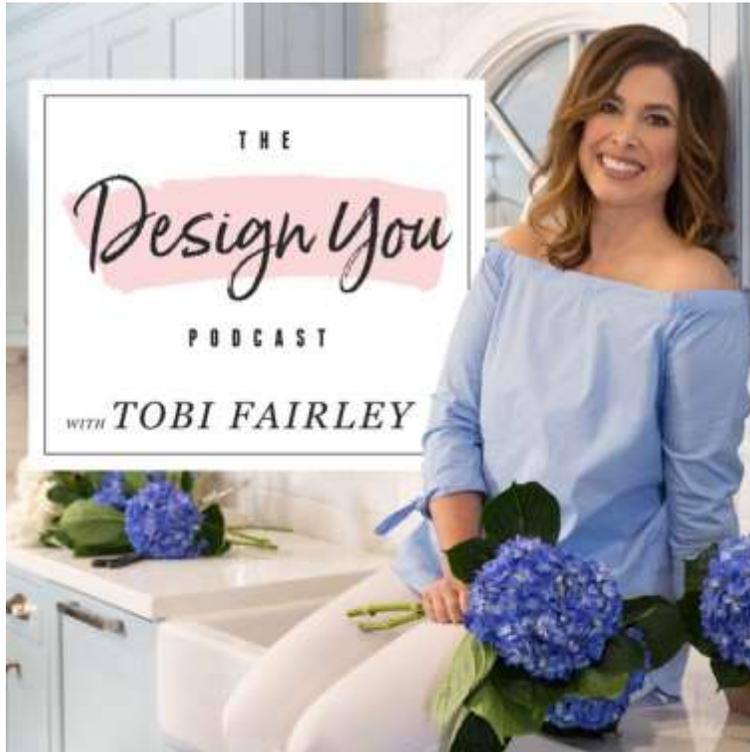


Ep #51: Why Perfectionism Is Holding You Back



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 51.

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. Who's ready for spring? I'm definitely ready for longer days and walks outside. I'm ready for flowers to be blooming. I'm not ready for the pollen and the allergies, but other than that, I'm so ready.

But today, I'm just as excited to dive into a topic I want to talk to you about that is not spring. It happens all year round and it's something that so many of us can relate to. So let me ask you a question. Do you ever feel like in order to be committed to something that you've got to make it perfect?

Are you laughing out loud right now? As in, duh Tobi, perfectionism is my middle name. Yeah, I know. It's so true for so many of us. We were taught to do our best, right? If we're going to do something, do it really well. That's definitely what I was taught.

And somewhere along the way, we turned that into something more like well, if my name's on it, meaning I created it, I designed it, I wrote it, I thought it, I mean, literally it doesn't even have to be that close of an ownership. If we're anywhere near it, then it has to be up to our standards, which by the way, happen to be perfectionist standards for most of us.

But have you noticed how being a perfectionist in everything we do is actually cause for procrastination? And it's definitely the source of a whole lot of what I call manufactured stress and anxiety. Meaning those things are optional, but we create them with our perfectionist ways and our perfectionist thinking.

So here's an example of what I mean. Maybe you're committed in your business to sending out a weekly email. Especially those of you who are in my *Design You* program, we're learning all about digital marketing. So

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maybe you're saying, "Okay, I'm with you, Tobi. I'll send out a weekly email or two or three."

But I want you to see and realize that you can be 100% committed to something like sending an email or a whole email campaign for that matter, but that doesn't mean you have to be a perfectionist about the email and it being the perfectly chosen words with absolutely no typos and absolutely no mistakes of any kind.

And if you were thinking, "No way Tobi, I can't. I just can't do it. I cannot hit send if it's not absolutely perfect so I agonize over it, I have to be the one that writes every email, I have to check every email, I have to re-read every email, and then when it comes in my inbox I have to re-read it again when it actually got sent because I sent it to me so I can test it and then when I see it I don't like it and I'm disappointed and I feel embarrassed."

Well, I'm here to tell you that all of that is optional, and you absolutely can do it. You can send something that's not perfect. Because here is the thing; that kind of thinking will make you quit. That kind of thinking will keep you from putting yourself out into the world. That kind of thinking, that perfect thinking, that perfectionist mindset is the enemy of done, friends.

If you are constantly being a perfectionist, you are likely not putting that much stuff out into the world at all. The successful version of 100% commitment to something like that email campaign may need to mean for you that done is better than perfect. Being committed and being a perfectionist are two completely different things.

And this leads me to today's topic, which is all about why perfectionism is holding you back. Boy, do I know this so well. As an interior designer of course, I love all things to be beautiful. An interior designer, or people in related fields, we love things to really look perfect. Our surrounding and all the details. That's what we do. That's who we are.

And it's taken me many, many years to see the difference between beautiful and perfect. I want to help you see that difference too because a

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lot of times beauty is in the imperfection. You know, in her book on creativity, Anne Lamott, writes this quote that I really like. "Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, the enemy of the people. It will keep you cramped and insane your whole life."

Nothing could be more true. Doesn't that resonate? Perfectionism will keep you cramped and insane your whole life, friends. Perfectionism keeps you stuck and limits your freedom and ultimately, it limits your creativity, if not stopping it altogether. If you keep trying to make everything perfect, you're going to be stuck and unable to move forward all the time. Or at least regularly, and far more than you have to be.

And you'll probably do more damage to whatever it is you're working on than good by picking it apart and trying to make it perfect. Perfectionism is one of the top creativity killers. It always will be no matter what. It squelches all the creativity you have. It sucks the energy out of your creative work and out of you. It puts an end to any creative fun.

So I want to help you take a look at yourself and find out if perfectionism may or may not be holding you back. And I'm going to explore a few ways that perfectionism might be creeping into your life without you even really being fully aware of it.

So let me ask you a few more questions. Have you ever been accused of micromanaging? Hello. This is one of the main symptoms of perfectionism. If you have a hard time delegating, then you probably feel like things won't be done perfectly, the way you want them to be done. And maybe you don't have trouble or you're not accused of micromanaging because you don't ever delegate anything in the first place. You just hang on to all of it.

Or maybe you can delegate but when you do, you might find yourself feeling frustrated with the results. You find mistakes and flaws and the things you delegate when they come back to you, when you get the results, and it doesn't live up to your standards and you chalk it up to being a "control freak," as if that's a good thing.

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And you think thoughts like, "I knew I couldn't delegate this, I knew I just had to do it myself. It's just easier and faster and simpler if I just do it myself." And I'm here to tell you not one single word of that is true. It is not easier. It is not faster, and it is not better because you can't do everything.

Perfectionism goes beyond just setting high standards for others and what you delegate to them also. Maybe you've set an insanely high standard for yourself and when you aren't able to live up to that standard consistently, you beat yourself up and you even get stuck on it, ruminating for days and maybe even telling yourself that you're not cut out for your work.

You feel embarrassment, you feel shame because you put something out into the world that you deem to be imperfect. I see so many creatives hold themselves and their businesses back because they think, "If I'm going to do video or social media, it's got to be perfect or I'm not doing it."

Or, "If I'm going to make an online course or even a website for that matter, it has to be the best and it's going to take forever to be the best and it's going to cost me so much money, but if it's not up to my perfectionist standards" - which probably, that's more like parenthesis because we don't see it as perfectionist. So if it's not up to be parenthesis perfectionist standards, then I'm just not putting it out there at all, period, and you can't make me.

And we feel like if we're not perfect, then we are actually lowering our standards, which we're not willing to do. But that's not the truth either. We can still have very high standards and not be caught up in things being perfect. Again, I can tell you this because I have practiced this in my own life. I have made this shift, and wow, is it liberating.

The telltale sign of perfectionism is if you feel like your work must be 100% perfect all of the time and the thought of doing B minus level work, just the thought of it, not even doing it yet, but just thinking I need to just get this out there, I'm just going to do B minus level work, that thought goes against every fiber of your being. It goes against your identity. It feels out of alignment with who you are at the core.

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Does this sound familiar? If you struggle with perfectionism, you're not alone. Especially as creatives. You might feel like success isn't always satisfying when you do have success because you consistently feel like you could have done better. This is the picking apart piece.

If this is you, you might need to start owning and celebrating your achievements just as they are. Not picked apart. Just because you did them. And this will start to help you avoid burnout and find more fulfillment in your work and your life. I'm so guilty of not doing this myself, of not celebrating my successes.

So right now I want you to just stop and think of one accomplishment you had today or this week. Even if it was something that you feel is tiny, or that you could do in your sleep or ordinary, I want you to think of it, just one, and just celebrate it for a minute. Because I want you to see that you are accomplishing things, and those things don't have to be perfect to be good or to be important or to matter.

So let's dig a little deeper into why you might be letting perfectionism hold you back. Deep down inside, many of us have a secret. We feel like imposters. We don't trust our creative ability, and a lot of times we feel like a fraud. And we feel like someone else can do it better than we can and that we might not really be qualified to really own our creative power.

We're not that good. Why would anyone want this from us, right? I've seen so many creatives, especially women, who shy away from calling themselves an expert and stepping into their full power and their full talent and their full creativity because of this kind of thinking. And they use perfectionism as a way to hold themselves back without even being completely away of it most of the time.

This is so common, and as I said, especially common for women. We hold ourselves back in so many different ways, from wanting to be superwoman and judging ourselves on our speed rather than our efforts. We want to do everything on our own. Don't help me, I got this, right? And we're fearful we

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will never know everything we need to know but we certainly don't want anybody to know that we don't know.

And this kind of thinking will zap both your energy and your creativity if you don't learn how to manage and move past the need to be perfect. Besides the fact that this is the kind of thinking that keeps us from serving so many other people with our gifts and our talents because we won't even put them out there at all, right?

So imagine the people that you're robbing from the things that you have to help them with, or to inspire them with, or to create beauty with for them. This is by far the biggest creative hurdle we all need to get past. Perfectionism, that is. But it's absolutely critical to learning how to build a creative life for yourself that you learn how to not be a perfectionist.

And it will have a positive ripple effect on every area of your life. Not just your work, not just your creativity once you do let go, even just a little bit. So how do you start to get past your need for everything to be perfect? Usually we want things to be perfect so we can feel the boost of validation and praise, or maybe it's credit when other people admire our work.

That feels so good and we care so much about what others think of us and our work. And we want their praise and their admiration, but we don't want their judgment or their critiques or their comments. And you can't have one without the other, right? You can't just get the praise from the people who agree and like what we do and not get the judgment, critiques, and the comments from the people who don't. It's just how life works.

Not everybody's going to think everything we do is amazing. What's wrong with them, right? We are amazing, but it's really kind of sad because a lot of times we don't even think we're amazing. And you cannot have the validation and the praise from other people without taking the risk of the negative stuff too.

So the result for many people is just staying small, keeping yourself small, holding back, hiding. It's the illusion of control and security when we do

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that, when we hide, when we don't put ourselves out there and we don't put our work out into the world. And I say illusion of control and security because we are neither in control or really secure all the time. Those things are just illusions.

And we are afraid of not being liked, and that's not in our control either. And we are also afraid of not being good enough. That one thankfully, absolutely in our control because it comes from our thinking. But here's what I want you to see; we can find other ways to get that validation that we're looking for without feeling like we have to be perfect, and we can find that validation from ourselves on the inside. Not from the outside and from other people.

And one way to do that is to practice validating ourselves. Sounds woo-woo, sounds dorky, sounds silly, I know. But a whole lot of woo-woo, dorky, silly things work really, really well. Trust me, I practice a lot of them all the time. One of these things that I love to use is affirmations, and if you can affirm yourself, you can give yourself that validation you need. You can give yourself what you're craving each and every day.

And when you start giving yourself more internal approval, you won't seek it so much from other people and hopefully after time, you won't seek it at all really from other people. And you can know that you are competent and you are skilled and you are worthy because you tell yourself so.

There's this wonderful bonus too that comes with this practice of self-validation, of these affirmations in that when we're seeking validation from others, we're often striving and proving and on that exhausting treadmill, right? So this kind of self-validation will help you ease up a bit on all of that stuff that you cram into your schedule and your expectations and that you take on all the time in an effort to strive and prove your worthiness because you don't have to do that anymore.

And you can take on a much more reasonable workload or approach to your life instead of killing yourself staying on that perfectionist treadmill. But you have to choose affirmations if you're going to try this practice that really

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work for you, specifically ones that work for your thoughts. So just going, I'm going to pick some affirmations out of a book and read them or think them every day, if they aren't the right ones, they're not going to do anything for you.

So the way you do this is you start by thinking about some of the obstacle thoughts that are holding you back. Those thoughts that come up all the time when you don't feel perfect or when you're about to put something out in the world and you're afraid it's not perfect.

So just let me give you a simple example. Maybe you think thoughts like, "I need my work to be perfect because I'll never make enough money if it's not." Now, if you can become aware when you're thinking that thought and you can change and replace that thought with an affirmation instead that's basically the opposite of that thought, you can catch yourself in this act of perfectionism and start to get a different result.

So your new thought or new affirmation could be, "I'm always taken care of. Money flows to me every day just because I put my creativity out in the world." See how that takes the pressure off? Your original thought was I need to be perfect or I'll never make enough money. Your new thought is I'm always taken care of and money flows to me every day just simply because I put my creativity out in the world. Just because I put it out in the world.

Did you hear that? I love this affirmation. And it takes all that pressure off that money is tied to perfectionism. And a lot of times we don't even see what we're doing to ourselves. We don't see that we're saying in our brains that money and perfectionism are married to each other. Or maybe you think a thought like, "If I'm not perfect, my family won't be proud of me."

And maybe your affirmation is something like, "My worth doesn't come from my works. I am enough." I love that. I am simply enough. I'm enough. I use that so often when I find myself striving and back on the treadmill because I slip back into proving and I literally just write on every Post-it note, on every

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piece of paper, on the mirror, "I am enough," and I just practice that. I'm enough.

So I want you to take the time to think through what affirmations really would resonate with you. If you don't like the word affirmations, if that's too woo-woo or weird, just use what thoughts would really resonate with you that you can practice instead of the thoughts you're thinking.

And I do want you to do like I just said, write them on Post-it notes, post them everywhere, put them as reminders on your phone, email them to yourself and repeat them regularly. Not just when you're having a perfectionist moment but all the time. Do whatever you need to do to make these a regular part of your day to day.

And when you see them posted somewhere, I want you to see them, speak them, read them and really let yourself feel the feeling that comes from this thought. Affirmations really work when we take the time to really feel what this new more desirable feeling is like that comes from a much better thought. So one of the most important things to remember as you move through your perfectionism is that we're all a work in progress.

Every single one of us. Even the people you're comparing yourself to that you think are absolutely perfect, they're not. Accomplishing great things is a lifelong journey. It's a journey of building skills and practicing them. And we're not always going to be good at everything, especially if we've never done it before. But sometimes we're not good at stuff even if we've done it a million times and that's okay too. It doesn't mean to stop trying.

Instead of beating yourself up when you don't meet the high standards you set for yourself, you can make choices about simple, small actions that will get you closer to the creative life that you want to lead every day. Did you hear that? Simple, small actions.

For instance, if you want to have a larger impact with your work, it's way more productive to identify one action, one key thing that you can take consistently every single day than to focus on all the things, all those

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thoughts about why you're not good enough or why you're not good at something, or why you don't like your results.

Any time we go into that mindset, sort of spiral spinning all those thoughts, it's internal drama is really what it is. Any time we go in there and we're focused on all the things that aren't working, that's a very dangerous place to be. But again, just picking one thing that we know we can do consistently and doing it, that starts to make a huge impact.

So give it a try and remember, you don't have to know everything and you don't have to do everything all by yourself. There is no shame in asking for help when you need it. If you can't figure out something you're trying to do, if you can't figure out how to solve a problem, then ask someone who knows the answer.

That's not imperfection. That's wisdom. This is the time to start accepting and embracing your capabilities and lean into the perfectly imperfect human that you are because the world needs you and your gifts and your talents. I need you and your gifts and your talents and I'm dying to see what they all are. So let us see you fully. Show us what you've got, imperfect and all.

Let's agree to do this together. I can't wait to see what you're doing. Tag me on social media if you're doing something that scares the heck out of you because it's imperfect because I can't wait to see you take another leap just like we talked about last week and put yourself out there, not just in general but putting yourself out there in an imperfect way and see what it does for you and all the people that you impact with your gifts and your talents.

And I'll see you again next week, and guess what. Next week is our 52nd episode. Woo-hoo, a whole year of *The Design You Podcast*. It flew by for me. I hope you've enjoyed every episode and I'll see you again next week when we record that year anniversary episode number 52. Bye for now, friends.

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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.