

Ep #150: How to Organize your Space Effectively with Samantha Pregonzer



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Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to the *Design You* podcast with Tobi Fairley, episode number 150.

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.

Hey friends. Are you getting organized around your place? Did you use January to get in that organizing mode? Or maybe now that it's February and we're getting closer to spring, spring cleaning is coming to mind. Are you ready to throw up the windows and clean out the closets and all the things? Well, if any of that applies to you, you are going to enjoy my guest today, Samantha Pregonzer.

So, Samantha or Sam as she goes by is a professional organizer. And you'll hear a little bit about how she and I connected because she used to live in Arkansas for a period of time. Now she's out in California. But we get into a lot of good stuff today. We talk about her philosophy on organizing and making it real and really work for you. So there's more to just a pretty space but we want one that's functional too. So she gives great ideas and tips on organizing today. We also talk a lot about how she built her organizing business.

So if you are a personal organizer, you wish you were one, you have a related type of creative business in another industry. But you want to learn from Sam and what she's really done to not only create a large social media following but a full book, a full pipeline of really happy clients and a lot of people dying to work with her then you're going to really want to take some time with this episode because there's so much there. I get the joy of not only knowing her from years ago when our kids were in preschool together but I now get to work with her in the Design You program.

So we talk about how Design You has changed her business and gosh, she's just a powerhouse in the softest prettiest package. And I don't mean that in any kind of demeaning way. I just think she's so beautiful and so – I

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kind of envy people who come across in a more laidback and soft way. I kind of feel like I'm often tackling my goals and I love that Sam is just chill but to the point and has built this great successful business. So enjoy my interview today with Sam Pregonzer.

Tobi: Hey Sam, welcome to the Design You podcast. I'm super excited to talk organizing today.

Sam: Thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Tobi: It's so fun. Okay, so tell everybody about you. If they're not one of the – I don't know, two or three hundred thousand people that already follow you on Instagram. Every time I look at that I'm like dang girl.

Sam: You're so sweet.

Tobi: But if they're not one of those people and they don't already love you, tell them about you so that they can become one of those people.

Sam: Well, I am a professional organizer and I work specifically with families in residential environments. And we do de-cluttering, and organizing, and space planning, and custom design. We do a lot of closet design. And recently what's really taken off is helping families move. There has been a lot of move management and unpacking which is great because then a family is set from the very beginning with good function and good order in the house. And of course we start in the kitchen to make sure that your first morning that you wake-up there everything's ready to go.

Tobi: That's so dreamy. I have a person who's actually been my personal assistant on two occasions but she has a business. And that's mainly what she does is packs and unpacks people. Does some shelf paper and some organizing and stuff but mainly that's her, and so I've benefitted from that the last three times I've moved. And I would never ever move again without

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that kind of help. So that's so valuable. Amazing. So did you go to school for this or you're just really good at this? How did this come about?

Because you and I knew each other sort of because our kids were in preschool and maybe a year or so of elementary school together years ago, you lived in Arkansas then you moved out to California. But I don't know that I ever fully knew the story or the background of how this became your business.

Sam: Yeah. Well, so I've always had a love and passion for problem solving and fixing things, and building things and assembling things. I remember my mom would buy a piece of furniture for the house or a shelf or something. And I was like, "I'm on it, I'll put it together." My grandfather owned a hardware store and he was always somebody that I really looked up to and I learned a lot from him. So I've had a passion for building. But I also have a big heart for helping people.

And I had a love of organizing, I had heard of professional organizing when I was in high school and college. But I didn't know if it was something that I could eventually figure out. I didn't even know where to begin. So my focus in college was counseling. So I have a background in counseling.

Tobi: Very helpful.

Sam: Very.

Tobi: Helpful for the organizing and when you have to talk people into letting things go and why they're attached to things and all that probably, right?

Sam: Completely. It is great to have that little tool bag kind of tucked away to help when we're at a tough point. But I graduated and I worked for a non-profit for several years and I was their program director. And within that role there was a lot of organizing as well, and planning, and seeing a need that was pressing in the community. And I was able to work with the grant

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writer and we would write grants to develop programs to help solve the problems. So I loved it. I was so passionate about it.

But then I had our first son and I decided to take a break and stay home. And then a few years later we moved to Arkansas and while living there, I was home with the kids and I really – I knew it was going to fly. I loved every moment of them before they went into school. But I knew once they went to school I was going to want to do something. So one of my friends suggested that I start a blog, she said, “I think this is a big thing. Blogging is becoming a thing. I think people would love your organizing ideas and your tutorials on how to build and do things and kind of work within your space.”

And I started a blog and that’s where the organizing business actually started was in my little house in Littlerock, Arkansas, in our little home office I started the blog. And the blog is such a big piece of the business because it’s where it started. It will always be the heart of the company. And from there the business just took off. People started reading it and back then we didn’t have Instagram when I was blogging.

So the Instagram connection came later but was a very close – I feel like it’s a very close connection to blogging because it’s a great photo. And then you’re able to write a caption and tell a story. And you’re able to connect and share your ideas with more than just your little community where you’re working in. So that’s kind of where it all started and then it just took off.

Tobi: Yeah, it makes perfect sense. I started blogging in 2009 maybe. I don’t know. It’s been a long time ago, 13 years, whenever that was and probably back and around the time when you were doing the same. And the same thing happened to my business, same exact thing. I mean I had built a local business already but the business I have today just like you and a lot of the connections and things came from blogging which was such a fun and exciting moment.

Blogs have changed, they’re still great, but definitely changed because we have all these other things like you said. But can totally relate. I spent hours

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and hours like I'm sure you did. When our kids were asleep and I mean sometimes I would literally spend three or four hours on a blog post which is kind of shocking, in the early days until I got really good or I really had something to say. And I'm sure you did too. And then there was all the photo editing and finding photos if you didn't have them. And I mean wow that was a whole other full-time job all by itself, right?

Sam: Yeah. It's not the way it is now where you would have like a plug and play type of a blog website. We had to build it ourselves and learn. We had to self-teach ourselves how to do HTML and how to connect, make sure things were connecting and it was great. I wouldn't go back and change that though.

Tobi: Yeah, I agree. I mean I don't want to do it again right now, things are easier but it was worth every moment. Okay, so let's get into the organizing. We're going to talk organizing. We're also going to talk about your business. But let's first just start with organizing because this is obviously the time of year when a lot of people are thinking about that, you get your Christmas decorations down, it's coming towards spring. And it's just this is the prime time we're thinking about it. And before we started I asked you if you had a philosophy.

I said, "I'm always, I'm a progressive thinker, I like to see how people think differently about the work they do." And so you shared with me what's important to you and I'd love to start there and talk about what matters the most to you when you're helping people, when you're doing an organizing project yourself. What is the why really behind that process for you?

Sam: Well, number one is always, you know, I care so deeply about the families who hire me and my team. I always want to solve the problem and do it the right way. So I approach every project individually. What is going to work for them, their family, their dynamic, the ages of their children, what their future plans are. They may not stay in that home forever. This may not be their dream forever home. And I'm taking all of that in to deliver

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something that's maintainable, it's going to last them a long time. It's going to really be worth their investment. So I always start there.

And the next thing I would say is respecting the amount of space that you have. I think we will see a picture on Pinterest or Instagram and it's great to have that inspiration. But you also have to keep in mind what space you have to work within. And I can always aim for that goal for you but just keeping in mind we have to respect the amount of space we have. We can't create more space.

Tobi: Yeah. And so that's the biggest problem probably that people see this luxurious closet, or pantry, or whatever and theirs is a fraction of the size. And they're like, "I want this to be what I have." Is that kind of what happens there?

Sam: Right. So we'll try and make that visual a reality. But also kind of respecting the amount of space you have. And that's where my job comes in is finding the right products, if we need product, that are going to make it look and feel, and have that spacious feeling, but also organized and maintainable. And it's going to work in line with your habits and it's easy for you to do a refresher yourself without having to call us back. And then it's just real. I like to keep the spaces real and down to Earth, beautiful but really truly functional.

And trying to meet their budget point whilst still keeping it beautiful and looking nice and I have a real eye for space planning. So I like to really take a hard look at their space and make it, like super maximize the space for them.

Tobi: So is that for you in your head, do you do it on paper, is there a lot of measuring, do you all do drawings? What's the tech side of that look like?

Sam: Well, graph paper. During the consultation I take a lot of photos, a lot of measurements. And I'm also taking a look at their aesthetic that's already in the home. What style do they seem to like? Especially if the

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space that we're organizing is outside of a closet door, something that they're going to see visually all the time. I usually draw things out. I like to draw everything. So I'll draw it out. And then I'll present them with a little look book of different products they can choose from that would fit in the space and not a lot of digital though. I feel like it just saves so much time.

The one thing I have noticed though that's been helpful recently is doing Loom videos. If I did have something visual to show them and I walk them through the space and them hearing my voice and seeing me and looking at the design really truly helps them see it and understand, what we're going for.

Tobi: Yeah, I love that. And so much faster, and simpler and less expensive on your part than having to have a drawing, or a rendering, or something that's like a 3D model. It's literally [crosstalk]. But yeah, I love to use Loom.

Sam: Or even typing it out in an email, just you know how long that would take to explain every little piece, so it saves so much time.

Tobi: Yes, totally. Yeah, those of you who don't know about Loom, L.o.o.m., there's Loom, there's Zoom, there's Noom which is a diet. But there's all these rhyming words. But Loom, where you can take videos, screen recordings of your computer, so helpful for so many things. You could literally make a video for your kids and send it to them and be like, "Here's what I want you to do this afternoon around the house." I mean they are so – but they'd watch that, they'd be like, "You've lost it." But it's so helpful.

So several things there that I relate to one of which is I really enjoy doing remodeling work, almost more than new construction because I can take something like you're saying that's broken or not working for someone and they already know the pain of how that feels. And then I can give them the solution for it. And to me that's almost more fun in a lot of ways than starting from scratch, sky's the limit, although of course it's always

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wonderful when you can have a dreamy big closet and you've got room to expand.

But I know what you mean by working within the space that you're in, I can relate to that so much. And then also just that real piece. And I want to talk a little bit about containers. I want to talk about budget. And I want to talk about clutter because I think people struggle with all of those. And so maybe let's start with clutter because it's kind of the culprit. And then let's talk about containers and that'll kind of lead us into budget, because they can get expensive. I shared with you I love organizing myself. It goes hand in hand with the space planning I do. And I've been doing a lot of it lately.

A lot of my Christmas was, every year too I'm like, "Okay, I just want more containers." My husband's like, "Really, that's what you want for Christmas?" "Yes, that's exactly what I want, some kind of appliance, something to cook with or an organizing container." He's like, "Okay." But clutter, I was sharing with you, and I think a lot of people are feeling this especially since we've all been in the house together now for so long.

And for me the sign that it's time to get rid of more things, I was sharing with you earlier is when I start to see things on countertops, on the bedside tables, on the bathroom counter. And I do not thrive with visual clutter, I just don't. I need things put away. If I'm going to sit and relax I want to not feel like there's things all around me and there's work to be done.

And so I'm often telling my family, "If your drawers, the cupboards, the closets are basically storage spaces and not useful spaces then we're going to end up putting all of our stuff on the counter." Plus sometimes we're all just lazy a little bit too. So talk to us about that because do you feel the same way that that's an indication that you're not really using your storage spaces?

And how do you get people moving into this less is more, do you try to? Or do you just store people's stuff? Do you try to talk people out of things? Do

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you try to get them to let things go? Or are like my job is just to let them be who they are and find a place to put the stuff?

Sam: Yeah. I mean there's a lot there because it just depends on what's happening. I think some of it is getting in the habit of maybe it's once a week clearing off your counters. It could be something as simple as that to deal with your clutter. Maybe you already have good systems in the closets and in the drawers but it's just you're too busy and you just need a system to keep going. Sometimes people lack a system.

The kitchen counter is always the one place where all the paper seems to accumulate. I think the best way to handle that is having a single basket on the counter, something that's pretty, that's not going to annoy you to look at in the kitchen. And you can sweep everything into it and you can still find it because it's right there in a basket. It's kind of like having a paper tray in your office except it's on the counter.

But people generally, when they reach out to a professional organizer, they're ready to either – they need a new system and they're ready to do it, they're motivated or they're motivated to let things go. So I find that I'm not really having to encourage somebody to let go of something because they will throughout the process get rid of something, so most of the time they're motivated.

Tobi: That's good. So in design maybe not so much, with our design work maybe all those people are not at the stage of wanting a personal organizer because I feel like we do deal with quite a lot of clutter and storage and things in the design world. That's interesting. Okay, so if people are ready for a system, does a system always include product for you or do you sometimes just use the shelving and the drawer space as is?

Sam: That is true.

Tobi: Because for me it always includes product because I know if I just put it in that drawer three or four weeks later, or three months later I'm

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going to have shuffled it all around and it's going to be – I mean I can make it look better for a little while. But it's just this repetitive thing that I have to keep resolving the same problem I feel like. And for me I feel like the right product really prevents that from happening as much.

So I guess for you it depends on what the client's able to invest in because they can be pricey. I mean individually the containers aren't that pricey. But when you need as I just ordered, I don't remember, 16 new canisters for my pantry because I wanted fresh new ones that were all the same. That's a lot of canisters for all of the snacks and all the flour and all the things. And it can add up pretty quickly when you're buying product, right?

Sam: Yes, it can. So we can look at products in lots of different ways. I think product creates a boundary. So within your drawers like you were saying, if you were just going to organize a drawer or just clean it out and de-clutter it and put everything back in, it will end up messy again just because that's life. That's reality, this is normal. But if you put some product in and create a system in the drawer you're setting up boundaries for yourself. This is, I can only live within this space, I can only have that many pens, I can only have that many.

And so product can definitely serve a purpose there. I definitely am not the organizer who pushes product on anybody unless I really think it's going to solve the organizing issue that we have. I do a lot of garage organizing, that's a huge part of my business. And most people when they first reach out for garage organizing think they need all new cabinets, all new shelving. But what ends up happening is when we go in for phase one is what we call it where it's just de-cluttering and re-planning as is we typically find at the end we don't really need anything.

All we had to do was a very good deep de-clutter, and then we space plan and put everything back and it turns out we don't need any products. So there's definitely a time and place for it. And whatever product I recommend truly would be something I think is going to benefit the space

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and benefit the family. And then from there we can decide what is your budget, what look are you going for? The other thing I'm careful about is if it's behind doors I don't really think you need to invest in something that's that expensive.

Your pantry, to your point, totally different because you're going to be going in and out of there all the time and it's going to make you feel good when you see how beautiful it looks. But for a closet or a laundry room closet or a linen closet, probably don't need something that expensive. You can go with something less expensive and there are a lot of options at IKEA or The Container Store or Amazon that are just a couple dollars. And you can totally organize your space.

And there's even people who just repurpose boxes and bins that they have around their house and they're totally satisfied with that.

Tobi: Yeah, it depends on you. So for me even if it's behind a door, if I open a door and see beauty I'm like yay, how pretty. It makes me so happy. So it's like a little jewel box and I'm like, what's inside? But of course not every – I haven't spent \$300 on every desk or every cabinet in every part of my house because I mean literally that would be \$50,000 in our house. I mean we've got lots of drawers. We've got lots of cabinets. We've got lots of closets in our lives, most of us do, or we're lucky if they do and it can really add up.

But I hear what you're saying, so it totally depends on the person and the personality, the same thing with design. Some people are like, "I want that certain brand \$3,000 lamp." And other people are like, "I like a \$99 lamp. Literally I just need it to light up the space so I can read. And so I get what you're saying. It depends totally on the person, their motivation, what they're looking for, their budget and all those things together and then your recommendations, yeah, interesting.

Sam: Yeah. And I think also what's good to keep in mind is when you purchase something, try to think of something that's going to last a really

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long time and it can transition from one room to the next. Not trendy type of containers but clear acrylic bins, clear drawer organizers, things that are just going to stand the test of time and you can just move them. What you might have in the playroom when the kids stop using the playroom, maybe you can use them in your office and things that can transition. And then you'll feel better about making that investment if you're going to invest a lot.

Tobi: Yeah, I'll agree with you, clear is my favorite. I want everything to be clear. And if it's not clear it's white or kind of frosted but it's still in the realm of clear which is so funny because I love color so much. You might think that I would invest in colorful organizers. But like you I don't want it, it's not about them. I mean I kind of even like whatever's in the container to be the color or the beauty because for example in our pantry we've got all kinds of color already happening in the packaging and all of the food and things that are in there. And so yeah, I'm on the same page with you for sure.

Okay, so people could absolutely spend nothing but your time and labor or their own time and labor and come away with a really organized space without having to invest in product, is that true?

Sam: True.

Tobi: So before we talk about business anything you want to share with people right now since they are in organizing mode? Is there any tip or two that you're like, "Just keep this in mind. This is the most important thing?" Is it that be real or how are you going to really live, is that the number one thing or is there something else they need to keep in mind?

Sam: Well, I think especially for us in California, we're still remote learning. So I think depending on where you are and what your current circumstances with kids home or not home, we're all being very careful. So we're all within our homes and we're frustrated and we're coming out of the holidays when everybody's naturally wanting to purge in all areas of their life.

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And just to keep in mind to take your time and start small. You don't have to – I know a lot of people are going to see their garage right now and they're going to be frustrated. They're trying to box up all the holiday stuff and get it into the, you know, on the shelving or in the attic, or somewhere. And you can start smaller than that. Your garage isn't going to go anywhere, it's still going to be there and it could be a great project that you could tackle over a couple of weekends. But I find if you start small you'll build a momentum and you'll get motivated and you'll stay on course.

But if you start big and you fizzle out quickly it's going to kind of soak into the other areas or seep into the other areas. So I try to encourage if you're doing it on your own just to start small and not overwhelm yourself. And you have time, just because it's January doesn't mean it all has to be done in January. You can pace it out, you can invest wisely in whatever it is you're doing and still feel good about it. So I think that would probably be a good starting point to think about.

Tobi: I like that. And I spent some time last weekend, I did my bedside drawer, I had not put any kind of containers in it for whatever reason and I'd got a few. And just that one thing made me feel like a brand new person. I just walk by and open it just so I can look in there and like be proud of, like it's an accomplishment. I'm like everything else in the world is chaos but if I need to feel ordered then I just open that drawer and look in there.

Sam: You're so cute.

Tobi: But you truly can, well, for me because I'm a nerd about it, but just it really does make me feel differently to see things and to feel like I know where things are. Nothing makes me happier in life than to not have to look for something. When my family is like, "Where is this?" Or, "Do we have one of these?" Or do I keep back stock on something we need or whatever. And I get so much pleasure and relief out of knowing exactly where things are and if we have them.

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And I cannot stand it if the last minute and somebody needs something for a project. That's probably my biggest pet peeve is that we create suffering that's avoidable because we're flying by the seat of our pants and we're at the last minute on something. And to me even just organizing a drawer can add to that, the relaxing and the pleasure of not getting into those moments.

Sam: Exactly.

Tobi: Yeah, awesome. Okay, so let's talk about your business. So we've worked together, we knew each other from a long time ago. But we've been working together for a while, I don't know if it's been a year yet, but you've been in the Design...

Sam: It has, this month it's been a year.

Tobi: Good, fun, okay. So you already had a thriving business. I'm not in any way taking credit for any part of your business and so please I want you to talk to us about your experience in business way prior to me knowing anything about your business. But it's been really fun to get to know your business with you this year as you've started to move into even some other more digital concepts and ways to reach people that especially during Covid when you aren't right there with them. So I'd love for us to start talking about that.

Tell us a little bit about that experience of building your business. What was hard? What have you learned? What's worked really well? Of course that could be a whole other podcast by itself. But what are some of the things that come to mind about this? Because there are people listening that may be thinking I really want to do that, is that possible for me? Whether it's your job or my job, people are thinking about that and I'd love to just share a little bit so that people get realistic pictures of what they're biting off, but also there's a lot of joy and great things along with the hard of business, right?

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Sam: Totally. And I will say I may have had a thriving business, when I showed up last January in your program but that doesn't mean everything was organized and in order. It's kind of like when you hear about the accountant who they're great at doing other people's finances but theirs are terrible. My business was so disorganized. And I was doing it by myself and I still am. And I recently hired three new organizers, they just started this week so now I have six total. But so much stuff behind the scenes was in disorder because I was so busy doing the work.

And I know you can relate to this and I've learned so much about it in the program just I'm more of a creative organizer, designer. And when you put me in that position of having to look at numbers, it's just a big stop sign and it completely shuts me down. So I've had to try and work on that and figure it out. I've had to learn how to be a boss, I didn't go to business school, I don't know how to be a boss and how to also encourage and motivate.

And I met with the new organizers just yesterday, we had a quick meeting. And I'm trying to also encourage them and teach them how to set a boundary because I know you can relate to this with clients. You have to have your own boundary for self-care otherwise everybody's creeping into your space all the time and we care so much about our clients. But you do have to have that separation. And so even just teaching them that, it's hard to be a boss, it's hard to lead, and manage, and encourage, and nurture them, run the business, all the numbers.

So coming into the program that's what I needed help with. I needed help. And I've come in there with the most random stuff, I'm like, "Tobi, help me." We've had interesting things and you always respond with something so professional and helpful. And that's where being a business owner, it's – I wouldn't do anything else, but it has really been a challenge learning and teaching them.

Tobi: Yeah, just to bounce ideas off, have another perspective. We get so in the weeds and too close to things and things can feel super emotional

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and it can be hard to get perspective on all kinds of things, with clients, with team members. I love that. What I was going to say a second ago is I really love, and I was thinking it when you said it about containers. I already knew that this could come full circle.

But I love that you're now talking about boundaries because I wrote down earlier, I love that you said, "The purpose of a product is to create a boundary", because I'd never thought of it that way. And to kind of give you some structure and in the same way it's so funny, you're like, "I organize for a living but I had to put in boundaries and structure in the company, in my time schedule, in my accessibility to my team or my clients and make some decisions."

And it's kind of the same thing, like organizing. You have to make some decisions about what we're going to do, what we're going to not do.

Sam: Well, that's what I was about to say is learning how to say no because when you're a small business owner you have that scarcity mindset that you've talked about with us. And it's, even though I would get that red flag when I would be on a consultation and think this probably isn't our ideal client. And I'll take them on anyway and then later I'm regretting it.

And I don't feel like I've delivered a good product because there was something weird going on there. That I should have said no to from the beginning. It's challenging but I've learned how to do it and I do it. And I say no a lot now.

Tobi: I would say that is probably top, I don't know, it might be number one, but it's in the top five. You are the fourth person since Tuesday that I work with in some level, a private client, a Design You member, even just you being on the podcast that we've had the discussion about what's really what I would call people pleasing behavior, which is what we're doing when we say yes to things that we want to say no to. And that's what you're talking about. So are you saying you can see a big difference? Would you have called it people pleasing yourself?

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And can you articulate the difference in maybe 12 months ago and where you are now in the realm of people pleasing? What allowed you to change and put those boundaries in place?

Sam: Well, I think it was just finally hitting that frustration point where I wasn't delivering what they really wanted. And I guess it is sort of people pleasing but also it's that one side of me where I don't want to say no. And I want to help really solve the problem and so I'm like, "Yeah, totally, I can help do that but that's not within our scope of what we do as a business."

So it's interesting, people see me as an interior designer too. And I'm like, "No, I'm not. I get where you might have that idea because it is space planning, it is design. There is that element there. But I'm not a good person to help choose paint colors. I'm not a good person to help pick your furniture pieces." Because we do bring in certain storage pieces and that makes sense, there is a definite aesthetic and an eye for that. But the line kind of gets blurred there as a professional organizer. So it was hard to say no because I can see how they are all sort of interconnected.

And then finally I just said, "I can't, we have to stick to what we're good at. And that is one of our core beliefs in the business is we're only going to offer you services in the areas that we believe we truly are an expert and that's it."

Tobi: Yeah. That's so smart. And I think, I mean that's a perfect example because people do confuse, they think if you're good at design, you're good at organizing or vice versa. If you're good at one of those, if you're good at interior design, you're probably also good at graphic design or you should be good at fashion design. And all the creative disciplines do not translate across all of the different areas for one thing. But even for me I am good at organizing but I don't offer organizing as a service to any of our design clients.

I mean sure, I might do, you know, if I'm putting stuff in a drawer, fine, I'll put it in there in an organized way. But if somebody wants what you do we

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hire an organizer to come on to or connect them with that person to come on. And I might talk with that person to help select something like you said, the paint color of the pantry and make sure it looks good with their containers or whatever. But those are two totally different things. And I think you're so smart in what you're saying.

And it's what gets a lot of people in trouble in their businesses, whether they're designers, organizers, or something else is when they're not clear about their zones of genius and what they do. And that's when it gets really stressful and people can get really upset with you when you start dabbling and saying yes to all the different things.

Sam: Totally. One other big – there's so many great things about Design You and working with you. But I'll never forget one of my first real aha moments and I forget what month, it may have been February, was, and this helped a lot in line with what we're talking about. The client expectation and my communication of that, and what took a lot of the grey out, was communicating via email.

Instead of me being on the spot with them in person I would say, "Let me think about that." And then that gave me a window of time to walk away and then go home and type something and say, "This is what I can do. This is what I can't do." And it helped so much to have the ability to just lay the client expectation out in writing as opposed to being on the spot. Because people would catch me on the spot all the time and that's where I felt like I'd get stuck and I couldn't say no.

Tobi: So true, yeah, so true. And that's a boundary in and of itself as well is to set that up for yourself and to know. And there's some level of either – sometimes it's people pleasing. But sometimes it's like – I don't know, whether you want to call it imposter syndrome or insecurity, or need to prove. There was some level for me especially earlier on in my business where I had a belief that if I was really good at what I do I should be able to

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answer on the fly. Our clients or our belief, somehow clients expected me to answer questions.

And so it did take me quite a few years myself and some emotional maturity to say, “If I’m really good at what I do, do we really want our doctor to just be like, “I’m sure I’ll know the problem, let’s just open you up and dig around in there.”” No, you want them to look at your x-rays. You want them to think about it. You want them to schedule something. You want a couple of consults. But somehow in creative industries we have this – I don’t know – this impulse or this belief that we’re supposed to always be able to answer everything.

And not only does it cause boundary issues like you’re saying, it also causes people to give a lot away for free or to let there be a lot of scope creep they’re not charging for because all of a sudden they’re just throwing stuff in. And so I think you’re so right, that just slowing down, putting in some systems that even if we know the answer right now this minute we’re not going to just blurt it out, we’re going to practice going back and putting it in this way. That’s just professionalizing your business, just kind of up-leveling the way you show up with your clients, yeah, so good.

Sam: Right. And people feel better because if you do you will regret it. And the project, the end of it will end up absolutely not showing your best work. And I’ve learned some really hard lessons.

Tobi: So now would you say that you do really practice honoring only working for those people that are, maybe not necessarily always your ideal client, but pretty close to that, they have most of those characteristics and that you walk away from the people that you know aren’t a fit? Have you dialed that in a lot more? Yeah

Sam: Definitely.

Tobi: And what changed about that? You just decided you’re like it’s too painful? It’s in those moments where you’re regretting because someone’s,

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you know, you're having a confrontation or another thing with a client, it could have been avoided, was that the moment that you're like, "Never again?"

Sam: Well, when I'm on the consultation, that initial meeting I'll feel, I'm definitely a person who senses, I take in all the energy. I take in everything. And if I have any sort of feeling I don't ignore it. And I trust my gut, I believe in it and now I just follow it. I don't deny it. And if we get as far as the next step, even if I felt okay on the consultation but then I send them my quote, because I go home after a consultation, I think about it. Okay, how would I approach this project? And then I send them a quote and a scope of work and what we would do.

If they come back and their response is either wanting to nitpick the pricing, wanting to nitpick the project ideas or how many organizers I'm going to need there then I know that's not my ideal client. And I have to say, "I'm sorry, that's not, this isn't going to work", or whatever would be the appropriate response.

But we're definitely going to, again, something I've learned from you, we are going to earn what we're worth. And I'm not going to discount the pricing. We work really hard, there is so much that goes on behind the scenes that nobody knows about, no one's aware of. And we are fully dedicated on every project, they get all of us.

Tobi: That's so true and I think that that's so important that you know your value and you can stand behind it because I agree. And the way you know the value of anything is when you start to try to do it yourself, even me saying I'm good at organizing, because I am. But I get halfway through, I was working on my pantry the other day and I started kind of late on a Sunday. And then a couple of hours in I was like, stuff's everywhere. And I'm like, "I would really like to quit right now." But it looks like a bomb went off in here.

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And it just reminds you, it's a lot of hard work. I mean, and even just going, my gosh, just going to The Container Store with a list and a grid pad and my tape measure and just finding or searching online, that can take hours just to get the right containers and things in the space. It is not an easy job. It's not a quick job. But like anything else in the creative field we make it look magically simple and it's just like here's the before, here's the after and I think people lose sight of how much work actually goes into it.

So I love what you're saying, because if you don't as the business owner, if you don't truly know your value you're not going to stand behind your pricing and you're not going to say no to the people like that that want to nickel and dime or negotiate. And that never turns out well because you know how much; you know how much time it takes. You know how much you're going to put into it.

And we get, I mean I find that's a boundary too because we get resentful if we do say yes to things that are really things we want to say no to. Because we know it's going to really not to create a good result, so good. Okay, so before we go, let's talk quickly about what you've done to move your business more into the digital space because that's been really fun to watch. And you've been so great at taking action.

And one of the things that I help people see is meeting people in the online space, having things to download so they can know more about you or learn from you, or even buy a course. And people get it and they love it in theory but I watch people get stuck in just the consuming and the learning but not actually doing. And I would say you're such a beautiful example of someone who took action and really made it happen pretty quickly.

Sam: Bless you.

Tobi: No, I mean sweet but true and it looks fabulous. So can you speak to that a little bit? And I think you already had something started maybe or some things to work with when you came to me but you really understood, you've got intellectual property, you can put it into this format. Also the

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other thing I loved about you is that you didn't just try to do it all on your own. You know what it's like to invest in professionals and people investing in you. And you also invested in the right people to help you make it happen. But can you talk a little bit about that process and experience?

Sam: Sure. So I definitely when I first joined Design You, I consumed. And I think I already told you that when we were in one of the messages. I couldn't get enough of the digital information that you were sharing, the education and just investing and getting a professional in who's going to do it. And number one, I couldn't have done it anyway because I was so busy with the organizing projects. But I knew I wanted a digital product, maybe additional in the future, but I knew I had one specifically.

Where I was struggling was, and I don't know if you remember this was am I going to do an eBook for professional organizers or am I going to go for helping people who need help with the organizing? And I wasn't sure what to do and I was worried I was going to be giving away all the magic if I did the professional organizer book.

But time and time again I can't tell you, countless times, weekly, people email or send a message over social media, "How did you get started? Tell me what you did? What did you do to start marketing your business? How did you find your clientele? What do you charge? How do you install that? How do you buy your product?" And just so many different messages and questions and that was the easiest way for me to kind of tiptoe into a digital product. And I wasn't giving everything away, I felt good.

But I did want to add value and I do want to be helpful and help other organizers and nurture that community. And so I had already the skeleton of an eBook put together. But again I was just busy in the business and there were – nobody expected Covid. But one of the silver linings of it was the ability to shut everything down and stay home and work from home for a couple of months. And I dug in. I had already gone through about two or three months of coursework with you.

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And then March 15th came and I was like, well, full steam ahead. I'm home for two months. I am going to redo the website finally and get it updated and really match what we're doing because it was such an old website. I dug in to writing the eBook.

I found a designer who also didn't just help me with designing it and exceeded my expectation on the design. I couldn't believe it. I could never have done that by myself, it was more than worth the investment just to have it look that beautiful. But she also, twofold, helped set up all the commerce behind the website, so she worked directly with my web designer and she got the shopping cart set up, everything. I could never have done that by myself. And then she and I worked together on an idea on how to start marketing it.

And then she helped design the sales page where the book lives and she helped create the bonus documents and the process for getting it out. I mean it was more than worth the investment plus I had the Design You community and you encouraging me. And if I was stuck I could go in there and ask questions. And so that was kind of my first step in. And I would love to do more of it. I think there is so much benefit.

And I'm hopeful that I'm able to do that right now, it's such a busy season with actual organizing clients that it's kind of tough to do that. But I'm hoping as I hire more people and it scales a little more then I'll be able to take a step back and do more digital, more digital products.

Tobi: It's so exciting. And the thing about it is, is once you do the first one and your head's around it you get it. It's like before you do anything like that it's so scary. And then once you do it, and I love that you just paid, that's what I do. I mean you could spend hours and hours doing it yourself and that's not your zone of genius. Or you can just go make money as an organizer, bring your intellectual property to someone else and have them help you develop it and release it, and so it's so smart if you have the budget and that's available to you, so super smart.

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But I love that now that you know what that process is like it's so much easier. I think it's probably, I would equate it probably to what I would guess that a person who writes a book the first time, it's gnashing of teeth way more. And then the second time, not that it's still not hard to get that onto paper, but so much of the unknowns are not unknown anymore. And it just takes a lot of that kind of pressure off of being able to do it. So it'll be so much easier for you next time to know how to organize it and think and whatever, I'm sure you will.

There's many digital products I'm sure in your future. And that's the beauty of that because once you start to build that part of your business, and it's making some money and you can see how the money could work, it allows you to be choosier on the other projects you do, which is super fun. So bravo, bravo.

Sam: Yeah, I love it. I love it. And I definitely think as a creative multiple streams of income is a good thing, as long as you can balance it okay and not all the balls are dropping. But for sure, even something as simple as setting up, right now we're in the process of doing this, setting up a shop page on Facebook that connects to Instagram. So now when people go to the Instagram feed they can shop your products. And they don't have to be products you sell or create yourself. They can be products that are affiliate links or otherwise.

Tobi: Yeah, totally, yeah, it makes so much sense. And it does take some time and if you're a one person show doing that and only getting \$30 here or 200 there is not necessarily worth it. But like you're saying, when you can get the space and get the help to do that, that can really start to add up. So it takes a little time to develop it, but once you do it can make a big difference. So that's so good. Well, if people want to find you, follow you for your inspiration; get that book that you just talked about, any of those things, where can they find you?

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Sam: They can find me on the website which is simplyorganized.me m.e. and the blog is there and the book page is there if there's aspiring professional organizers out there listening and also on Instagram at Simply Organized. Those are kind of my two main hangout places. I try to keep it simple and I don't spread myself too thin over all the different platforms.

Tobi: Yeah, I love it. I spend some time on your Instagram. I'm like let me get some organizing eye candy. I don't even have to organize myself. I can just look at other people's organized spaces and somehow my blood pressure drops. So definitely check Sam out there. This was so fun. Thank you for sharing so much. I know it's helpful in so many ways to so many people.

Sam: Well, thank you for inviting me. I loved talking to you.

Tobi: Yes, me too.

Sam: I wish I was still in Littlerock so we can just hang out.

Tobi: Well, we can just hang out on FaceTime or Zoom.

Sam: Okay, I'd love it.

Tobi: It's a date. Okay. Thank you so much for being here and I wish you a wonderful New Year or next 12 months; it's going to be I'm sure an exciting one.

Sam: Yeah, thank you, you too.

Okay, are you ready to get organized? I know you and I know you've got some stuff to get rid of. But in case you want to keep all of it go check out Sam's Instagram because she did say that she's not just about making people get rid of stuff. She's also about helping people organize and control the things that they do have and that they want to keep. So whichever camp you're in, the clutter camp or the like me get rid of everything camp,

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you're going to find a lot of inspiration from Sam and her Instagram and her website.

So head over and check her out and let both Sam and I know if this episode really inspired you. We would love to hear from you on Instagram so reach out, send us a message and I'll be back next week with another great episode of the *Design You* podcast. Bye for now.

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.