Method #4: Focus Map

Step 1   Step 2   Step 3   Step 4   Step 5   Step 6   Step 7

Where You Stand Now

The Crispify method gives your team a big set of crispy target behaviors. However, they won't be prioritized. And that's our next step.

To effectively design a solution for changing behavior, you and your team need to identify the best potential target behaviors—those that are easy to do and will have high impact. That's why Behavior Design includes a method for prioritization. We call this step Focus Mapping.

Your Next Step: Focus Mapping

After Crispifying, you may have a set of 20 to 40 specific behaviors. When you Focus Map, you take this large set of crispy behaviors and help you find one behavior (or a few behaviors) with the best combination of impact and feasibility.

Focus Mapping is our favorite method because it solves for this specific problem: **Any time you have a big set of items and you need to choose just a few**, a Focus Map brings the best items forward and builds group consensus.

Below is a graphic showing a generic Focus Map. We suggest you can take a few moments now to check out the graphic, before you continue reading. **We'll then explain how the method works.**
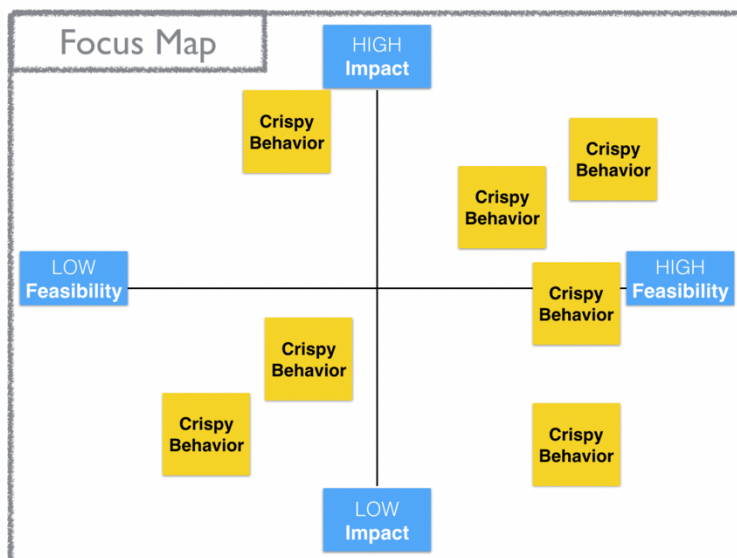

Figure 1. Generic Focus Map: Sorting and prioritizing potential target behaviors to surface the best behaviors for your solution. The yellow squares are sticky notes with crispy behaviors written on them.

How to Focus Map

Focus Mapping is a prioritization process. You have a set of potential behaviors and you need to choose the best behaviors. **If you are working with a team, then you're also seeking to build group consensus.**

To Focus Map, you sort behavior items to prioritize them along two dimensions: Impact x Feasibility

The Impact Dimension

The vertical dimension of your Focus Map is for impact. You place the behaviors with high impact toward the top. The behaviors with low impact go toward the bottom.

In the visual below, the red circles highlight the labels for the Impact dimensions. The yellow squares are the crispy behaviors from the prior steps (Magicwand and Crispify).
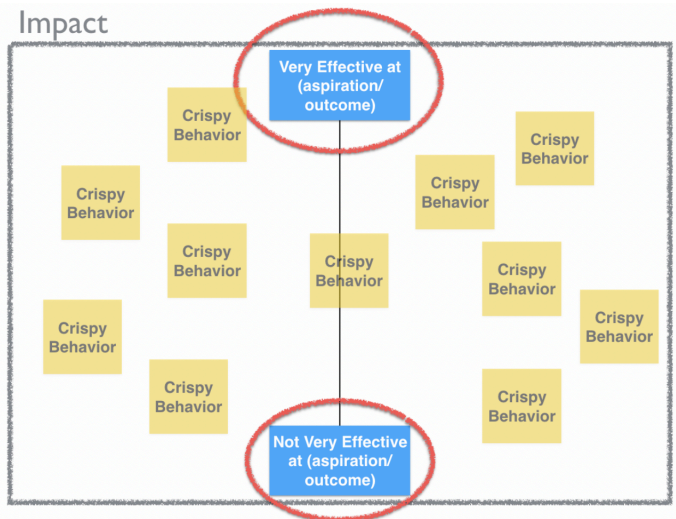

Figure 2. Labeling Impact. The key here is the phrase "Very effective at . . ." or "Not very effective at . . . " [your *aspiration or desired outcome* from Step 1: Clarify].

Please note the wording at the top and bottom of the Focus Map. You sort the items according to impact on your aspiration or desired outcome, which you clarified in Step 1.

What is Behavior Design?

Behavior Design is a new field that BJ Fogg started in collaboration with researchers in his Stanford lab. Over the past 10 years, he has created a set of models and methods for Behavior Design. Models are ways of thinking, methods are ways of doing or designing.

How to Focus Map (cont.)

The Feasibility Dimension

In Focus Mapping, the horizontal dimension is for feasibility. The behaviors you "can get people to do" are placed toward the right. Those behaviors that you "cannot get people to do" are placed toward the left.

In the visual below, the red circles highlight the labels of the Feasibility dimensions.
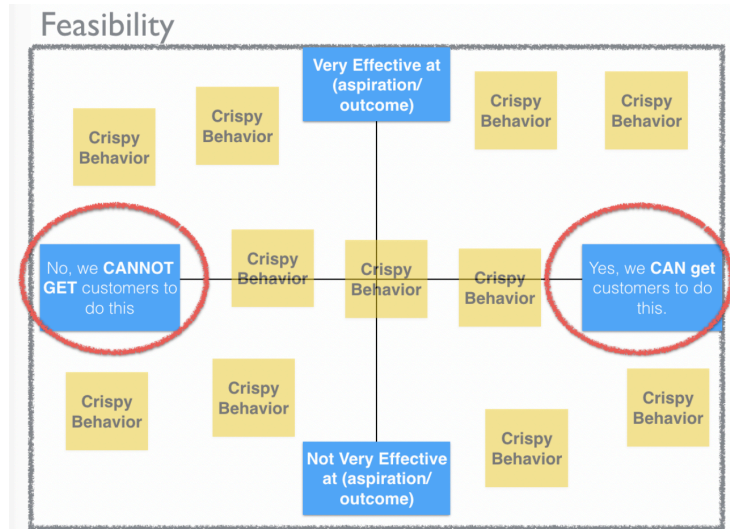

Figure 3. Labeling Feasibility. The key here is "can get" or "cannot get" a group of people to do this. That group might be your team, your users, your donors, etc.

Please notice the wording here. **You don't label the endpoints as "highly feasible" and "not feasible."** And the labels are not "easy" and "hard." Those labels aren't good enough.

It took BJ a few years to figure out the best labels for this dimension. Below is the wording he found that worked best:

Right side: **"Yes, we CAN GET** [our target group of people] to do this."

Left side: **"No, we CANNOT GET** [our target group of people] to do this."

Note that the wording above—"we can get"—combines both ability and motivation. So as you sort from side to side, you are assessing both ability and motivation of people at once. We hope you can see that these labels are broader—and better—than simply "easy" and "hard."

The Focus Zone

After you sort by Impact and Feasibility, you then turn your attention to the Focus Zone. **That's the upper right corner of the Focus Map.**

The behaviors that end up in the Focus Zone are those with the **best combination of impact and feasibility.** In later steps, you will focus on designing for the behaviors in the Focus Zone. And you can forget about all the behaviors that land outside of the Focus Zone.
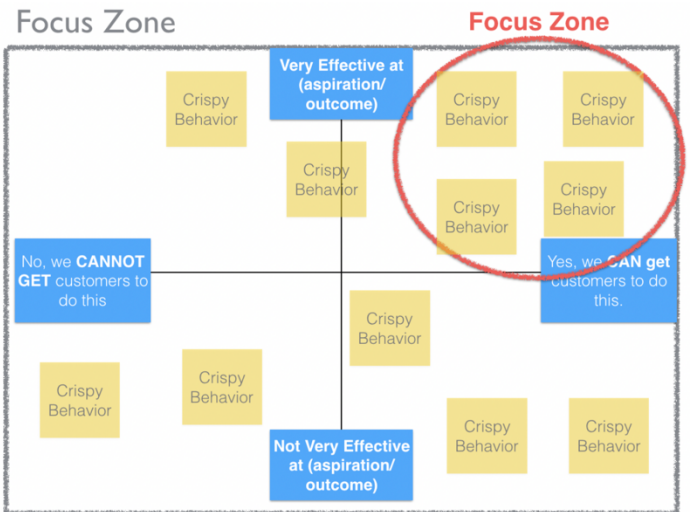

Figure 4. Focus Zone. Highest impact and highest feasibility toward your aspiration or outcome.

Focus Mapping alone or with a team

You can do a Focus Map on your own. That would be you, alone at a table, sorting cards. This will give you a lot of insight.

You can also do a Focus Map with your team. As a team, you will all get new insights. That's good. But just as important, this method will build team consensus. **At the end** of the session, **your team will agree on which behaviors you design for, as well as which behaviors you will forget** about for now.

Focus Mapping in Action:

Meg and her team Focus Map

After Meg's team Crispify all the potential behaviors, they take a lunch break. During this break, Ben goes to work. He is the intern with good handwriting.

Ben goes through all the crispy behavior cards (e.g., sticky notes) and he rewrites them neatly on new cards (.e.g, sticky notes). **The behavior statements are now both crispy and readable.**

When the team returns from lunch, they thank Intern Ben for his good work. And the team starts the Focus Mapping process.

Meg speaks up: *"Hey, everyone. It's now time for my favorite method—Focus Mapping. Everyone, please stand and form a semi-circle facing the wall."*

Meg **reminds everyone** about the importance of this method: **"We Focus Map because** it's a simple yet powerful way for us to prioritize and focus on behavior. We'll be able to **reach consensus** in a systematic and **efficient way that cuts hierarchy and gives us loads of time back."**

Meg directs the process. She has her team members take turns placing the behavior items on the wall, mapped to the Impact dimension. **Each person reads aloud one behavior item and places on the wall, top to bottom.** Then, the next person **reads one**

behavior aloud and places on the wall, top to bottom, etc. They don't talk or discuss at this point. They just **read the one item** that they selected and **place it** somewhere **on the Impact dimension**.

Two cards may end up with the same level of Impact—for instance, both close to the top and at equal height. And that's fine.
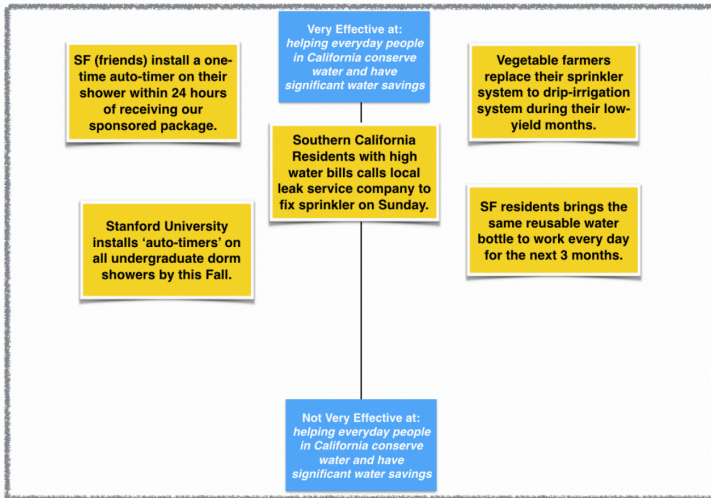

Figure 4: The starting point of creating the Focusmap for Meg's team. Only five behaviors are shown for the sake of simplicity. In the real world, you'd have many more.

Once the team has sorted the behavior items on the Impact Dimension, **the items are locked and frozen vertically.** The team then shift gears and sort the items side to side, along the Feasibility Dimension, **while holding the same vertical** (y-axis).

One person moves one behavior item (side to side). Then, the next person moves one behavior item that they want (side to side). Again, they don't explain or discuss.

Meg catches a newbie, "*Hey – you can't move it like that. **It was at the bottom, so it needs to stay at the bottom,** but you can it left-and-right along the x-axis.*" The next person moves the behavior that they want, until the team agrees that they have the right arrangement of items.

In just a few minutes, Meg and her team are done. They now have three behaviors in their Focus Zone. Those are the behaviors they will pursue in the design steps that follow.
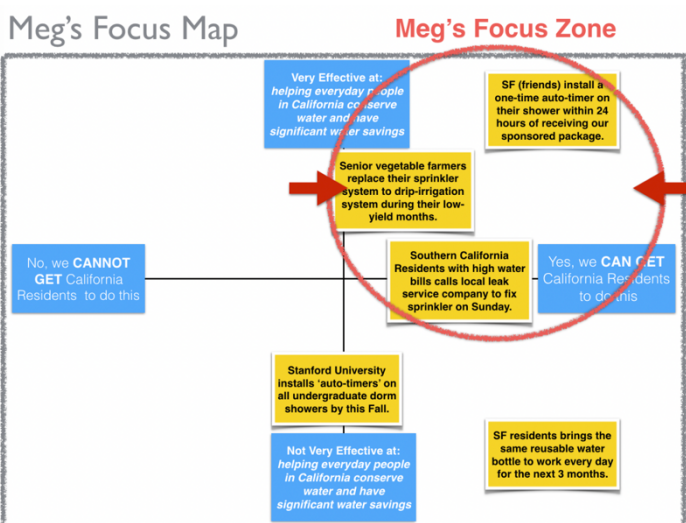
Deeper Dive

Running a Focus Mapping session with a team of 10 people takes about 30 to 60 minutes, start to finish. The smaller the team, the faster it goes. Also, an experienced team can complete a session in 20 minutes or faster.

Below we outline the key steps in running a group Focus Mapping session.

### Round 1: Place items and sort them top to bottom (Impact).

Before you begin, you need to have a set of crispy behaviors to sort. You should write **one behavior on a card or sticky note.** It is important to write these in a way that's readable. (That's why Intern Ben re-wrote all the items: He has great handwriting.)

In **the prep round**, you and your team place items on the Focus Map. **When it's someone's turn, that person read out loud one item** and place it on the wall or table. Then, it's the **next person's turn.** One item on the wall. Repeat this until all the behaviors are mapped according to the Impact Dimension. Everyone begins to familiarize the behaviors and their visual placement.

In the first official round: You then sort the behaviors, up and down, according to your project's aspiration or desired outcome. When done in a group, this sorting happens in silence. Okay, it's not totally silent. As a person takes a turn **moving one card,** he or she reads the behavior out loud. **One turn. One move.** Otherwise, no talking.
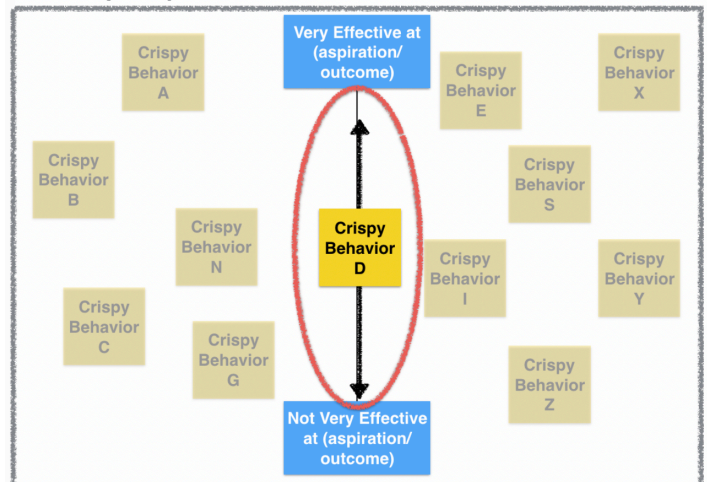
Round 2: Sort items side to side (Feasibility Dimension).

In Round 2 you shift your focus to the Feasibility Dimension, which is horizontal.

You take turns, just like in Round 1. **One turn. One card.** However, in Round 2 you slide items side to side. You don't move items up or down (that includes diagonally). Remember, **they are locked in their vertical position.**

Before you start sorting, you define the end points of the horizontal continuum. The end points always have a similar wording. You may use one of the pairings below, or something similar. (**see diagram on next page**)

Deeper Dive (cont.)

Sort by Feasibility

Sort by Feasibility

Very Effective at (aspiration/outcome)

Crispy Behavior S

Crispy Behavior E

Crispy Behavior X

Crispy Behavior D

Crispy Behavior G

No, we **CANNOT GET** customers to do this

Crispy Behavior N

Yes, we **CAN get** customers to do this.

Crispy Behavior I

Crispy Behavior C

Crispy Behavior A

Crispy Behavior B

Crispy Behavior Z

Crispy Behavior Y

Not Very Effective at (aspiration/outcome)

In Round 2, you take turns moving items, reading each one aloud, until your group agrees you have a good placement according to the Feasibility Dimension.

Left side of Focus Map	Right side of Focus Map
No, **we can't get our customers** to do this	Yes, **we can get our customers** to do this
No, **we can't get people** to do this	Yes, **we can get people** to do this
No, **we can't get ourselves** to do this	Yes, **we can get ourselves** to do this

"Get" is a key word here. **Note that the "who" can be *ourselves*.** Or it might be *users*, or *customers*, or *students*, or *myself*, if you're Focus Mapping for yourself. Adapt it to your project's priorities.

Round 3: Wildcard Round (you can move items anywhere)

Most of Focus Mapping in a group is done without discussion. This way, you focus and select based on behaviors—not who argues the best, talks the loudest, or has the highest status in the group.

In Round 3 the rules change. On your turn, **you can move an item anywhere**. And in this round **you can discuss**.

Here's how it works:

Jennifer sees a behavior item on the Focus Map that seems out of place to her. When her turn arrives, she steps up and proposes a move. **She points to the exact spot on the Focus Map where she thinks the item fits best**. Jennifer **might briefly explain** why moving it to the new spot makes sense. Sometimes people discuss briefly. **Then everyone votes.** If the majority agree, then Jennifer can move the item.

At this point, Jennifer's turn is done. The next team member has an opportunity to make a proposal. People keep taking turns until everyone agrees the Focus Map is in great shape, with all the items in the right spots.
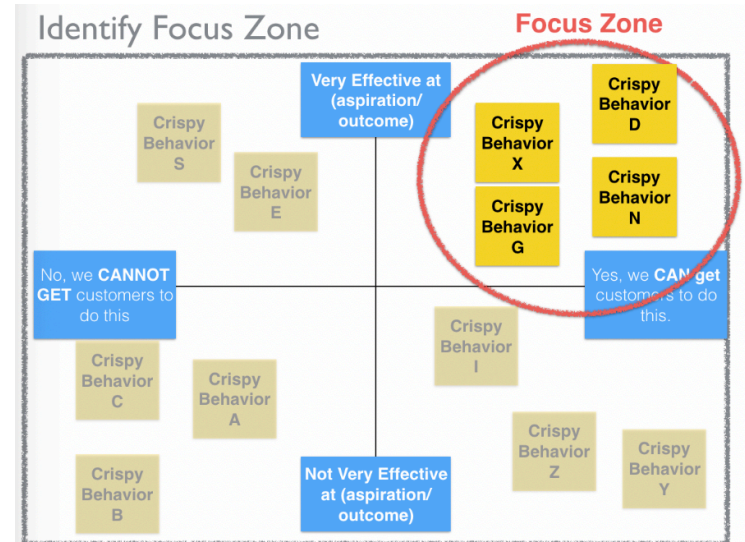
Taking a turn in this round is optional. **But everyone votes** on each proposal.

Identify the Focus Zone

Once you are done sorting the items, you now select which items to use and which to ignore. We are fans of choosing just a few items, perhaps two or three. Sometimes you might select more, if the items are easy to do.

As you can see, you will be choosing among items in the upper right-hand corner. Those are the ones with the highest impact and highest feasibility.

We call this area the Focus Zone.

Identify Focus Zone

Focus Zone

Very Effective at (aspiration/outcome)

Crispy Behavior S

Crispy Behavior E

Crispy Behavior X

Crispy Behavior D

Crispy Behavior G

Crispy Behavior N

No, we **CANNOT GET** customers to do this

Yes, we **CAN get** customers to do this.

Crispy Behavior I

Crispy Behavior C

Crispy Behavior A

Crispy Behavior Z

Crispy Behavior Y

Crispy Behavior B

Not Very Effective at (aspiration/outcome)

We believe the Focus Mapping is the best method in the world for prioritizing. There are other methods out there, including some from design thinking. However, when we train people with serious skills in design thinking, they almost always agree that Focus Mapping is the best prioritization method.

Here are some reasons Focus Mapping is so effective: Each **behavior option** gets some consideration. Compared to a list where you might be blind to something, in Focus Mapping **you and your team look at each item twice.**

Next, the process is physically engaging (you're standing and moving). In addition, the final result is both visual and physical. You and your team constructed a tangible thing that's of value where **you can see the relative (spatial) importance of your behaviors.**

We explain more online

Learning about Focus Mapping through written text isn't the best medium. A video is better. So we made one. It's online, waiting for you. There's also a 15-page script for facilitators who intend to Focus Map in a group.

Go to welcometobehaviordesign.com/focusmapping to see more real Focus Map examples, such as one for an early LinkedIn.

Ninja Use of this Method

Focus Mapping is a great method to use whenever you have a bunch of options and you need to pick one or just a few. Using this method with your team can create insight and alignment. **But at times you'll want to use this method on your own.** In fact, to get insight on your project, you may want to run through all the steps we've shared so far. Just you, in ninja mode.

What does it look like? You can write the crispy behavior statements on post-it notes or index cards and then sort them on the kitchen counter. As simple as it sounds, this approach can lead to big returns.

Working alone, you can do a Focus Map on your own in less than 20 minutes It's a great investment of your time. You will emerge with a strong, clear point of view about where to focus your efforts.

Consider this scenario:

Your team is creating a mobile app to help people meditate daily. Your team has a lot of ideas of what the app can do, but you realize that simplicity matters. You need to pick and choose.

You can do your own Focus Map to learn which app features you want to advocate. It's easy and fast.

First, write down each potential app feature on an index card.

Next, sort the items according to the Impact dimension, top to bottom. In doing this sort, you'll need to specify the aspiration or outcome. That's your criterion for the vertical sorting.

If you believe the most important strategic outcome is "daily use of our meditation app," then that phrase becomes the criterion for sorting up and down. In other words, you'd write these at the top and bottom of your Focus Map landscape:
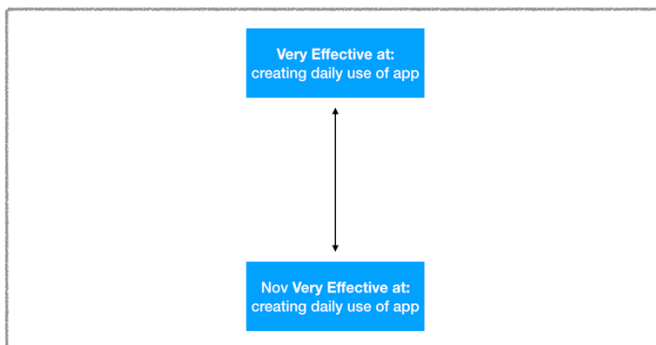
After you sort the app features up and down, then you'd move on to the Feasibility dimension, which is horizontal. You'd label the end points like this:
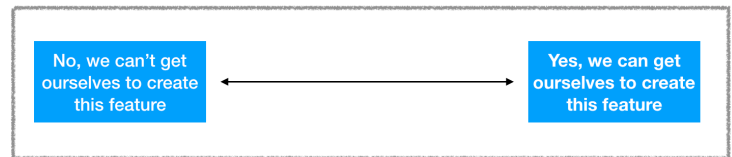
After you sort items side to side, you will then have a handful of potential features in the upper right-hand corner, the Focus Zone. What you see there is your answer. These are the features to include. Everything else you can disregard.

After working on your own, in this ninja way, you can then return to your team's project with a clear, strong point of view.

People may not agree with you, of course (which is why the group version is so helpful). But after doing your own Focus Map, you will have the advantage of having considered the app features carefully and systematically. Your point of view is not a pure guess.

In some cases, you may want to share the Focus Map with your team. Maybe they will agree. Maybe they won't. Perhaps after your team sees what you've done, they'll want you run a group Focus Map session. That would be a great result, and you can congratulate yourself for your ninja skills of moving the project forward.

What Comes Next

You now have a clear set of prioritized behaviors. You might be feeling the itch to already figure out the solve (the how-to). Good! The next two methods will make these specific behaviors easier to do (Easify) and then you'll explore different sequences on how to solve for your target behavior (Starfish). Those are the next two sections. See you there.

Author Appreciation

We are deeply appreciative for Dr. Stephanie Shorter, our editor, for joining us mid-way in our journey, contributing, and sticking with us until the end.

I am a behavior scientist, with deep experience in innovation and teaching. At Stanford University I run a research lab. I also teach my models and methods in graduate seminars.

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BJ Fogg, PhD

I am a behavior designer, with deep experience in (snap)testing the psychology behind ideas or behaviors. At Stanford, I worked with BJ at his lab. I also created and graduated with the world's first Behavior Design major from Stanford University.

In industry, I work with my team of world class behavior designers to workshop, operationalize, and consult in Behavior Design for good.

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