Rose Hurwitz
April 15, 2026

Design Principles

The silence of the hushed audience rings in my ears and my skin pricks at the thought of its cold touch. Slowly, I extend one leg and place my foot onto the tightrope in front of me. I shift my weight thoughtfully to gauge its steadiness. One misstep and I fall 50 feet onto the ground, but 10 careful, yet confident glides and I can receive a standing ovation. Bracing myself, I look ahead to my destination on the platform opposite where I stand now. I hold my breath, tighten my muscles, and go. One foot in front of the other. Total focus. Moving. Until I reach the other side. The crowd can no longer contain their relief and excitement as my slipper skims the second platform. To celebrate my nearly impossible feat, they cheer and I bow. I think to myself, there are certainly easier ways to get from point A to point B than a tightrope, but none that provide this thrill.

Not all bridges are equal. Each design principle comes with its own set of challenges and strengths. A tightrope and truss bridge each connect two points but vary wildly in their execution. A tightrope can be constructed easily and quickly using a steel wire or an elastic cord, but offers little support, so only the steadiest acrobats can cross. A truss bridge is known for its longevity, durability, and stability because of its triangular construction. Ordinarily made from steel, concrete, and timber, these bridges can offer a safe crossing to even the heaviest loads. However, this feat of engineering is expensive to build and requires careful planning and advanced construction knowledge to execute flawlessly. When constructing a bridge, consideration must be given to optimize design quality under constraints related to time, money, resources, labor, materials, purpose, designers, and end users. Beyond building, maintenance and repair can prove to be even more complicated. Once a bridge breaks, the entire structure is compromised. Outcomes can vary from total collapse to solvable design solutions. Bridges, despite their seemingly simple purpose, are extremely complex.

These design principles ring true not only for built infrastructure, but also for social bridges and relationships. Some connections between people are rapid and flimsy but can withstand stress if the people involved are acutely aware of their position and nimbly navigate undulations in tension. Other connections are built on trusting foundations over time, creating strong, lasting, resilient relationships. Like physical bridges, social bridges require thoughtful execution to ensure the relationship structure is designed for the people involved and provides stability, direction, and connection. When social connections are compromised, relationship repair can seem like an insurmountable task. This is especially true when social connections span not only a few people, but entire populations, like in Holocaust reconciliation efforts.

The Holocaust was a catastrophic state-sponsored genocide by Nazi Germany against mostly Jewish people, but also Roma, homosexuals, people with disabilities, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others. The Holocaust itself was a result of dismantled social bridges where trust between different identities and social classes was destroyed and weaponized. The connection between these groups was annihilated because the social structure was completely redesigned by deliberately harmful institutional ideology, encouraging people to seek unity and safety in similarity and to defy difference and ostracize the other. Allyship is abandoned. This longstanding tension of distrust ultimately escalated to the execution of more than 10 million people during the Holocaust, the displacement of more than 8 million people after World War II, and nearly a century of attempted reconciliation between survivors, perpetrators, descendants, and broader society.[1]

1. https://wienerholocaustlibrary.org/2022/01/24/the-end-of-the-holocaust-and-the-aftermath-of-genocide-holocaust-memorial-day-2022/

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Now we are faced with the challenge to both build and repair social bridges to establish peace, understanding, and allyship, and to uphold our promise to “Never Again” allow hostility, discrimination, and targeted violence to be ignored or allowed to escalate. Being an ally is not a performance across a wire, dependent on balance, bravery, and applause. It is the slow, deliberate, and often invisible work of construction. It is laying foundations where there was once fracture, reinforcing structures where there has been strain, and returning to maintain what we have built.

To be an ally is to add support where there is weakness, to redistribute weight so that no one group bears the burden alone, and to remain present even when the work is difficult, unrecognized, or incomplete. It requires rejecting the false security of sameness and instead choosing the harder, more meaningful work of connection across difference. It asks us not only to cross bridges, but to ensure that others can do so safely.

Unlike the tightrope, true bridges are not built for spectacle. They are built for passage, for endurance, and for trust. They do not demand perfection from those who cross them—only that they exist, that they hold, and that they remain.

If the Holocaust revealed the devastating consequences of bridges dismantled, distorted, and destroyed, then our responsibility is clear. We must be the designers, the builders, and the caretakers of something better. Not fragile lines suspended in tension, but strong, resilient structures rooted in humanity.

Because the work of remembrance is not only to look back. It is to build forward.

1. https://wienerholocaustlibrary.org/2022/01/24/the-end-of-the-holocaust-and-the-aftermath-of-genocide-holocaust-memorial-day-2022/