

We know your job is hard, you don't have to show us

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Some years ago, I attended a internal presentation where one group was teaching another group how to use their new feature. This particular feature was a “Just plug in the things you want, click the *Apply* button, and sit back and relax while we figure out how to do what you asked” type of feature. The presentation leader showed some examples of the feature in action, and gave some clear, concise guidance on how the feature should be used, guidance like “Use Pattern A when the user is faced with a choice between two clear options, but use Pattern B when the situation is more open-ended.” So far so good. The next part of the presentation was given to the feature’s lead designer. The lead designer called out some design principles that the feature adhered to. For example, “Notice that we always position the Widget above the Frob.” But then the lead designer started getting into details that were basically a fifteen-minute way of saying, “Look how hard our job is.” The designer called up the graphic design software, showing off the bazillion buttons and sliders and switches that the designers used to fine-tune the colors, gradients, and shading. The designer then went through the animation storyboard templates and showed how each of the carefully-plotted curves achieves the desired visual effect. Once we reached the “Look how hard our job is” portion, the presentation ground to a halt.

The lead designer lost sight of the fact that all this information about how hard the feature was to design was not actionable. The attendees did not need this information in order to use the feature effectively. It was just showing off for the sake of showing off, and it basically wasted everybody’s time.

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