

## Ep #5: Releasing Yourself from People-Pleasing



### **Full Episode Transcript**

With Your Host

**Tobi Fairley**

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## Ep #5: Releasing Yourself from People-Pleasing

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

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, beautiful friends, thank you so much for being here today and for all the fabulous comments and compliments and ratings and reviews I've been getting from you guys on iTunes and in person and on social media about this podcast. I am so super-duper glad that this content is resonating with you so much and I thank you, thank you, thank you.

Okay, so today guess what we're talking about? We're talking about people pleasing. And I'm not even going to apologize for calling us out yet again on the behavior that is holding us back. I mean, I really think it's my job now on this podcast to do that.

Well okay, maybe not. At least it's my job to call myself out on things I'm doing like this that hold me back. And if I can call myself out on the podcast and help you in the process, then I'll call that a win-win. Okay, so here we go.

Do you do much people pleasing? It's not a trick question. I suspect you do because most of us do really. It's so common for us to want to please our kids and our parents and our spouses and our bosses and our friends and the world and people we don't even know. I know, right? And there's at least one of those groups that you're probably working on pleasing right now.

How do I know that? Because I do it too. Okay, so then there's the flipside. Do you expect your kids and your spouse and your parents and your boss and your friends and others to please you? I thought so. I know. Okay.

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Guess what, people pleasing is totally optional. Don't you hate all this stuff I'm telling this is optional now? But it's true, and you know why? Because it's caused by your thoughts. So if you've listened to my podcast before, you're going to remember that every action we take comes from a thought that we think that makes us have a feeling that makes us take that action, right?

So whether we are doing the pleasing or we're mad because someone isn't pleasing us, it's all coming from our thoughts. Crud. Another thing we're doing to ourselves. But remember, that's good news because if we're doing it to ourselves, then we can stop. Hooray.

So what are we thinking that makes us want to please people and really, what are we thinking that makes us want to do those things or please people by doing things that we don't even want to do just to make them happy? I want you to think about this. Would we be doing these things if today was our last day on Earth? Or would we be doing these things if we were billionaires and had all the money in the world? Probably not.

So what are we thinking that makes us think we should be doing them now? So before we go any farther, we got to stop right here for a second because we need to have a side conversation, okay? Because it's really important that we realize that we cannot make anyone else feel anything. That's what the model that I taught you on the last podcast was about, and here's what I mean.

So your husband cannot make you mad. I know you're thinking, "Oh yes he can if you have one," or your wife or whatever. He cannot make you mad, but your thoughts about your husband can make you mad. So no matter what he does, you have an equal opportunity every time to choose not to be mad. And I mean no matter what he does. Like he forgets your birthday. You can still be totally fine with that, like, really fine. Not like passive aggressive fine, like, I'm fine. But you can be actually fine because you can choose to think a million other things that will make you feel something besides mad or unhappy.

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Like, woohoo you forgot my birthday, that means I get even more presents. Thank you, Jesus for letting him forget my birthday. But seriously, you could let him off the hook and not be mad at him. And he might even get you more presents. So see how you can choose to feel whatever you want to feel by the way you think.

So even if you don't want to admit it right now in our little side convo over here, I want you to get an understand this concept that you can choose to be happy no matter what other people do. And they can choose to be happy no matter what you do, okay? So on that sort of related note, you can't make other people happy. Only they can make themselves happy.

And they can decide to be happy no matter what you do. But there is no guarantee that even if you do something nice that they will be happy or that you will be happy if other people do things nice for you. So good, we're on the same page. We can't control other people's feelings no matter what we do.

So back to my question about the people pleasing. What are we thinking that makes us please people or try to please people? Well, it could be a few things, so I'm going to give you some options to try on for size. Like, try these on like a coat. Do these fit me? Are these my reasons? Okay?

You could be trying to please people because you're seeking validation or credit from someone so that it'll make you feel worthy or important or needed. But guess who's the only person who can make you feel worthy or important or needed? Yeah, you. So that could be the reason but as we're going to see in a minute, that's not going to work for you very well.

Another reason we might be trying to please people is sometimes we start to believe that pleasing other people is our purpose or our job. Like with motherhood, we confuse taking care of our kiddos, which is actually like, feeding them and clothing them and loving them and making sure they stay alive, we sometimes confuse that with trying to make them happy all the time. And if your kid is a teen like mine, then god help you try to make them happy ever because it's like, not going to happen, right?

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But sometimes we do that, and sometimes we please because we're thinking a thought that makes us feel obligated or feel guilt. And note I just said you're thinking the thought that makes you feel that way, so they don't make you feel obligated or guilty. I bet you think people make you feel guilty. You're like, "Oh yeah, my mom totally makes me feel guilty." Well no, she doesn't, it's just the thoughts you're thinking that make you feel guilty, but it's still a reason why you might try to people please.

So some of the thoughts you might be thinking that make you feel guilt or obligations are things like, "But they've been so good to me, this is the least I can do." Or, "It's my mom, or wife or child, so I'm supposed to make them happy." Or, "It's really selfish not to try and make them happy. That would mean I was just thinking about myself." Or you might think, "They are only young and little for a little while and then they're going to grow up and move away and never come visit so I better try and please them right now while I still can."

Or you might be thinking something like, "If I want to be successful in my job then I need to please," and you can insert anybody you want there. "I need to please my job or a superior or a potential client or a peer," right? So if I want to be successful then I need to please this person, and if I don't please them now when they're asking me for something or when they're expecting it or when they want me to, even though it's not a good time for me, they're probably going to never ask me again and this opportunity is going to pass me by. That's a thought we think, right? So we better go ahead and please them to get what we think we're going to get in return.

We also might think, "You know what, they're getting older, and they won't be here forever." Maybe it's our parents or somebody in our life and so we think, "They won't be here forever. I better do this even though I really don't want to." That's that obligation or guilt. Or maybe you think, "I don't want to regret not doing this for them. If something were to happen to them I'd feel horrible. So even though I don't want to, I'm going to go ahead and do it."

So the list goes on and on and on, but as you can see, we think thoughts all the time that make us feel things like obligation and guilt and those

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might be the reason you're pleasing. But let me tell you the problem with all these reasons that I've given you that you might be using for pleasing other people. They all assume that something you do has the power to make someone else happy.

But therein lies the big old gigantic problem, right? Remember our side conversation? There's no guarantee that even if you do the thing that you think you "should do," that it will actually make them happy. So people pleasing is a crapshoot really, and we often choose to do it anyway even though we know it's a crapshoot, and even though we sometimes choose to do it anyway, we need to assume in those moments that at least part of the time, if not all of the time, it's not going to work.

And then what happens when we try to please somebody and it doesn't work? Well, we feel all sorts of feelings as a result of the thinking that comes up that made us do the pleasing. So what are some of those feelings we get when we try to please people and it doesn't work? Well, there's a bunch of them but I'd start with the ones that come to the top of mine like anger and resentment and frustration and unworthiness and failure and a lot of other awful things that come up when we try to please people and they're still not happy.

And sometimes they're happy, at least for a little bit, but then what happens? If we're in this habit of trying to please them and sometimes they're happy for a little bit and then they just want more from you, well that also makes you angry and resentful and frustrated and tired even because you're thinking a thought like, "No matter what I do, it's never enough."

So if this people pleasing thing isn't really working for us because we're really painting a pretty clear picture of why it doesn't work, what are the other options? How do we have a healthy relationship with people and with ourselves without being a pleaser all the time or ever, for that matter? And without expecting them to please us.

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Well, lucky for you, I've got five different ways that we can start to think differently about people pleasing that are going to change your life and theirs. So let's dig into them.

The first way is called emotional adulthood. Emotional adulthood, novel idea. So I've alluded to this already, but let's just be blunt here. You have to stop taking responsibility for other people's happiness and start taking responsibility for your own happiness. And we humans seem to have this equation backwards for some reason. We understand logically that we can't control other people, but we somehow believe that we are responsible for their happiness and even some of their other feelings too, or all of them.

But when it comes to taking responsibility for our own emotions, we blame others and we dump those on other people like it's their responsibility. So maybe we dump it on our spouse or our parents or our kids or our boss. We give them control over our feelings. So then we think things like, "If you would have just done X, or if you wouldn't have just done Y, then I could be happy right now, so it's all on you."

But that is a lie that we tell ourselves because it really doesn't matter what anyone else does. Unless we hand over those keys to our emotional vehicle, they're not driving our lives. We are. So we can choose to be mad at them when they don't do what we want them to, and they can do the same thing to us. Or we can choose to be totally happy in spite of what they do.

And it's so fantastic when we can let them and us off the hook of having to please each other. So please friends, stop the madness right now and let's make a deal. Will you make a deal with me right now? Like, pinky swear me and you? Put your pinky up, here we go. Repeat after me. Starting right now, I promise to become completely responsible for my own happiness all on my own. And starting right now, I will expect others to become completely responsible for their own happiness. I will no longer believe it is my job to make anyone else happy ever, except myself.

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So do you see how if this is your belief and commitment that you can come together with other people in every single relationship that you have and you can both show up in the most authentic way you can, no matter if they like your behavior or you like theirs? Do you know what this is called? Yeah, there is it. Emotional adulthood. But I also call it freedom.

And don't worry. When you practice emotional adulthood, you won't suddenly become selfish because remember, you're in charge of your own happiness, and does being selfish make most of us happy? No, it doesn't feel great. So emotional adulthood means you're responsible for being happy and selfish makes you feel bad. You're not going to do it.

Now, that's idea number one. Here's idea number two about thinking differently about people pleasing. The second idea is practicing unconditional love for yourself and others. So we have this emotional adulthood thing of not trying to please others and not having them try to please you.

And it doesn't mean that you're going to be selfish, we established that. But it also doesn't mean you're going to be unkind or unloving or that you're not going to be generous, or all those other amazing things you want to do. So it's not like that just because you don't have to please them that you don't have to be nice to them, okay?

So you have to learn the difference between people pleasing, which I would consider a codependent relationship, versus unconditional love, which is what I would call a very independent relationship. There are no strings attached. You're acting independently. Others don't have to do anything to receive your actions, including they don't even really have to be happy about them. And you're okay with that. You can still love on them whether they're happy about it or not.

Because with unconditional love, it's in the doing without expectations. Not in their outcome or response that you get to feel good. So just by doing it to them or for them, you get to feel good, okay? So in our culture, we're trained the opposite way. We're trained to do things for accolades or for



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gold starts, right? But what if we started just doing for the sake of doing for others because we want to? That's unconditional love. That's where people pleasing does not exist. It's just unconditional whether we please them or not, you see?

And conditional love like people pleasing sets you up for failure because you can't control what others give you in return. Conditional means that I'll do this for you but you got to do this for me, except you can't control whether or not they do that to you, right? And often, we pretend things are unconditional love when really we had an unspoken condition in our minds all along and we didn't tell them.

And if we don't tell people the condition then how in the world can they meet it? They can't, right? So they can't please us in return if we had a condition. So our thoughts then that come up about the unmet condition that we didn't even tell them we wanted to meet are leading to things that feel like resentment or that just feel bad.

And you may be thinking, "Okay Tobi, well, here's the thing. I'm not interested in trying to be good to a bunch of people if they don't give me anything in return." But here's my question for you. Why not? Think about this. If you pair emotional adulthood with unconditional love, you will likely be the happiest you have ever been. You get the benefit of loving on other people all you want and doing good stuff for people that feels so good to you all you want, and you don't have to be disappointed if they don't meet your expectations because you don't have any expectations.

The only person you expect to make you happy is you, and you can do that all day every day, and it's fantastic. So you're free to love people with nothing expected in return, and you're free to make yourself happy. And you know what else? You're not being taken advantage of by those people by doing things for them unless you think you're being taken advantage of by them.

But if you think you're not, then you're not. Because it's all in our thoughts. And I want us also to circle back real quick this idea of selfishness for a

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minute because when you begin practicing unconditional love for not only other people but for yourself, there will be a lot more taking care of you, and that's not selfish. But unconditionally loving yourself will likely mean less sacrificing yourself all the time to please others because you're going to realize, "I'm the only person here that's supposed to take care of me, so I better make that happen. I don't have time to be pleasing everybody else because I got to take care of me."

So let me give you a couple of examples before we move on to the rest of the reasons of what unconditional love and emotional adulthood look like together so that these concepts can really sink in just a little bit more. So first of all, think of a grandmother. You know, that amazing grandmother, my mom's one of these kinds of grandmothers, who just loves to do everything she possibly can for her grandkids.

Even when they forget to say thank you because you know, they may be a teenager and their nose is in their phone or something. But does she get mad if she's just loving on them unconditionally? No because she wants to do it for them anyway. Makes her feel good. It's a bonus when they're grateful, but that's on them and she can't control that and she doesn't even care because they're her pride and joy so she's just going to buy them things and cook three different meals for three different kids just because she can and just love the heck out of them and expect nothing in return.

So that's granny, she's being an emotional adult and she's having unconditional love, okay? So that's one good example. The next example, think about this. Think of a husband and a wife. Where one spouse gets angry or passive aggressive when the other didn't handle a moment or say a holiday, or a gift or something exactly right. And they think the thought, "Well, you know what, I'm sick of them never remembering say, my birthday. I'm sick and tired of them never remembering my birthday."

Or, "I'm really sick and tired of them not reading my mind and doing everything that I expect them to do that I haven't told them when I am working so hard to do all of this stuff for them." Now, that would be your choice to think that way, but just know that when you do, that's being both

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conditional because you're doing something for them expecting something in return and being an emotional child. Like, you're throwing a tantrum because they didn't do whatever it was that you wanted them to do to make you happy, okay?

So are you going to be like granny and be grown up and an emotional adult and unconditional? Are you going to be like this example and be both conditional and an emotional child? Well, let me tell you an example about myself now because I'm not just pointing fingers. Let me tell you how I've done all of these behaviors.

So a real-life example from my childhood is when I was growing up, I was often really disappointed at Christmas because I always told my parents that I didn't want any surprises. But I always just knew in my mind without telling them that they would secretly get me at least one surprise anyway and that it would be way better than any other present that I told them I wanted. Better than anything I could imagine. And they'd wheel it out after I'd opened all my presents, and there it would be and it would just make me the most happy kid in the world.

And at the same time, I was also saying to them, "I don't want any surprises, don't waiver at all from my list. Period. Get me exactly what I want. I hate surprises." Well, my mom follows rules really well, so she did not waiver from the list. And she also did not get me a surprise because I said I didn't want one.

So I was disappointed almost every year with no surprise. Now, I would get over it relatively quickly because I did get every single thing I asked for, for the most part, and I was really fortunate. And I was also a child so being an emotional child as a child makes a little more sense. The good news is that children are the only people who do get a free pass sometimes with acting childish, okay?

But move into my marriage. So good 15 years later, 20 years later, into my marriage, I did the exact same thing to my poor husband. And my husband loves surprises because his parents always gave him surprises. So he

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would totally waiver from my list, and then I would be so mad. Because he gave me surprises and you know, as a child I wanted a surprise, but when he waived from the list, it really made me angry.

And in hindsight, now that I've grown up a lot and I've changed my behavior, thankfully, it's actually really comical because I remember this one year when I wanted a specific bicycle from my husband. A Townie beach cruiser in mint green with a basket and a horn. How much more specific can you be than that?

And guess what my husband rolled out instead. He rolled out matching for him and me, like basically dirt bikes, they're probably not dirt bikes, but you know, like, I don't know, bikes that weren't a beach cruiser. Matching black bikes for he and I like we were going to go ride these together. And he was so proud of himself, and I was so furious. And he was dumbfounded because I was acting like an emotional child.

So it's hilarious now when I think about it, and a lot of us act like this as adults, don't we? But then thankfully, for the sake of our marriage, I learned these first two concepts I've just talked about. I learned first that I am 100% responsible for my own happiness and I also learned unconditional love.

So now what does Christmas look like at my house? Well, I just let my family, my husband and my daughter get me whatever they want to get me. And trust me, I get some amazing surprises because they try really hard to get me things they think I would like and they like to spend money on me and they like to pamper me. And I get amazing presents. But if I don't love all my presents one Christmas, who cares?

Because they get so much joy out of gifting things to me that I just love and cherish what they gave me simply because they're from them. Because now I'm acting like an emotional adult with unconditional love. And I don't expect them to please me. And ironically, because I no longer expect them to please me, they almost always do.

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And on the chance that I don't get something I was hoping for, then I take my emotional adult self out and I go get that thing for myself. And then everyone's happy. And you may be thinking, "Well Tobi, my husband doesn't buy me any gifts." And my question is again, so what? Do you want to be happy? Then just be okay with that and go get what you want for yourself.

And if you can't afford it, save up and get it for yourself. But just let him be himself and love him because of that unconditionally and don't try to please him and don't have him try to please you if your goal and the outcome you want is to be happy, okay? So that was step number one and two to stop people pleasing or expecting to be pleased. And aren't those two ideas amazing? I know, right? Look at how I transformed my life and my marriage by acting that way.

Okay, so what else do I have for you about people pleasing or wanting to be pleased? Well, number three is this: please realize that people pleasing is a total waste of your time. And how many of you are constantly complaining because you don't have enough time in the day? Do you want to give away important hours doing something that may or may not make someone else happy when you've only got 24 hours in the day?

Probably not. Is trying to make people happy even though there's a good chance that they won't be a good use of your time? I don't think so. So again, that doesn't mean you don't do things for people. You do what makes you feel good, but you can do it at a time that makes the most sense for you. And when you do things for other people, please, again, for the sake of time, don't waste a moment being mad, or for that matter, even thinking about whether they liked it or not.

If they liked it, they'll tell you, and that will be amazing and fabulous and wonderful. And you can think thoughts that are warm and fuzzy about that and it will make you feel good. But don't expect it. One way I know that I'm not giving gifts conditionally is I get all the pleasure when I get the gift. Like, I'm so proud of myself, like, oh my gosh, this is the best gift ever, and I give

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it to somebody like for a wedding or something else, and then I never even notice if those people wrote me a thank you note.

In fact, when somebody does, it's awesome because it's like a surprise treat in the mail that I wasn't expecting, but I'm certainly not sitting around mad and thinking someone's rude or has bad etiquette because they didn't write me a thank you note because I'm not giving it for that, and I'm not judging their manners. I just gave it because I wanted to love on them with that amazing gift. I love thinking this way and so I don't waste time expecting anything in return.

And next, number four, this one is really huge for me. What if you realized that even though you thought pleasing others might be bad for you and your schedule and your timing and you can't control other people, but at least you thought it was a gift you're giving to others, well, what if you realized that by people pleasing you're actually causing other people issues?

In fact, you're enabling the people in your life that you love that you're trying to please to not grow up and be an emotional adult. Why? Because you're getting in the way of them accepting taking responsibility for their own happiness. So this is huge, and especially if you have children, please stop enabling them to not be responsible for their own happiness.

So if you want to make someone in your life grow up, then stop getting in their way. Let them take charge of their own emotions and if you've been trying to please them their whole life, then no wonder they aren't happy because they don't even know how to do this for themselves because you never let them. So I hope that's a light bulb moment for you. And this isn't just for kids. You may be keeping your spouse or other people in your life from growing up too, so stop doing that.

And last, number five, I want you to separate your worth from the accolades that you get from people pleasing. So separate your personal worth from those gold stars we talked about earlier, and here's why. Can you see that if you are giving up the praise and the accolades and the

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stroking and the ego puffing stuff that sometimes comes from people pleasing that you can finally get down to what you really want to be spending your time doing?

As long as you're dependent on that attention from other people that you may or may not get, you're not going to do with your time what you really want to be doing. So you've got to find the place where what you want for yourself and what you want to do for other people intersects without expectations of those accolades.

This is not a place where people pleasing happens and it's also not a selfish place. It's a magical place. So can you learn to do that? Can you learn to do things that are 100% right for you regardless of the outcome? Regardless of people's behavior? Regardless of the accolades, the gold stars, the stroking, and all of that?

Well, if you do, then you really will be happier than you've ever been, So here's the most important thing with people pleasing. Stop doing it. Because you're not going to be happy with the outcome. And I want you to decide to be happy. Decide to set yourself up for success. Decide that it's other people's job to take control of their own happiness, and also decide that it's okay for them to not be happy at all. That's not on you.

So off you to go stop your people pleasing and stop expecting others to please you. But if you want to please me, well, I'll be happy with you either way, I'm just kidding. But if you do love this podcast, please take a minute and leave me a rating and a review. And to do that, you just search the *Design You* podcast on iTunes and subscribe to it and then you can leave a rating or a review or both, and if you prefer, you can just go to [tobifairley.com/itunes](http://tobifairley.com/itunes) and we'll tell you exactly how to leave a rating a review.

So thank you so much because that will be really fun to read what you have to say. But I'll still love you either way and I'll see you back here next week with another episode. Bye for now, y'all.

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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](http://tobifairley.com).