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Edge Staff at 04:21pm January 2 2013

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Our commandments of game design series kicks off 2013 with Flow, Flower and Journey producer, Kellee Santiago, co-founder and former President of thatgamecompany. She is now a partner at Indie Fund. We published our own ten commandments in November, and you can keep track of all the collected proclamations by using the Commandments of game design search tag.



## Always ask yourself, "Why?"

And if the answer is "because everyone else in this genre is doing it" then stop. Great game experiences happen when all the pieces fit together perfectly. This rule goes for elements in and outside the game. The way you talk with your players, the way you promote your game – everything should come from the game itself.



## Making games will be hard

So make sure the answer to, "Why am I making this game?" is really good. No matter if you work at a large studio on a large team, on a small team, or by yourself, making games is a hard endeavor – each way of doing it comes with its own challenges. So don't waste your time as a developer, or our time as players, with a game that is a copy of something else, or is safe. Take risks and fight the good fight, and you will be rewarded.



## Playtest, playtest, playtest

Don't just do this once, during beta, just to make sure it's all working. Playtest early and often, even though it makes you cringe to watch people 'break' your game. They are helping you to make it so, so much better. Remember: Every great game sucked at some point.

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## Keep an idea journal

A great game designer isn't someone with one great idea – it's someone who has 100 other ideas when it's discovered that first idea really, really stinks. Stay nimble.

## Stay creative

Play lots of games. But also rack up on new experiences: books, films, art shows. Travel. Pick up a hobby or two that have nothing to do with games or digital media. These experiences will fill your well of creativity, and will also make you a stronger collaborator and game maker.

## Have mentors & friends

Chances are, that idea you're wrestling with, that artist you're having problems with, that team that just won't listen to you – these are all problems other people have had. Build your network of trusted colleagues now, so that when times are tough, you know who to call. And please – don't forget to call them in these times!

## Eat well and exercise

This may seem silly or old-fashioned, but this comes up in almost every post-mortem on best development practices, and time and time again in my conversations with other independent developers. Eat well and exercise, especially during those times in development when you feel you don't have time to do either. It will keep you sane, and out of the trappings of depression that can come when you are struggling on your game. It will make you and your game better.

## Don't be cynical

To quote Conan O'Brien, "It doesn't lead anywhere. Nobody in life gets exactly what they thought they were going to get. If you work really hard, and you're kind, amazing things will happen. I'm telling you – amazing things will happen." It's true.

Tags: Commandments of game design, featured, Kellee Santiago

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