

Ep #96: Why Your To-Do List is Killing Your Business



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Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley episode number 96.

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, hey, friends, Hey, hey, creative entrepreneurs. Hi, CEOs. I’m talking to you. I’m talking to you creative business owners and guess what we’re talking about today. We’re talking about why your to do list is killing your business.

I mean, it’s killing it and you don’t even know. It’s killing you, too, right? You’re exhausted, but that’s not even the most important part. Yeah, I do worry that you’re exhausted, I know we all are when we run our businesses this way, but I want you to see that it is more than just burning you out, okay? It’s literally killing your business and here’s why.

Working really hard does not equal success and I thought it did literally my whole life. I firmly believed you have to work really hard to make a lot of money. You may have heard me say this, but back in September last year of 2019, I was sitting at a Mastermind Program a couple of days with the Life Coach School Mastermind and within the first five minutes had an enormous epiphany based on something that was being said by Brooke Castillo and I don’t even remember what it was.

I have no idea, but I do know that I wrote in my notebook that I had a huge ah-ha moment all around the idea that the very reason that I likely have not hit my financial goals is because I’m working too hard. I did not say, “Not working hard enough.” Now, some of you aren’t working hard enough on the things that you should be working on and that’s probably true for all of us and we’ll get into that today, but I want you to see that working too hard on the minutia as Greg McKeown in *Essentialism* calls the trivial mini.

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That's exactly what's killing your business. The concept of working really hard to make a lot of money does not compute because there are so many people who work really, really, really hard and you may be one of them, I definitely have been for years, that did not equate to the level of money that I wanted to make.

For 2020 with my goals, my one key goal and that is just so you know, my one key goal for this year is to 2.5 times our revenue for the whole company, and we've got some other goals for the team themselves like to 3X our Design You membership. In the company as a whole, which is what I'm looking at for me, 2X the entire company revenue – well, 2.5 times, and do that while I, me, Tobi works 6 hours a day, 4 days a week.

Okay, that doesn't mean I'm going to be goofing off the rest of the time. I will be doing other things, other visionary-type things, reading, studying. We're going to talk about some of that today, but it's a big challenge and I want it to be an audacious goal, one that scares the heck out of me, one that seems completely impossible because that is exactly what I'm going for and if I just say, "I need to work less this year" which I've said many, many times, that could mean 15 minutes less.

That could mean 75 hours instead of 80 hours which, you know, I haven't been working 80 hours, but you get the point. I want to be very, very specific and I am going to show myself that it is absolutely possible to work, and especially busy work, fewer hours than I ever have in my entire life to make 2.5 times what our revenue was this last year, okay? Which we were seven figures in our business last year.

That is going to take some mega, mega work from me. It's going to take so, so much constraining. As I was thinking about this I thought, "I've got to bring this to the podcast today" because I want you all to see that it's not just me that has a problem with this. In fact, I have my schedule dialed in.

If you've heard my time blocking podcast and if you haven't you need to, there's several of them that are incredible where I teach zero balance time blocking. I've got that perfectly dialed in, but the point being I'm still doing

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way too much of the stuff that I shouldn't be doing. Way too much of the stuff outside of my zone of genius and not near enough in the areas that actually make a difference in the company and in my life, okay?

Here's what I want you think about. I want you to think about shifting from employee mindset to CEO mindset. I heard James Wedmore talk about this on a podcast episode and it was really mind boggling to me, and he said this, "If effort is your competitive advantage then it's the absolute lowest form of any type of competitive advantage that you can have."

Basically, what he was saying is if all you do is outwork other people, which I've kind of done that for years in a lot of ways, then you're really vulnerable to all your competition because anyone, literally any person, could beat that effort just by hiring more people.

If you work your fingers to the bone as one person it is just not very hard for somebody else who either is more effective or efficient than you or someone who hires more people and can 10X the amount of work you're doing by just paying for more people that's not hard to do.

He's really saying working from this linear, limited construct of time and energy, because there's only a certain amount of both of those, is not a competitive advantage. That is mind boggling. Besides the fact that it's also not sustainable because you can't work that hard for that long which is what I ran up against and not that by any means I think I'm old, in fact, I'm in a lot better health and shape than I've been for any years, honestly.

More so than in my 30s when I was also doing this hard work thing. So, it's not that I think that age is an issue, but I do notice that the older I get I do just naturally in some ways and some moments have less stamina than maybe I had a few years ago and maybe it's just that I have a lot more wisdom now and I'm not willing to work that hard. I'm just over it.

Whatever the case, if I'm trying to win on outworking somebody which I think I was doing accidentally, that's a terrible strategy. What is the opposite of that? Well, it's the CEO mindset and it's spending way more

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time in things like super thinking, visionary thinking, focusing your time on the things that actually and truly can only be done by you. The things that cannot be outsourced.

That is where you get a real competitive advantage is going to that creative place and really figuring out and solving problems and getting your company to a different level. Because you're spending time in the strategy, in the creation that meets your customers, your audience where they are and serves more people.

This is the thing, most people don't this kind of competitive advantage thinking. They don't do this kind of visionary thinking. They're more going through the motions. They're going through their to do list, their to do list runs their entire day. Their clients run their day, their children run their day, their vendors run their day. Everybody but them runs their day and they're not protecting all of their work time to be used for the things that matter the most.

If you read my Forbes article that came out recently, and I hope you did, if not check it out. But I've talked a lot about the starving artist mentality and this is one of the things that goes along with that is staying in employee mindset not CEO mindset.

It really also is that same concept that a lot of us have read about *The E-Myth* where Michael Gerber, the author of *The E-Myth* talks about how a lot of us as craftspeople open our own business, but we never really step into a leadership role. We're really just still being that craftspeople and that's what I'm talking about, being that person is killing your business because that is where your to do list is running your life.

What are most of us doing instead of being in CEO mindset? What are we doing when we're in that employee mindset? Well, we're keeping ourselves busy constantly, we're glorifying busy actually. And guess what, we're doing that to distract ourselves from the real work that matters.

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Because as long as we can be busy, as long as we can have a to do list that's a mile long and feel like we never accomplish it we technically get to stay in our comfort zone. Now, is it comfortable being that busy? Not really, but it's not the same kind of discomfort we get if we go out and do the really hard stuff, the big thinking stuff, the visionary stuff that's going to move our company ahead by leaps and bounds.

We give ourselves this illusion of hard work, but in reality it's actually the easy stuff. Now, is it fun always? No. Does it seem draining and monotonous? Yeah, especially if we're thinking that it is. But the problem is it's just the stuff that we know how to do. We can do it on auto-pilot, we don't have to be present. It's really in that spot where we are competent, but not visionary.

In the book *The Big Leap* which maybe you've read that – we're reading it in my program right now, Gay Hendricks, the author, talks about being in your zone of competence which is far different than being in your zone of genius and that's what we're talking about.

Your to do list is literally killing your business because it's keeping you in your zone of competence, it's giving the illusion of hard work, but it's not really doing anything for your bottom line and it's not moving you in the direction of those audacious goals. It's not moving you in the direction of the impossible goal that you want to set for your life and your business this year.

Here's the thing, improving your website, creating a new logo or even just looking at, for hours, logos that somebody else sent to you as drafts, working on your social media and your profiles and going through emails and doing basic task in your business that somebody else could do. Whether it's your interior designer and you're doing the actual design work most of it is not that creative. Do you want to bring your competitive advantage to the most creative parts and pieces of it? Sure, but 99% of the work is not that, right? It's busy work and you're doing that.

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As entrepreneurs if we really want to lead it's our job to do the uncomfortable stuff and guess what, we're not going to want to. Most of that stuff that we're procrastinating with the illusion of hard work, with the overimportance we're putting on our to do list, that is the work we should be doing.

Here's the other problem many of us, and I was one of these people, get our worth from productivity, not necessarily from the major, major results, but we pride ourselves on the busyness. We pride ourselves on how – and I've said this so many times, y'all, how much work we do in a day. I have literally said so many times to my mom, to my team members, to even my community, my Design You audience that I do more work in a day than most people do in a month and I act like that's something to be proud of.

When I realize sitting at Mastermind that that was the very thing that was killing my business not only was it an ah-ha moment, it was also exhilarating because I don't want to be that tired. I don't want to be that busy and where I feel most alive is when I'm doing the visionary work. But it's so uncomfortable to either hire or delegate or be committed to sticking with not doing that work in your company.

It's really hard because that's just what we know, our zone of competence, right? Again, all that basic stuff including going through your emails all those things that you're doing, spending hours talking to your team, spending hours talking to contractors, spending hours talking to clients, those are not the things that move the needle. If you do get your worth from productivity you're going to keep staying in that zone.

We just can't understand why productivity does not equal money. Why our self-worth that we get out of productivity does not equal the net worth that we want and it's because they don't go hand-in-hand. When you really think about it, with stuff you know you should be doing, or you don't even know yet, but you know there's something you should be doing that is going to really make a difference in your company, that stuff that's all about working on your business, you know that stuff is what's going to grow your business, right?

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You even say it. You even are like, “Yeah, I know, I should be doing a bunch of other stuff for my business, but I’ve got to do this other stuff. I’ve got to take care of my clients. I’ve got to get my emails cleaned out. I’ve got to,” whatever the laundry list. You can literally just start reading your to do list and I hope this is an incredible, mind-blowing ah-ha moment for you.

Because for me I was saying holy shizzle, to be a little less crude. Holy crap, y’all. This is the epiphany that’s going to change everything for my life moving forward and I want you to see that you are choosing to do the stuff that doesn’t make a difference.

When yourself say, “Yeah, yeah, I should be,” blank, “but I’ve got to do this other stuff,” that is you choosing busy. That is you choosing employee mindset. That is you choosing to stay in your comfort zone. That is you choosing to not reach your big goals. It’s on you, you’re choosing it.

Productivity equals comfort zone every single time and crossing things off your list does not move your business forward and does not make a difference in your bottom line. Most of the stuff, 99% of the stuff that you do every single day you should never be doing. Guess what, when you think of it that way you’re going to get really uncomfortable. You’re going to feel pretty freaked out. Your identity is going to come into question.

You’re going to be like, “Well, if I’m not supposed to do any of that stuff, what the heck am I supposed to be doing with my time?” That’s where the real work comes in. That’s where you stretch yourself. That’s where you learn how to elevate a company. That’s how you use things like my Design You Coaching Program or some other coach or mentor that helps you stretch outside of the busyness of the to do list and helps you figure out where you should be spending your time.

Yeah, it’s way more comfortable in the doing which is why if you just want to stay in the doing you might not want to own your own business. That sounds really harsh, but the employee mindset, which is a beautiful thing for employees because we all need them and they’re so valuable, right?

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That is a beautiful thing, but it is not the CEO mindset and if you want to stay in employee mindset you might need to be an employee.

It is going to be the most frustrating if you stay in employee mindset while pretending like you're a CEO for years and wondering why you never hit the level of success that you're looking for. Because busy work does not make you money. Your to do list is killing your business.

When you hear yourself say, "But I've worked so hard and I don't understand why I still don't know where payroll is coming from this week," or, "I still am constantly in feast or famine mode in my business," guess what, you're perpetuating that because every time you get a new client what comes with it? A whole bunch of stuff for your to do list that you put your name beside it.

Now, does that stuff have to be done? Of course, but if you're going to run a business and you're going to be the CEO of it then you have to have other people doing a lot of it. Now, a lot of it doesn't have to be done at all and you need to get brutal about what you and your team is doing because I don't want you wasting time or money for anybody including the employees.

There's a lot of employees that are doing stuff that's also killing part of their job, too, their role as well because they have a lot of stuff that don't really matter on their to do list. You've got to get brutal, first of all, about constraining, about having conversations, about what priorities are and what really matters, but when you add a new client if 99% of those jobs that come along with it, the tasks, the doing have your name attached to them then you are absolutely staying in employee mindset and you're going to be burned out and exhausted.

Now, work itself does not exhaust us. Work itself does not burn us out. It's the mental stuff, the mental baggage that comes with the work that burns us out. Because think about it, when you're doing something that you absolutely love like a hobby or something that you just are crazy about you

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could work at it for hours and hours and hours and you don't get tired of it, right?

It doesn't burn you out, but it's when you have all of those things on your list that you shouldn't be doing and you are doing them because you're competent at them and it just seems easier – when you're in zone of competence you're thinking things like, “Well, it's just easier for me to do this myself. It's going to be faster if I just go ahead and get it done.” But those are the problems and when you do that enough and you add enough things to your to do list and you start to really get in scarcity about time and money, usually, but especially time that's when you start thinking thoughts like, “I have too much to do and not enough time to do it in.”

Then you create feelings like overwhelm, that is the path to burnout. Yeah, your to do list is burning you out, because of the things you think about it, but it's also keeping you, preventing you from spending the time in the places that really make a difference in your business.

Again, as long as that to do list is a mile long it's really difficult to get perspective on when and how you can do that other kind of work, besides the fact if you want to go into CEO mode, if you want to go into super thinking mode, if you want to go into visionary mode and you're completely burned out from your to do list you're not going to be very effective.

That's another thing I watch people do, they're like, “Well, let be the employee mindset 99% of the time and let me grab an hour here or there and assume that I can then turn on a dime and go right into creative visionary mindset,” and it doesn't work, right? We get there and we're like, “Ugh, I don't know. My brain is so full I can't even think. I don't even know how to get to that visionary place, I'm going to just go back to doing this other busy work because at least if I get that off my plate then I can have the bandwidth to think.”

In theory that sounds great, but when we never change our thinking and we never change our habits there never is a place where we're really done with our to do list, right? Because when we finish all of those things or far

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before we finish them we've added a whole bunch more to the end, so it's this never-ending list until you die.

I think some of you have heard me say this on another podcast, but I saw a meme not too long ago that said, "Adulting is just saying I'll be less busy tomorrow every single day until I die." That's what the to do list is and it doesn't have to be that way. But you have to make real conscious shifts to get out of employee mindset and to get into CEO mindset.

You've got to look at your beliefs. You've got to look at those things that are holding you back, just like I had. The things like I've got to work really hard to make a lot of money. Now, my homework for 2020 is the opposite. It is, I've got to work very little to make a lot of money, and that starts to play with your brain a little bit, right? It's kind of confusing. It's kind of uncomfortable to say, "How do I do that? How do I even say no to all those things? And who's going to do them? And what am I going to do with my six hours, four days a week? Because if that's all I get it's got to be the important stuff, so how do I decide which things are important?"

What you can start to see is if you ask those kinds of questions your brain is going to help you figure out the answers. You're going to spend that six hours, four days a week if you're me in super thinking going, job number one is to figure out what I've got to do with these 24 hours a week that moves the needle. Job number two is to super think about who's going to do the other stuff and what they're going to need from me and how we're going to organize that so it all fits into those 24 hours.

Again, I'm going to be doing plenty of work that will equal a 40-hour week, not that anybody is counting. In fact, some weeks I'm going to force myself not to do anymore just to prove to myself that 24 hours is all I have to do to build this business. The point of doing this exercise for me is so that I can free up all those other hours for the reading and the thinking and the resting and the replenishing and the meditating and all the things that really matter to get me to my goal of building an eight-figure business.

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I'm asking myself, yeah, your belief is got to work really hard to make a lot of money. The question is, what if the truth is the opposite of that? And let my brain go to work and see what it says about that. The other belief that you have to really look at and I've done a ton of work on the last three months with my own life coaches and as I've been going through master coach training is the belief that no one can do this but me.

I had a lot of my worth tied to what I call Wonder Woman or Superwoman thinking. I would sometimes start people or often start people on other tasks. I would "delegate" things. I thought I was delegating, but the moment they got stuck when they got uncomfortable and they reached out to me because, of course, they're going to because they're humans and they're hitting discomfort, my response was, "Let me swoop in and fix this. Let me swoop in and finish it. Let me swoop in and save the day."

I've done so much brutal work on that is not the answer. Anyone can do this besides me, everyone on the team must be able to do these things besides me and I cannot possibly let myself step in and do them. What happens when that's the case? Then someone reaches out to you and you just give them a little pat on the back and keep them going.

You're like, "Okay, that sounds great. It looks like you've got some more work to do. Bring it back to me when it's complete. Bye-bye." Now, that's hard because guess what, then I'm just as uncomfortable as they are. My mind wants to go, "But what if they can't do it? What if they don't know the answer? What if they're not as good at it as me? What if it was just faster if I did? What if I'm costing me and the firm money by having them spend more time on it?"

I mean, literally, all the scarcity thoughts come up and I have to be ready for those and know that yes, somebody besides me can do this and if they can't then let's find that person. Let's get the team right so this can be done by me. I'm now going through everything I do in 2020 and literally being so brutal about questioning if anybody else, a single person on the planet could do this besides me who would they be? What would that look like?

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Are they already on my team or not? What would they cost to put on that team?

Because I want to prove to myself that I'm not telling the truth most of the time when I say, "I'm the only person who can do this." That is just my comfort zone. That is my zone of competence and far from my zone of genius.

Another belief that a lot of people that I encounter deal with is, I'm a control freak. I'm just a control freak. I just want to control everything, but it's under the guise of quality, right? Quality control, "I'm better at this than other people," just kind of like we were saying, and, "I'm a control freak and so I just don't want to let that go."

Guess what, that's just you trying to stay in your comfort zone. That's just you trying to control the amount of discomfort that you let in. Because as long as you are a control freak the only thing you are controlling is your comfort zone. You're certainly not stepping out of it because when we step out of our comfort zone we feel the opposite of in control. We feel vulnerable, we feel confused, we feel like we've never done this before, we feel like it's new territory.

Yeah, it can be exhilarating or it can be scary. It depends on how you choose to think about it, but it is definitely not under the "control freak" belief, okay? There's so much more. There's so many more beliefs that you need to uncover and the way you do that is really by journaling, doing thought downloads. Every single day identifying what it is you're thinking.

You can go back and listen to some other episodes I've done early, early in the podcast. Episode number 4 was about the model. It's called *How to Solve Any Problem*. It's about the thought model I use to really dig into what I'm thinking and I use this often and I do journal every day, but for 2020 part of my practice, part of how I'll be spending those 24 hours is doing a lot of thought downloads with the model.

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So, not just journaling which I do very easily and I'm super comfortable with. Some of you need to get comfortable with it, but I'm having myself do a minimum of six thought models every single day without exception, 365 days this year, okay? Will I be imperfect? For sure. Of course there will be a day I miss for whatever reason, but if I get 270 days of it it's far more than I did last year and I know it's going to make a difference in me understanding where I'm continuing to get in my way, where I'm continuing to block my genius. I want you to see that.

One of the things that I know about me and I know about those beliefs, about how productivity equals my self-worth is that I'm also a pusher, a forcer, and I learned this from Gabby Bernstein in her book *Super Attractor* which, whether you're into the woo-woo of *Super Attractor* or not I think this is such a great thing to know and notice about yourself if you're trying to force things.

Because if you are, if you're trying to force results, control the outcome. If you feel like everything you do every day is pretty much a fight and there's always more to do and it feels exhausting and fatiguing then you are, for sure, trying to force and control your way to success and that's coming from a place of scarcity and it rarely gets you to the level of success you want.

Because, again, with it comes so many thoughts that are exhausting you, that are burning you out. Notice also if you have beliefs around forcing, pushing, controlling. They go along with that control freak concept or mindset and I definitely had those, so part of my practice and part of my meditation this year is going to be to surrender a whole bunch of stuff including surrendering a whole bunch of the work, in fact, almost all of the things on my to do list that have typically been on my to do list.

Surrendering them to other people on my team and not just being okay with what the results are, but asking them to step up and do this work at a level that's equivalent or better than what I would do myself. Everybody has to rise to the occasion which is super exciting. And you can just imagine that if we're all rising to the occasion at that level, if I'm not stepping in ever and

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saving anything, and in fact, if I'm delegating most everything on the front end and having people show me what they got, show me what they're worth which I haven't really allowed them to do if I'm being Superwoman then imagine how the whole company rises together.

That whole idea of a rising tide lifts all boats, and so if we all have this collective mindset as a company the whole company is going to rise together and we're all going to be better because of it, right? We're all going to feel more confident. We're all going to feel more secure in our genius. We're all going to have more perspective on what we should be doing with our time and where we need to fill in other gaps.

It might be the most exciting work I've ever done and I'm so excited about this. It's going to be, for sure, the hardest and guess what's going to come up for me every single day because it comes up for you already. I would say it's the number one thing that stops most people from their greatness and their success and it's this: what's going to come up every day is I don't feel like doing what I'm supposed to be doing.

For me, a lot of times, I feel like doing things like cleaning out my email inbox because it's mindless and it feels productive and I've attached that value and worthiness to productivity. When I take that away, am I going to feel uncomfortable? Yes. Am I going to feel like I'm not doing anything to earn my worth and value? Yes. Am I going to have to go manage my mindset around that? Yes.

But kicking the, "I don't feel like it" excuse to the curb, if I can do just that and nothing else this year and stick with what I have planned ahead of time to do in my time that will keep me in zone of genius then that is the stuff that really, really moves the business ahead.

Not only is it not giving in to the "I don't feel like doing it," but it's teaching myself to feel like doing things that feel uncomfortable. Are we always going to feel like doing them? No. There's many days, in fact, most of the time the first few minutes you're going to resist, right? Because you're going to want to be doing something easy and so you've got to expect that.

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Okay, I'm about to go into an hour of some hard focus with some big thinking, I'm not going to feel like it, but once I get started, once I get in the groove it starts to feel really good.

That's when you can train yourself, as I've talked to you about many times before, of training yourself to feel comfortable being uncomfortable, that's what I'm talking about. And getting in that zone of doing things you haven't done before, that is exactly where your zone of genius lives.

Notice all of these beliefs. You might even also want to check out the book *Clockwork*. I read it last year, we read it in book club for Design You, but it's something I'm listening to again right now on audiobook and hearing completely different things now that I've changed my mindset. There's a whole lot of awareness around your thinking in that book which I call doing thinking.

A lot of you are only into doing thinking like, "I've got to do this and I need to do this, and how are we going to do that." Really, you're not looking at the bigger picture thinking. You're not looking at the 40,000-foot view thinking which is the designing of your business. They talk specifically in the book *Clockwork* about four different Ds, there's doing which is that zone of competence, they don't call it that, but it can equate to that from the book *The Big Leap*.

Deciding is also fitting in your zone of competence which is not delegating. We think we're delegating but we give it to someone else, they do part of the work and they bring it back to us to still make the decision, that's deciding. Neither of those really get you where you need to go. Those aren't really CEO mindsets. Those are really in that zone of competence.

Then, from there, you go up to delegating which is actually giving someone the whole job to do and they only bring it back to you when it's complete. That's getting you way closer to allowing you to spend time in your zone of genius.

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Then there's the work of designing which is absolutely that CEO mindset. Not designing as in doing interior design work, but designing your business, designing your company, designing your profits, designing your outcomes, designing the results that you want to get and the processes that are going to help you get there. Again, when I say designing it doesn't mean that I figure out every step. I have an integrator who is a genius and she figures out the operations part, but I'm staying in that super thinking of designing the bigger picture, the bigger vision for where the company is going to go and that's absolutely my zone of genius.

Now, you need to figure yours out so just in this one episode I've already talked about the book, *Clockwork*, the book, *The Big Leap*, and the book, *Essentialism*. If you haven't read those three, I would make those your first three reads for 2020. They are all incredible. They are all really going to help you get into this concept of CEO mindset, super thinking and out of employee mindset which is keeping you on the treadmill of your to do list.

Okay, so that's what I've got for you today, friends. I hope it was mind-boggling. It's the very work I will be doing every single day of this entire year and I can't wait to report back to you in December which 11.5 months or so from now and tell you the results I've gotten from these big, big, major shifts. I know they're going to be enormous. I'm so excited about it. I know I will be a completely different person at the end of this year and what I do also know is that if I truly follow through on this the things that matter to me most in my life, like my family, will have far more time with me than they've ever had and that is what I really can't wait for.

I'm moving into CEO mindset more than ever. I hope you're coming with me. The zone of genius is where it's at, friends for 2020. Thanks so much for listening and I'll see you back next week with another fantastic and exciting 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 exclusively monthly coaching program, Design You at TobiFairley.com.

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