While on the search of something to write about in terms of failed design, I struggled to open my water bottle. Then it hit me. I bought this bottle without the ability to even open it. Both my friend and I stood in Wegmans for 5 minutes with Nalgene bottles trying to figure out how one worked.

“Maybe this squishy top does something?” Nope.

“What about pulling that blue tab up?” It doesn’t move.

To test whether or not I was crazy in not understanding this design, I even asked my roommate to try and open the bottle. She couldn’t figure it out, and she’s not the only one.

Why it Fails:

After observing several people, I saw that everyone’s initial instinct was to press down on the rubber button of the top of the bottle cap. It has a splash symbol, it looks like a fun button to push, it’s on the top of a spout that you would expect water to come out of, and yet nothing happens when you push it. Why would the designers do this to us? In terms of visibility, we see it and we want to press the black rubber button on the top of the bottle, but it does nothing to give us water. We do receive feedback in terms that it doesn’t give us water, but there are no hints as to how we’ll find that out.

As for this blue tab, it has a black opening above it showing us that there is another piece of plastic underneath. We can also see this when we look at the loop. Although, we don’t understand how to get this blue piece up. You pull and pull, but nothing moves. The tab is small and awkward, which means you don’t get enough leverage to even attempt pulling it up. Try all you might, but it doesn’t work.

Now how does one open this bottle?

I feel rather foolish to admit it, but it took me two days to figure out how to open the bottle and it was by accident. So what’s the secret? You push the blue tab up. The blue tab is placed at the angle so that pulling it won’t open it, but pushing it upward with the tip of your thumb will. It is surprisingly efficient when placing the bottle in your bag and your books can’t open the cap, but it is rather rough to open.

Solution:

In my opinion, I would edit the cap to make the design easier to understand in terms of visibility. If you can’t see it and understand it within a second, then there is something wrong. I would remove the splash symbol from the rubber top (which is actually a water seal), close the blue cap up, and make a larger curved tab that is in the shape for the top of your thumb. By removing the splash symbol, we remove a lot of user confusion because then they won’t see it and think it’s the key to getting water. Closing the blue cap up is only a personal aesthetic fix, but it can also deter confusion in visibility. By extending the tab and forming it to the top of a thumb, we enhance the visibility to direct attention to the tab, and also increase the efficiency and comfort of understanding. Once you pick up the water bottle, your thumb will gravitate to that tab and your body will knowingly push it up to finally open the cap.