

# MEMO

FROM: **Larry Kulchawik**

RE: Design Days- SIU

DATE: April 14, 2014



## Stepping Stones *for* Designers



**In 2014**, I was asked to speak at the Design Department of my alma mater- Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, IL. Each year the SIU Dept of Design asks graduates to speak in April at an event called Design Days. Alumni are asked to share how their degree in Design helped them succeed in their present careers. The theme was-*Alchemy*- ‘turn something ordinary into something special’. For me, a degree in design at SIU prepared a foundation for “open ended thinking”. It did not teach me how to draw, or how to be creative, but how to think, how to research, and how to develop a process to approach any design challenge.

At the time, Buckminster Fuller was on the SIU staff and often lectured on whatever he was working on at time. Three quotes I remembered him saying- “*People should think things out fresh, and not just accept conventional terms and the conventional way of doing things*”. The second “*Make the World Work for 100% of Humanity*”. The third, “*Doing More with Less*”.



Bucky Fuller at 1967 World Fair- Montreal  
“Man and His World”

With a degree in design, and architectural drafting experience received at a vocational high school, I set out make my way and find a job, hoping to use my degree in design, and this was not easy. My first job was to design store windows at Xmas for a department



store called Goldblatts on the south side of Chicago. A year later, a friend knew a friend who was a carpenter building exhibits. My first question-“What is an exhibit?” This exhibit design company really needed help and offered me a job as an exhibit designer. My architectural printing made me look like I knew what I was doing. I then discovered a new church to spend my weekends and Sundays, called McCormick Place. Other churches to attend in the world then followed.

Like most people employed in the world of trade shows, I fumbled into the business and learned what to do as I went along. No one went to college to learn to be an exhibit designer. Who would have ever dreamed that there was such a business!

Lesson to the graduating class in Design at SIU- never lose hope that you will find a place to apply your skills. Many times you just don’t know what you don’t know.

From the notable staff at SIU.. “Designing exhibits helped me to broaden my understanding of interior, industrial, and graphic design”, says SIU professor Steven Belletire who worked for *Firks Exhibits* in Chicago (later to be called Giltspur) in 1979.

“It is interesting to see how different design backgrounds can manifest themselves into our lives after graduation. Our mission here at the SIU School of Art & Design is to provide our students with a foundation for creative thinking that can apply to different industries,” remarked Professor Marie Bukowski-Director of the SIU School of Art & Design.

43 years later, I have never left the trade show industry and have just completed a book titled- *Trade Shows from One Country to the Next*. My passion now is to help pave a path and provide the *stepping stones* for others to discover this exciting industry. Over recent years, a number of learning institutions now offer dedicated training in exhibit design. Two that I have been involved with are **Bemidji State** University in Minnesota, and SUNY/ **FIT** in NYC. There are also a number of other colleges that offer a class or two to bring awareness to the industry. Lo and behold my days of following the thinking of Bucky Fuller at SIU have helped me greatly in the world of exhibit design (“*Doing More with Less*”) and his global thinking- “*Make the world work for 100% of humanity*”. Thank you-SIU!

(For further info on Buckminster Fuller go to [www.buckminsterfuller.com](http://www.buckminsterfuller.com) or [www.designmuseum.org/design/r-buckminster-fuller](http://www.designmuseum.org/design/r-buckminster-fuller)