

James C. E. Zabel

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SENIOR DESIGN MANAGER · UX LEADER · 15+ YEARS

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PROFILE

Senior design manager at Microsoft. Led design across *Azure CXS, Resiliency, and Customer Health*. Previously scaled an enterprise IoT platform past *20M devices* as the founding designer. AI-native, mission-oriented, still shipping software myself.

SKILLS

LEADERSHIP

Design management, UX research, design ops, mentorship, executive storytelling

CRAFT

Design systems, prototyping, information architecture, data visualization, mobile & enterprise SaaS

TOOLS

Figma, Adobe XD, Sketch, Axure, Zeplin

BUILD

HTML, CSS, TypeScript, React Native, SQL, AI-assisted design

EDUCATION

M.S. Industrial Engineering

Human Factors Psychology focus
Clemson University · 2010

B.S. Industrial Engineering

Clemson University · 2009

HONORS

- Azure X Manager of the Year
- AWS Certified Cloud Practitioner
- Six Sigma Green Belt
- IIE President, 2009–2010

EXPERIENCE

Microsoft / Senior Design Manager

Apr 2023 — Present

- Manage and mentor a team of 6 designers and UX researchers across Azure X, Resiliency, and Customer Health.
- Recognized with Azure X **Manager of the Year** for delivery results and people leadership.
- Established design-driven operating rhythms — improving clarity, velocity, and cross-org alignment with PM and Engineering.
- Elevated team visibility at senior leadership through executive-ready storytelling and design-led narratives.
- Contributing member of a cross-org v-team defining the Future of Work vision for the broader UX organization.
- Drove quality initiatives including large-scale bug bashes resulting in 100+ actionable improvements shipped or prioritized.

Microsoft / Senior UX Designer

Feb 2022 — Apr 2023

- Led UX for internal Azure field platforms serving **4,000+ users** across 10+ Microsoft orgs.
- Drove **175% MAU growth** post-preview on internal tooling.
- Supported business outcomes tied to \$25M+ projected revenue and \$3M annual cost savings.
- Trusted IC partner to senior PM and Engineering leaders; influenced roadmap investment and contributed to early AI / LLM exploration.

SnapOne (formerly SnapAV) / UX Manager

Feb 2015 — Feb 2022

- Led UX for **OvrC**, an IoT cloud remote management platform supporting 20M+ managed devices globally.
- Led **OvrC Home**, a residential consumer app enabling homeowners to monitor and control smart home devices.
- Strategic design support for the \$150M+ Connected Device category, driving double-digit growth annually.
- Managed onshore and offshore design teams; built a standardized design system across all software interfaces.
- Planned and facilitated regular usability sessions with customers across both platforms.

SnapOne (formerly SnapAV) / User Experience Engineer

Aug 2013 — Feb 2015

- Early team member helping launch OvrC, a device management platform now supporting 20M+ IoT devices.
- Led offshore UI team utilizing AngularJS, HTML5, CSS3, Bootstrap, and WebSocket technologies.
- Created wireframes, prototypes, and flowcharts; conducted usability studies with clients to iterate design.
- Translated requirements with a standardized design document to guide development and QA teams through implementation.

EXPERIENCE, CONTINUED

Lockheed Martin / Human Systems Integration Engineer

Nov 2011 – Aug 2013

- Principal investigator on usability assessments for the Navy **Ballistic Missile Defense 5.1** program.
- Used iterative design and heuristic evaluations to develop new GUIs introduced to fleet architecture.
- Gathered input from active duty sailors to resolve novel interface and layout problems.
- Presented testable content in weekly Mission Planning workgroups with government customers.

General Electric (Axiem Engineering) / Human Factors Engineer

2011

- Risk assessments, Root Cause Analysis investigations, and Preliminary Hazard Assessments supporting new product development across multiple GE business units.
- Identified safety-critical components and systems; completed PHA, HazOp, and Accident Scenario Reviews.

RECENT SIDE PROJECTS

CharTaker / JavaScript · iOS

2024 – Present

- A TTRPG character manager for creating, organizing, and tracking tabletop RPG characters. Shipped to the App Store.

Inspec / TypeScript

2024

- Franchise management application for streamlining inspections and operations across distributed teams.

MealMapper / React Native · Supabase

2024

- Cross-platform mobile app for meal planning, grocery list generation, and real-time household sync.

HOW I LEAD

- **Grow the people.** Built on trust, 1:1s, design crits, and stretch assignments. Teams that learn deliver.
- **Ship over perfection.** Working increments first, polish what matters. Momentum beats perfection.
- **Design the system.** Systems, not screens. Scalable patterns keep product coherent as it grows.
- **Test what you don't know.** Validate fast. Assumptions are risks; feedback is fuel.