

Ep #175: We're Asking the Wrong Questions



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Tobi Fairley

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Ep #175: We're Asking the Wrong Questions

You are listening to the *Design You* podcast with Tobi Fairley, episode number 175.

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, hey friends. How are you? I hope you are so good. Me, I am in full focus mode right now in my business and in my life, lot and lots of exciting things happening with my programs and with my team. We're working on new parts of our programs, a big photoshoot that is so exciting, a new website and so much more. Plus, all the exciting stuff just happening in my day-to-day life with my family, my kiddo who's now a teenager. Well, she's been a teenager but now a driving teenager. Yeah, life is really, really good and we're doing lots of stuff.

Now, if you are listening to this episode the day it goes live on August 5th, 2021, you're in luck because one other thing I'm working on is something absolutely free to you. And it is happening today and it is a free call with me. So be sure to register for my free Q&A call this afternoon or check out the replay if you registered but couldn't be there live. It is going to be so fun.

I absolutely love when we do these calls. And I get to coach people completely free. But just like, and I mean just like the way I coach people, all of our members in our Design You coaching program all the time pretty much every week. So, it's really, really fun to let everybody in on a little glimpse of that but mainly just to come solve your problems. I love this work. I love to coach. I love to solve business problems. I love to help you tackle those big things that are challenging you.

So, I really hope if you have a design, interior design business question that you'll be on that live Q&A. And we can tackle your challenges together. Now, the way you do that, check our show notes, we're going to put links to register for things. But also, just check my social media. I mean if you're hearing this the day of my call, the morning of in particular you're going to

[The Design You Podcast](#) with Tobi Fairley

Ep #175: We're Asking the Wrong Questions

see lots and lots of ways to register for that call all in my Instagram. And Instagram is where it's at. So, I'll see you on Instagram and I hope to see you on the call.

But let's get into this podcast because today on this podcast we are building on last week's episode which was all about accountability and something called how greed, where we just want people to tell us how to do all the things, how to do it so we don't have to figure it out on our own. And that podcast was also about how we aren't showing up for ourselves. And in our businesses, well, we're really wanting to use that how greed, I don't know how as an excuse. So, we stay stuck and we stay in our own way.

And let me just say again, I said this last week but I am so, so excited, and happy to be back with these solo episodes because I just love to talk about these things that I'm constantly working on and tackling in my own business, in my own mind. So that's what we're doing today. So today I want to talk to you about another way that you are getting in your own way because you are asking the wrong questions in your business. And of course, if you ask the wrong question you're not going to get a very helpful answer.

So, I think there are three questions that I hear interior designers asking over and over again. They're asking me these in my programs, on free live calls when we have them, also just asking me and each other out on the web, on Instagram, when we see each other at market. Literally these are the questions that I hear over and over again. So, I'm going to address all three of these today and the stories, the narratives we weave around these questions because we're really good at doing that, making them sound really, really true. I'm going to talk to you about that.

And I'm also going to show you how you can ask much better questions, in fact just one much better question and get an answer that gets you real solutions. So, let's dig in.

Ep #175: We're Asking the Wrong Questions

The first question that I hear people asking all the time is, where are all the clients who are a fit for me that aren't cheap? Seriously I hear this all the time. The story that the designers are so often telling themselves along with this question is about the quality of their clients. And it sounds something like this. The internet and HGTV have just ruined this industry and our clients. Now everybody thinks they are the designer. Everyone in my town or area is just cheap. I could never charge as much as I need to, to make a profit in this location.

And I just need more and more clients since I can't charge any of them enough to make a living. So, here's the problem with this question of where are all the clients that aren't cheap. When you ask from a place of believing that all clients are cheap, guess what you're going to find? Cheap clients. It's called confirmation bias. You find what you are looking for. And so, we think we're looking for the non-cheap clients. But what we're really reinforcing is that our clients and everybody in our area is cheap.

So, when you say, "Where are they? Where are the ones I really want?" What you most of the time end up really saying is, "See, I knew that all the clients around here were cheap." And when you look for them and consequently find them you're going to stay stuck. You're going to stay in a place of not enough quality clients. And being in this belief feels hopeless and frustrating. And it keeps us saying yes to the wrong clients over and over, believing that they're our only option. And that we can't afford not to at least take some of them, if not a lot of them.

So, here's something that I want you to know. There's not an island, a secret island somewhere out there of ideal clients that you just can't find, that other people, that other designers know about but you're just not in on the secret. It's a myth that these 'great clients' are all out there somewhere and you just don't have the map, you haven't found them. The problem is you're asking the wrong question. And asking me or others where to find your ideal clients, the ones that aren't cheap, that's the problem.

Ep #175: We're Asking the Wrong Questions

Clients are everywhere, good clients are everywhere, clients with money are everywhere. Fill in the blank, clients with x, taste, money, whatever it is, they're everywhere. They're in every state all across America, if that's where you live. Trust me, if they're in Arkansas, a super rule, poor state by comparison to almost all the others, if they're here and they are then they are definitely in your area too. But attracting clients isn't something you do on demand when you need them. This is part of the problem.

It's like deciding you're ready to be married and then asking why can't I find the perfect mate this afternoon? Why can't I find clients that aren't cheap? It doesn't happen on the fly, it doesn't happen on demand. Having a consistently full pipeline of ideal clients takes one, knowing exactly who you're looking for, who they are and how to talk to them.

And two, talking to them all the time, not just when you've wrapped up your latest project, or you're looking at your bank account being kind of low and you're wondering how you're going to pay the bills. So, you desperately need to find them and convert them stat. And so, you go out looking for them already believing that they're not there. That is not the way to fill your client pipeline.

So, think about it for a minute. If you decide on the fly that you need the perfect anything, how often does that really happen? I'd say almost never. I mean whether it's finding the perfect dress for the wedding you have to go to tomorrow, or finding the perfect sofa in stock this afternoon, because a client won't wait. Or as we're talking about, finding an ideal client right now, it's just not how that process works.

So, I'm going to cover more in just a minute, in just a bit once we get through the other two questions. How to keep us from looking for clients on the fly and only seeming to find the ones that are cheap, the ones that aren't a fit. I'm going to tell you how to ask a better question. But first I want to talk about the second question that you are asking far too often in your business that is also a problem and here's the question. Why don't clients respect me and my talents and just let me do what I do best?

Ep #175: We're Asking the Wrong Questions

This story is another dramatic tale or narrative that we weave and we repeat to ourselves and to others, anyone who will listen and commiserate with us, our peers, our teams, our husbands, our wives. But it's also not a helpful question. It's not helpful at all. It's a terrible question.

And that story that we weave to go along with it sounds something like this. I just want clients who have realistic budgets, or better yet, robust budgets because you know, we just said, we don't want them to be cheap. But I want them to have realistic aka huge budgets and I want them to stop questioning all my decisions. And I want them to get out of the way and just trust me to do my job.

Okay, the first problem with this narrative and this question about why they aren't respecting us, and our talents, and our expertise. The first problem is that when we think of it this way we are putting the responsibility of respecting us, respecting you, the client respecting you completely on the client. As if you have absolutely no responsibility in this relationship. So, ask yourself, are you believing that if they were 'a really good client' then they would just hand over their dollars and let you do whatever you see fit?

And I think a lot of times even if we don't realize it, the answer is yes. And that might be fun for a moment, yes, we do love spending other people's money. But how boring long term to just have such a one way relationship. Good design is not about someone handing us a pile of money and getting the heck out of the way. It's about collaborating with our clients. It's about problem solving. It's about stepping in and guiding people to the solution that's right for them.

And I think the bigger issue here is less about us wanting to have carte blanche and more about us not wanting to feel the discomfort of confidently leading our clients through the design process, of not wanting to be honest about what budgets we need to accomplish what they're asking for. And not being willing to repel the clients and walk away from the clients that we know are not a fit for us. Because they aren't fully asking for our expertise,

Ep #175: We're Asking the Wrong Questions

or they aren't really willing to take risk, or they aren't willing to spend the money that we would need to do what they're asking for.

So those clients that we don't want to be honest with they're not even really looking for what we offer most of the time. Those clients want to guide, sort of, but less of an expert. And a lot of times in our one-on-one design businesses in particular, that's not what we're offering. But we don't want to have to tell them that because that feels uncomfortable, and weird, and confrontational, and icky. But here's the thing, we are the ones who are saying yes to working with them even in sight in light of all of those red flags.

So why, why are we saying yes? And by saying yes we sort of become the victim in this scenario. And you may have heard me talk about victimhood before and being a victim versus a villain. And yeah, when we just hand over the responsibility, it's all the clients' responsibility, if they were a good client they would respect us and get the heck out of the way. Then we're falling into that victim role, even if by accident, even if we don't know it, even if it's not really our fault especially or we're not clear.

It's still us playing the victim as if it's not our fault for not saying no. But it's their fault for not being a different person, being a different version of who they are, changing their personality, having a budget that they can't afford. Instead of all of those things being different, we want to change the circumstance, and change the client, and change who they are at their core. We want them to do all that so we don't have to just show up and say no, and guide them, and direct them, and be honest about the way the process works, and the budget works, and all the stuff.

So again, I'm going to come back in a minute and give you a solution and a better question to ask. But that's the second narrative we have so perfected. In fact, you're probably nodding your head a lot today already. You're like, yes, I know the story so well about the cheap clients, or the clients who don't respect me, or both because I've said them so many times sort of like a broken record.

Ep #175: We're Asking the Wrong Questions

Okay, so before we get to the solution let's talk about this one last question, the third question that I hear designers asking repeatedly and it's this. Where are the employees or team members that actually want to work and will care about my business as much as I do? Where are those people for my team that want to work really hard and care about my business as much as I do? And that sounds plausible, all these sound really good. Yes, of course we don't want cheap clients and we don't want people to disrespect us.

And yes, we want hardworking employees that care about our businesses. And this one, here's what that story or narrative sounds like. It sounds something like young people, or even if they're not that young, but young people, or people today, or employees today, or teams today just don't want to work. And they want a lot of money. And they want flexible schedules. Good grief, how do they think we can be flexible and pay so much when we have so much work to do? And our clients are cheap, for God's sake.

How can we pay great salaries and be flexible when our clients are so freaking cheap and don't respect us? And by the way, team member, why aren't you stepping up and taking things off of me? And at the end of the day you, Mr. team member, Mrs. team member you go home and I'm still the one working all hours of the day and night to pull off all this work. And yeah, the story continues to say things like I knew I couldn't delegate to them. And I ask for them to make design selections and I hate everything they picked out. And I knew I was the only person who could do this work.

And on, and on, and on your story goes. And again, this is another question that we're asking, whether we realize it or not we're really positioning ourselves again as the victim. And when we do that, when we feel like poor us, we have to work so hard, they don't care as much as we do. We're the ones here till crazy hours of the night while they go live their life, two things happen.

Ep #175: We're Asking the Wrong Questions

When we put ourselves in victim mode of any kind, one, we give our power away, our power, not meaning power over other people. But our people to change our own circumstances so we're giving up the power. We're just kind of being like, well, here you go, take my power to change my own life. I'm handing it all over to you, it's in your court.

And two, we give ourselves permission to procrastinate or stay stuck instead of taking complete responsibility and creating the business we want and deserve. So, I don't know about you but I don't like finding myself in victim mode, being the victim of only having cheap clients, only have clients that don't respect me, only having team members that don't step up. I don't want to be in that place because I don't want the power to not change those things in my life and my business.

And I don't want an excuse, one more excuse, more permission to procrastinate and stay stuck, and stay confused, and stay overwhelmed instead of making things different. So, all three instances, we're showing up in the same way. Why can't we find the clients? Why don't they respect us? Why can't we find the right team members?

And you can see I hope, I mean ask yourself, can you, can you see how crappy these questions are? They're terrible questions. And when we ask them we're going to get an answer, a crappy one. Because in our brains everyone is cheap and nobody values design and values us. And all millennials, or all team members, or all gen whatever's, all the people that I would be hiring for my business are for sure lazy and don't want to work.

No, these answers sound true, everyone's cheap, no one values design and all the team members are lazy. They sound really true because we've been telling ourselves those thoughts and we believe them. And we believe our own answers of yes they are. But here's the thing, these are absolutely not true because everyone is not cheap, there's not everyone in the world who doesn't value design or value us and everyone that could be on our team is not lazy and doesn't want to work.

Ep #175: We're Asking the Wrong Questions

There are plenty of people who aren't cheap. There are many, many people who value design and value us. And there are many people of all ages that are incredible team members who make life so much better than life is when you're by yourself in the middle of the night still working on your design project complaining because the team you have isn't stepping up. So, here's the thing, here's the solution. You've been waiting for this the whole episode. Here's the solution.

What questions should you be asking? Well, it's just one question. It's one question. And it's likely not the question you think. You might even be disappointed. Because it's so much more, I don't know, fun in some ways, at least exciting and definitely dramatic to stay in the mindset of everyone's cheap, no one values design and nobody wants to work hard. That seems so much more exciting but it never brings us to the results we want.

So, here's the question, I'll be boring but super effective that you need to be asking yourself, and heck I don't think it's boring. I think it's super exciting because I've seen the results of what it creates. But let me just put it out there, enough procrastinating on the question already and let me tell you what it is. Here's the question. What repeatable processes and SOPs do I need in my business to remedy all these problems? Seriously, that's it. That question is so much better. It's the perfect question for getting a whole lot of amazing answers.

Just think about it, when you ask the question, what repeatable processes and SOPs, standard processes and procedures do I need in my business so this stuff doesn't happen anymore? That is a question that I can get behind because there's some beautiful answers that creates so much value in your business. So, let's break it down for each one of these questions. What repeatable processes and SOPs do I need in place so I can consistently attract and close, convert clients who meet the criteria that we work with or that we want to work with, including the budgets?

What repeatable processes and systems, SOPs do I need in place to consistently attract those people time and again so I'm not wondering

Ep #175: We're Asking the Wrong Questions

where the hell the island of mythical amazing clients is? And secondly, what repeatable processes and standard operating procedures do I need in place to consistently implement our design process on each and every job in a way that marries what the clients wants and needs with my expertise?

So that my ideas are clearly articulated and presented in a way that the client hears me and respects me. And we work together to get the right solutions for their design challenges, what are those processes and procedures that help me do that?

And number three, what repeatable processes and procedures, or SOPs if you prefer, that's what I like to call them, do I need to create a hiring process, and a training manual, and a communication system within my company so that I don't just have to wish my team members would step up and see what needs to be done, or care more? But that helps me clearly explain my expectations and helps me delegate effectively so that we get better results on our desired timelines, not in the middle of the night.

And really one, a process, a procedure, or several that support my team in a way that doesn't leave me disappointed. Or leave things to chance or leave me cleaning up messes because they will know with these processes and procedures, exactly what to do and when to do it, and how to do it to get the results that we want. And what does that look like for me when I get those processes and procedures in place? Because when I do I get to stay in my zone of genius in my role and they're in theirs. And it all works so much better.

I'm telling you friends, if you ask the right questions, and lets think about this, it's asking the questions of yourself, it's shifting that responsibility to you, which of course we don't really ever want to do initially. That feels harder but it's so much better. Because when we put the responsibility on the other people, where are the clients that aren't cheap? Where are the people that respect me? Where are the team members that are going to care about my business? When we put the responsibility on others, again, we don't have a move, we're stuck.

Ep #175: We're Asking the Wrong Questions

But when we take responsibility of what can we put in place in our business to create the business we want, then we absolutely can make a change. We absolutely can create time freedom in our business, and financial freedom, and a business that we truly love. It's absolutely possible. So, when you keep asking those crappy questions you're just going to keep confirming that you're stuck. And that the clients and the team members that you want are nowhere to be found.

Stop asking those freaking questions, please. Please stop asking them. And start asking yourself what processes and SOPs, standard operating procedures do we need in our business to find the clients we really, really want and the team members we really, really want? So, this business can be a whole lot more fun, and more profitable, and have more ease, and really fill in the blank of whatever it is that you want your business to feel like. That is the right question.

And here is the best news, the best news is you can go figure this out on your own. You can just ask those questions and let your brain tell you, and you'll still cavort around a little bit and feel stuck and be like I don't know, I'm confused. But they're out there, it's a much better question. But you could do it on your own or you could just work with me. You can work with us, me, my team, the amazing people in Design You.

We're starting this fall, we literally for the first time ever in all my 20 years of business and all the four years of Design You are going to hand over the processes and the SOPs, and procedures, and systems, for running your firm this way, the way that I talk about. Plus, we're going to also give you the expertise in coaching. We're going to stand there behind you and help you have your own back when you get stuck.

So, we're going to coach you on your mindset so that you not only ask the right questions and implement these systems but continue to ask the best questions in your business and stay the course of creating the business you really, really want. Instead of getting stuck, even when things feel hard, we're there to coach you, and help you, and hold your hand. It is so cool.

Ep #175: We're Asking the Wrong Questions

So, if that sounds like something you want there's a couple of things you can do. Well, there's kind of three. So first again if you're hearing this the morning this show comes out on August 5th, 2021, then head over and register for my Q&A that's today. You're going to find all that information on my Instagram at Tobi Fairley, or in the show notes of this podcast. So, head over and get coached or listen to other people get coached, that's number one.

Number two, get on the wait list, if you're not already, which means you head over to tobifairley.com/designyou and put your email address in there so that you're getting our emails. And the minute the doors are open very soon you can get in Design You. Now, it's the all new Design You, completely new, completely revamped. If you've been in it before, it is going to be so different. The calls are different, they're more often. The support is different, what you can submit to get critiqued on is different.

The coaching process is even slightly different, the good news is all the best parts, all my signature courses and things are all the same. So, it's like Design You but better, Design You 2.0. So, get on that wait list because we're opening the doors and they're going to be open just a little while, a week or so and then they're going to close. And then you're going to have to wait to get all this goodness. So, you want to be in there when the doors open on our brand new design system which is my entire design system, process, procedures, SOPs. So get on the wait list, so you know.

And then number three, before the doors open to Design You, if you want even more from me to continue this conversation we've been having the last two weeks here on the podcast. Then come to my masterclass that I'm teaching on August 12th, and this masterclass is about the three lies that we keep telling ourselves and the one solution to fix them. And you can register for that by going to tobifairley.com/onesolution because there's one solution you all, just one.

So, if you've loved these last two weeks, last week about accountability and how greed, this week about the terrible questions we're asking then you

Ep #175: We're Asking the Wrong Questions

absolutely should come and hear about the lies we tell ourselves. Because they're three key ones and it's building on the same story that we've been talking about here on the podcast, these three key lies we're telling ourselves. And I'm going to teach you on that masterclass how to get out of your own way and really even take another step towards building that dreamy business you want with more free time and more money.

And on that masterclass I'm going to go into detail about the brand new Design You, what I just called here Design You 2.0 and the design system that we're launching that you can get access to. And all the other amazingness in Design You. So, if you come to that masterclass, not only are you going to learn a bunch of awesome stuff, not only are you going to see more places you're getting in your own way so you can get out of your way, which is sort of a taste of how I teach in my courses in Design You.

But you're also going to hear all about the new Design You so you can get in if it's right for you while the doors are open. So, head to register for that at tobifairley.com/onesolution. So usually, I just tell you one thing to do at the end of these podcasts. I sometimes just even think about the episode, today I gave you three things you can do.

You can get on my Q&A today if you're hearing this in real time, the morning of it coming out. Number two, you can get on the wait list before the doors open to Design You. And number three, you can come to my masterclass on August 12th, 2021, and hear about the big three lies that we keep telling ourselves and be on that if you hear this later, just always head over to tobifairley.com in general and you can get all the latest details of what's open, how you can get a piece of it.

If you're like I need that system, give me the system, give me the classes, give me all the stuff, the coaching, the support, you can always find out the latest and greatest about that at tobifairley.com.

Okay, so that's what I have for you this week, friends. I hope you're seeing that you've been asking crappy questions but there is an easy solution, I

Ep #175: We're Asking the Wrong Questions

just gave it to you, for the one question you should be asking instead. What are those processes, repeatable processes and SOPs I need? So that's your question, write it down, ponder it. See if you can find some answers or head over to work with me and we will get answers together.

Alright, I'll see you back here next week and I have another cool episode with one of my spectacular members of Design You that has created big results. She's going to inspire you. She's going to inspire you to go for your dreams. So don't miss it. I'll see you back here next week with that amazing episode of the *Design You* podcast. Bye for now.

Thank you so much for listening to the *Design You* podcast, and if you're 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.