

As gamification practitioners, we are looking to utilise things that games do really well in areas that could desperately do with being more engaging in some way.

I read somewhere recently that “in games, we are trying to become our best selves” or something similar. I have to say, I only partially agree with that. In some games that is true, but most of the time I am trying to forget who I am and be someone totally different, be they better or worse than the real me. In reality, many games bring out the worst in people as a sort of catharsis! For me, I want to escape from reality, and that is the point. Games provide a way to escape the reality of life. That is why the concept of Uncanny Valley exists, where something that isn’t alive looks uncomfortably close to real. It makes us uneasy.

Don’t get me wrong, some games use reality for exactly that reason. Playing a game like “This War of Mine” is all about teaching people the reality of war as a civilian. There are no heroics, just tough decisions that almost never feel right. It is not about being your best self, it is about surviving. But it is about escaping your own reality and existing in someone else’s for a while.

In gamification, we don’t always have the luxury of creating a fully immersive experience that allows people to escape the reality of their day to day. In fact, very often, we are trying to teach people more about their reality in a way that is entertaining and informative. But I think that we should always strive to include something that allows people to stretch their imagination a little. For instance, if you are creating some sort of mandatory training, it doesn’t have to be static pages or boring videos, it could be more akin to a choose your own adventure. Put people in realist situations and let them decide how to act. If they choose the correct course of action, celebrate it. If they choose wrong, explain why and help them understand what they did wrong. If there is no right or wrong answer, explain both sides of the coin! That way they are still dealing with reality, but in a way that feels slightly abstracted and safe.

Even points, badges and leaderboards offer a form of escapism, they are not part of standard reality of most day to day jobs, as long as they are implemented well and are not the core of a long term strategy.

So give people experiences that allow them to escape, even for a few moments, even in the most serious of apps, and you will find they [engage](#) far better.

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