a chapter, maybe, I guess I would call it from the heart, just whatever we wanted to say, then going back through and doing a lot of editing together. There was editing at the end of each chapter. We'd edit each other's chapters. Then we'd edit with our editor. Then we'd edit with our technical reviewers. We'd edit with each other again after all that. To get the book ready, we spent all day in a video call just going through every line of it that our technical reviewers had brought back. In the end—

Andy: 800 comments. I agree with that.

Michael: Yes. That's fine.

Andy: Literally 800 comments.

Michael: That was a neat process and we got to apply, like I said, some of the lessons from the book, which I think makes it a better book in the end. We did things like there's a little sidebar in there where you can see how we came up with some voice and tone principles for the book before we wrote it. That was the fun part.

Andy: I think it helps being able to meet in person a few times too. We did a workshop in Singapore with Singapore Design Week that was two days. We did the workshop but we also spent some time just talking about the collaboration. At Confab last year, I was telling Amy before the call that I wrote most of chapter five, the first chapter, chapter five, in my hotel room the day before Confab. At that point, we were a little bit in disagreement about the title. Michael and I just took a long walk after the day's sessions one day at Confab last year just to talk it out. We really ended up in a good agreeing place after that walk. I think that helps. It was a walk to remember.

[laughter]

Kristina: No. No.

[laughter]

Kristina: That is so reasonable of you to take a walk. That's really great. [chuckles] You're both such lovely, generous human beings. I'm not surprised that the process involved so much give and take. Thank you for sharing that. I do, a little bit now, feel like I did when Sarah said that she wrote the book in six days because co-authoring is difficult. It's hard.

Andy: She didn't have a co-worker.

[laughter]

Michael: That's true.

Kristina: That is true. All right. What else do we have? This is from Gladys. I don't know if it's because I've been laughing so hard or what but now my glasses are all smushed up. Gladys Deandokie. I screwed that up for sure. Sorry, Gladys. Hi, Michael. Sarah mentioned about— Just Michael.

[laughter]

Kristina: [unintelligible 00:25:40] Sarah mentioned value mapping your content. Do you have a technique you use to value your work? Do you believe that this is an interesting approach and, if not, what would you recommend? Do you have a technique that you use to value your work?

Michael: This is a very hot topic. I think it might take us a little different in terms of I'm not usually— When I'm talking about valuing the work, I would ask why we're trying to value writing specifically and not everything else that goes into building a product. We should all as a team find our value in what the product can do for our users and our customers. We work together to achieve that. What I would say is if you're in a product team and you're trying to show value, what I would really try to do— A lot of times, people do this because they're trying to increase headcount. They're trying to get funding to hire more writers. I would say work with leadership to get one team prioritized.

What is the most important team to focus on? Really run with that team and be part of that team and be a co-designer with them. Then look to that team's results and compare it to everyone else's because, again, I really don't think that it's about saying, "Why are the words specifically valuable?" Design is also valuable, the people with designer in their title. The engineering team, they're also valuable. We're not talking as much about how to prove your code is valuable. If there is no code—

Andy: What's the ROI of engineering?

Michael: [laughs] Right. There's no code, there's no software.

Kristina: I think that as writers and content strategists, we can talk about this for days and why the writing or why the content is undervalued. I think that the underlying principle is really solid and really good, but are there— In terms of art, do you help facilitate these conversations? Are you just living these values day-to-day? Are you making cases? Whether or not we should be making the case, we got to. Right?

Andy: Yes. Honestly, that's what my job is at Adobe now. I am the manager of a small but growing team in a discipline that's, surprisingly, in Adobe's 36 or whatever years of existence, this is a new practice, at least in an intentional, strategic way. I get most of my results with my stakeholders by comparing—not even comparing, but just showing how writing is part of the design process.

Honestly, though, design is still trying to figure out how it can be better product owners and strategic partners with the business. I think, Michael, you tweeted about the business a while ago and it's totally a word that Adobe uses too. Why is design not part of the business? Really getting that buy-in at large is still a thing. I'm happy to be part of that conversation as a full-stack design practice.

Kristina: Sure. Go ahead.

Michael: I was just going to say to get to that making the case part of it, it's about once you prioritize that team that you're going to focus on and really work with, telling the story of what you are able to accomplish and impact. It's really important that you don't just let the work pass you by, but think of archiving it and think of making sure you capture the impact day-to-day so that you can share it with others.

Kristina: Yes. I will say that this is the number one question I've been asked over the last **[unintelligible 00:29:40]** these many years, which is, "How do I demonstrate value?" Exactly what you just said. Where I see change happen within organizations is people who are confident about doing some roadshow or an ongoing share out to say, "Here's what we did. Here are the results. We can help you too," versus, I think, what I used to try to do, which is, "I'm going to come in with this deck and explain to you what content strategy is. I'm going to show you the quad. We're going to describe how we can help you, and then we're going to sit back and wait for you to call." I think that continually sharing out the good work is just critically important and that is what starts to change minds and hearts.

Andy: 100 percent.

Kristina: Okay, another question. From Julie Miller, "I am looking forward to your Q&A and hearing more about your book." That was from the future.

Andy: Here we are.

Kristina: "My question is—" [chuckles] Yes, here we are. You're welcome, Julie Miller. "At what stage does it become possible to design content in a project? How early on must content enter the room or doesn't this really matter?"

Andy: Good question.

Michael: This question is a good one. I would ask when is the rest of the team part of building the product or part of the project. Why is the writing or the writer being treated separately? As in, when should they come in and help the team? They are part of the team. As writers, you really have to stake that claim and make sure that you're running with that team, being a part of everything they do, their stand-ups, their backlog refinement. Make sure you are sticking with them and deciding what features to build and giving input in all those things. I would say as early as the work starts, there should be someone involved on that team from a content perspective or a writing perspective. You should definitely not be— Carry on.

Kristina: No, go ahead.

Michael: I was going to say you should not be expected to provide perfect words whenever you come in. You are building fidelity of the language as more visual designers are building fidelity from wireframes to mockups, right? I totally think you can wireframe with words. You can use Lorem ipsum text or you can use terms that aren't locked in place because, guess what, it's going to be way easier to change that while things are still being wireframed than it is once you start coding everything out and you have terminology to manage [crosstalk]

Kristina: Right. I think, too, that it is important that the writer or content designer who's also doing writing or whatever comes to the table with, "I am not here to nitpick about words. I am not here to deliver the perfect words or the final words. I'm here to help shape the experience, and we're going to just keep moving through it until we land on what makes sense for the user."

I think that what I would get a lot is, "Well, we don't want to include words in the wireframes or in the designs because we don't want to distract the stakeholders, because then they get all super picky about word choice." I'm just like, "you don't want to distract the stakeholders from the reason people are there looking at the website? They're not there to look at your color palette, my friends."

Anyway, I think it's fantastic that that's becoming more of the norm. I also want to say, I will never forget hearing from somebody— We see this a lot. There's a content and UX slack workspace that, Michael, you created all these many years ago. Now there's 7,000 people in it or something. You see this a lot where people are like, "You know what? I got this job title and people told me what I was supposed to do. I still never got invited to any meetings. I just started paying attention to other people's calendars and showing up." I'm not kidding.

This idea that you have to be there from the beginning, that's going to take time and seriously, just, "Hey, guys, what did I miss?" Just ask if you can go or just show up. Once you're there and you begin to actively participate in that conversation, nine times out of ten, people are going to recognize the value of it. One more thing. At Facebook, when they had two content strategists, three content strategists, they actually actively started a campaign internally. It was called Friends of Content Strategy, or FOCS. In fact, you know what? I didn't even mean to tee that up but that's the Facebook FOCS right there. [chuckles]

They actively kicked off an internal campaign that was basically like, "We can help," and invited themselves and invited people to happy hour. Now they have, what, 80,000 content strategists or whatever.

Andy: We used to play BANANAGRAMS at that happy hour. It was so much fun.

Kristina: Oh, really? See? BANANAGRAMS. That is the way to any **[unintelligible 00:34:50]** heart, I'm telling you.

[laughter]

Okay. Nathan Magnuson is hitting you with a one-two punch here. Question. It's a two-part question. "What didn't make it into the book, and which content design practices are the hardest to teach?" [laughs] Okay, let's start with the first one. What didn't make it into the book?

Andy: Oh, man. It was perfect. The first draft of it was perfect.

[laughter]

Actually, in the introductory chapter, I wanted to have a conversation about job titles. I tried to give some back and forth and some pros and cons about each one of them. I wanted to actually just approach that and just be the line drawn in the sand or whatever. Michael was just like, "This isn't going to age well, probably," so I completely took that to heart and we left that out of the book.

Kristina: I have something to say about that—

[laughter]

—which is that I think that there are tens of thousands of people all over the world that really wish you had.

[laughter]

People are looking for somebody to draw a line in the sand about like, "Look. This is where the product content strategist—this is what this role is. Here's where the content designer comes in. Here's where the UX roles or whatever." I still want you to write that.

Andy: I'd take it to Button **[unintelligible 00:36:20]** and you will have that line in the sand.

Kristina: You think I'm going to do that? Sarah Richards is like, "Why don't you do it?" I was like, "I'm not going to do it."

Andy: You're going to facilitate it. We're all collaboratively going to do it. [chuckles]

Kristina: Yes, I'll facilitate it. I don't know, but I also feel like even just from my own experience writing *Content Strategy for the Web*, there is something that just feels like, "Oh, can I define this? Can I say what this is? People are gonna argue. What if it's not right?" I think at some point, it's helpful to say, actually, people aren't going to argue. People are going to just agree across the board and we're all going to join hands and move forward. No, that's not true.

Andy: This crowd always agrees on words, for sure.

Kristina: [laughs] That's right. Okay, so job titles didn't make it into the book. Deeply disappointed. Nevertheless, that book is **[unintelligible 00:37:10]**

[laughter]

Michael, what didn't make it into the book that you were fighting for? Anything?

Michael: What didn't make it into the book? I think I had played around with some ideas around how to visualize things better. We have a little bit in there around that. I think it's an area where people who write sometimes feel really self-conscious and feel like they can't contribute. I wanted to empower them to feel differently about that topic, and to feel like they can communicate visually. That's something I've been passionate about for a long time. I used to teach a workshop with Scott Kubie about making content strategy visual. There's a bit in there but, ultimately, we had to focus things a little bit more. We didn't get as much as I'd hoped for but maybe next time.

Kristina: Oh, next time. Is there going to be another book?

Andy: Two.

Kristina: Let me write down **[unintelligible 00:38:09]**

[laughter]

Andy: More writing, more designing.

Kristina: [laughs] More. Okay. Don't forget about the second part. Which content design practices are the hardest to teach? This is interesting because yesterday, Sarah Richards said, "Anybody can be taught anything. Anybody can learn to do anything. It just takes practice." What's the hardest to teach?

Andy: Collaboration.

Michael: I think the hardest to teach— Oh, I was going to say the same thing, Andy. Yes, absolutely. Collaboration. I feel like it is the most underrated skill and I love how this year's Confab includes so much about how to do that. Rhiannon's talk yesterday— really, all the talks have touched on this in some way. It's really neat. Like I said earlier, it's more important than writing just the right words. You have to be able to convince people that these ideas are worth pursuing. You have to be able to work with other people, and help them see that you're there to help them, and that you want to solve problems, and that you're engaged with the team.

All these things are just so critical. Just being a writer, and I've been this writer before who's just cranky because no one will listen to you, is not going to work. You have to come alongside people. You really have to approach it as a team effort. That is a really critical thing. We have a chapter for that. That's chapter eight. We have little things in there like, "Here's how to invite yourself to that meeting that you keep getting left out of." We have technical things like that because it's important to get the work done.

Kristina: Great. Andy, do you have anything you want to add or did Michael just take all the words out of your mouth?

Andy: I think he covered it for sure.

Kristina: Great. All right. Let's see. Oh, Mary Pritchard has a great question. I hope that you came up with this answer on your mighty book tour. Did you do a book tour? This is, "What can I take away from the book to put into practice tomorrow?" Is that a seeded question? Did you pay Mary to ask that question? That's my question.

Andy: So glad you asked, Mary.

[laughter]

Kristina: By Mary, I mean Corey Vilhauer.

[laughter]

Andy: Thanks for making it weird. I think some of the big takeaways from the first chapter, what people understand, exactly how words fit into design, we actually take a chapter, we take an idea from your book and talk about the difference between useful and usable. Your words have to be both of those things. We just show some examples of the differences—and responsible, of course, too. Your words need to be accessible and responsible. We dive into interactive words and how they actually need to solve problems and not just point people to the answer. They need to be the answer.

Kristina: Excellent. What else? Michael, what practical actionable things will people take away from your book?

Micheal: Practical, actionable thing. I think knowing that there's no right answer for every problem is a really important one. A lot of blog posts out there write about this topic as if there is just a best practice and that's all you need to go ahead and be successful. People are out there looking for the right answer a lot but, really, what's important is to find what's right for you, to find what's right for your users, to find what's right for your organization. Give yourself the time and space to do that. Don't hunt for right answers all the time, but hunt for the right answer for your situation, and for your team, and for the problem you're trying to solve.

Kristina: Not to plug another Brain Traffic conference, but I'm going to plug another Brain Traffic conference. We are, for the first time, hosting Button, which is a product content conference for UX writers and content designers and product content strategists in October. It was supposed to be in Seattle, but now it's going to be virtual and online. The subtext of the entire past five weeks have been like, "Now, when you do this for Button..." The impetus behind that conference was everybody is out there looking for the one answer.

While there's a lot of conversation happening in the comment sections or even in the content in UX Slack group, there hasn't really been a place for people to come together and have unstructured conversations or more structured conversations led by speakers and facilitators around some of these topics. I really want the spirit of those conversations to be, there's no one right answer. The reason there can't be one right answer, ultimately, is that we all work for very different organizations.

I think a lot of the didactic, "This is the way you do it," are coming out of, no offense, guys, but the Silicon Valley in the West Coast organizations where UX writing has become more of a mature discipline. I'm super excited to see how those conversations progress and evolve at Button, where you're both going to be joining us, right?

Michael: Yes.

Andy: Yes. Excited.

Kristina: I know. You're on the website and everything. Let's see. We have time for a couple more questions. [chuckles] How am I doing? Am I doing all right?

Andy: You're doing great.

Kristina: From Ann Doherty. "Once you have—" No, you're doing great. This is all for you. I'm just the facilitator.

[laughter]

Andy: Confab **[unintelligible 00:43:53]**

Kristina: From Ann Doherty, "Once you have convinced individual UI and UX designers that writing is design, what advice do you have for getting to the next level where writers are included at the beginning of a project instead of just before launch?" This is parallel to the conversation we were having earlier, but you mentioned that there are actual tactics in your book about getting invited to those meetings. Can you share some of those specific tactics with us?

Micheal: Yes. Some of the tactics include just saying— You can pick what suits your personality or what you feel most comfortable with. Some people are good with the fly on the wall idea. "I'm not going to disrupt anything, I'm not going to do anything, but I feel like this really impacts my role so I really want to be there just to hear what's discussed." That's one way to do it. You could also go with the scare tactics. "It could be really expensive if you leave me out of this conversation and I need to ask the development team to redo a lot of stuff."

[laughter]

That's another perfectly legitimate tactic.

Kristina: [unintelligible 00:45:00]

Micheal: Exactly.

Andy: You can take the Mike Monteiro method, which is just barging in.

Micheal: [laughs] We were in quarantine **[unintelligible 00:45:10]** with Mike Monteiro and Erika Hall. We were talking with Erika about inviting herself to meetings and Mike's like, "What? Inviting yourself? Just show up." I think that's funny because writers, a lot of times, we do feel like, a little nervous to take that step.

I also say building relationships is something we didn't get into too much in the book, but just common sense, like making friends with other people in the organization or other readers, finding out what matters to them, helping tell the story to their team again and again, they're going to want that. They're going to be excited about it once you start doing it enough. That's another really key way. Even if you're not involved the way you wanted to be the first time, you can be involved in the next project that kicks off from the beginning when you start to build those relationships.

Kristina: Exactly. Rhiannon actually had some really great tips about that in her talk yesterday morning, for sure—

Michael: Which was great.

Andy: Loved her talk.

Kristina: —which will be available, if you missed it, in the recording of the live broadcast. Okay. Let's do one more question. Let me see. A lot of people have that question about how do I get in the room earlier.

Andy: Room where it happens.

Kristina: Let's see. Here's a good one. This is from Haley Donahue. I probably mispronounced that too and I apologize, although somebody from the last session was like, "You're the only person who's ever pronounced my name right on the first try." Win.

[laughter]

"I love your example of DoorDash without words to show the value of content." That's an example in your book. "I'm struggling to get this concept across to some of my designers and I think this example would be really valuable to share. However, I'm afraid it will come across like I'm diminishing the value of their design. Do you have suggest—" For example, nobody came to look at your designs on that website.

[laughter]

Michael: It'd be a shame.

Kristina: [unintelligible 00:47:10]

Andy: Nice corner round on those buttons.

Kristina: [laughs] Rude. All right. Haley actually does ask the question. Do you have suggestions on how to gracefully have this conversation with designers to help them understand that content and design are equally important?

Andy: Honestly—

Kristina: No.

[laughter]

Andy: —just as the app doesn't make much sense without the words, it also doesn't make much sense without the layout, the shapes, and the flow. If it's just an un-CSSed website with just a bunch of lists, that doesn't make sense either. I think, really, what that shows is not to diminish the design but to show how inseparable both of those things are.

Kristina: Sure.

Andy: I think you can't have— Even layouts that are completely word-based are designed. Somebody laid that out. I don't know if you have anything more coherent to say to that than I do.

Michael: I just feel like everyone wants to be first a lot of times. There is a content-first movement or a mobile-first movement. Let's be together. Let's work together. I think coming to that conversation from a place of appreciation for that person and the skills they bring, being excited about their work and showing that excitement visibly is really important, and just helping them understand that you feel like this is a critical thing for you to work together, and doing activities like that together.

I've done co-writing sessions with my visual designer on projects before, where we both learned something at the end of the day. I learned why he is concerned about that label being too long and messing up [chuckles] the layout that he has. We can appreciate it. I think just getting in the trenches too and partnering with that person is really important.

Kristina: I think one concept that has been really helpful to me in recent years is understanding that, I think, like you said, just be together. I think that when we are trying to defend our work, and even that word "defend" or to demonstrate, I guess, to demonstrate value. A lot of times, the way that we see things operating in organizations with dynamics is that in order to feel like you're here, you feel like you have to go one-up on people. When you go one up on people, that means that somebody's going one down. It's very, very difficult to talk or collaborate or co-design when you're sitting here, and so just that constant effort of trying not to feel like— For me to feel valid or valued, I got to put this person one down.

Andy: That's why they call it a value add. It's adding value.

Kristina: I received a note from the Brain Traffic designer and full-on experience designer of Confab, and here it is.

[laughter]

[unintelligible 00:50:28]

Andy: Huge snake fisted tubes. Did somebody get a screenshot of that, because—

Kristina: Exactly. I would actually like to say that because we had five weeks to put this together and there is another very gory story about how quickly the microsite came together, that I will share it another time. Sean and I, for the first time, Chandra Brady is the contract designer and has been since 2011, Sean and I had the opportunity to work right together non-stop for, what, it felt like over 24 hours, literally in 24 hours where we were designing right there together, where he was doing the visual and I was feeding the words and then he was speaking the words. He kept going, "Is this agile, Kristina? Is this agile? Is that what we're doing?"

[laughter]

Kristina: It was really an unbelievably satisfying— I had not been that into writing words for a website in a really long time. It was an unbelievably satisfying experience because we were together, right? Yes, it was great. On that note, our time is up. This one, I say, I think that you are both just two of the loveliest human beings on the planet, and I am so thrilled to have a continued relationship with you and Confab and moving into Button in October. Thank you so much for taking the time for being here and answering all these great questions. I'm going to ask, are you planning to hop on over to the Speaker Q&A channel to maybe continue the conversation with your fellow attendees?

Michael: Absolutely. We'll be there.

Andy: We are indeed. We'll be there.

Kristina: You guys are the best. All right. Thank you so much. We'll see you in the hallway, the virtual hallway. We'll talk to you soon. Thanks.

Michael: Thanks.

Andy: Peace out.

[00:52:24] [END OF AUDIO]