

Ep #32: How to Make Relationships Easier



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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 32.

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.

Hey friends, how are you? I am so good. You know, I'm feeling like things are just working. Do you ever feel like that? Like things are just working in your life? Because there's all those other times when you feel like nothing's working, right? The total opposite.

But what about the times when they are? When things are just gelling and coming together and you're feeling energetic and alive and like so much stuff is getting done? Yeah, well that's right now for me, and it is amazing.

I have the most amazing team ever, and I know I've told you all that. But I have about 13 people on my team now and nine of those are virtual team members and we're just really rocking and rolling in every single way, and wow, does it ever feel good.

So what the heck are all these people for? Well, I've talked to you a little bit about some of the people that it takes to take care of me in my life, but what about the people on my team?

Well, on my virtual team, I have an email marketing person and a community manager, that's one person, Macy. My social media person, Kristen, my video content guy, Dallin, my web designer, Natalie, my CRM specialist, which is like, our email marketing program specialist, Rhonda, my podcast editor, Pavel, my funnels expert that I'm just starting to work with, Pamela, my graphic designer, Brianna, my photographer, Nancy, my online business manager who has absolutely changed everything about my life for the better in the last month, Emily, my accountant, Greg, and then there's Devin, who's the full-time on my team and basically my right arm at work, and then there's Amy, my personal assistant who is my left arm sort of at work and life.

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And wow, are these people spectacular. And I may have even forgotten somebody. If I forgot one of my amazing team members, I'll mention you next week. But you people are amazing. When you can have a team like I have now in place, it makes life so good. And I have so much more time for doing what matters to me and am I ever so super-duper grateful for that.

Plus, they're all experts in their areas. So they make me and my company look so much better than I ever could have alone. And y'all, we are getting ready to take this whole thing, this whole kitten caboodle, my company, my work, to a whole other level in 2019 with these phenomenal people on board and it is going to blow our minds and yours.

So cool. And yeah, all those people don't even include my personal team that I've talked about before like my life coach, Suzy, and my yoga teacher, Farida, and my doctor, Judy, and my massage therapist, Julianne and you know what, all these people together, that's like 17 people that I work with every single week.

And they're all rock stars, every one of them. I'm just saying, they are all rock stars. So mainly, I just wanted to tell y'all about them this week because I wanted to shout out to all these amazing creative, professional peeps that are part of team Tobi and just say out loud how grateful I am to be working with these people, so thank you, thank you, thank you team Tobi. And you guys, if you need a team like reach out and tell us because we can give you the deets on how to find amazing people to help you too.

Okay, so since we're talking about these 17 important relationships I have in my life, not even counting my family, today on this episode, we're going to talk about how to make our relationships thrive and in particular, how to stop making relationships harder than they have to be.

So clearly, if I've got 17 people not even counting my husband, my daughter, my mom, or any of my other family members that I deal with every single week, I need to be a relationship expert if I want to thrive, right? And that really is the reason why this team is the best team I've ever

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had, because I've done so much work on me and how I feel about other people.

So I'm going to teach you about that today. So here's the thing; most of us, unless we have done some major thought work in this area of relationships, we have something that my life coach mentor, Brooke, calls a manual. So basically, it's an operations manual for how we want other people to behave, and our manuals are so super detailed and specific.

These manuals are really unwritten and often unspoken books of rules and regulations and expectations that we create for each and every relationship we have and what's in the book is what we believe is normal or kind or acceptable behavior that that other person should exhibit in their interactions with us.

In other words, we think we know best how everybody else should behave so that our life is easier, right? You know what I'm talking about. You might not have ever thought about this before, but I know this is going to hit close to home. And something I want you to notice about that definition I just said, a couple of key words there are that usually, these manuals are unwritten and even unspoken.

So they're just up there in our head. And we have all these rules up there in our brains about what other people should do, but we don't even share them with the other person typically. We just expect that our people should be able to read our minds and act accordingly, right? Absolutely they should, or so we think.

And our society today helps reinforce this idea that we should help meet each other's needs and if we don't, we aren't holding up our end of the relationship. And I get it, we all want to be seen and we want to be heard and we want to get our points across and we want to make our list of needs known to other people so they can be met, and we want to feel good all the time and we want to be happy and we want to avoid all those yucky negative emotions like we talked about last week on the podcast. Or maybe that was a couple of weeks ago but recently.

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And when we were talking about how to feel better so we want to feel good all the time, but here's what I want you to see; this kind of relationship where two people, whether those people are clients or friends or lovers or just they're - any other type of relationship. Siblings, parents, any of that stuff, when any two people are just following each other's rules, this is the opposite of a real connection.

Let's call it more like compliance. Compliance, not connection. So let me tell you what compliance looked like in my life for a long time, particularly in my marriage. So for years, my marriage was just like this. My husband and I were both working super hard, and we were both trying really, really hard to provide for our family and we were both traveling a lot for work and our relationship sort of vacillated between trying to meet each other's needs and feeling sorry for ourselves that our own needs were not being met to our expectations by the other person.

So it was a lot of pleasing and feeling unpleased, which was not a very pleasant situation. This sort of relationship actually led to a whole lot of stress and resentment and pain. We both really misunderstood each other almost completely, and in hindsight now, it's easy to see how that could happen because we were so wrapped up in our thoughts, in our own minds about what each other was doing or not doing to help each other, and we weren't spending any time connecting with the real person on the other side of our own thoughts and expectations for them.

So we were like, what have you done to help me? How are you making my life easier? But there was never any really, let me put myself in your shoes, let me really get into what it is that you need and think about you. So there was a lot of selfishness going on and we really couldn't even see it because life is busy, right? And we're all just doing the best we can and our intentions were so good and we were both trying to provide for the family and each other and raise our daughter.

But nobody was communicating, and we had all these expectations for each other that continually went unmet. Well, that's probably what happens a lot in relationships that fall apart, because nobody's talking about this

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stuff. And I mean, god forbid we actually stop thinking about ourselves for a moment and find out what the other person was going through or what they might have needed.

And I'm not suggesting we were supposed to meet their needs, but even just being compassionate or hearing their side of the story, right? That would have been amazing. That didn't happen for a long time, but thankfully, we're some of the lucky ones. We had a wakeup call a few years back, then we really saw where our relationship was and we decide to do the hard work to make our relationship amazing, and now it is. Not perfect. Nothing's perfect, but it's really great.

And what that meant, that shift that we had to make, that we decided that we no longer wanted to take care of each other's needs. Now, hang here with me for a minute, because that may not be exactly what you think or what it sounds like. Here's what I'm talking about. We decided that we wanted to take care of our own needs and let the other partner off the hook completely for our happiness.

So that when we were together, when we are together, when we have time together in the evenings or weekends or on trips and all the stuff that we now do together, that we could just enjoy each other's company, and that we would just let our owner's manuals for each other go.

Now, this decision y'all, changed everything for the better. The minute we stopped with all the expectations that we were supposed to make each other happy and just started making our own selves happy, we showed up in the relationship like emotional adults. That was a game changer.

And if you need a refresher on being an emotional adult, go back and listen to episode 29 called How to Feel Better where I talk a lot about emotional childhood versus emotional adulthood. Emotional adulthood is amazing. I mean, who knew how good it feels to actually grow up emotionally? And let me tell you, most people have never experienced this.

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Being emotional adults and taking responsibility for our own happiness doesn't mean that we no longer do things to be kind to each other, to help each other's lives be easier. Actually, for us, for my husband and me, it meant the opposite. Because when you let the other person in the relationship off the hook for your feelings, and when you give them the benefit of the doubt in every situation and you practice gratitude thoughts about them daily, then what happens is that you want to do far more to love them and make their life easier than ever before.

When we were trying to get our own needs met, it was more like a power struggle. Whose job is more important, who's supposed to take care of the child, who's turn is it to do the dishes, or buy the groceries or take care of the dogs? So we went from a power struggle to a partnership where we gladly do our own share and we lovingly take up the slack for each other when one of us is experiencing a very busy or stressful week or period.

And now that we actually communicate with each other, we know what the other person is struggling with, or when a week is especially busy because we actually listen to each other and have conversations. Let me tell you a funny story. One time, a therapist called the old version of us Mr. and Mrs. Tit-for-Tatterson. Because there was so much score-keeping or tit for tat keeping that every time she saw us she was like, "Mr. and Mrs. Tit-for-Tatterson are here," which is so funny now.

It wasn't really funny then. Thankfully, those days are gone and we don't even remember or care how many times we go out of our way for the other one anymore. We don't even notice if the gesture is not returned because we don't need that gesture to make us happy. We're making ourselves happy. We are no longer operating from a manual for each other.

And we're not always thinking thoughts like, "If he would just do so and so, fill in the blank, then I could be happy. If he would just pick up his socks then I could be happy, if he would just come home earlier then I could be happy. If he would just be more romantic, then I could be happy," because you know what, now we get that we can be happy no matter what the other person does.

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And sure, we still ask each other to do things all the time. It's not that we can't request things of each other. We're just not mad at the other person if they don't comply. And we don't make it mean that our needs aren't met or that they don't love us enough or that we aren't important to them or we don't make it mean anything at all just because they don't do it.

If one of us doesn't do something that the other asks, then we just do it for ourselves. Easy peasy. And we don't get mad because guess what, the thing is, it still gets done because we do it. I mean, crazy responsible for ourselves. Wow.

And one of the big perks of this relationship shift is that we aren't both resentful all the time of doing a whole lot of stuff for the other person that we don't really want to do. We either decide we want to do it to be nice, or we're honest that we just don't want to do it or that we can't do it, and that's totally okay.

We even laugh now sometimes. If I say something like, "Hey honey, would you go to the grocery store on Sunday night," or it is Sunday night and I'm like, "Hey, would you go to the grocery store?" and he's like, "Nope, not going, don't feel like it," and now instead of getting mad at him, I'm like, you know what, me either. Never mind. Call Chinese food for delivery.

And we high-five each other and we smile and everyone's grateful for the Chinese food and we have a casual night at home and nobody goes to the grocery store. No big deal, okay? Because why should he have to do that if I don't want to, or vice versa?

It's so much easier this way. We've learned how to meet our own needs and take responsibility for our own emotions and we've stopped blaming each other. Wow, that too was huge. So emotionally adult of us, right? And our relationship has completely transformed for the better because of all of these changes.

We now feel like soul mates, best friends, partners, and we never felt like that before. I always wanted to feel that way and I didn't know what the

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problem was. And before, it was more like roommates, not soul mates but roommates. And even a lot of times, like we were parenting each other. But we weren't asking the other to parent us, right? So that's super frustrating.

We were parenting each other and sometimes, unfortunately, we even felt like enemies, and that was really sad. I didn't like that part at all. So if you want to remove the friction in any relationship romantic or otherwise, the first step is dropping the manuals that you have for other people.

And to do that, you've got to know what a manual looks like, so I'm going to give you some phrases that are likely in your manual for other people like your friends or your mate or your kids or your mom, and see if any of these resonate with you. So I'm going to give you quite a few of them, so here we go.

Your manual might say something like, "She should call me back when I call her. She should write me a thank you note. She should invite me to her party or on her girls' trip. She should listen to me for as long as I listen to her when she had a problem. She should come to the hospital when my family is sick, or she should have come to the funeral when someone I love died."

Or maybe it's about him. "He should help me with the kids more. He needs to help around the house more. He should be home more often. He should work less. He should make more money. He should treat our family better or my family better. He should be kinder to my friends. He should like my friends. He has to like my friends."

Think about that. That's so funny to me. "He should talk to me more and he should complement me more. He should support me in my diet and not eat all that fattening food in front of me. He should tell me how he feels more often, because you know guys are usually super touchy-feely, so he should totally tell me how he feels more often. He should be more involved in our life and our decision-making around the house."

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Or maybe it's about them. "They should know what I want for my birthday or for a holiday without my even having to tell them." Okay, do any of those sound familiar? Here's a few more. "He should surprise me with gifts more often. She should be less messy and more organized. He should take out the trash or help with the groceries without having to be asked. He should not look at other women ever. He should take better care of himself. He should lose weight and he should dress a whole lot better. He should make me happier in our marriage. He definitely should be more romantic, he should be more attracted to me, he should be more intimate with me."

I love this one. "He shouldn't watch so much football. He should want to go to the movies and the restaurants that I like. They should be kind and understand when I'm frustrated. They totally should understand that." And you know what, y'all, the list goes on and on and on and on.

Any time you hear yourself thinking he should, she should, they should, because if they did then I could be happy or feel better or feel more confident or feel something else I want to feel, then you know that is you having a manual. And when you stop with the manual, here is the only rule that's left; you're an adult. You are an emotional adult. You get to be who you are and you get to decide what you think and feel about the decisions you make.

And if you want a thriving relationship, then it behooves you to choose good thoughts and feelings about the other person instead of all these shoulds. Because as you already know, if you've been listening to my podcast at all for other episodes, you know that all thoughts are optional. And our thoughts create our feelings, so if we choose to think a certain way and to feel a certain way, and then we don't like our mate or our friends or anybody else in our life, then that's on us.

You absolutely can decide just because you want to, to feel loving or kind or appreciative or attracted to someone just because you want to and just by choosing the right thoughts. But the dangerous part is you can also choose to do the opposite, and that's what my husband and I did for years.

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Thankfully, we've corrected that because yeah, I've done both of these things.

I chose thoughts about my spouse and he chose thoughts about me that nearly ruined our relationship a few years ago, and now we choose amazing thoughts about each other every day. And we have very few arguments and a whole lot of joy and fun in our relationship and it is so fun and fantastic and stress-free most of the time because we are choosing that.

So take a moment and think about what manuals you have for the people in your life. Whether it's your mate or your mother or your sibling or your friends, how are the manuals that you have wreaking havoc on your relationships? Because we all have these, y'all, unless we do the work to get rid of them.

And think about how you are not taking relationship for your own happiness and instead you're expecting other people to make you happy. Your clients, even. If you're expecting other people to be happy, it's not going to work. We cannot control other people. Using manuals for them never works.

So if you wonder why all your relationships with employees and friends and partners seem to fail, it's likely because you have a whole lot of expectations for them that you should be expecting from yourself. And if you can see now that you're guilty of having lots of manuals for other people and side note, if you don't think you have manuals, you're lying to yourself. But if you can see that you do, here's the thing; don't beat yourself up. Just start the work of getting rid of them.

Beating yourself up only makes you feel bad and we want to feel good, right? We've recently talked in that other episode number 29 about how to feel better, so beating yourself up doesn't make you feel better, but getting rid of the manuals and taking responsibility of you definitely will.

And quickly, here's an exercise that will help you get rid of manuals for each person. So ask yourself these questions. So first, think about the

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person that you want to change and write their name down on a piece of paper. And then I want you to write in detail what you would like them to do or change. So that's the first question. What do I want them to do or change?

And then for each one of those items, write down why you want them to behave this way. And guess what, it's going to be to make you feel better in some way but be specific. If they would just do this, then I could do - what? Because you want to know what it is that you're hoping for.

And then the next question is how do you think you would feel if they behaved this way? And how would your thoughts about them change if they behaved exactly the way you wanted them to? Then I want you to think about this. Do you want them to behave this way even if they don't want to? Why or why not?

Because what I find with us doing things that we don't want to do, we create a ton of resentment, and that's not great for relationships. So be really clear about this. Do you want them to do this stuff even if they don't want to do it? And what do you make it mean about you if they don't behave this way or if they're not already behaving this way?

Because he doesn't take out the trash, he must not really love me. Like, you want to know what it is you're making it mean. And then I want you to answer this last question. When someone wants you to behave in a certain way so they can feel good or be happy, what's that like for you?

Yeah, it's always good to put ourselves in the other people's place, right? This exercise is going to be eye-opening for you, and that's a good thing. And again, be sure not to beat yourself up about any of this. You've been doing the best you knew how in the past, just like I was, even though it was tragic a lot of times, but now you have this handy dandy new concept of the manual and this tool will help you thrive, or this knowledge and getting rid of this and going through this exercise, that's the tool, these questions, it will help you thrive in every one of your relationships.

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And guess what, to make this work easier for you, I made you a downloadable worksheet with these exact questions so you can take yourself through this process with every relationship. So print it out as many times as you want. You can have a fresh one for every relationship and sit down and do this work. Because if you just do it in your head, it's not going to stick. It needs to be on paper.

So to get that worksheet, you just go to tobifairley.com/32, and when you go to that address, you will find the download there. And it's about how to make your relationships really thrive. So go get that worksheet, print them out for everybody that you need to and good luck doing this very important work, and I promise you, you will be amazed at how much letting go of manuals and expectations for other people changes your life for the better.

It completely changed mine and I know it will change yours too. And I will see you next week when we're going to talk about another relationship idea and how to deal with that and it's about boundaries. So meet me here next week, we'll talk about boundaries, and that one's going to change your relationships too. So bye for now, see you next week, friend.

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