

Ep #3: Creating White Space & Margin



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With Your Host

Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number three.

Welcome to *The Design You Podcast*, a show where interior designers and creatives learn to say no to busy and say yes to more health, wealth, and joy. Here is your host, Tobi Fairley.

Hello friends, what's happening? We're rocking and rolling into episode number three here at the Design You podcast. Yippee. I'm so excited to have started a podcast, I have wanted to do it for years and it is done. So thank you for being here. Tell me, what's happening with you guys? Did you say no to busy this week? Did you add in some stuff just because you wanted to and not feel guilty or behind?

Gosh, I sure hope so. And if not, go back and listen to podcast number two all about saying no to busyness. You know, I had a lot of time with my family this week and weekend and it is really shocking. Like, if you know me, it is shocking to think that I did not work at all period on Saturday or Sunday.

Did I just hear some of you gasp? Tobi, what? I went to the movie in the middle of the day, and it was spectacular. But hey, it's a practice, friends, it's a practice to say no to busy and create a bunch of white space, and I'm getting so good at it. And you're going to get good at it too, so let's talk about it.

Today, we're going to talk about creating white space or what I sometimes call margin, in our lives. And in the last episode, we were rethinking busyness and opening our minds to this idea that we get to decide what fits in our 24 hours a day. And I want us to define now what margin and what white space are because you're going to hear me use those terms a lot today, and if you keep listening to this podcast, you're going to hear them some more in the future. I love these words.

Unlike busy, which I have erased from my vocabulary, the B word, margin and white space are my BFFs, seriously. So I use these terms

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interchangeably most of the time, but maybe they're slightly different in my mind, if I'm honest. So what are they?

Well, white space to me is just open space that's not earmarked in my schedule. It's like free space. It's time that I intentionally leave open in my day every single day so that when I get to that moment, I get to decide how I want to use it. So white space for me is for things like taking a walk, resting, sleeping, playing, planning, working on a hobby, going to the movies, like I did this weekend, learning something new, connecting with other people, sometimes it's for reading or spa time or yoga or self-care.

I mean, there's a lot of stuff that happens in my white space. Sometimes, white space is for work. Sometimes it's for organizing my schedule because I'm feeling super disorganized at a moment and I need to get it all cleaned up so I can feel better. White space is great for that.

Sometimes I use it in a very active way, like some of these things I've mentioned like for planning, or for dreaming and goal setting, or exercising, moving my body. But sometimes it's way more passive. Sometimes it's just for lying around and learning to be still. Yes, y'all, I've had to learn how to be still. A busy person can't just be still.

So it's for learning to be still, it's for journaling, sometimes it's for doing literally nothing at all. Not even reading, just sitting. Talk about a practice. That's kind of like meditating for me, but just to sit. So to go from like, an uber busy person that I've been for years, I was in the past for a long time, to someone who can just sit around without losing my mind. That is a huge shift.

And white space has allowed me to do that. So yeah, sometimes white space is even for stuff that I thought in my past busy life was a waste, stuff like binging on Netflix. Yes, I can love me some Netflix, y'all. And I also can love watching reality TV with my husband because he's a reality TV junkie, which is so funny to me. He loves The Bachelor. It's not me, it's him.

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But now I see these things as fun and as totally acceptable, and not a waste of my time. I even see them as important. Important time for my relationships and for me, y'all. So this process of creating white space and then enjoying it is all a part of my quest, my mission for finding balance.

And that's what a lot of you are here for too. So these formerly unimportant things that now fit in my white space are amazing and it feels like they're allowed, they're approved. Instead of some secret pleasure that I used to do sometimes but I would feel guilty about it or try to hide it, now it's like I have this big old stamp that says Tobi approved, and I can just stamp it on these things like watching Netflix, so I can have fun and I can play and relax and enjoy.

For me, the best thing about white space is that when I plan it in my daily schedule, which I do, it's there for me to use the way I need to at any given time. And I can wait until that time and decide what I need most when I get to it. So it's there for me, and it's supporting me every single day if I need to finish something or complete something that I thought would be completed earlier but I didn't, or I just need to take a break.

You know, white space is a time for me to be spontaneous, which is something else I have to practice, my type A planner personality has to practice spontaneity, and white space is when I can be spontaneous when the rest of my schedule is for actually doing what I say I would do when I said I would do it.

And if you're the opposite of me, if you're one of those people who like to be spontaneous more than not, planning white space into your day can actually be a tool to help you be productive. It can help you be disciplined with all the other parts of your schedule because you can see your white space as your reward for getting everything else done.

So it works for both of us, the spontaneous ones of us and the type A people that are just like me. White space is life changing. I call white space my saving grace. It's my overflow area, it's where I find my sanity and my peace.

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Now, margin for me is similar, but I think of it as room for the unexpected. So margin for me means I no longer have appointments scheduled back to back to back to back to back to back all day every single day like I used to. It means I leave time before meetings to prepare and to be on time because there's always something unexpected like traffic that can keep you from being on time.

And it also means I leave time after meetings to do anything that I promised in the meeting that I wasn't planning to have to do, or to type notes from a meeting. So putting margin all around those things on my calendar help me be successful.

Designing a life with margin in it means that I put my most important two or three goals for the day first. And I plan to complete them early, even if they're big tasks, I try to complete them before 2pm if I can. So then I can have margin around them and after them to wind up my day at a decent hour, and to start turning my attention to my family, to my daughter.

Sometimes as early as when she gets out of school, which is 3pm. Sometimes sooner, just because my brain did enough for the day and it's tired of thinking, and at two o'clock, I can check out. Before I had margin, my typical workday stopped when my head hit the pillow at night.

Now, margin for me is kind of like the back office part of my life, even the back office part of my personal life for sure. It's where I keep all my personal systems going. It's like, you know that little external hard drive where you run the backup on your computer at the end of the day or the week, or however often you do it so that you don't lose all that key information in your computer?

Well, margin is like that for me. It's that place where I do all the maintenance and the backup so that everything else in my life runs smoothly. And it's also a place for all of the unexpected stuff like illness, or death, or accidents, or injuries, or job loss, or relationship drama. Or anything at all. Not always tragic, just anything caused by other people because other people are out of our control.

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Like, someone being late to an appointment is out of our control. And having margin makes that okay because there's definitely going to be plenty of those unexpected things in life, that's how life works, right? But if we have margin, these often-difficult times become much less stressful because we have space for them to happen.

So you may be thinking, "This sounds amazing, Tobi. In theory, this sounds perfect. But there is no way, like, zero possibility that I can run my life that way. How do you ever get anything done, Tobi?" But let's look at this for a minute.

Here's the thing. I actually accomplish a lot. I'm a doer. And just be accomplishing at least three key things every single day, usually way more than that, but at least three, that's 60 things a month if I'm doing this five days a week. How many of you that are super busy are accomplishing and completing 60 key things a month? Probably not very many of you because you're distracted and you're interrupted, and you're doing busy things that aren't even important.

So think about that. When you put it in this perspective, you can start to see that this lifestyle could actually help you accomplish way more than you thought, and likely way more than you're accomplishing right now. And because I leave space in my schedule, I do have time to exercise and to eat well, and to say yes to lunch with mom, or a friend, or to drive carpool for seventh grade girls volleyball when I planned it or even in a pinch when some mom says, "Hey, can anybody drive today? I now have a conflict."

It gives me time to be available for those people who need me when they need me, and that feels so good. But the reality is most days, those extra things and those emergency things, they don't pop up. So I end up with extra time in my day. Shocking, right? Have you ever had extra time in your day? Well, I end up with it often.

And when that happens, I can do one or two more work things if I want to. That's what happens in the margin, or if I don't want to do more work for the day I can practice extra self-care, or I can read a book. You know, usually

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when I'm reading a book, it's business or personal development, which helps me in life and in business, but it's still pleasurable for me, and it's still something that I didn't have time for before.

Now, when extra time opens up, I get to do what I want to do and what I enjoy doing, even though they're things that are going to help me in business and in life, and it's amazing. Here's what else I can do with margin. When my day wraps up at a decent hour because I left space for that to happen, I can start a healthy dinner at a decent hour, and it is life changing for our family.

In our old life, we usually were in an argument because we had three hangry people who were so tired, we had no idea what we wanted to have for supper, usually had no groceries, and none of us had the capacity to make one more decision at the end of a long day, so it was torture.

With this lifestyle that I have now with margin and with white space, it makes us all so happy. My family loved it because you know what happens when they come home? Well, first of all, I like to cook. You may not, so you don't have to do this with your white space, but just to give you an example, we talk about this and we kind of laugh and we pat ourselves on the back at what a good job we're doing and what a good job momma's doing because here's what I do now.

I just decide what's for dinner, and I have groceries because I planned ahead. And I fix dinner, and there's no having to decide or having to agree at the end of a long day what everyone feels like eating. Like, we know ahead of time what we're having, and I left space to make that actually a reality.

So they show up and there's dinner, and I had fun cooking it, and I'm probably having a glass of wine, and we're all just giddy because it is a win-win for our family, and margin helps me do that. This lifestyle with margin, it feels like balance. It is balance. It feels like quality of life.

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This is what I had in mind for a business and a life I loved, and I'm actually living it. I wasn't living it before. I want you to think about your own life. How much margin or white space is in it? How much margin or white space is in your life versus busyness?

If you're thinking on a regular basis thoughts like, "I don't have time to work out or I don't have time to eat healthy or I don't have time to cook, I have to do this client job starting immediately when I wake up this morning because I'm already behind, I can't spare an hour, I can't do anything for anybody, including myself," then you don't have margin or white space.

And what you may not realize is that it's not your schedule or your clients, or your circumstances that are preventing you from adding in exercise or family time or eating right. It's your thoughts. It's never our circumstances that are the problem. Our thoughts create our feelings, which create our actions, or sometimes inactions, and that's what creates our results.

So if you have no margin, it's your thoughts that are giving you that result. And if you don't believe this sort of life or schedule is an option, think again because it is. And though it may be hard to believe at first, the only thing that has to change if you want to add margin or white space in your life is your thoughts.

The only thing that has to change if you want to say no to busy is your thoughts. But changing your thoughts take practice. Most people can't do it all alone in the beginning, and in the next podcast, I'm going to teach you a tool that's going to help you become aware of and start to change your thoughts.

It's this cool thing called The Model, and I learned it from one of my mentors, Brooke Castillo, and it is amazing. And I'm going to teach it to you. But here's the thing, before we can change our thoughts, we have to start to become a watcher of our thoughts. In other words, we have to become aware of what we're doing, and more specifically, what we're thinking that is getting our current results.

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Both some things that we want in our lives that we're getting, but also other things that we're getting in our lives that we don't want. So think about this. Here's the interesting thing about not allowing margin or not believing we can have any margin or white space in our life. Let's think of an example.

We can think the thought that we don't have an hour to eat right, or to workout, or to do something for somebody we love because we have to work, right? I've thought that a million times. But then what do we often do following that thought?

Well, if you're like me and you're not managing your thoughts because I wasn't for years, then we start to think more thoughts and the new thoughts we think after we think we don't have time for any of that stuff, are thoughts that cause us to feel overwhelmed and stressed out about what we're supposed to do in our day.

So then what happens? Well, those thoughts actually derail us from the work we were supposed to be doing to begin with. So often times, our action is that we procrastinate. Maybe that's an inaction, but the point being we procrastinate on that super duper important work that we sacrificed ourselves and our family to do.

But we didn't even do it. Is that true for you? It's definitely been true for me so many times, and rarely when we procrastinate do we go back and then say, "Well, I'm procrastinating on work so I might as well go ahead and exercise or do all those things my family needed me for."

Of course not. That's not what we do. We do something we feel like doing instead, don't we because we want to do something that makes us feel better. And that doesn't mean that we're going out and having a good time, sometimes we're doing something like eating something because that makes us feel better. Sometimes we're doing something mindless like cleaning out our email inbox, but the point being, we're not doing what our family needed, we're not doing something for our self-care, and we're not doing the work we were supposed to be doing to begin with.

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We would have had time for both working out, and eating right, and giving time to our family, and getting our work done, if our thoughts were aligned with making that happen. And you know what? If we had worked out, there's a really good chance we would have relieved a lot of the stress that led to the thoughts or the thoughts that led to the stress that caused us to procrastinate on our job when we were supposed to be working.

Craziness, I know. So can you start to see how this is the case? Why can't we see this when it's happening and just make a change so we do what we say we want to do to get the life that we say we want to get? Well, it takes practice. And one thing that's confusing for us is because our to-do list never gets shorter, and that's because we're doing all these things, we're thinking thoughts that lead to procrastination that don't ever finish our work, so our to-do list is still long.

So we look at it and we're like, "Well, it's all still there, clearly we have so much work to do that we have no time for margin, we have no time to be healthy or do anything else because our work is still not done." It sends a really confusing message. It's often very hard to see that we're doing this to ourselves, but it's not our job that's keeping us from our families or our health.

It's our thoughts that are keeping us from them, and to think all those years I was blaming my job, or my family sometimes, but often my job, it's not my job's fault. If we don't have white space and margin, it is not your job's fault, it is our family's fault - it's our fault, even, or at least our mind's fault for the thoughts that we're thinking that are leading us to this result.

Our thoughts and only our thoughts keep us from being healthy and balanced and keep us from getting our job done. That's just how powerful our brains are. And when we start to become a watcher of our thoughts, we can see our brain's power, and we can also see that we don't have to believe everything our brain thinks. We have a choice.

Yes, we are sabotaging our lives with our thoughts and believing that there's nothing we can do about it. But we can do something, we can

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become aware and we can change our thoughts. So what I want you to know is that white space and margin are the only way to have the balance we say we want.

They are the keys to creating a life and a business we love. They are the opposite of busy, and they are a choice. They start with our thoughts. You know, you've heard the saying, "Failing to plan is planning to fail." Well, not having margin is planning to fail because it's making the assumption that nothing will ever go wrong and nothing unexpected will come up, and that's impossible.

You know, recently I was working with my own life coach because yes, I have a life coach, and I think even coaches need coaches to be our best. And what she and I realized was a really neat thing. We were talking about how much margin and white space I've added to my life over the last two to three years, and we were talking about all the busy that I've said no to.

And we realized that white space is like a metaphor or a picture of my new and improved life. Here's what I mean: those of you who know my interior design work know that I use a ton of color in the spaces I design, and those of you who know me personally and know my extroverted and outgoing personality know I like to design a colorful life that's fully of meaning and joy.

So I'm all about color in every way. I want lots of meaning and lots of joy and I try to squeeze it all in and that's where that busyness used to become an issue. But now, I work on finding real joy and lasting joy. In fact, I spent the entire last year adding in as much of it as possible because joy was my word of the year.

So what my coach and I realized is that in my life, white space, the space where there is no color because it's white and it's open and it's free is crucial if I want to be replenished and ready to make the rest of my life as colorful and as joyful as possible.

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And ask yourself, is that true for you too? Probably. I bet it's true for everyone. Do you want to live a colorful life? Well, having no margin and no white space is almost always going to increase stress and overwhelm unless you are a pro at managing your thoughts, and few of us are.

And those circumstances that cause these feelings like overwhelm and stress that take us away from a colorful life, the circumstances aren't always avoidable, but the thoughts of stress and overwhelm that come from them if we don't change our thinking really aren't what I envision as part of a colorful life. I don't know about you, but colorful does not equal stress and overwhelm to me.

So why not set ourselves up for success by putting in margin and white space in our life that help keep things like stress and overwhelm at bay? And I'd even suggest adding far more margin in your schedule than you can even imagine. You will be surprised at how much of it you'll need. You'll probably use every bit of it if you're going to really create a life of balance that you say you want.

And don't worry if you put too much in, you can always correct that with squeezing in some extra work, but for most of us entrepreneurs and particularly female entrepreneurs, work is not the thing we have trouble squeezing in most of the time.

So believe me, nothing feels better than being available for the people who you love when they need you. Without margin you can't do that. Without margin, when they need you and you're not there, you feel guilt and shame and anger and frustration in those moments. Without margin, you will use busy as your excuse for being unavailable.

Margin creates a confidence in ourselves that adds quality to our life. It adds that color to our life. It gives us an opportunity to be more patient. It helps us be more kind. It allows things to roll off our backs. Having margin and white space makes you feel like a successful mom, a successful entrepreneur, and a successful person.

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Margin and white space feel so good. Busy does not. I hope you choose to feel good. And if you want help to get started on creating a life with margin and with white space, I have something to help you. It's my Design You blueprint for designing a life with more health, wealth, and joy.

And to get this, go to my website at tobifairley.com and download it absolutely free. It's there under a tab called Free Blueprint. But it's not just a rinky dink free thing. It's super robust and thorough and it's the exact plan I used when I started adding margin and white space to my life.

And here's the thing: because I don't want to add more overwhelm or more busyness to your life, when you sign up for it, it's going to come to you in a five part email series. So you can take a look at it a little bit at a time and start to add margin and white space into your life in baby steps. When you start to see where margin and white space can come in, you can start to make real changes to create the balance and the quality of life for you and your family that you so desire.

So head on over to tobifairley.com and click on the free blueprint tab and get started redesigning your life today with white space and with margin, and I'll see you again really soon when we'll start to dig into changing our thoughts to create the life we really want. Bye for now, y'all.

Thank you so much for joining me for this episode of *The Design You Podcast*. And if you'd like even more support for designing a business and a life that you love, then check out my exclusive monthly coaching program Design You at tobifairley.com.