

Ep #58: The Dirty Little Secrets of the Interior Design Biz



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Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 58.

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 my designer friends and my creative friends. How are you today? Are you feeling great and rested or are you like a lot of people I've been talking to lately, tired or even exhausted? Today I want to talk about that. I want to talk about this epidemic of being exhausted that I'm seeing all around me.

But I want to give you a warning first. This podcast episode is a major truth-telling, and I mean major, so get ready because just listening to it is likely to bring up a lot of discomfort for you if you are currently operating your business and life the way I'm going to talk about today. So just know that.

And this is specifically for interior designers, but of course it really applies no matter what industry you're in. Now, so many of you have been reaching out to me after hearing me on LuAnn Nigara's podcast and I always say Nigara and I think it's Nigara, so LuAnn, if you're listening, I'm sorry. It's just like all the people who call me Tobi Farley instead of Tobi Fairley, which is my actual name.

So Nigara, LuAnn Nigara. So a lot of you have been reaching out to me about *A Well-Designed Business Podcast*, which is her phenomenal podcast, and I was on it a couple of weeks ago, and it was very much a truth-telling podcast too. And it was all about ways that I believe you can think differently about your business to really make it a fit for 2019 and beyond.

So this podcast today is really going to build on that one, or if you listen to this one first that's fine. You can listen to that one later, but they're going to go hand in hand in a lot of ways because that one is really starting to get into the how of fixing what I'm going to talk about on today's podcast. So we'll link that episode from LuAnn's podcast in the show notes for this

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podcast and you can find that at tobifairley.com/podcast and then click on episode number 58.

So if you missed my appearance over at LuAnn's that's going to be how you figure out how to listen to that episode. But let's dig into today's episode and get ready because it's not going to be a short one. It's going to be long but it's super-duper important.

So I was recently at High Point Furniture Market and if you're not an interior designer, just so you know, High Point is basically fashion week for the interior design biz, and it happens twice a year and thousands of designers and other industry partners converge on a town in North Carolina called High Point and there are literally millions of square feet of wholesale showroom space that are only open to the trade, as they call it.

Not to the public but to people in the industry who are selling everything from furniture to rugs to accessories. You name it, if it has to do with the home, High Point is where to find it. And market week there is not just a place to see product, but it's also a place to connect with peers and experts and learn from other designers and industry experts. There are a slew of presentations and panel discussions and keynote addresses from people.

And I mean, gosh, there's just all kinds of stuff happening, plus there's fun and parties and all kinds of stuff. And often I am a speaker and a presenter at market but this time I wasn't, which was really fascinating and fun to just be sort of a consumer of the whole experience and talking to people and chatting to people.

So I was definitely going to events and lunches and dinners with peers in the industry and catching up, and it was very insightful. So this year, this market, which was spring market April of 2019, what was my biggest takeaway? Well, I was struck by how everyone, and I mean everyone that I spoke to when I asked how they were, every single person literally, not exaggerating, not hyperbole as my husband calls it when I try to say everybody, but I mean everybody that I spoke to for the most part, their answer to how are you is, "I am exhausted."

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And my mom was with me and we were noting it. I mean, I was really kind of tired too, not because of my job but more because I've been on the circuit of volleyball games with my daughter and she's been traveling for those and so I had to give a lot of weekends to that recently, and wanted to, but had to.

But what I noticed at market was even more than in years past, even really kind of more than back in the recession when it was so scary, the overwhelming response this time was, "Tobi, I'm exhausted." And so I have been tired, as I said, from travel and not having some weekends, and really to be honest, about 10 of my 15 weekends up until market, so that was like mid-April, so 10 of the 15 weekends of 2019 I had not had a typical weekend with some downtime.

I had been traveling. Some for work, a lot for volleyball. But I did not feel absolutely exhausted at market because of a lot of changes I've made in my life over the last couple of years. So a lot of mindset work, my scheduling and time management stuff, and even though I had been traveling and busy, I had not fallen into my old ways from a few years ago of all or nothing mentality.

So I didn't quit doing all of the things that are good for me while I was gone. I didn't quit going to the gym, I didn't quit eating well, I didn't quit my massages or my yoga. I may not have done them as often as I would like but they definitely were still a piece of my life.

So I was feeling pretty tired but in a lot of ways, I had way more energy than I've had in markets past because I'm doing a better job of taking care of myself and I have more time to do that because of the way I run my business now.

So anyway, I'm not sure that a lot of the other designers and creatives that I was talking to that were so exhausted were doing the same of taking care of themselves, and today's podcast ironically and believe it or not is not really about taking care of yourself, but it's about some of the things that you have to do to have the time to take care of yourself.

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So let's get into what this podcast is really about. And what it's really about is a lot of the dirty little secrets, as I call them, of the design industry and of running a design business. It's the stuff that nobody talks about and it's the very reason that I believe everyone is so exhausted.

So what are those secrets that I'm talking about? Well, they are numerous and that's why this podcast is not going to be short. And I'm sure they aren't all specific to the design industry as a whole. Not every single designer is experiencing all of these, but many, many people are trying to sort of hide and cover up or maybe aren't even totally aware of that I really want to pull back the curtain on today and dig into what they are so that we can then figure out what to do about them.

So here's the first dirty little secret. Everybody is exhausted. And the reason it's a secret or it was but clearly it's starting to come out into the open as I found at market because no one can really hide it anymore, it is really a symptom of a bigger issue I think, in my opinion. It's that in general, the design industry is really great at smoke and mirrors. I call it the smoke and mirrors state of the industry honestly.

And so interior design really fits into that whole only show your highlight reel part of living these days in 2019 and beyond. You know how social media only shows our best self and really in general, we're just in a period of time and culture, especially in America where you only show the pretty side of life and nobody's talking about the other stuff.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not all about airing our dirty laundry exactly because that really just weighs people down too and we all have our own stuff to deal with. But our industry is so good at making everything look perfect just by nature. That's what we do. We make rooms look perfect, we make photography of our rooms look perfect, we make ourselves look perfect, we make the process look perfect. It's just a longtime practice of our industry.

And so it's really easy for us now that we are living out in the world of social media and everybody sees and knows everything that we only show that

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highlight reel. And we're showing all the stuff that "really successful designers are doing." The product lines, the books, the getting published, all of that stuff.

But guess what the dirty little secret is? The dirty little secret is that the highlight reel is not often financially successful. It looks successful and it seems successful but there are a whole lot of what I would actually call hobbyists in the business if we were looking at their financials because they're not making any money that we're seeing as those benchmarks and those people in the industry who we want to be like, who we want to emulate, who we want to model, who look so successful because they're getting all of these things.

These things, these experiences, these opportunities, and the dirty little secret is they aren't - a lot of them. I'm not saying nobody. But a lot of people are not making any money even when they look super successful on the outside and if they are making some money, at least it's a constant struggle to keep making money. It's really that feast or famine nature of the business that so many of us have experienced, that we know far too well.

And I speak with designers and decorators literally daily, either in my coaching program or those considering joining it or when I'm out at market and places like that, or even just on social media who are absolutely overwhelmed and exhausted and they're wondering what they're doing wrong because they aren't making money and a huge number of those people aren't paying themselves at all. I mean zero.

Or if they are, it's so erratic that they're just taking money out here and there, kind of as needed or in an emergency and calling it an owner's draw. But they aren't actually making money or supporting themselves and their family. And they're looking at all of these other people and their highlight reels and they're making the assumption that with successful looking businesses comes financial success.

And I'm saying that those two things don't naturally go hand in hand unless you are making sure that the choices you're making are actually making

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you money. So these people are a lot of times struggling, they're saying what am I doing wrong, they're literally teetering on that sort of precipice of going out of business and if they had one major issue with a client, they would be out of business because guess what, they are undercapitalized and their main service because most designers really only have one service that's full-service designer, let's be clear, it's not making them any money or at least it's not making them consistent money.

So they don't have money in their business, they're operating on shoestring and then what they're trying to do for people like putting every single customer into their full-service design and having to really negotiate on price to get a yes from those customers is not making them money. And it's a great big giant problem that nobody's really talking about.

And I talk with people all the time, especially when I find out they aren't paying themselves, and I ask questions and they're usually saying, "Well, I had to pay for all the other stuff in my business and I had to pay for me team members and then I felt like what little tiny bit of money was left over I had to put back in the business to operate so I couldn't pay me."

And it blows my mind every single time because here's what I want you to see. If you cannot pay yourself consistently and if there are years that go by that you're not paying yourself, why in the heck are you still in this business? Or at least why are you not making a major and I mean major change to the way you operate?

If your business is operating just to pay employees, what in the world, why is it your job and responsibility to work to the point of exhaustion to pay for other people, your team, to have a job? Don't get me wrong. I'm not anti-team. I love people and I love my team. But my point is if it's taking all you've got to keep those people in a job and you're not really in a job because you're not getting paid, then it is time to stop the madness right now and nobody's talking about that.

It is not your job to sustain other people and not sustain yourself. And your job and reason for being in business is to support yourself and your family,

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or better yet, to help you achieve a dream and be a big financial success. And a big financial success is not the same thing as looking successful. I want to be really clear about that today.

I don't think anywhere in your dreams when you're dreaming that it went like this; gosh, I would just die to have a business where I support a lot of employees at my own expense and my own personal exhaustion and I don't really even need to make money at all because I'm doing this just for charity and I'm totally thrilled to struggle in my life and with my family while doing this and at least those people on my team are getting paid. That is absolutely dreamy.

Of course not. Nobody dreams like that. We're dreaming about us and what we're going to make and what we're going to do and what we're going to have and what it's going to afford our families, and yet we're stuck in this dirty little secret of not even paying ourselves at all. Paying for these other people to exist and the funny thing is that it's not that great of an existence for them because a lot of times we can't pay our team that well either.

So they're not that happy and we're really not happy and nobody's making any money and we perpetuate this cycle thinking that at some point something's going to change and we'll just suddenly start making money. And I have actually said more than once this week, why are you even keeping your business open if it's just to support your team?

You would be way better off having a job with someone else and actually making \$50,000 to \$100,000 yourself working for them. Maybe not even in interior design, instead of working for free because when you own the business, guess what comes with that if you're working for free? All of the burdens and the headaches and the stress and the fear of owning and running your business.

No, please, no. So that's one of the dirty little secrets that is leading to this level of exhaustion, but it's not the only one. So what about the people that are making money or at least some money? But the state of the industry

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and today's consumer is far too stressful to be really a sustainable business model.

Well, if you are only doing full-service interior design and you likely can't really charge your worth or enough to make it fun and sustainable, what happens? Well, that's what a broken business model looks like, friends. That's what it looks like. The only way to make more money with this broken business model, a full-service design only is that you have to add more clients.

You need more money, you got to add more clients. And to get more money and more clients, you got to have a lot of other stuff. You got to have more time, which we can't get more time in the day, so if you don't have more time then you have to hire more people to handle more clients.

And that becomes this terrible cycle that for you to grow in this broken business model, you find yourself spending more and more and more time and money managing employees and putting out fires and you have very little time to be creative and work at a level of design or creativity that you could actually charge a lot of money for.

So it's really like being on that treadmill. So yeah, maybe you're making some money and maybe that's what confuses you and fools you because you do make some money, but not enough to ever get off the treadmill. And because of that, your work suffers because who has time and the brainpower and the bandwidth to juggle all the stuff of running a business and wearing all the hats and actually being creative and handling all those customers, employees, and all the stuff and the fear and the liability and everything while being completely exhausted?

Nobody has that brainpower or bandwidth or ability. Nobody. No one has the time or energy for that broken business model and that's why I say it's broken. And you can't just keep adding more and more and more and more jobs and more team members because the math doesn't work. Why does the math not work?

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Well, because when you increase expenses while bringing on new clients, it's really something that you learn in school maybe if you ever took an economics class and heard the law of diminishing returns, you don't make that money profit for every employee and client that you have to add. If you could just take on more clients and keep your staff the same size, yeah, you'd be making more money.

But if each time you bring somebody else on you have to bring on more people to take care of them or have more resources or you just get slower and slower so the clients get really mad at you, either way, it's not sustainable. It doesn't work. The math, the money, the finances don't add up.

And just this week I also had the conversation with someone who said, "You know Tobi, I made way more money when it was just me," and I said, "Of course you did." Of course you did because statistics show and the math shows that the least profitable business and design business in particular are often between one and 10 employees.

So you either have to be really big to make a lot of money where you have a whole huge firm and that's still very difficult, or you have to be a party of one. But in the middle ground, that's the no man's land or the no woman's land. That's the place where you take whatever money used to be yours when you were working by yourself and suddenly, you're using it to pay other people and to put into the business, and that is really a lose-lose situation.

And that's the place that you find yourself taking all the financial resources of your business, every single one of them and using them to operate and pay the team with nothing left at the end of the day for you. And more often than not, when I dig into these businesses that are not really profitable, they have a little profit here and there, just enough to keep them going, but a lot of times if you look underneath and you may have heard this saying before, that a lot of times people are bankrupt before they're actually bankrupt, that is sort of what that business model looks like.

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It's just a matter of time or a period of time or one recession, you're one recession away from absolutely being out of business because the only thing that keeps you going is you get clients just often enough to keep this miserable cycle of being on the treadmill operating. So again, nobody's talking about this. It's one of those dirty little secrets.

And more often than not again, when I dig into these businesses that aren't really profitable, here's what I find. Number one, there is very little if any, of a financial knowledge or system by the owner. They don't even really know what's working and they don't really even know what's making them money or if they are making money. They just know they're still in business.

Number two, they have no systems for time management. They're not operating on a schedule, they're not using anything like I do like time blocking. They're just putting out the next fire or the next squeaky wheel or hoping no clients get mad today and so they're either operating on that putting out a fire or when they do have some time in their schedule, they do what they feel like doing, not necessarily what they're supposed to be doing or what's profitable.

So it's like I'm exhausted and I finally got all the fires put out, and now I just want to do something creative so I'll go in my design workroom and play with fabrics and create a design scheme. And even create one that's far over the budget of the person I'm supposed to be working for and there's no way if I'm being honest with myself that they're actually going to move forward with all of this.

So then again, we'll be back in that defeated place of having to substitute everything and at the end of the day, hope the client is not so mad that they actually move forward with something and that it's enough that we can stay in business for one more day, week, or month. You know what I'm talking about. Some of you, don't you?

And on that note, number three, their businesses are very undercapitalized. They don't have money in the bank, they don't have a cash reserve or money to actually invest in help for coaching or consultants or outsourcing

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to people or some kind of software that they need or anything really to help them get out of this cycle.

And since all of their money is going to pay the team and those basic operating expenses, what they are is really in financial gridlock. I mean, so often I have solutions for people and they're like, well that's great but I don't have the money for that so I guess I'll just try to make more room in my schedule when I'm already exhausted and overworked and try to do that myself, which is absolutely not the answer.

So this financial gridlock becomes business gridlock. And then they're spending all their time working in the business because remember, if we're talking about them, it might be you. Maybe this is a you're doing this, but we're going to say for this podcast they are spending all of their time working in the business, taking care of all of those clients and employees that they had to bring on to try to make ends meet.

And there is no time to work on the business, to get them out of this hole or this deficit financially or out of their deficit of time and really start putting some new measures and new ways of working on place because some of you have heard my podcast, you've heard me on LuAnn's podcast, you've heard me solutions, you might even be in my coaching program, but you're at this gridlock place because you don't believe that you have the time to start the new stuff so you're trying to do it as your side gig and when you're exhausted, side gigs never happen because at the end of the day there's no brainpower left.

And that kind of feeling, trapped and stuck, that's what leads to overwhelm and confusion and it keeps you stuck long-term. It's for sure this whole thing of not being able to see the forest for the trees, or even if you can see the forest, you don't know how to get out do it. It's like being in the forest without a map, and you're just lost in the forest forever.

Sounds like a scary Disney movie, but we got to get out of there and so again, these problems and secrets aren't all just specific to the design industry. They're really sort of the dirty little secrets of small business or the

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dirty little secrets of entrepreneurship, but I think it's so important that we shine a light on them and that we name them and that we become fully aware of them and because I'm in the design business and I work with people a lot in the design business, I love speaking specifically to how they show up in that industry.

And it's in the awareness that we can then formulate a plan to get out. Not to just get out of the business but to get out of the problem. Some people might decide to get out of the business but I want you to see that's not the only solution. As I said on LuAnn's podcast, it's not be super successful in the broken business model or get out.

There's a million steps in between those two things. But you've got to get perspective and being exhausted and ignoring all these dirty little secrets is not really the way to get perspective. So what other dirty little secrets have I discovered to the design industry?

Well, unfortunately there are a few more. One of them is that when I dig into these problems with designers and creatives and we start mapping an escape plan from the pain and moving forward to a new business model that's both profitable and sustainable, we hit some roadblocks.

And the first one that I want to really talk about is when I start talking to designers and creatives about what it really takes to undo a lot of their thinking, a lot of their beliefs, and a lot of the ways they're operating their business, they come to a conclusion that they don't want to admit, and therein is the next dirty little secret.

And here's what they say sometimes. Sometimes they never say it but I suspect it. And a lot more than I would even think, they actually say this, "Hey Tobi, I really hate to admit it but if I'm being perfectly honest, I think I've realized that I want the success and maybe even the fame but I'm just not willing to do what it takes to succeed in business. I just don't want to work that hard."

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I can't tell you how many people, especially creatives discover this about themselves. They're like yeah, I want a solution, oh wait, I actually have to consistently do hard work and show up? No, I don't really want it.

But not admitting that keeps us again on the treadmill or in the cycle of believing we're just looking for the answer. We're looking for the thing that's going to get us there when all along, it's just actually consistently doing work that gets us there. And really, it's this kind of realization of wait Tobi, what? I have to consistently show up and I have to actually do what's written on my calendar if anything's written on there at all? But if I did implement your time blocking and scheduling, I have to actually do what's on there instead of what I want to do?

Because what about the days where I get to my calendar and what's on there and what I'm supposed to be doing and what's actually going to make me money is not what I feel like doing? Because on those days, I just don't want to do that because it seems hard and it seems confusing and I just would rather quit. And are you telling me I'm supposed to do it anyway?

Well, yeah. Yes, that's called being a responsible business owner, that's called having integrity with your clients and doing what you told them you would do, and that's called being an emotional adult. Three things that are really required to have an actual successful business, not just one that looks successful.

So let's be clear. Very few people really are and really do all these things. Be responsible, have integrity, and are an emotional adult. Because guess what, that feels boring. That feels predictable and it feels hard. And I just really am a creative and so what we're actually saying but not saying is I just want to keep starting new things and new experiences because it's super fun at the beginning with all the hype of having a new program or a new coach or a new idea or a new business model and then when the new wears off and it's time to actually do the actual work, well, that's not fun anymore and I don't want to do that.

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So again, what do you think? It's a dirty little secret, right? And then a lot of people are thinking, "Tobi, I know I could actually show up and do what I'm supposed to do and what it takes to put myself out there and use your proven tools and try new things that I haven't tried before, but that doesn't feel good. That feels uncomfortable and that feels scary and I don't like to feel uncomfortable and I don't like things that feel scary."

Well friends, let's think about this. Growth is on the other side of discomfort. So which one are you in? Are you in that dirty little secret of I would rather have the quick and comfortable path as opposed to the actual path that gets me real results, especially financial results? Because if you are, if that's what you want, if you're like, Tobi, I want the quick and comfortable path, here's my answer.

Perfect, you've already got that. And it's not that comfortable because it's not comfortable in the moments where you have no money, but day-to-day when you're not having to show up and do the hard work, it feels more comfortable in those moments and that's a little blunt, I get it, but I want you to see that the road to financial success, the road to actually being successful and not just looking successful, it involves discomfort.

It is not comfortable and easy, trust me. I've been taking that road less traveled for years because that's the only road that leads to the financial success that I'm looking for, but it's not easy. As they say, if it were easy or let's say if it was quick and easy, but if it were easy, everyone would be doing it, right?

So if you want to get the results you say you actually want, you have to be an action taker. You have to show up and do the work and you have to be a high performer. And again, nobody's talking about that because we live in a culture where somebody is always telling you, just do this, just do that, we'll make it easy, how to make six figures in five easy steps, right?

And one of the reasons this whole thing is a dirty little secret is because there are a lot of people on the smoke and mirrors path, as we've already talked about that aren't doing the work. They're just making it look like

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they're doing the work. They are getting published with projects. But nobody's looking at those projects and seeing if they actually made any money or even lost money.

And a lot of people are because they're not able to charge enough and they're thinking, well, if I charge that much the client will never move forward and the project will never get finished so it won't actually be photo ready so I'll undercharge and negotiate and pass things on at my cost or barely market up at all to my financial sacrifice, but ultimately then my ego gets stroked because it's good enough to get published.

And when we put that photo op out into the world, people that are watching, other designers, other creatives, other people are making the assumption that that person actually made money on that job. But when reality was that they were more interested in the photo op and the ego stroking than the profits in the moment because they have some belief that if I just get published enough or get enough of these good deals or collaborations or licensing deals, then the profits will come, and it just doesn't work that way.

There are people that are doing all kinds of things, paying out of pocket. People pay out of pocket to have a design book so they are a published author and it looks super successful. But not only are they not making a dime on those books, they're paying to have those books created.

Now trust me, I'm not saying don't do that ever. I'm not. I'm not saying that I wouldn't do that ever, but there's some caveats because first of all, there are plenty of publishers out there that will absolutely help you create a book if you pay for it because it's a money-making business for them. But what we're looking at from the outside as peers and as designers aspiring to be like other designers is, we're assuming those people are getting book deals and that those are making them money.

So again, I'm not bashing the process. By all means, for the publishers to make money, great. I think everybody should make money. And if you have the money and you want to pay to have a book and you haven't had an opportunity to get one another way without paying then absolutely, that is a

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perfectly acceptable business decision if you have the money, but so many people doing this don't really have the money.

It's kind of like what we see in our culture in general. There are people who literally can't buy their groceries but they'll buy \$2000 Chanel bag or \$3000 Chanel bag or Louis Vuitton bag. So we're in that culture where we want the ego stroking, we want the appearances, and it's happening in our industry too.

So again, I'm not bashing this. Don't get me wrong. Don't say Tobi said don't ever have a book and all these people that paid for theirs are doing something wrong. No, but I just want us to expose the truth in that just because you see someone with a book does not mean that they got a book deal and that it was free to them or that it's making them money.

It's a marketing expense and it can be a very hefty marketing expense to the tune of six or multiple six figures. And I'm also not saying that even if you did pay to have a book created, that it in any way diminishes the quality of the book. I'm not saying that at all. There are beautiful books that are amazing and inspiring that I buy and read and love that someone paid to have published.

But what I'm wanting everybody to think about is how are we judging the success that we're trying to achieve, that we aspire to, and are we being fooled by and lured into something that looks successful but that's not financially successful, and I'm saying absolutely we're being confused by that every single day. That smoke and mirrors part is what is confusing.

Because as other designers that are onlookers are striving to be that "successful designer with the published projects and the published book and more," they are making the assumption that if a successful designer has all those things then they must be a success financially and they must be making money. And if I can just get those things then I will also be making money, and that's where the dirty little secret is.

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That is the part that is not necessarily true. And so as a businessperson first, myself, as a moneymaker first, I want people to make money, a lot of it, and then go after the stuff that the ego wants. The fame, the getting published, the fancy clients, the book deals.

But to do those things instead of the profits, that's a big problem. That's backwards. At least it's backwards for long-term success and it's backwards for creating a sustainable business. So many designers and creatives are saying yes to every opportunity that looks successful instead of saying yes only to opportunities that are successful financially. Those are two completely different things.

And there is a belief, and I would say a false belief that if I get enough of those successful looking opportunities, that eventually the money will follow and I'm here to tell you that is not the case. I tried it. I was confused too for years. I thought those same things, I looked at those same successful looking peers or people that I aspired to be like and made the assumption that they were profitable and it wasn't until I really dug into the business side and got to know some of those people personally that I realized what was really happening.

So you have to know how to or learn how to create money in your business. And the way to create money is to create a ton of value, and that is not creating a book, most likely. It is not just doing design the way everyone has always done it, but it's to really figure out what you personally bring to the world that is of high value and creating a business around that.

And when I start digging into this value proposition with a lot of the designers that I work with, they really aren't doing anything that is that valuable or that unique that their customers couldn't get in a million other places, including other designers that might even be cheaper than they are or even including from online sources now.

And so when we see that and when we really dig and see well, they're not making any money or they're not making a lot of money and maybe they're making less than \$50,000 a year themselves or to split amongst their team

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and we dig in, we realize maybe the problem is they are getting paid what they're worth and that \$50,000 a year is the going rate for the work that they're doing in the world because there's so much competition at that level of work.

That they're not really solving a problem that other people aren't solving or they're not really doing something that is really garnering a high wage, a high fee for them. And that's a hard pill to swallow because if you're like, well crud, I got into this business making the assumption I can make a lot of money and the way I want to run my business and the way I thought this business was run really only makes maybe \$30,000, \$40,000, \$50,000, \$60,000 year. Now what?

Well, you have to do things differently. I just heard Tony Robbins on Jenna Kutcher's podcast last week or so by the time this comes out. It was about a week ago. And he said he did some research and that most people that he asked this question to said that in an emergency, they couldn't even figure out how to generate \$400 on short notice.

And I find this same thing to be true with many designers and creatives that I talk to and work with. The only way they know how to create money is to get a big client, land a big client full-service and how often do those really come along?

And so otherwise, if I'm like, well, figure it out, figure out how to sell your ideas, your expertise, your solutions in a way that you can start creating money today, \$500, \$700, \$1200, \$1500, \$3500 a pop, they have no idea what that even means or what that could even look like because they haven't been taught how to think entrepreneurially. They haven't been taught how to create value in a way that equals money and that equals money quickly and easily for them while also being a win-win for the client.

They're just perplexed that there's even any other thing they could do or offer that would generate way more money and far faster money than this old broken way they have been taught to do business and they're continuing to do it that way. And guess what, that old broken way is

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exhausting and unprofitable, which all goes back to the whole reason I started this podcast today of everyone being exhausted.

But guess what, because that's the only thing that these designers know and it may be you that I'm talking to, it's the only thing you know, then you just keep doing what you know, even though it's not working because people who are running their business this way haven't put in basic business structure, they haven't put in basic marketing structure that actually works.

They definitely haven't embraced anything progressive or forward-thinking or even just current because it's not even that progressive anymore to embrace something like digital marketing and today's proven methods for meeting our clients where they are, which is online, friends. They're all online. Believe it or not.

So an email list or a lead magnet or a value ladder and all that stuff that I help people create, a lot of these people don't even know what that is. And if they did know, it's like well, that's not the kind of business I have and those things don't work for me and if they even think that there's an inkling of a chance that they might work for them, guess what their reason is for not doing the work.

"I don't have time, I'm too busy Tobi, I do not have time. I do not have time to do new things. Yeah, I'll try it as a side gig." Well again, when we're exhausted, side gigs are a myth. They're an illusion. They're something that we pretend like we're going to do and we get to the point of doing them, guess what, we don't because we're tired.

So it's got to be part of the main gig. It has to fit into the main part of your day. In fact, I think it needs to be the first thing you do while you're most rested every day, if you're getting any rest at all. And when you say I don't have time and I'm too busy, do you know what you're actually saying to me?

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This is what you're actually saying. "Tobi, I don't have time to actually make money because I'm too busy doing a whole lot of things that make me no money and are super difficult and completely unprofitable and take a whole lot of time and are a huge liability and hopefully in the doing of those things, nothing goes wrong because I'm operating my business on a shoestring so I'm one sizable mistake or issue away from being in serious trouble and all of that takes so much of my time that I couldn't possibly work on a solution to actually make money."

And I'm being funny here but I'm not because I just want you to see that every time you say that, "I'm too busy with the stuff that's putting me out of business to actually make money," I want you to know that's what you're saying. I want you to see that that is a myth and that's one of these dirty little secrets that we don't talk about.

Here's another thing you're kind of saying. You're saying, "Oh, and if I did have time, if doing this new thing you want me to do, if that makes me let go of the identity of what I thought design was or the way that design used to be that I fell in love with then no, I don't want any part of that because I would rather stay unprofitable and eventually go out of business, especially if I don't have some major health issue first from the stress of running this business but I would rather do that and try to do these get rich quick things or these look successful things than to consider running a business that doesn't look the way I thought it would. Nope, I don't want any part of that if it's not going to make me look successful with product lines and a book and all of the fancy things that I dreamed of when I dreamed of interior design, then no, even if it makes me a ton of money, I don't want any part of that."

Well, no wonder people are exhausted, friends. No wonder you're exhausted. Most of the thing about exhaustion is it's mental exhaustion and it's coming from the fear and the anxiety that is constantly in the minds of designers running their business this way, worrying about all these issues and hoping that something will change but not actually doing anything to make it change.

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And it's so interesting to me how we use time as an excuse to keep us in this place. There's a saying I've heard for years and the saying is the pain I know is better than the pain I don't know, and that's got to be what this is because we're like, well, it's scary to go into that new business model and way of thinking, that's not what I had in mind, so I'd rather be in the pain of going broke slowly and miserably because there's the fear of what if that new thing doesn't work.

But here's what I want you to see. You're saying I would rather stay in the thing that's for sure not working instead of trying the thing that might work. It does not make any sense, y'all. None at all. I would rather say stuck and for a lot of people, it's really I would rather stay stuck and not have to work too hard or not have to work differently or not have to feel uncomfortable.

And here's the thing, for a lot of people, if you do have the benefit of having somebody else as the breadwinner of your family, then you even have more leeway to stay stuck and not make money but you would rather stay stuck and not do that hard and uncomfortable work and essentially say yes to taking years off of your life and taking quality time away from your family, hoping that if you just keep doing the same thing, then by some miracle you will get a different result.

And then everything will be right with the world, and we all know, we've all heard a million times that definition of insanity is doing the same thing and expecting a different result. And if all these dirty little secrets weren't exhausting enough, we throw one more bad decision into this equation and that's that we say yes to almost anything and everything and everyone, except of course taking charge of our business and our lives and starting to make money.

We don't say yes to that, but we say yes to everything else. We say yes to every shiny opportunity, don't we? Especially the ones that seem to cost us money. We don't have any money but if an opportunity comes up, we suddenly find the money to do that thing, hoping it will be the magic pill to get us to success.

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We say yes to the wrong clients with bad budgets and hope that the budgets will grow because we're thinking, "Well surely they realize that they can't do everything they say they want with that budget," but do we speak up and tell them that and turn down the client? No. We say yes, and we wonder why we're so exhausted again.

And I don't know about you but if your client list is full of unprofitable jobs, but you are so busy and too busy to create something that actually makes you money, isn't that a problem? Absolutely. Stop saying yes to those jobs.

And then if that weren't enough, we say yes to all kinds of other stuff like speaking engagements or being on a panel of experts or doing a show house or some other collaboration that feel so good to our ego. And we're like, surely this won't cost us that much money, \$30,000 to \$50,000 later doing a show house room, the reality sets in.

And I love how again, so much of this is smoke and mirrors. Now, don't misunderstand me once again. I'm not saying don't ever have a speaking engagement because yes, those can be good for building your brand. I'm not against them in theory. Show houses I mean, you got to take a hard look at those, and unless you have a lot of extra cash sitting around, I want you to really think about those.

For some people they're great but for most people, they are an expense that never gets you actual clients. They may stroke your ego, they may get you published in a national magazine, but usually they're not profitable. But sometimes they are, occasionally. Got to look really hard at them and see what it involves, and also the speaking engagements, sure, that's good for your brand but they're not the thing that is suddenly going to make you famous enough to start making money.

And then the other thing that is so funny about them is they perpetuate the smoke and mirror thing. So the order of doing these things is wrong. I want you to go make money first and then get speaking engagements to build your brand. And of course, if one comes up along the way, fine say yes to it, but don't say yes to it and not do the basic things that you've got to do

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every single day to fix your broken business model and get your business future ready.

Most people try these other things first because they're way more fun. Let me do show houses and speaking engagements and get published and be interviewed on something, but let me not do the actual consistent hard work. Those are two totally different things.

And my point about perpetuating the smoke and mirrors is so funny to me that we sit and listen to these talks and these presentations by successful designers and some of which are only successful looking but not financially successful and we have these "successful people" telling us just do this or just do that to be a success.

But again, when we're sitting there listening to those conversations, those panel discussions, those talks, we're making the assumptions that by successful designer, that we're meaning that they're profitable and so often, that is not the case. So often, if we were listening to them and looking at their financials, there would be a big disconnect.

And again, I'm not pointing fingers at any designers that are in this situation. It's hard. I was there too. I was there for years and I felt like a fraud. I'm like, oh my gosh, if people only knew how much debt I have and here I am telling them how to be successful. So I'm not pointing fingers. I'm just saying it's one of the dirty little secrets of our industry.

And I really want to be helpful in moving us into talking about true success and financial success, which is a combination of making money and doing these other things. Not just looking successful but constantly struggling to make ends meet.

So I think these are really more about how to look successful a lot of times when we're going to those talks and discussions, but not necessarily how to be successful and that's the path I want to take you on. So wow, what a podcast, right? No wonder we're so exhausted as an industry, heck, as a society.

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We spend a ton of time trying to find the quick fixes so that we can avoid just buckling down and doing the things that work and the quick fixes are what actually lead down the path that is truly exhausting. It would be so much easier just to go make the money first and then have the funds to do all of the other things.

But that takes us thinking differently and doing differently, and it takes us doing, period. Doing things, taking action, doing what works. It just reminded me even though I didn't have it written in my notes, it reminded me of Dave Ramsey, the financial guy. Like him or hate him, I really was just thinking about how he says you have to delay gratification for what you want right now so you can have it in the future.

So he's saying like, if you spend all your money on those \$1000 and \$2000 purses right now, you're never going to build any wealth, and that's the same for our industry. If you spend all the money doing the smoke and mirrors stuff on the frontend and don't just get the financials working like a well-oiled machine, then there's never going to be a point where the financials actually catch up.

So when you do what works and you actually make money, when you have the guts to think differently and not define your business by that old broken business model that everybody else is using or not falling into the smoke and mirrors, then guess what, the exhaustion starts to go away.

And that's not to say that you aren't sometimes tired because go-getters and high performers and action takers definitely get tired, but I think really the difference in tired and exhaustion is the difference that tired comes from action and exhaustion comes from your thoughts. And if you're just thinking about how to find the solution but you're never actually in the doing, then you're going to be less physically tired and more emotionally and mentally exhausted.

And I believe that the agony of thinking and doing things over and over and over again that never get you results or money, that is what is not sustainable and that's what leads to burnout or people just giving up

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altogether. And there is a different way, I promise you there's a different way. And I'll talk a lot more about the different way.

I already do on a lot of podcasts but I'm not going to keep you any longer because we're been here about an hour, but go check out LuAnn's episode. I talk about how over there a lot and I'm going to keep digging into this more and more in *The Design You Podcast* but if you want to know more about this right now and if and only if you are actually willing to do the work and you're actually willing to get uncomfortable and you're actually willing to follow through and you're actually willing to find, create, and spend some money on coaching and help and outsourcing and the things that you need to invest in your money to actually change it, even though it feels scary to spend that money, if you're willing to do that because you are so over living with all these dirty little secrets, then message me.

Either send me an email to info@tobifairley.com or just go over on Instagram and send me a DM. In Instagram stories, just respond to one of my stories and say I heard the podcast and I want to talk about how to get rid of the exhaustion and the smoke and mirrors and these dirty little secrets in my life and my business for good.

That's all I've got for you today, friends. I hope that was enough. It's an hour of serious stuff. A lot to think about, and some of you are even going to want to listen to this again or maybe several times, but you do know where to find me if you need me and I can't wait to hear from you and what you think about this episode and I'll see you again next week. Bye for now, friends.

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.