

Ep #86: From Zero to a Multimillion-Dollar Business with Sigrun



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Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 86.

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. Today I have a great interview for you from a woman who literally has just one name. Her name is Sigrun, and Sigrun is an amazing business woman who's creating, really, change in the world with female entrepreneurs and gender equality for female entrepreneurs in the online space.

And we have a really cool interview today about how she's built her business. One of my favorite things about this interview, I think it's going to give so many of you that are wanting to do things more progressively, I think it's going to give you so much confidence in how it literally is starting one step at a time.

Starting one step at a time and growing into, in not a very long time, it's been about five years for Sigrun, into a multimillion-dollar business where she's impacting hundreds of people in her programs, her courses and her groups.

So I hope you love this interview, I really think you will. I know that you will, actually. So, enjoy, and I'll talk to you at the end of the show a little bit more about this episode.

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Tobi: Hey, Sigrun. Welcome to the *Design You Podcast*. I am really, really excited that you're here today.

Sigrun: I'm so excited too, Tobi.

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Tobi: We have a lot of things in common. We were recently at a dinner party together in New York City, and we just hit it off, because we're both so passionate about helping other women, right? We want them to be millionaires, we want them to not suffer and struggle in business.

And that's really a lot of what you're going to talk about today on the show. So, why don't you tell everybody who maybe hasn't heard of you yet, who hasn't seen you in your fabulous signature red outfit, and all of your red brand, which I think is so fun.

Tell them about what you do, who you are, a little bit of what you're passionate about, and then we're going to get into some of these topics today.

Sigrun: So first of all, I'm from Iceland. That's an important part of who I am. I've lived abroad over half of my life, in Germany, UK, and in Switzerland most of the time. I was a CEO for 10 years in Iceland, and then later in Switzerland, running all kinds of businesses from a medical technology startup, to website design company, over to the fourth-largest IT company in Iceland. Being on the list of, you know, the 100 largest companies, we were four women, and I was one of them.

And then, onwards to getting sick for seven months that I couldn't actually work, and losing my job twice in two years, and realizing in my early 40s, it was time to follow my dream and start my own business.

Tobi: Awesome. So was the getting sick, was that just something that happened? You don't have to go into details. Or was that actually like the burnout from keeping all of this stuff going?

Sigrun: Well, actually, I was in a job that wasn't so stressful, but I was still working long hours, because somehow the working hours in Switzerland are quite long. And I didn't have many meetings, I didn't have many reasons to stand up from my desk, and I developed a repetitive strain injury. So yes, it was related to work.

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Tobi: Interesting.

Sigrun: My brain was fully functional, and it was quite frustrating to have to sit on my sofa most of the day to recover, or go for walks, and I couldn't sit at my computer. But my brain was very active.

And that's where I just started to think about, you know, being 40, and what is life about? And what do I want people to remember about me? And what do I want to leave behind? And it was definitely not working for another company.

Tobi: Yeah, awesome. And one thing you didn't say that I find interesting, and just a connection for some of my audience of creatives, is you also actually have an architecture degree, right, or background?

Sigrun: Yes. When I was growing up, actually six years old, I decided to become an author. But, you know, being an author when I was so young, living back in Iceland, it was not a full-time job. You couldn't live from it. So, my parents warned me about this idea of mine to become an author. I'm like, "Okay, then I'll be a teacher, as well." And then the teachers went on strike, and I realized how much they make, or how little they make. And I was like, "I'm not gonna suffer."

So, 11 years old, I decided to become an architect, and you couldn't study architecture in Iceland. So I was on a hunt, where you could study it. And then we were on holiday in south of Germany that same year. I was 11 years old, and I decided I'm going to move to south of Germany and study architecture. And nine years later, I did that.

Tobi: Awesome. That's amazing that you've had that mindset from the time you were barely old enough, really, to remember, right? Which is so good.

Well, let's get into one of the things that you and I have really connected on. Because really, your passion, as you've told me, is the whole idea of gender equality, really in the online space, right? So, helping women show up and build thriving, profitable businesses in the online space.

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And I am very much on the same path. I do the same thing for creatives, especially creative women, some men too. But talk to us a little bit about your passion, because you have a thing coming up next year which is bold, and I love it. Because later we're going to talk about helping women feel like they can, you know, really not only make money, but have an impact, and you're doing just that.

So give us some insight into your beliefs, and like why you're so passionate about helping other women do this, and kind of where you're headed with this message, because it's very exciting.

Sigrun: So I was brought up in the belief that I could do everything. My parents had maybe not traditional roles. They had their own company, they had a little dry-cleaning shop with a few employees, so I started to work there two hours a day in my summer holiday when I was only 10 years old. But they were both working.

But you know, my mom would cook and my dad would be doing the bookkeeping in the evening, so yeah, a little bit traditional, but still probably more modern than in other countries. But yeah, I felt I could study anything, become anything, and that was the discussion at the dinner table.

And then, when I was 16 years old, I would love making my own clothes, so I did courses on that. I was already making my own clothes when I was 12, and when I was 16, I wanted to learn how to do patterns. I wanted to have an idea for a new clothing item, and just be able to make it. You know, not having to ask someone or buy some patterns.

And I was doing this course at this dressmaker's house, and everyone else was like in their 40s and 50s and I was 16, so it was a little bit weird situation. So I wouldn't say much. Like, I was just there, quiet. And I listened to the women, and it was shocking what I heard. They had dreams, but they had not made them come true.

And they used all kinds of excuses. They said, "Well, I had children, my husband, my job." You know, "I don't have the skills." You know, time,

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money, skills, you know, the typical excuses, but a lot around having children and be married to someone that maybe didn't give them space or believe in them.

And this impacted me hugely. First, I was angry, frustrated, and just mad at society. Not necessarily at the women, but more like, they get away with this? Like, this is how society is for women? Like it's worse to be a woman. It's not as good to be a woman as a man. That was basically my conclusion. And having children, that definitely stops you from following your dreams, so I decided not to have children.

Tobi: Interesting.

Sigrun: And then a man, you definitely have to pick the right one and not let that man stop you from following your dreams. So, after the eight weeks, having followed these discussions, I made very important decisions. I decided I was never going to have anyone stop me from following my dreams. And, I would always make my dreams come true.

I decided also not to have children. Now, I ended up actually marrying a man who had two wonderful children, so I have been a stepmom now for 11 years, and they're great. They are currently at home with me, and one is sick in bed, and I had to attend to him before I did the call.

But yeah, life has turned out beautifully. But this decision of mine, this firm belief that I would make my dreams come true has helped me greatly. But still, today, I meet women just like these women when I was 16 years old. Now, I'm a lot older today, and I am shocked that we still have this.

Now, that's why, this became my why. Like, when this happened to me when I was 16, I didn't realize that this would be so life-changing, but it did. I thought about what I could do to change this. I even became a part of a, like a feminist movement for a while.

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But, you know, I'm not an active person in politics, and I don't believe politics help us here. I honestly don't. I think politics is very much, I don't know, it gets corrupt, you know?

Tobi: Yeah.

Sigrun: Because people get elected, they can never push the things forward that they actually believe in. So, I think you have to have a lot of hope, and I just don't have much hope for politics.

But what I believe can help is being a role model. And I think there were two vital things that happened around a similar time, or me being a young person, a child or a teenager. When I was nine years old, the first female president got elected in Iceland. She's the very first in the world that got democratically elected as a woman. She was the president for 16 years. So, for me, a woman president is the most normal thing in the world.

We've also had, the current prime minister of Iceland is a woman. We've had a gay, lesbian prime minister as well. So, these were all like normal things. Okay, women can become presidents. That's kind of obvious to me.

But then also, Björk, she is our most famous singer. Yeah, world famous, only uses her first name, just like myself. And I heard about Björk when I was 14. You know, so I could, I could see for myself. Like I was looking for examples of women who could make it. Become a president, or a world-famous singer, and I could see it.

Now, not all women do it. They look for the examples opposite. The thing is, there's just not enough role models. You know, girls grow up and they see a male doctor, or they see a male CEO, and even if I come from Iceland, and I'm proud that we are considered the number one country for gender equality in the world, it's also disappointing that we are number one, just because everyone else is so bad.

Tobi: Yeah. I love that. I love what you're saying. And I agree, I grew up a lot like you. I had parents who said I could be anything. In fact, we were

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having those conversations when I was a kid saying, "You can be the President of the United States."

Like you, I decided I didn't really want to be in politics after seeing what it was about. But just believing that, like exactly like you're saying, from a very young age that anything was possible, I think changed so much for me. And it just never occurred to me that whatever I dreamed of, I couldn't do, and that's very similar to what you're saying.

But I also thoroughly agree that it is very difficult to find role models in certain areas. Like for me, that's the same kind of motivation I have, to be that role model as a creative that can make a seven or eight-figure business and beyond. Because I completely agree with you.

And there's more opportunity than there's ever been, right, for us? And that's what you realized, is online, and we can reach people anywhere. The technology. I mean, you're in Iceland, you're in Switzerland, you're all over Europe. You were in New York a few weeks ago when we were together.

But, like there's nothing except us and our own beliefs that stop us from being anything we want to be. Of course, well, I guess there is something. It is a little bit harder for us to break into it, and it takes money and it takes time. But if you have enough tenacity, if you have enough belief, there's a lot of things you can do, right?

Sigrun: Yes, it is. And, you know, maybe I am sometimes naïve, and naivety is a good thing, because it makes me actually do things that I wouldn't do if I knew all the things about it. But a part of me believed like, oh, yeah, we just need another, you know, 20 years and this will all be changed. But here we sit, you know, and have this conversation today, and I feel things have not changed so much, you know, since I had those, or listened to those talks when I was 16 years old. Like, there are still so many women.

Now, I'm in Europe. Switzerland was the last country in the world to give women voting rights. Last, last country. Iceland was among the first. So

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here, children go home for lunch, which means the woman has to stay at home to give the kids lunch in the middle of the day.

Like, this is, it's just unacceptable to me that things haven't moved faster. According to a recent study from World Economic Forum, Iceland is 23 years away from gender equality. US is 200 years.

Tobi: Oh, wow. Wow. Okay, let's just sit with that for a minute. That's crazy. 200 years? Wow. Okay, so let's get into the nitty gritty, because for those people who are like "Yes, absolutely. I'm tired of suffering and not making much money." I mean, not even blaming other people, not getting into the feminist thing, not bashing men, there's a bunch of amazing men in the world. Like, you know, but like just taking responsibility ourselves and saying, okay.

Because that's a lot of it too, right? A lot of it is we just don't step up and step into these roles. Again, we're going to talk in a little bit about making an impact. But first, let's just talk about the kind of practical piece of it, the logistics, the workflow of it.

Because you and I also both have had similar experiences, and I think everybody goes through this. And it kind of makes it a little more understandable of why a lot of people quit when it gets hard. But tell everybody a little bit about how you were telling me, that you had a website agency, and you were really hitting a ceiling, a glass ceiling. Maybe you could see it, maybe you couldn't.

But like this whole service business that's not scalable, really, because that's exactly what a lot of creatives that I work with, and that I am one myself, discover. Like, to scale, you have to have more people, more human resources. And then the more of those you have, you find yourself managing more than being a visionary or a change-maker or an influencer, or you don't have time to do stuff.

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So you had this very experience, right? And that was what started shifting you into, very much like me, the online space and really a completely different business model than you originally started in.

Sigrun: Absolutely. I was a CEO for 10 years before I started my own business, and I kind of landed in that role. Like, I was just working at a website agency, I decided after my architecture studies that I didn't want to become an architect.

I moved into computer science and got a job at a software company. After two years. I lost that job in the dotcom era, and landed in a website agency. And then, a year later, suddenly the company was sold and through fortunate events and because I stepped up and asked for the job, I became the CEO.

Now, suddenly I had it on my hands to kind of make a budget and see how we could do a turnaround. It turns out, the company had been losing money for seven years. Almost nobody knew in the company, and suddenly I was there, looking at Excel, I had no business background, no business experience, but it was kind of common sense. You have to make more money than you spend. And the company was spending more money than it was earning. Still had amazing clients, and it had several good employees.

So first, I had to clean a little bit up and then, luckily, the market started to pick up and we had clients coming in. And I was like, okay, so the way I grow this business, if I have enough clients, I always have to hire another programmer, and I started to calculate like, how many hours for a programmer are effective, like that I can sell out. So that was like 80%.

So I could really calculate based on, I'm assuming there was enough demand. Of course, you have to do some marketing or get a good reputation out in the market, but it got tiresome after a while. And what happened is, unemployment rate went down to 1% in Iceland, as we were actually doing quite well. And I had been growing the company for three

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years, done the turnaround and everything, and we hit a ceiling in terms, I couldn't find more people to hire.

Tobi: Ah, interesting.

Sigrun: So, there was demand for our services, but it became a, what do you call it when the employment market is so strong? Like basically, people would tell me what they wanted in salary, and I couldn't negotiate back because I didn't have leverage.

Tobi: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Sigrun: And I thought, this is not a good business to be in. And I was looking at other people who were selling products, and they could just, you know, produce more products and make more money. And I was like, whenever I start my own business, and I wasn't thinking of starting my own business at this time, definitely not. I was even offered to buy this company and I'm like, "No, I don't want it." But I thought to myself, and I had discussions with my sister at the time, who was also working in the company and we said, "We will never start a company that is not scalable."

So, when I decided to finally start my own business, I got the hint, you know, losing my job twice in two years and getting sick for seven months. I'm like, "Okay, it's time to start my own business." I knew that I wanted a scalable business, and I discovered online business. And I was like, okay, this is it. Something scalable, online courses, online programs.

But it was hard to start. And I always talk about that, because it's like, "Oh, yeah, now I see it's making millions." But it's hard for everyone to start, because I didn't have a business idea. I was kind of ignoring the fact that actually, oh, I'm good at starting businesses and scaling them and even turnarounds, but I was like, "Oh, I'm going to write travel books. I'm going to put up an online shop with Icelandic design." I was like, if you read *The Alchemist*, you know, he's looking for the treasure.

Tobi: Yes.

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Sigrun: I was kind of, the treasure was right in front of me, because my zone of genius is building businesses. So I was kind of avoiding the zone of genius and I'm like, "Travel books? Oh yeah." And photography. I'm a serious hobby photographer.

I like, I had a photo studio in my home for a while. I have all the equipment, the lenses and the cameras and the flashlights. But I would go also and calculate, how much money can I make? And I saw as a photographer, as a local photographer, I would struggle. I would have to be, you know, one of these famous ones that travel around the world, you know? And I saw always like some stops. And I was like, "Oh."

And then one day it hit me, that I had been avoiding my zone of genius. And I started finally, January 2014. I was like, "Okay, this is it. This is what I'm doing." And I started testing out a few ideas I had with entrepreneurial friends. I had like, Your Best Year Yet, like challenges that didn't exist back then. Now, everyone's doing a challenge. But I did some challenges behind the scenes.

And then one day I put a button on my website, One Hour Business Coaching. Debated long about the price, because I had done an MBA at London Business School, and my husband reminded me what my colleagues are probably charging, because they're all working for, you know, famous consulting companies and charging \$1,000 an hour. And I'm like, "No, but my clients cannot afford it."

So I put \$180 for one hour, and I don't even advertise it, but someone comes and buys. And you should never sell single sessions, but I started that way. I didn't have a business coach.

Tobi: Right.

Sigrun: I wasn't in a community. I was like, "Oh, yeah, I'll just do this." I had bought two online courses, so I had gotten a little bit of an idea that you need a freebie and, you know, landing page. I kind of understood the lingo,

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and obviously since I worked at a website agency before, I kind of understood how you do a website and all of that.

But I still didn't get the kind of customer journey thing and, you know, creating packages. So I started with single sessions, and I learned a great deal because I connected with all of the people, I don't know, a month or two months later and wanted to check in on them. Not all of them booked a call again, a free call.

And then, my second client, my very second client that I'm still connected with today, she said to me, "Sigrun, I was testing for a new business coach and I bought single sessions for four business coaches. Yours was the cheapest, and yours was the best. You should raise your prices."

Tobi: Wow, that's awesome. But a lot of things you said there, just I was making notes as you were talking, because there's so much goodness there, and I just want to make sure that everybody understands. Because when you're in the online business world, we sometimes, just like when you're in, like my other profession, interior design or other things, we accidentally talk kind of industry lingo.

And I just want to make sure everybody understands what we mean by scale. Because, of course, you can scale to a degree a service business by adding more people, but what we're talking about is the kind of scaling where you can make something once and sell it over and over again, or you don't have to add more human resources, or very few of them, to have an infinite number of sales, right? So that's one of the things we're talking about.

And I love a lot of other things you said in there, because I see creative, and you are creative also, you have the architecture background, and you love creating products and you love photography, so it very much fits into that mindset.

And I think it happens a lot with creatives that I work with, like you are outwardly searching for something that we think or hope somebody will

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want to buy. Like you said, these travel guides, or I see people trying to come up with product ideas all the time, and sort of the, "If we build it, they will come" model.

And I love what you implied without exactly saying it of, when you really leaned into your zone of genius, to me the zone of genius is not only what you're really good at, like your sweet spot, but where it also comes together with a need from the customer, right?

And I think that's the disconnect a lot of times with creatives, like we want to create something, but we're not really sure if there's a need for it. And I think what you were, in effect, saying is, "I realized I'm really good at this thing, and then I just started putting it out there." And floating it and testing the waters to see if there was a need for your business coaching, which there was.

So it sort of looks like an accidental business, and I have an accidental part of my business, which is my whole business consulting, which turned on to my online program, same thing. People were like, "How did you do this? How did you build this business? How did you build this brand?" But I think what you're saying so much is that we have to pay attention, not only to where our sweet spot is, but where that aligns with the customer.

And you just, you have to leap, and that's what you did. It's hard. And the first day you're not going to make a ton of money, right? At \$180 a session, but you kind of have to go through that part of the path too, right? To sort of see, okay, wait.

This also, like this isn't what we mean by scalable either. Like, it maybe is in the right category, it's the right information, but selling myself for an hour at \$180 is definitely not the way to scale. But you were more in the arena of the information business and the online world, so you could start to go the next steps, right?

Sigrun: It was more like a proof. Like, when I made that first sale, I even remember the date. It was March 26, 2014. I celebrate it every year by

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sending out an email, and reminding my email subscribers that everyone starts at zero, and that I was even scared to put the button on my website. I was debating the price. I was scared of advertising it.

But, you know, I was active in Facebook groups, so ultimately someone would click through, if you have everything connected on your profile, and you have your website connected on your Facebook page, ultimately, someone will find it. Now, that's not the best way to advertise your services, but, you know, in the beginning, everyone is a bit of like, shy or, you know...

Tobi: Uncomfortable.

Sigrun: Uncomfortable, and feeling like you know, some imposter syndrome. You know, "Can I really sell business coaching?" Like because I had this massive business experience, but not in the online space yet. You know, I hadn't built a successful online business, but I had built other types of businesses.

So that was the scary part, a little bit, in the beginning. You know, who am I to sell business coaching? But yeah, I was a superb business coach, but I was very much under-charging. I was not advertising my services. I was scared to ask for the sale. But somehow this first sale I was like, "Okay, this worked. I can do this again, and I can scale it up."

Tobi: And so when you started to scale, you told me as the path goes, and it kind of goes for everybody, and I think this is real important. Because when people come to me and they hear all of the kind of progressive things I'm saying about creative industries, and things like creating courses, like that's the sexy part of thinking about something like having a course that makes you money while you sleep, but that's not the first step.

There's a lot of other steps in between there, including getting really clear on that zone of genius and what you offer. But you said, which is true for me and everybody I know, you kind of start in that one-on-one space, right?

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And then you go to something like groups, group coaching maybe, and then, like you work your way up into that really scalable product.

So talk to us a little bit about that path, what it looked like for you. Because I think it's really important that, you know, I think we want to just get it done. We're like, "But yes, Tobi, just like..." or, "Yes, Sigrun, like just fix me, just fix my business. I want to start today, and like, I want to roll out a course next month." And that's not at all what that path looks like, right?

Sigrun: Well, I was thinking a little bit along those same lines myself, and I had to learn by making the mistakes. As I said, if there's anything I could change about that first year, I should have probably hired a business coach sooner, or be in some sort of a group program where I would get more support.

But I was on my own, and I thought online business is about online courses. So around that same time as I made that first sale, I put out there a seven-day challenge, publicly, for the first time. That was also in March, 2014. And it was a seven-day challenge, How to Find Your True Passion and The Right Business Idea.

And I thought like, I can really help people with that. You know, I was also a Dale Carnegie trainer for a while. And I was like, "Yes, I am a good coach, and I can help people with this." And I was pretty much helping myself. You know, I was using, like, tools that had worked for me and I'm like, "Now I want to share this for you."

Now, this course was free, 134 people signed up, so obviously, I was building my list, and then I was a little bit stuck what to do next. I did not have an offer. After this wonderful seven-day challenge, where people actually found their business idea, I did not have an offer.

Tobi: So you're like, "There you go, for free, all my great ideas. See you later. Don't buy anything from me."

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Sigrun: No, it was a big, big mistake. If I had had that community or a coach, someone would have told me that this is not the way you do it. But yeah, now I've learned my lesson, I can share this lesson and this is a funny story today.

So yeah, I struggled a bit for a few months, but then I started doing weekly webinars, and that's probably one of the best things I did to kick off my business. Weekly webinars I wouldn't do today, because now we have Facebook Lives and you know, I love doing my podcast, like you do.

But it was for me, it was this era of like, not so many people were doing webinars. Yes, a few, but not so many. Not so many people were either doing Facebook ads, I learned that quickly too, and I grew my list like crazy. And then I'm like, "Okay, now I have all these people on my list. How can I sell something to them? How can I create an online course?"

Yes, I was still thinking online courses was the magical word here. And I finally hired a business coach, and I hired someone just for six weeks to just teach me launching. And she told me, correctly that, "Sigrun, I don't think you should actually launch an online course. You're still in your first year. You should do some one-on-one packages." And I'm like, "Nope, nope. I want an online course."

Okay, so we planned a webinar, and 600 people signed up for the webinar and one person bought my course because I had not asked anyone if they wanted this course.

Tobi: Like, what was the topic that was so juicy that got 600 people on the webinar, and just to help people understand, because to be honest, some of my audience like, doesn't even know, again, the lingo of the online space, and maybe doesn't even know what an offer is.

Which an offer is just something to sell them, right? A course, a program, a session, a one-on-one strategy day, anything that they can buy. So tell us like, how did you get 600 people on there? And like you hadn't really floated out the idea to see if this course was viable. Is that kind of what you

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mean? To see if there was any interest in it? Or, what was the disconnect there?

Sigrun: It feels so silly today. Like, you know, because I do teach my clients, survey first. You know, if you have an email list, send out a survey, like a poll.

Tobi: Yeah.

Sigrun: Just ask them. What is their worry? What is their challenge? You know, and what would they love? What is the ideal solution? Like, people will tell you.

Tobi: I love that.

Sigrun: And then if you don't like the answers, maybe you have the wrong people on your email list, and then you just get different people on your email list, but ultimately, it should be a connect.

Tobi: Yes.

Sigrun: It should be, you know, they should probably give you the answer that you thought like, wow, yeah, that's exactly the course I want to create. But, I didn't do a survey, I just came up with a course. And the topic for the webinar was, because, you know, I was in this dilemma of like, "Who am I to sell online business coaching, when I haven't actually built a successful online business?"

But I had 10 years being a CEO. I had an MBA from a top business school. So I thought, "Okay, I can teach business, not just on my business yet. How can I bridge this gap until I am successful?" So that was the limbo I was in. So, I decided to focus on the tools. Like, I also have a master's degree in computer science. I'm like, "Okay, I can talk about all the launch tech tools you need for your launch."

Tobi: Awesome.

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Sigrun: And that was the topic of the webinar, and people loved it. So I was getting all these people to my webinars, because I focused on the tech first, so that's kind of an easy start. If people are tech savvy, and don't know where to start, that's how they can start their business.

And that's something you can switch, and I did. You know, when I realized I was getting known for tech, I'm like, "Sorry, I was the CEO for 10 years at a... oh, I need to change this."

Tobi: That's not what I want, yeah.

Sigrun: But it was a good start, and I had all these people super interested. But, you know, they didn't want my course because I hadn't checked if they actually needed it or wanted it, but...

Tobi: Yeah, and it wasn't a course on tech. There was a disconnect between learn my tech tools and then buy this other thing, is what you're saying?

Sigrun: Well, the course was still on launching, so there was a connect, and I had discussed that with the coach. There was a connect between the webinar and the course. And normally, you would think that worked. But for some reason, there was a disconnect.

Tobi: Yeah.

Sigrun: There was just like, they didn't want the course that I put in front of them, and...

Tobi: They came for the free tools and they left, and like, which does happen, right? It does, definitely does happen. And I think the beauty of what you're saying too is, our best moments of growth in building any kind of business, including an online business, is to try something and fail, right? And nobody ever wants to do that, and a lot of people quit when they fail. Tons of people would have quit right then.

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And I think it's all about changing your beliefs, especially as women. We don't want to fail. We don't want to look stupid. It feels vulnerable. It feels uncomfortable. And we have to know going in, if we're going to build anything in 2020 essentially and beyond, that we have to know that failure is part of the path to success, right?

Sigrun: Absolutely. I think my biggest growth lessons have come from failures. And in the moment, it's not nice, but I tend to be an optimistic person. So I'm like, "Okay, I have all these people on my list. There is somebody that wants something from me."

I was convinced about that. And obviously, you know, since I still had the coach with me for another, I don't know, one or two weeks, we're like, "Okay, what's the turnaround strategy?" Since I've also worked on turnarounds and I've successfully turned around companies, I'm like, "We can turn around this launch." So, we came up with just offering them discovery sessions.

Like, let me just talk to the people and figure out what they want from me. And then I'll have an offer, how they can work with me one on one, which was the original suggestion from the coach anyway.

Tobi: Yeah, you know, that would be a novel idea if we actually listened to people who knew what they were doing and tried it, right?

Sigrun: Perfect. So, I sent out an email, and I talked about what I had been doing the whole year. So I still had great success, like in terms, because you know, I was catering to beginners. I was a beginner myself, but I was still ahead of them. Like, I had accumulated a lot of knowledge in the 10 months I was in my business, I had made money. I felt it should be more money, but I was still making money.

So I just listed, honestly, where I was at. I've grown my list from zero to 2,000. I've done this, I've done that, I've made this much money. I put it in an email. That email goes out, and they can book a free online business strategy session. Ninety people booked.

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Tobi: Wow, how long were your sessions? Like 20 minutes, or 30 minutes, or an hour, or what?

Sigrun: 30 minutes, and I did them all back to back in the next two to three weeks. Crazy. And I remember I was taking the first sessions, I was just, I had to take them on the phone in the car because I was so fully booked, and sold out my packages.

Tobi: Awesome.

Sigrun: They wanted to work with me.

Tobi: Yes.

Sigrun: They just didn't want that other thing that I tried to put in front of them.

Tobi: Not yet, anyway, right? Eventually they would want it, but just not yet, and that's okay. Like we hear those buzzwords all the time, like they have to know, like, and trust you, and we get desensitized to it. But in a sense, that's really what that was. Like, they didn't even really know you yet. They sort of got that you were an expert when they watched your webinar, but they needed to be able to sort of dip their toe in and make sure you were a fit, and then it worked. Right?

Sigrun: Absolutely. So pretty much within three months, I made \$55,000 after having months of like, \$2,000 to \$3,000, then suddenly I was like, you know, 10K and even December, 2014 was a 25K month. Like, it was crazy how things just turned around. Not magically, but you know, perseverance, being positive and believing like, okay, the people have signed up because they like me, they like my topics. There's something here and like, yeah, it's good to start one on one. I loved it.

I did it for about a year until I launched a group program because I was thinking about scale, scale, scale. How do I scale this? I would raise my prices gradually, always when I had, like five people at a certain price, I

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would raise it. And so my hourly rate went from, you know, \$250 to \$500 fairly quickly.

And then I launched a group program, and I did it in July, in a month where actually everything is dead in Europe. You cannot convince anyone to do anything in July here. But I was like determined to start a group program that fall, so I just, in the middle of my summer holiday, I started to see it in my Facebook group.

Like, who is launching in the next three to six months and would like some launch support? And people would comment. "What should I name my launch program?" And then I had them booked. So I was, you know, I started to understand how you create buzz. So, without a webinar, only with a few emails, I sold out two groups of six people for my first group program.

Tobi: I love it. Well, and I love that you challenge the beliefs, because we have the same thing here in the US, and I was just talking to Tim, our marketing guy, about this recently. He's based in Australia. And we both have that belief that, you know, saying you can't sell something during the holidays, or during the summer, like which is July here too, which can be a slow period, is really just a belief. And if you choose not to believe it, you absolutely can sell things during those times.

In fact, for me, I have more space and bandwidth during the summer and the holidays because my clients are busy doing other things. So that's the very time I'm online looking to buy something. And I'm thinking about my next coach, or my next whatever.

So I love that you chose to just not believe some of the things that are so easy to become excuses for us, right? Because, like we tell ourselves that stuff and we're like, "Yep, that's the truth. No one will buy in the summer. I guess I'll just have to wait." And there's really not any truth to that, if you go through the steps and the motions of putting yourself out there.

Sigrun: Absolutely. Christmas is also the best time to sell too.

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Tobi: Yeah, I love it. I know.

Sigrun: Christmas.

Tobi: I love it, I agree, and I see why. Because like I said, like you have a lot of time that you're sitting around on the sofa, like at your in-law's house or like your aunts and you're bored or whatever, and you're looking online. Or like, you know, things calm down, or you have some time off during the holiday. I love that.

So, before we go, let's talk a little bit about, it's kind of two things that I know that you mentioned to me, and I think they're related, and they are a really good follow up to what we've just been saying. And they're the two ideas of helping, really, women, female entrepreneurs believe in themselves. And then really, that whole piece of making money and having an impact.

Because, I think people are listening, probably a lot of people and they're like, "Well, that sounds great. But I have zero people on my list and I don't even know how to get to 2,000 people on my list." And, "I don't really even know how I could make an impact." And, "Why me?" And, "Why would anybody want something from me?"

And all of that goes back to the believing in yourself, right? And so, can you talk to us a little bit about what you did, or what you really believe, that can maybe be a shift in mindset for people? So they can start to believe in themselves enough to build a list, to have an impact on a certain group of people, or in a certain area. How do we make that happen, especially as women?

Sigrun: I think we need role models, first of all. And I think what I saw already back in 2012-13, I found a few people, not many, maybe two or three people, that I saw were doing the things that I eventually, possibly, wanted to do myself. And it was just thinking, like, "If someone can do it, I can do it."

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Tobi: Just one person. If just one person can do it, I now have a belief that it can be done, right?

Sigrun: It can be done. Somebody's done it. And I am now stepping up to a stage where I say, "Well, if nobody's doing it, I need to do it." So that's another stage, but it takes several years for me to get to that space.

But in the beginning, it was all about, I just need to find one person, and it's about modeling, you know? Really, when you start your business. Not copying, it's different. Modeling.

Modeling means that you see someone with a lifestyle or a business model and you like and you think to yourself, "Well, I would like that." You know? I would like to have online courses, or being bestseller on Amazon, and I would like to travel the world, whatever, or I would just like to be home with my kids, whatever you want.

But just figure out if there is someone out there doing it, and you start to model it like, and that's why I so, you know, happily share my start of my stories. Like, everyone starts at zero, and you just don't wake up one day and have a million-dollar business. You actually did certain steps.

And I took this very seriously to work one on one, once I figured out that was the path to go. When I went into group programs, I also realized, "Well, okay, and how do I scale that?" And it doesn't happen overnight. In July 2015, I sold my first group program, because I thought all group programs need to be six people. That's also just a belief.

Tobi: Yeah.

Sigrun: It's just because I saw someone else do it, and I started to challenge that. A year later, I had group programs with 18 people in them, and I was still the only coach, and the quality was still superb. It was so good that my first 18-people group, they renewed twice over three years.

Tobi: Awesome.

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Sigrun: Yeah. Now, I have a group program with 80 people in it. Now I'm not the only coach anymore, I have multiple coaches. But you know, my clients love it because I have a Facebook ad coach. I have a coach that is focused on selling high-end programs. I have a coach that is focused on launching. You know what I mean?

Tobi: Yes.

Sigrun: It's like, you can multiply yourself and the way you present it to your audience so they don't think they're losing out on something, where it's like "Oh, why am I not getting more of Sigrun?" I'm like, "I am not the best person in these things." You know, Facebook ads have become very complicated.

Tobi: Yes.

Sigrun: I can still do them, but I shouldn't, you know? Someone that runs a multiple seven-figure business shouldn't be doing Facebook ads any longer, they should hire a Facebook ad manager, and then I get that person to be a coach in my program.

Tobi: Absolutely, it's a value add. It's not taking away, and I think I have people that think that all the time, even in service businesses, one-on-one interior design businesses, they're like, "How in the world do you get your clients to be okay with one of your other design team members to meet with them on a certain thing, or to talk to them about a certain thing?"

And that's what I always say. I'm like, "They don't want to talk to me, because if they asked me that question about where their sofa is, and if it's arrived yet, I'm just going to call that other person, so why don't they just talk to that person?"

And so whether it's on that level or at a much bigger level like you're saying, where it's an area of expertise, I agree with you. We have to challenge these insecurities of - that we have to be the one to do everything, right? Because we're actually not only holding ourselves back,

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our financials back, we're holding our customers back if we're trying to be everything and know everything, because it's just impossible, right?

Sigrun: Yeah.

Tobi: Yeah, I love that. Really good.

Sigrun: So, I've just challenged and it has helped me a lot to model. Like, at some point, you go far enough in your business, and you are starting to invent things. Like, you know, for me scaling my group program, I didn't see anyone else do it. But I have also sought out coaches later on, where I see they're actually doing the things that I want to do.

You know, I have two coaches currently, and one of the coaches also has a group program, and he has 200 people in it. And I'm like, "Yeah, I know. I know it's possible."

Tobi: Exactly.

Sigrun: So, it's looking for people, and these could be your coaches, but it could also just be people that you admire from afar, you read about, you listen to their stories, if they're interviewed on a podcast, and you start to model what they did. Not copy, I want to emphasize that. It's modeling.

Tobi: Yes.

Sigrun: And when you model, you learn how you can build your business in a way that you always can tell yourself, "Well, they were able to do it, I can do it." And just remind yourself again and again.

Tobi: I love that.

Sigrun: That that is possible.

Tobi: Yeah, I love that, and I love that you said, "I'm a huge proponent of hiring coaches." You and I are both coaches for other people, and we both have our own coaches. And I think that that is so key, and that there's no

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shame and there's no diminishing our own expertise because we have to or want to hire someone else, right?

So to those people who think, "Well, you know, if I have to hire a coach, I must not be a very good one." That's really a lot of, you know, just negative self-talk and there's no truth to that. Because I think the best coaches always have coaches. There's no way we can know everything, and I love that you said that.

So, well any final things that you want to share before we go? Because this has been so helpful. I really appreciate you being so vulnerable and honest about your path, because I know that just hearing that, hearing how somebody went from zero to a multimillion-dollar business, one step at a time, is so helpful.

But for women listening, for people wanting to get into the online world, is there anything else that they really need to know?

Sigrun: Well, I think the last part of my scaling, maybe not the last part, who knows, but it was about having a completely scalable program. And I remember when I was starting my first year, I saw people come out of nowhere and creating a fully scalable program in their first year of business. And I, to be honest, I was a little bit jealous, because I was like, how did they do that?

You know, I think couldn't sell my online course, I had to do one on one first. But you know what? These people are not where I am today. So, I need to remind you and myself that taking the little bit slower path is actually the faster path.

So, I created my signature online program that is fully scalable, after three years in business. I was a bit frustrated with myself because I felt I should have had it sooner. But, in hindsight, I'm very happy I didn't do it sooner.

Now, I'm not saying that you have to wait three years. I think it's just different timing for everyone. I think what I needed, I needed to step away

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enough from other online courses that I've taken myself, so I wouldn't copy them. Because, you know, even if you think you're not copying, sometimes we do copy, if we are too close to something. And I needed to do one on ones and groups long enough to understand how I could uniquely be different.

And it was after I had sold out, I don't know if it's maybe five group programs in one go, and I call them masterminds, they were all masterminds, and everything was sold out. I had nothing to sell to anyone interested. Not doing one on one anymore, I realized that was the time.

Tobi: Yeah.

Sigrun: And then the idea for the online course, that is now a 12-month online course, well actually, a program, came to me, like you know, instantly. And it's just have to wait for that right timing, and now I have, we have 550 people in there. The course has made \$2.5 million in two and a half years. It's because it was the right time.

Tobi: Awesome.

Sigrun: That is the third part of scaling. Like, one on one, groups and then going to a signature online program.

Tobi: I love it. I love it so much, and I love that it was because you hit that next kind of level, or need, that then you had the clarity of where to go next. And I think we just have to trust that sometimes and not rush it. I see people wanting to rush and just create something so they can check it off their list and think it's going to automatically then make a lot of money.

And I think you're so right. Like, it's about following that journey with your customer, right? And being open to where you and they, your customers, need to go next. I think that's such great advice.

Well, I appreciate you so much today. This was so informative, so helpful. I can't thank you enough for being here.

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Sigrun: So, and then when I have done all of this, I realized...

Tobi: Yeah, right. Tell me to be quiet, I've got to tell you something else.

Sigrun: Yeah. How do I have a bigger impact?

Tobi: Yeah.

Sigrun: And that's where I came to the conclusion that I needed to have a conference.

Tobi: Oh, yeah.

Sigrun: To go [crosstalk 00:48:43] online business, because I think where we're heading with online business is not just online. We need to take it offline. We need to tell the rest of the world about this, you know? That this is possible for women, and that's why I decided to create the Self-Made Summit, which is happening next year in Iceland.

Tobi: Oh, yeah.

Sigrun: That's where I am bringing 12 speakers, world-famous speakers, people that you probably know, on the stage, and they will share their story and exactly how they did it. So similar to what we've been doing here in the interview, but it's different. Live, face to face, and having the chance to meet these women, and basically creating more role models.

Tobi: I love that.

Sigrun: Because that's the only way we're going to accelerate gender equality.

Tobi: I love that. So you've come full circle. You're like, that was the end of the digital story. But hey, before we go, I need you to know like, there's another piece. We're going back analog. We're getting back in a room together.

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And you even told me before we started, like this space holds what, 1,600 people or something? Like, this can be an enormous event that impacts so many people, and it's not still in the online space. It's in real life, connecting with people at a real level. Which is so funny, because you essentially came all the way full circle from one on one, to even in person again, which I think is so cool.

Amazing. Well, I can't wait to see the success of that. I know we will see it, and now these people that know you can watch and see what happens. It is in Iceland, is that right, next year?

Sigrun: Reykjavik, Iceland, because you know, we have to go to Iceland and learn from the number one gender equality country in the world, how we can achieve more, and there are so many role models there already. It's happening in June, 18th and 19th of June, because that is - 19th of June, 2020, is 105 years since women in Iceland achieved voting rights.

Tobi: Wow.

Sigrun: And 21st of June is Summer Solstice, it's 24-hour daylight.

Tobi: Wow.

Sigrun: And it's the perfect time to go on a holiday, or have a retreat, or whatever, and meet other amazing women from all around the world. We already have a speaker from Australia and we have guests who have bought tickets from Australia. So it's really going to be women from all over the world coming together in Reykjavik, Iceland, to learn from each other and make this world a better place.

Tobi: I love it. Well, it's so inspiring. And again, I just thank you. I'm sorry to cut you off too soon, because we had to end with the big finale of like, what's happening in 2020. So thank you for making sure that everybody heard that, because I love that story.

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And again, I just thank you so much for being here, and we can't wait to watch your event, and I know it's going to really, really be incredible. So congratulations in advance, and I can't wait to talk to you again soon.

Sigrun: Yeah, thank you for having me, Tobi. It's been a pleasure.

Tobi: You're so welcome.

—

Okay, so really cool, right? I love how matter of fact Sigrun is. She's just so straightforward. There's not a lot of drama to it. We want to put so much drama in this for ourselves. And, you know, especially those of us who are women, we have so much fear and discomfort and all the reasons why we can't do something.

And I love that Sigrun says, basically, just put one step in front of the other, and be willing to do things you haven't done, start one on one and then grow and scale your business. And that's exactly what she's done. That's exactly what I do.

So, thanks for listening to this conversation today. I can't wait to hear your feedback on it. You can check Sigrun out at Sigrun.com, S-I-G-R-U-N.com. You can see her on Instagram in her signature red attire and brand, which is really fun. And we'll all be watching together to see how amazing her conference is in 2020.

So, thanks for being here today, and I'll see you again really soon on another episode of *The Design You Podcast*. Bye for now.

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.