

## Ep #109: Creating an Online Membership with Stu McLaren



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**Tobi Fairley**

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## Ep #109: Creating an Online Membership with Stu McLaren

**Tobi Fairley:** You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 109.

**Female Announcer:** 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's your host, Tobi Fairley.

**Tobi Fairley:** Hey, hey, friends. Today is a note-taking episode. They're all note-taking episodes, right? Yeah, but this one is a note-taking episode for you if you are wondering how to meet your clients where they are and create scalable revenues, recurring revenues for your business doing what you absolutely love.

So, today, I have the incredible, energetic, fun, exciting Stu McLaren on the podcast, and I'm so excited about this because I have been a student of Stu's for a little while, and he is just phenomenal. Let me tell you a little about him in case you don't know him and what he does. Stu coaches and consults with New York Times bestselling authors, top rated speakers, experts, and niche celebrities on how to launch, grow, and scale high profit recurring revenue streams. Sounds ideal, right?

He also was the former founder of the world's number one membership platform for WordPress called WishList. Through that, he helped and supported over 60,000 online communities and membership sites. Through that experience and all of his coaching and consulting, he has really become the go-to guy for anything membership, and he now uses all of that knowledge to help his clients through his Tribe Workshop.

Go to [TobyFairley.com/tribeworkshop](http://TobyFairley.com/tribeworkshop) if you want to check it out. In Tribe, which I'm a student of his course Tribe and all the other things that go with Tribe, workshops, and live events, and things that he does, through Tribe, he helps people launch and grow high six and seven-figure membership sites.

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So, I didn't have Stu's expertise when I first started my membership Design You, but I did find it probably a year in, and all the things he's helped me do, and rethink, and organize, and really master have made such a difference for my members and our growth. If you want to hear what Stu has to say and not miss any of it, get out that pen and paper and get ready. He's super fun and energetic. Here we go. Here's my interview with Stu McLaren.

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Hey, Stu. Welcome to *The Design You Podcast*. I'm so excited you're here, and honestly, fangirling a little bit over here.

**Stu McLaren:** I appreciate that. I appreciate that. Well, thanks for having me.

**Tobi Fairley:** Tell everybody that hasn't encountered you. Gosh, you've done so many things in the online world, and you're the master of memberships for sure, and you've worked with some of the biggest names in the online world, and coaching, and content creating, but besides all that, what did I miss? Tell us about you and who you are.

**Stu McLaren:** Well, if we go all the way back, I was basically a square peg that didn't fit in a round hole. Got my business degree and was supposed to go right into the corporate world, but it just didn't jive with me. It didn't feel good. So, ultimately, I started my own business, and I started speaking at high schools and colleges, teaching students how I went from a failing out of my first year to graduating top of my class by the time I finished.

That was all through using creativity. So, I was really passionate about how to come up with ideas and be creative, whether it be to improve your schoolwork, whether it be to land the job of your dreams, whether it be to win the girl or guy of your dreams. That was my first business. Then I started to shift a little bit because I realized schools could only afford so much, and I could only speak so many times a year. So, that was basically my ceiling.

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I wanted to get beyond that, and so I started to learn how to package what it is that I know and sell it through courses, and memberships, and so forth. Then long story short, I ended up, at one point, wanting to create my own membership. This was in 2008. It was really hard because then the technology was nowhere near what it is today. So, I was way over my head on things like server settings, and HT access files. I was just like, “What do I do?”

So I was moaning to groaning to a friend of mine, Tracy, and I just said, “Dude, all I want to do is I just want to be able to teach.” He said, “Well, why don't you create your own membership platform?” I said, “Are you kidding me? Did you not hear what I just said? I said that I'm having trouble with the tech.”

I was like, “I can't program my own thing.” He said, “Well, look, I have a programmer that's worked with me for years. He's really good. Why don't we team up and create it together?” So, we did. Ultimately, that became WishList member, which went on to become the world's number one membership platform for WordPress.

We powered over 70,000 online communities and memberships. Through that, I'm behind the scenes, and I'm seeing what the companies who are growing year over year are doing with their memberships. I just started paying attention to that, and started focusing on like, okay, what are they doing as far as their content?

What are they doing as far as their marketing, and how are they keeping their members? I focused on those strategies, and ultimately, that's led me to where we are today, which is teaching other entrepreneurs how to launch, grow, and scale memberships in a very profitable way.

**Tobi Fairley:** I love it so much. You're a very good teacher. I am one of your students. I am one of your Tribe members. I don't know, has it been a year or two years? Probably a year because my membership is just over two years old. Probably two and a half. I started without you and made a lot

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of mistakes and did a lot of things right, but I learned so much from you, a lot of which we'll talk about today.

Because we're in the middle of COVID-19, the Coronavirus, it's almost impossible to me to have a podcast interview right now and not talk about it because it is, as everybody is saying, the elephant in the room, and we can't just be business as usual with our conversation, but in a lot of ways, we can be business as usual in the online world. I think that's what everybody is forgetting.

That's what I want you to talk about because you have a really unique perspective on not only what's still available to us, but what is now newly available to us as opportunity in the online world. So, let's talk about that. Tell us your Coronavirus philosophy because I know it's really different than what a lot of people are hearing, especially when they turn on the news.

**Stu McLaren:** Well, and that's just it. We're hearing one side of the story, and I want to preface this by saying I am in no way understating the seriousness of the Coronavirus because I have a dear friend of mine, Carrie, who is an ER nurse. She's on the front lines of this. She, in fact, has just moved into a trailer in her driveway because she needed to create separation from her husband and her two kids so they don't get sick.

So, I understand the health concerns, and I know at some point, all of us are going to know somebody at arms-length who's either had it or really suffered from it. That is a very serious thing, and the ripple effect that that's having in the business world is also very serious. You think of brick and mortar businesses who depend on foot traffic.

I've got friends who own restaurants, and breweries, and coffee shops, and retail shops, and all of them have come to a screeching halt because there's no more foot traffic. So, I understand the seriousness of this, and I'm not understating that. My heart goes out to everybody who is impacted by this in some way.

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But there's another side to this story that is not being told, and that side is the opportunity that the Coronavirus has created. I'm not talking about the opportunity for the guy who hoarded all of the toilet paper, hoarded the Lysol wipes. That's an opportunist. That's not what I'm talking about.

What I'm talking about is an opportunity to serve people in a different way. With online businesses, particularly memberships, the first thing I want people to know is that they're actually booming right now, which is counterintuitive to what we think. The media is making it out that all businesses are burning up in flames right now. That's not true.

For example, Levi Kujala, he owns a guitar membership. He teaches people how to play guitar. He's in our community, and admitted to me the other day. He said, "I was actually really nervous to look at my membership stats," because he figured same thing, that with all the negativity, that people are just going to be canceling left, right, and center from his membership.

But then his community manager came to him and said, "Levi, we've actually crossed a major milestone. It's a major milestone." He's like, "What are you talking about?" She said, "We are now at 7,000 members." He's like, "7,000?" So, he dove into his stats. Here's the crazy thing. Week after week, during this whole thing, he's been tripling his sales during this time. Why? Why is this happening?

Well, here's the thing that I want everybody to know. More people are online right now than ever before. Not only that, but more people are spending more time online than ever before. So, Tobi, I know you've probably seeing it, but views of videos are up, podcast downloads are up, engagement is up. All these things are up.

**Tobi Fairley:** Email open rates are up. The things that make us crazy in a normal economy are now doubling, tripling, like you're saying, and it's amazing. It's so wonderful.

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**Stu McLaren:** Exactly. So, there are businesses that are booming. Last weekend, I got two messages that just lit me up, and these happen all the time from our community. One was from Emily Jeffords, so she is an artist. She teaches other artists, and she just finished a very soft opening of her membership. She did two emails, two Instagram lives, and a few social posts. She ended up welcoming 367 new members right in the thick of this. I also heard from Tamara Bennett. Tamara just finished her launch. Welcomed 420 new members bringing her total over 1,100 members in her membership.

**Tobi Fairley:** What does she do?

**Stu McLaren:** You're going to love this.

**Tobi Fairley:** You're like, wait, I'm getting there.

**Stu McLaren:** She teaches people how to paint decorative door hangers. Decorative door hangers. You don't even know. I had no idea that this was a market, but it is, and she just welcomed 420 new members right in the thick of this. So, I'm sharing this story because number one, the thing that I want people to realize is that memberships are booming.

It is the perfect environment because people are at home, they're online, and they want to be productive with their time. So, they're looking for things to learn. They're looking to pursue passions that they didn't have time for before. I could share endless stories. That's number one.

Number two is that people are craving connection right now. Where we used to get connection, whether it be in the church, or at schools, or sports teams, or at the pubs, or the clubs, wherever we get that connection, that social interaction, it's not happening. But that doesn't stop us from meeting and wanting that connection.

This is why memberships are perfectly positioned for that because it's a community. It's a safe place for people to interact, and socialize, and get to

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know each other, and help each other, and support each other. So, again, it is a perfect environment, and this is what we're seeing. In terms of engagement, it's all up. I have a friend of mine, Ricardo, who is over in Portugal, and he's seeing record attendance on his live trainings.

**Tobi Fairley:** That's what we're seeing. Yeah. We normally do two live trainings a month in our membership. So, I jumped in, of course, and immediately started offering all these bonus trainings, and how to help people think about their finances right now, and do a 90-day strategic plan, and just manage their emotions, and all the things, and we've never had this many people come in, and I've never gotten this much feedback of how supported they feel, which I'm sure is exactly what he's hearing.

**Stu McLaren:** It's exactly it. To give people some context, where he would normally see around 1,000 people attend his webinars, he's now seeing 4,500 people attend his trainings.

**Tobi Fairley:** Oh, my gosh.

**Stu McLaren:** I'm sharing this because this is the connection that people are craving, and they want to be together. They want to connect and socialize. Again, perfect for the online space. Now, the third thing is one that I want everybody to pay really close attention to because the Coronavirus, what it's done, is it's created a new set of problems, a set of problems that weren't there before.

Now, I know your kids are a little bit older. Mine are young. So, for anybody listening who has younger kids, you'll know how to relate to this because there are literally millions and billions of parents who have been immediately thrust into now becoming teachers.

We're like deer in headlights. We don't want our kids on Netflix. We don't want them on the iPad, but we're like, "What do we do?" So, we are stuck right now. We're frozen. This is a new problem. So, people like Anna

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DeGilio, who she has a membership site providing lesson plans for teachers.

**Tobi Fairley:** I remember her from some of your Tribe promotions and how amazing she's done with her business. I like hearing that familiar name.

**Stu McLaren:** Yes. So, Anna, she provides lesson plans for teachers, has a thriving membership doing that, but she's also recognized, "Oh, hang on a minute. There's now millions of parents who could also now benefit from those lesson plans." So, she's made a slight pivot. Now, she's providing those lesson plans for those millions of parents. As one of those parents, it's like a godsend because yes, there's a million and one free tips, and tricks, and all kinds of information online, but I just want somebody to tell me, "If you've got a kid in this age, this is what you do."

**Tobi Fairley:** Do this, and you trust her. You already know that she's very reputable. You can see all of her success, and you're like, "I'm willing to pay this lady because I know it's going to be good stuff. It's not just a hodgepodge of me gathering all this free stuff off the internet.

**Stu McLaren:** Here's the reality with that. As parents, our workday has been cut in half because literally, I work half the day now. It's like a high five with my wife, and then I take over. I'm on daddy duty, and then she's working on her business.

**Tobi Fairley:** Half of the time, right?

**Stu McLaren:** Exactly, yes. We don't have the time to sift and sort through a million and one free pages and stuff. We just want to be told what to do. Anna DeGilio is a good example. Patty Palmer is another teacher who provides art lesson plans for teachers. She's now pivoted and doing the same thing providing those lessons for parents. If you think about all the new problems that have emerged, that's one of them.

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Another one is you've got millions of people who are now at home working, and normally, they'd be in an office, but now, they're trying to figure out like, "How do we do this virtual online stuff?" There's people, millions of people, who used to go to a gym to work out, but now, they can't do that. Does that mean that their desire to be fit and work out has stopped? No. All it means is that now, it's an opportunity for the right kind of person.

Like Dave, my trainer, my local trainer, he recognized this right away, and so he shifted. He recognized that people are now at home. They're stuck at home. They don't have access to the typical workout equipment that they would at a gym. So, he started building an audience and serving people by providing at-home workouts, and he's been doing this just on his Instagram account, and building this amazing following.

**Tobi Fairley:** Love it.

**Stu McLaren:** I'm sharing this with everybody because hopefully, hopefully, it's planting seeds in terms of new problems have emerged, and as entrepreneurs, this is what we do. We solve problems. So, all we need to do is we just need to think creatively of how we can show up and serve people, and meet them where they are at.

**Tobi Fairley:** I love that you're giving people so much permission because that's the same thing that I'm doing in my membership. We're mostly creative entrepreneurs, but we have a gym owner in there. We have somebody who's a pet groomer in there.

People that identify as creatives, but their business might not be the typical like some of our other things, interior design, event planning, all of those things. But what you're saying is it really does not matter what your business is if you're willing to think differently, pivot, which I am 100% on the same page with you, and I love it. I was just coaching the girl yesterday about pet grooming, and she's just feeling stuck.

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She's like, "I've been shut down. My governor shut us down. It's not an essential need right now. I'm petitioning for that." I'm like, "Well, are you connecting with your audience? Do you have pets? Can they be your Guinea pig? Can you get on Instagram and show people how to cut their hair? They still need stuff happening. Their dogs are dirty. They're stinking. They're in the house. How are you meeting these people where they are?"

That's what you're saying. No matter what your industry is, even if you were a one-on-one service, low end, high end, any of it, if you're willing to think differently, you can absolutely meet your customer where they are right now and solve not the problems necessarily you used to solve, which is how people want to just go, "How do I force this old other thing on them?" But you're saying you've got to meet them where they are and find out what their needs are right now.

**Stu McLaren:** It's a great, great point. Here's the question that I want everybody just to sit with. This is a question that I learned from one of my former business partners, and I love this question. His name is Michael Hyatt, and he said, "When times are tough, the question we want to ask ourselves is, what does this make possible? What does this make possible?"

I can tell you right now, there are people that are listening to this right now who are going to have a major breakthrough because this situation has forced us to think more creatively. It's forced us to get out of our comfort zone. So, to the pet groomer, I have a Golden Doodle, and I'm telling you, she is becoming a shaggy monster. She can't even see out of her eyes.

So, I think about how tutorials on how to do the bare minimum, take care of the dog in that way. I'm wondering when barbers are going to become an essential service because I'm getting out of control here too, Tobi. So, I'm seeing tutorials now of how to do at-home haircuts.

**Tobi Fairley:** I saw one today on Instagram. Same thing. How to do a basic men's haircut with a such and such kind of clipper.

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**Stu McLaren:** Exactly. So, I just think that there are so many ways in which we can show up and serve, and just identifying that there are new problems just waiting to be solved right now. We've just got to pick ourselves up, and we got to keep moving forward. We can't stick our head in the sand and hope that one day this'll be over.

That's not who we are. We are entrepreneurs that show up, and we create, and we identify problems, and we create solutions for people. So, number one, memberships are booming right now. Number two, people are craving connection. Number three, new problems have emerged that are waiting for us to solve.

Now, number four, is that right now, there are so many businesses who my heart go out to, particularly like the pet groomers, like the brick and mortar businesses, and I'm in the thick of this. I have friends who own restaurants, and coffee shops, and breweries, and retail shops. They've all just been closed right up. My heart goes out to those people because I understand that reality.

One of the things that has been heartwarming for me is hearing from people like Kasey Hope who has a physical brick and mortar art studio, and she sent me a message recently. She said, "Stu, I am so grateful that I launched an online membership because I just had to make the tough decision to close the art studio for three weeks, minimum of three weeks."

She said, "Normally, I'd be full of fear right now. How do I pay my employees? How do I pay myself? I'm not even going to have a business when this thing finishes." She said, "But I don't have that level of anxiety because I have my online membership." She has a calligraphy membership. She teaches people lettering, and she said, "I don't have that fear because I know that that membership is going to bridge the gap."

I heard from Sarah Williams who has a brick and mortar retail shop, but in the last year, she's grown her membership from 300 members to 2,000. She has a subscription box where she sends out monogrammed items to

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all of her subscribers and members. Same thing. She's had to close her retail shop, but she's like, "I'm still able to pay my employees, and still able to take care of them despite all of this because of the membership."

I've heard the same from Tracy whose husband is a chiropractor who's had to close his practice, and that would be devastating except for the fact she has an online membership that's helping them bridge the gap. Or Mary Claire Fredette who has a physical massage studio, and because she launched her online membership last year, that monthly income is bridging the gap.

So, I'm sharing this because, my friends, it doesn't matter if you've got a product-based business, service-based business, knowledge-based business, or community-based business. You can do this, and it can be the very thing that's going to create more stability in your business than ever before.

What I want to challenge people to do is I want to challenge people to think about how could I use this time to come out healthier, stronger, and in a better position after the Coronavirus than when I went into it? Can you imagine how proud we would be to be able to look back on this moment in time and say, "I didn't lose myself. I didn't stick my head in the sand. I didn't hope that things would get better. I rolled up my sleeves, and I made things happen. Not only that, but I created momentum for myself during this time."

When you do that, can you imagine the momentum that is going to be on your side when things do turn around? Oh, my goodness. So, if not now, when? That's the question I want people to really camp out on because now is the time to figure this out. Now is the time to sort this out because, for the fifth reason, it's created more urgency.

That urgency has come because who would have seen this coming? None of us knew this was coming. None of us knew the ripple effect of what would happen. I'm raising my hand because I'm in the same boat. My wife

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and I, we have a nonprofit. We have our own charity, and our primary way of raising money for that nonprofit is through live events.

Well, guess what, Tobi? All those live events have come to a crashing halt, and so has all of our fundraising dollars. We build schools over in Kenya, and these communities and our team is like, "Well, what do we do now?" Are we sticking our head in the sand and feeling sorry for ourselves? No. We are picking ourselves up, and we are pivoting, and we are looking for ways in which we can start generating revenue for the non-profit in another way. Guess which way we're doing it, Tobi. Guess which way?

**Tobi Fairley:** Online. Online memberships.

**Stu McLaren:** Yes. So, listen.

**Tobi Fairley:** I love it.

**Stu McLaren:** What I'm sharing here is look, what has happened is horrific. It is terrible. I don't wish upon anybody what has happened from a health perspective, from a business perspective, but the other side of this is that there are going to be some major breakthroughs that are going to come from this because it's forced us to think differently. It forces us to think more creatively.

I want to encourage everybody to embrace the stability that comes from membership because I was passionate about it before. I'm even more passionate about it now because I'm seeing the impact for the businesses like Kasey likes Sarah, like Tracy, like Mary Claire Fredette who otherwise would have been in a world of hurt right now, but because they've got their online memberships, they're not.

**Tobi Fairley:** I love it so much. I so am on the same page with you. I'm not surprised, but I'm teaching a webinar later today, and one of my points is don't waste this sense of urgency. Also, really to be grateful for the fact that this is shining a flashlight on your weak links in your business because

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even though my business is very stable and the membership is such a great piece of what we do, it's been really exciting to me to suddenly have the time to fix things that were broken, to up level our sales processes, to up level our customer service.

I'm already thinking, "I love this added connection with my members. I don't want it to go away when this is over in two months. How do I keep coming to them every week instead of twice a month? How do I keep this level of engagement?" So, there's just so many things about it that have been amazing. I've heard so many people say, "I kind of am happy a lot of stuff got canceled off of my schedule that I had committed to that weren't moving the needle for me at all. Now, I have no excuse but to get in here and do this stuff, and create, and fix stuff."

I think that's exactly what you're saying. I would love for you to expand a little bit on, for example, the massage membership that you mentioned. One of the things I had shared with you prior to our recording is that I think a lot of the blocks for people that come from a one-on-one type of business, and you've named some already that were amazing examples, like the artist who now does calligraphy, but I'd love them to just have a couple of more examples so that they can really buy into this because this opportunity, as you've just shared, didn't just happen with Coronavirus.

There have been amazing brick and mortars and one-on-one service providers who have been creating memberships for years, I'm one of them, that have absolutely revolutionized their business, their cashflow, and everything about it. I would love for you to speak to that a little bit more because there's different types of memberships and things, and I just want people to really understand what this could look like for them if they're still resisting and thinking, "I'm the exception to the rule. How could an interior designer or anybody else that only works high end now have a membership, or a course, or both?" Tell us.

**Stu McLaren:** Let's talk about the interior design. Timeout. We are now quarantined in our homes.

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**Tobi Fairley::** Exactly.

**Stu McLaren:** I don't think I have to state the obvious, but I will. We're looking around the house, and we're reevaluating everything like, "Oh, we really need to change things up in this room." Or my wife is evaluating all the different rooms in the house, like what she wants to change and how she wants to change it. So, this is the perfect time because, again, as you said, many times, people have wanted to do things but have put it off because they didn't have time. Now, they've got the time. So, now, they're exploring these things.

Case in point, like Nicholas Wilton, he teaches people how to become a fine artist, to paint big, beautiful canvases. He just recently finished a big promotion for his course right before all the Coronavirus hit. The number one objection that he had of people not buying was that they didn't have time. Well, guess what? Fast forward a few weeks, and he's got a lot of those people who said no because they didn't have time are saying, "Hey, can I get in now because I actually do have time?"

This is, again, a story that's not being told in the media right now, that people don't just want to sit and veg. They want to be productive, and they want to do things, and they're exploring this stuff. So, for the interior designer, there are all whole lot of people who are looking at their house right now and saying, "I wonder what we could do here. I wonder how we could change that," and they're looking for advice.

Right now, my wife and I are building a cottage, and this is exactly the mode that we're in. We're like deer in headlights because there's a million and one options and a million and one different directions we could go, and our builder is saying, "Do you want to go with these cabinets, or that cabinet? Do you want this finishing?" We're like, "We don't know. We don't know."

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**Tobi Fairley:** You're like, "We're just trying to get our kids educated and keep our business afloat. Don't ask me about cabinets. I don't know about paint. I have no idea about styles. I don't know."

**Stu McLaren:** The whole conversation this morning. I have to laugh because my wife is like, "Well, where do we put the microwave? We don't really use the microwave that often. Should we put it in the pantry door? Do we need to build it into the cabinets?" This is the kind of little thing. So, somebody listening, that interior designer yourself, are probably thinking, "Oh, my gosh, dude. I cannot believe you are getting tripped up on something so trivial," but I'm telling you, these are the things that people are experiencing that you could help solve.

**Tobi Fairley:** People in my industry take it for granted. "Oh, everybody knows that. Oh, nobody is spending money right now." I'm like, "They might not have started their construction, but they may be planning it right this minute." There's so many things. Yeah, I love it. I do think another important point here is I think that there is a difference in just reacting and throwing out something that you don't even really intend to stick with, and really using this as an opportunity to say, "No, I want this to be something that's in place long after this pandemic is over. How do I actually dig in and create a real needed revenue stream membership for the certain particular area of my industry?"

**Stu McLaren:** We may think, or that interior designer may think, "Yeah, but if I'm helping people figure this out for themselves, then they're probably not going to want to hire me down the road." I'm here to tell you that is not true. What actually happens is it actually creates more demand for what it is you have.

Yes, what you teaching does is it gets people started, it gets their minds open and thinking about how to do this, and they fall in love with your philosophy, and your style, and how you think about it, but at the end of the day, what it also does is it generates leads. It creates demand for what it is that you're offering.

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I'll give you one other example of a creative business owner who made the shift. Her name is Christy Hawkins. Christy, she used to host evening paint lessons. These were local sessions that she would host for people who were wanting to learn how to paint, and she would walk them through doing different types of paintings.

The problem that Christy had though was that these were all in the evening, and she's got three daughters who are all playing competitive volleyball, and so she could never go and see any of their games because all of her painting sessions are all during the same times as their games. So, she was always conflicted. This is how she earned income, but she wanted to spend more time with her daughters.

She ultimately launched a membership site, again, teaching people how to do the same thing she was doing in the physical form now online. The beauty part about it is she's reaching way more people. She shared a story with me that just touched me at a deep heart level because one of her members took the lesson that Christy shared that particular month, and went and taught that lesson in a senior's home.

The member who taught it in the senior's home showed Christy all of the paintings that all these seniors had done from Christy's lesson that she shared virtually inside of her membership. These are people that she's reaching, and touching, and helping that she would never have access to because of her local business if she had stayed in that space.

So, I'm telling you, it is a world of opportunity, but it's also incredibly rewarding to be able to serve more people and help more people, and that's exactly what a membership does, is it gives us that ability to do that.

**Tobi Fairley:** Last question, and then you can tell them all about where they can find you, the master of memberships. The last question is how to start because I know that sometimes you teach people to have a course first, and then have a membership on the backend. Some people like me just start with the whole membership.

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My membership has all my courses built into it, which I love. I had courses first, but it simplified everything when I launched the memberships. I put the courses inside, and I love it that way. If they're like, "Okay, well, I hear you, but I still know what to do. What does this really mean nuts and bolts wise for me?" Then what do they do besides checkout Tribe?

**Stu McLaren:** For sure. Well, here's the thing. A lot of people get their knickers in a twist thinking that they got to get everything perfect and everything right before they move forward. There's no right or wrong answer. There's a variety of different ways you can approach this. I'll give you a couple of things for people to think on.

One is that when I'm thinking about a membership, I first start with, okay, is this going to be a frontend membership or a backend membership? Let me explain the difference. A frontend membership is a membership that you're going to charge for on a monthly basis, and it's really geared toward bringing a lot more people into your world.

What we do is rather than in a course, we teach a lot and we go deep very quickly, we teach what to do and how to do. In a membership on the frontend, you're going to take the pace of learning and the pace of teaching is much slower. What we want is we want people to realize this is a journey, and they're not going to go from not knowing how to paint to becoming a Picasso overnight. They're not going to go from not knowing how to play the guitar to being the next Eric Clapton overnight. There's a journey to this.

So, a frontend membership is a great way to bring people into your world and to generate recurring revenue that then could lead to higher ticket offers like a course, like consulting, like one-on-one coaching, or whatever the backend offer is because people then want to go deeper.

This is what I was saying with the interior design. A frontend membership would be perfect for that because it helps people begin to cast a bigger vision. They start to understand your philosophy, the way you approach.

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They're going to learn a bunch of stuff, but it's also an amazing lead generation tool for people to hire you because they're falling in love with that whole philosophy. That's a frontend membership.

Now, the difference is a backend membership really falls after a course or some type of consulting or so forth, and of course you're teaching people what to do and how to do it, but very seldom do they also have the time to simultaneously implement it.

Because of that, they get to the end of the program, and then they're asking themselves, "Oh, wait a minute. What happens? Now that I'm implementing this, am I going to be able to get support? What about the community? Can I still have access to the community?" This is where a backend membership is perfect because it allows people to continue to get the help and support in helping them implement what it is that they have learned.

So, there's a frontend membership, and then there's a backend membership, and the focus of a backend membership is really to help people implement what they have learned. Getting started is way easier than people think. Here's a question I want everybody to ask themselves. How could I make this super simple? How could I make this super simple?

Cheryl Hatch asked that same question, and she used to get tripped up on all the tech stuff. She's not a tech person. So, the thought of like setting up a membership site, and what platform do I use, and how do I do that? That just overwhelmed her, but she didn't let that stop her. She asked the question, "How can I make this super simple?"

So, get this, for two years, for two years, she continued to deliver the content in her membership solely via email. Every week, she would just email her members the new deliverables. For two years, she ran her membership that way, until she finally then decided, "Okay, maybe I'll put it in a members area," but she had over 600 plus monthly paying members.

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**Tobi Fairley:** Wow.

**Stu McLaren:** Imagine if she had stopped to try to figure it all out, and let that be the obstacle, she would have had lost out on two years' worth of income with 600 plus monthly members. I share this because getting started is easier than we think. Again, we often think we've got to have a massive audience like tens of thousands, or at a minimum, thousands. Not true.

Case in point, Wendy Batten, she serves a very specific niche. She helps paint store retailers, paint stores, shops, retail shops that sell paint. We can't get any more niche than that. So, she didn't have a big guide. She didn't have tens of thousands of thousands.

She had 354 people, but she did a founding member launch, and a founding member launch is one of the most simple, elegant ways to get started and to create momentum. So, she sent out the message to those 354. She had 52 members join her, generating \$2,800 in month number one. She since grown that to hundreds of members.

Another great example, so at Tribe live, which is our annual event, on stage was Jamie Swanson, who was sharing how she did a founding member launch of her photography membership. Jamie had a little bit of urgency because she was pregnant with her sixth child.

**Tobi Fairly:** Oh, my gosh. Oh, my.

**Stu McLaren:** I couldn't even imagine that, but she was pregnant with her sixth child, and she wanted to launch the membership before she had the baby. She didn't have time to do all the fancy stuff like webinars, and videos, and sales pages, and all that stuff. So, she went out and did a founding member launch, and basically, this.

She went out to her Facebook audience and said, "I'm thinking of starting this membership. Here's what it would look like." She cast the vision. Then

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she invited them to join her as a founding member and said that they would be rewarded with founding member pricing where they'd be locked in at that certain price. Even when she raises it, when she launched it to the general public, they will forever be locked into that founding member price. Long story short, she ended up welcoming 119 new members.

Now, her sharing that inspired in the audience Anna Saucier. Now, Anna Saucier does not have a big audience. She doesn't have tens of thousands or thousands. She, again, had just over 300 people because she helps infertility practitioners. Again, super niche, but she was inspired by what Jamie was saying. She's like, "I can do that."

So, again, she didn't have the sales pages, and the webinars, and the videos, and all this big stuff. She didn't even have a members' area. She didn't even have a checkout set up, but she's like, "I could post a message to that group," so she did.

She followed the founding member's script, and she posted a message and said, "Look, I'm thinking of an idea like this, and here's the vision of where I see that going. I want to invite you to join as a founding member," and she said, "If you're interested, just send me a direct message," because she didn't have anything set up. So, they sent her a direct message, and then she sent them a PayPal link. That was as quick and as simple as it could be.

**Tobi Fairley:** Yes, low tech.

**Stu McLaren:** Low tech. She ended up generating \$5,024 in the next 24 hours doing this. I'm sharing this because we can keep it as simple as we need to. The beauty about that is I was sharing that story, and I was sharing Anna's story, and then that inspired Tasha Cochran last year. She did it. Same thing.

She's like, "Oh, it can't be this simple." So, she went out to her sub audience of just over 300 people. Same thing. Ended up generating over

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\$6,000 in revenue in the first 24 hours. I'm sharing this because story, after story, after story of people who just got going inspired this amazing domino effect of people just getting out of their own way, and just putting it out there to the audience, and seeing what happens.

So, I'm here to tell you, you absolutely can do this, and you can do it in the most simple way if you get out of your own way and you allow yourself to keep it simple just like Anna did, just like Jamie did, just like Wendy Batten did and so many others have.

**Tobi Fairley:** That is so good. I think such the perfect way to end because I think that so many people have probably listened to this entire episode with the, "Yeah, but. Yeah, but I only have 300 followers on Instagram. Yeah, but I haven't been active on social media. Yeah, but I have no idea how to use any technology."

You just literally pulled every other remaining excuse out from under them, which is what's so great about the time we're in right now, is it really is removing all excuses. You just helped further get people out of their way, which I think is so good. Thank you.

**Stu McLaren:** I've got one thing to share with people too, is that when you have a smaller audience in the beginning, you actually have a unique advantage, and you may not think that. We may think like, "Oh, yeah, but Stu, I've got to have the big audience." No, no, no. The advantage you have when you have a smaller audience is your ability to build a more intimate relationships with that audience.

Because of that, you can do things that people who have bigger audiences can't do at scale. You can reach out to people. You can private message people. You can talk to people. You can pick up the phone with people. You can send them personal video messages. People who have big audiences, they can't do that for everybody in their audience, but you can when you have a smaller audience. What that leads to is much higher conversion rates.

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This is why when Nicholas Wilton first launched his membership site, he had roughly just over 200 people who were on a webinar when he cast the vision for his membership site. He didn't have it built. He did the founding member launch just like we talked about, and he ended up having over 180 of the 200 join him as founding members, generating \$5,400 a month in month number one.

So, I'm telling you, when you have a smaller audience, you have also an amazing, unique advantage, and that you can do things to build a more intimate relationship, which is going to lead to higher conversion rates. My friends, I'm just here to tell you, you can do this, and you can do this no matter where you are at. You just got to get out of your own way and have the courage to take that next right step.

**Tobi Fairley:** So good. Well, you are just as amazing as I assumed you would be, and you always blow my mind that you literally remember all of these amazing success stories off the top of your head. If people could see you, you're not looking at notes, you didn't have this prepared. It's literally just off the top of your head, which I love so much because it shows how much you really care about all of your members. So, that speaks just volumes about you.

**Stu McLaren:** I do. I appreciate that. Thank you for noticing. I think at the end of the day, like your business, my business, all of our businesses depend on our ability to help people get results. As long as we help people make progress in some area of their life, and we celebrate the progress that they're making, we will continually have stories of success, and those stories are our greatest marketing asset.

So, I am in love with these stories because I obsess over it, and this is the thing that lights me up more than anything, are the stories of people making progress using what it is that we teach. I take pride in that because for me, this is why we're in business, is to help people get results.

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**Tobi Fairley:** So good. Okay. So, tell everybody. How did they find you? They're going to want to know more. They're like, "I just got a taste of this." So, where do they go?

**Stu McLaren:** Well, the good news is that we're going to be releasing a free workshop. We do this every year one time a year, and I'm sure Tobi, you'll probably give them the link somewhere or in the show notes.

**Tobi Fairley:** I will, yes, and we'll make sure this episode is out before that. So, that'll be perfect.

**Stu McLaren:** Awesome. Here's the thing. In this free workshop, it's three parts, and I'm going to be live, and I'm going to be teaching each part of this, and we'll be available to answer questions. So, I want you to come after you listen to this episode on the podcast. I want you to come to the free workshop, and if you've got questions, I'm there to answer them.

The first part of the workshop, we're going to focus on what type of membership is going to be right for you and your market because there are many different types of memberships. What I want to do is I want to help you get clarity around what type is going to be right for you, and whether it would be a good fit given your market.

In the second part of the workshop, I'm going to be going live, and I'm going to be teaching you what to provide inside of a membership because people think like, "Well, what do I actually give people? I don't know." Then one of the big mistakes that people make is that they give too much.

The number one reason that people cancel from a membership is not that they can't afford it or it's not that the content isn't any good, it's that they are overwhelmed by the sheer volume of content. The moment that that seed of overwhelm is planted, they leave. So, how do you balance that? How do you create a membership that serves people, that helps them make progress, but does not overwhelm them? We're going to break that all down in the second part of the workshop.

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Then the third part, I'm going to pull back and zoom up to the 30,000-foot view and give you insight into the five areas of a successful membership starting with your foundation strategy, then your content strategy, then your marketing strategy, your retention strategy, and your growth strategy.

You will get a detailed PDF mind map of all of those broken down so you can download it and use it. We've had people who have launched memberships just off the back of this PDF blueprint that we're going to give everybody. So, it's this free workshop that's rolling out starting April 23<sup>rd</sup>. I highly recommend you come and join us.

**Tobi Fairley:** Yes, give me the link. I took it. I took the workshop. I did all the worksheets. I did all of the pieces. Then I became a member, and you're right. Where you helped me the most was the overwhelm piece because I am known for giving so much content, and I didn't want to have to stop giving it, but I wanted a way to be able to keep people from getting overwhelmed, keep them focused, keep them moving forward, and I definitely learned that from you, so thank you so much for that.

**Stu McLaren:** My pleasure.

**Tobi Fairley:** Okay, awesome. Well, we will let them know where to find all of those things. It's such an exciting time, and I just thank you for even just being so generous today because like you said, before they even take your free course, so many people can take just what you taught just on this free podcast episode and already put things to work.

They don't have to wait on you. Well, your training is free, and it'll be close to when this comes out, so they can jump right on that, but I just love that you gave so much permission today for people to just pivot and step into what's right in front of them. So, thank you. Thank you for being generous.

**Stu McLaren:** Yeah, you're welcome. If you don't mind, I'd encourage people to come and listen to also the *Marketing Your Business Podcast*. This is a podcast that I produce. I just did three episodes specifically talking

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about more of what we shared as far as the Coronavirus, and how to think about pivoting, and how to make that shift.

At the end of the day, I just want people to realize that yes, what is happening, it really does suck. There's no way around it, and people are being impacted, but I also believe that we can come out the other side of this better than when we went into it. Is it the most convenient way? No, it's tremendously inconvenient. We are being forced to do things that we do not want to do, but it's also an opportunity, and I want to encourage people to take advantage of this gift of time because what does this make possible?

Keep thinking on that because what that does is that's going to turn your brain onto what to do and how to move forward versus sticking your head in the sand and hoping things are going to get better. My friends, we can do this. This is who we are. We are creative entrepreneurs. It's about taking control of our future and moving forward. So, just keep moving forward, my friends.

**Tobi Fairley:** I love it. You have me even more ready than I already was to make the charge, and you're so right. So, thanks for your optimism. It's where I also connect with you. I'm very optimistic, and I think that's the number one message people need to hear right now. Just again, super grateful. It was so much fun and I loved seeing your kiddos too.

**Stu McLaren:** Thank you. Yeah, they're a bundle of energy. They're waiting for me to go play right now.

**Tobi Fairley:** Okay, well good luck with that. You're going to have to learn a lot of new stuff about horse tag in the next 15 minutes.

**Stu McLaren:** I know it.

**Tobi Fairley:** See you, Stu. Bye.

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Okay, friends. Can you believe how amazing Stu is? His thought leadership is incredible, his memory for all those success stories is incredible, and I just am so excited for you to know him and know his expertise. He has his launch for 2020 for Tribe coming up.

So, watch on Instagram, watch me and Stu, @StuMcLaren, but we're going to do some fun, special things together. So, be watching us over the next few weeks on Instagram as I help Stu promote and launch his course for this year because we got some big surprises and special bonuses coming up for you over there. Okay?

So, I hope you loved this. I hope it was just one more nudge, or let's call it a push. I don't really nudge, do I? Push to get you out of that comfort zone and really creating a business and a life that you absolutely love.

Don't forget, if you want to check out Stu's workshop, go to [TobiFairley.com/tribeworkshop](https://TobiFairley.com/tribeworkshop), and I will be back next week with more, and more, and more to help you during Coronavirus, after Coronavirus in business in general because you know that's what I do because I love you guys so much, and I just want you to be so, so super happy and successful in the businesses that you have. Okay?

So, I'll see you again next week. Bye, for now. Be sure to be watching us on Instagram because there's some fun stuff happening over there. See you later, friends.

Thank you so much for listening to *The Design You Podcast* and if you are ready to dig deep and do the important work we talk about here on the podcast of transforming your mindset and creating a scalable online business model there has never been a more important time than right now. So, join me and the incredible creative entrepreneurs in my Design You coaching program today. You can get all the details at [TobiFairley.com](https://TobiFairley.com).