

# Ep #190: From Me to We: A Conversation with Team Tob



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**Tobi Fairley**

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You are listening to the *Design You* podcast with Tobi Fairley, episode number 190.

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. So 10 episodes to go till we hit 200. I was laughing at my math last week, I mean heck, I'm an accountant. I have an accounting degree and I'm like, "Will we get to episode 200 by the end of the year?" And then I started thinking about it's mid-November and we've got 11 episodes and I'm like, "Yeah, that's a no, Tobi." But we will be very soon in January. But for now we are enjoying being at episode 190 which kind of is mindboggling that we have that many episodes but this one is a really fun one.

So what I have for you today is a follow-up on last week's episode which was all about values and how to really use real activated, real life truthful, meaningful values to really run your company. And this week I have my team, I think there's six members of them that are full-time that are here. And we have an incredible transparent, heart-warming, honest, direct as our values say, conscious amazing conversation about what it's really like to work together with each other and in this company culture, and in a company that's run by our values.

And you all, I have never ever had a company culture like this. I've had a business for 22 years. I have had all kinds of chaos, and drama, and burnout, and it wasn't all bad, there was a lot of good too. But I've had a lot of stuff, turnover, stress. What I've never had is this, and I will say I believe that is because I've never worked with a team of people that we were very intentional about building based on values to create a company culture like this.

So I'm going to be quiet because I want you to hear from these incredible, smart, brilliant, kind, just genius women that I have the pleasure and joy of

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working with every single day. They make my life so much fun. In fact my CFO, Emily, who's not on here, she's not full-time on our team.

But I just had a meeting with her today actually when I'm recording this and she said, "Do you realize when I first started working with you over a year ago, you came to the meetings every week and you're like, "I'm frustrated with the team, and we don't have the right team yet, and we haven't built the right team yet, and I can't get the team to do what I want to?"" Because we were in the building process still. And you'll hear some of these people, these ladies on the team have only been here, some of them, a few months.

And she said, today she goes, "It's been a long time since you said that. It's been months since you told me that the team's not working, or that we don't have the right people or the right fit." And I have not thought about that in that way but she is 100% right. And I think after you hear this episode you'll get and understand exactly why that is. And that way you can start to imagine, envision how you could build a similar team and company culture that is absolutely as joyful as the one that we get to work in every day.

Okay, so here I go. I'm going to be quiet. Enjoy this conversation, I'll call it, not even an interview, a conversation, it's delightful with a group of women that I love and adore and we'll call them Team Tobi. Okay, so here we go.

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**Tobi:** Hey ladies, welcome to the Design You podcast. That feels weird. You all help me produce this every week but you are the people that help me bring this together. And now I'm welcoming you to the show. So welcome, welcome all of you.

**Sommer:** Hello.

**Loren:** Well, hello.

**April:** Hi, Tobi.

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**Haley:** Hello.

**April:** Hey, everyone.

**Tobi:** Hi, friends. Okay, so we are going to have a really cool chat today. It could go anywhere, especially with Haley here, it could go any direction. We have no idea where it's going. But let's start by having each of you introduce yourselves and tell everybody who you are, where you live, what your role is on our team and anything else you want to share, you can share anything. And let's see, I'll just start over, since we're on Zoom looking at each other, I'll start at my top left with you, April. Why don't you take off and tell us about you?

**April:** I'd love to. Hey, everyone. I am April Force Pardoe. I am the COO at Team Tobi. And I have been here, it's really coming up on two years exactly, Tobi, around Veteran's Day, so kind of cool. I live in Maryland on the East Coast near Baltimore. And that's me.

**Tobi:** And in your former life you were an interior designer with your own business, right?

**April:** I was, I had my own interior design business for about 12 years and was a member of Design You when you first started it. And that's how we cooked this up together, so yeah.

**Tobi:** Yeah, and thankfully you came over to save our world and be part of our team, so awesome, amazing. Adrienne, tell us about you.

**Adrienne:** Hey everybody. Adrienne Meachum, I am the lead designer for Team Tobi. And I also help create design-related content for Design You. I am in Little Rock, well I'm close to Little Rock, Arkansas. And so I get to see Tobi in real life on a regular basis. And I have been here just over a year.

**Tobi:** Awesome. And we have a new team, best team ever and it's new. So for those of you who are thinking that's not possible, we're blowing that myth up for you. Awesome. And so, Adrienne, also you have been a

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teacher beyond being a designer. That was one of the things we loved about you, because you were a master at creating curriculum already.

**Adrienne:** Which is funny because when I filled out my resumé, I thought well, I'm not saying teaching on here. I don't think that's going to relate at all.

**Tobi:** And that's the thing we have you doing the most a lot of days, so awesome. Okay, Haley, tell us, tell us the things.

**Haley:** So I'm Haley, I'm Tobi's Executive Assistant. I have spent pretty much my whole career at some form of design, whether it be engineering related, architecture related, but pretty much all in the Executive Assistant realm. And my degree is in professional writing. And I live just outside of Ann Arbor, Michigan.

**Tobi:** And all of you so far, all three of you have children and families that you haven't mentioned, that you don't have to. But we have half mommas and half young no mommas or not yet mommas on our team. So yeah, so you have babies. And you are the comic relief of the team too we might add.

**Haley:** Usually. My life is just funny all the time. I have three little teeny tiny redheads, so it's hilarious here every day.

**Tobi:** Yes. And they often attend our meetings via Zoom in the background which is, yes, amazing. We also have lots of dog lovers here too. So we're welcome to talk about dogs too. Awesome, okay, welcome. How about you, Loren?

**Loren:** Hello, hello. Yeah, my name's Loren Turner. I am the Success Coach Manager here on Team Tobi. I've been here for a couple of months now but I did work a few months prior to that, working as a contractor for Tobi. And then she convinced me to join the team.

**Tobi:** I had to twist your arm multiple times and a couple of your legs.

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**Adrienne:** We had to bring her to Little Rock, we had to bring her to Little Rock [crosstalk].

**Tobi:** Yeah, we did.

**Adrienne:** We had to wine her and dine her.

**Loren:** That sold me, okay, these women are awesome. But yeah, live in Columbus, Ohio.

**Tobi:** And you're a certified life coach.

**Loren:** Yeah, certified life coach. I was coaching introverted entrepreneurs before joining the team.

**Tobi:** Awesome, amazing. Okay, Sommer, how about you?

**Sommer:** Yes, hello everybody. So my name is Sommer Brennan and I am a success coach here at Tobi Fairley. I've been with the team for a couple of months now. And let's see. My role here is basically helping you guys make sure you can master your mindsets, you can get the results that you want. So that's been really fun. I also run my own coaching business on the side kind of like Loren, where I help high achievers and perfectionists basically create the work life balance that they want without overworking.

**Tobi:** Amazing. And a certified life coach as well, you may have said that. And what's so weird to me, and don't you all think, the rest of the team, doesn't it feel weird for them to say they've only been here for a couple of months? Because I feel like we've all been together for at least a year, if not years. So that's a good sign. Okay, and last but for sure not least because she makes this world go round on the day-to-day basis, how about you, Nichol?

**Nichol:** My name is Nichol Grady. I am the Operations Assistant here. And I have been on the team for about seven months. And I'm from Indianapolis, Indiana,

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**Tobi:** Amazing. And again I feel like you've been in my life forever but in a good way. All of you, that's all a compliment. It's not one of those things like a marriage where you're like, "This thing feels like it's been going on for yonks." No, it's all – we're still all in the honeymoon phase but it feels so good. Okay, so we are here to really help other people understand what's possible when it comes to creating a company culture that really, not only that we love and that we thrive in as a team but that it benefits everybody.

It doesn't benefit the boss, or it's not super hierarchical we've always seen kind of in traditional, what I would call traditional businesses. And I really wanted our audience and the people that work with us in our programs to hear from you all. Because I can tell them stuff all day long and they're like, "Yeah, yeah, I'm sure it is amazing." But I really wanted to have the truth behind what it's been like for you all. And something that's coming to mind for me and I don't even remember the source of it right now. It's a quote. It might be from a book that I read about the Netflix culture.

But it was really talking about how you can't just design a culture ahead of time and then fit people into it, it's just evolution. And I really see that happening with us. But it also takes participation, it takes a lot of trust, it takes a lot of things. So that's what we're going to get into today. And then one other thing I want to kind of just set the tone. I even just had someone in one of our programs ask me today. She said, "Can you help us understand more of how you went from me to we?" Which is what we really talk about. That's what we kind of call this.

We went from this is Tobi's company to this is our company on purpose. And I think that that is such a hard thing for so many people to achieve. So that's kind of in a nutshell what we're going to talk about today. So let's just kind of start, whoever wants to jump in, just kind of so we don't talk over each other. I guess just kind of raise your hand or whatever and I'll help air traffic control a little bit. But let's just start having this conversation about kind of how the culture feels to you.

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And maybe even in context of where we were in this process when you came in. Because some of you were here early on or April, you really helped me originate this whole process. Some of you came in after it was really kind of taking shape. And so let's just kind of have an open conversation to get rolling about how you feel about our company culture.

**April:** I'll start. I feel like I'm on a Design You call. I was like, "I'll go first." I have a love of our culture and I love it. I told Tobi recently that I love it because every day is a challenge in a good way and inspiring. And so it's kind of that – I don't want to use the word 'hate. But it's this love hate, it's like love it because it's such a place where we can be humans first like Tobi said. But it challenges you and you get that growth because you're being challenged. And sometimes that feels a little like, ah.

But I've never worked in a place where you were encouraged to, and almost really told to put your failures out there and share that and so everyone else gets really comfortable and understands that this is how we roll. That no matter what your role is here or what level you are equal in that way. So everyone is encouraged to bring your best self, roll the dice, do your thing and let's see what happens. And nobody is really holding anyone – we're held accountable but we're not blamed, or shamed, or we're looking for solutions when something doesn't go the way we planned.

We're not looking for whose fault it is, we're looking for how do we solve it. And how do we support each other in getting the best solution. And we look at ourselves in addition to the person that did something that was awful and we're like, how did we contribute? So it's this really great – that's the piece of it that is really good, that you're forced to look at yourself and everyone else and kind of play equal roles in how we succeed.

**Tobi:** Oh, I love that so much. And remembering back to when you first started because you really did help me. I had the vision. And we were sort of getting started and we had a fractional COO before you that I had hired just to help me even figure out what a person in that operations kind of integration role even looked like. But it wasn't all together when you came



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here. In fact we had a really dicey Zoom call with a former contractor kind of early on when we were starting to practice project fail. So do you remember?

Can you think back now, it's kind of hard to remember even a year or 18 months later, things feel so good now. But can you remember any level of what it felt like before or how either uncomfortable, or awkward, or interesting it was in that process of building? Does anything come to mind?

**April:** Well, I had been here a couple of months when you did project fail and then this request for everyone to kind of put out failures. And while that was great, it didn't really have the team behind it. It didn't feel like we were embracing it. It felt like another task kind of just to fail and do it.

**Tobi:** Please be really bad at stuff, which is so counterintuitive, right?

**April:** And you know that felt really awful to me and I even said that. I was like, "No, I don't want to do that. I don't want to tell you what I want to fail at." I think because it wasn't maybe organized, or we didn't have our values stated yet, which to me really support and kind of uphold the failure thing. It just felt like a thing to do. And it wasn't infused I guess. And partly because we didn't have – now we have team meetings.

I feel like the unification of the team brought all those different elements together so they feel like we're living them is I guess how I would say it. Before it didn't feel like – we knew we were all doing it but it didn't feel a cohesive thing that we were living.

**Tobi:** Yeah, I love that. And I'm glad you brought that up. See, this is why you all are here because I can't even know all this stuff if I don't hear from your perspective too. But I think that goes back to what I was saying earlier about what I had read, that you can't just set a company – you can't be like, "Here's our company culture, everybody live by it." But I guess at the beginning you kind of have to, to start the ball rolling. And that's probably the difference of what you're saying. You're like, "We kind of handed it to

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everybody.” And we’re like, “Here’s who we’re going to be.” But we weren’t really those people, at least not yet.

And I think it’s not something that the leadership, or the boss, or somebody can decide alone. And that’s been one of my favorite shifts ever in my business. I’ve never in 22 years had a business where I made decisions with other people. We literally together decide where we’re giving our money, how we’re spending our time, how we’re doing projects. It feels so good. And I think that’s what it takes to create this culture where we embody it like you said.

**April:** Yeah. And I’ll add one more thing that I think brought it home was everyone getting one-on-one coaching, I think really helps. Because if you throw that at someone and a lot of you have coaching experience so you probably weren’t able to roll with that. But if you throw that at someone that’s like, “I’ve never done that, what is that? That feels weird.” And now you have a coach that you can work on any of those things. And it’s there to support you to be your best self and work through things. I think that helps. That’s another piece. So you have to layer it in, I think, over time.

**Tobi:** Yeah, so for those of you listening that didn’t exactly pick up on that. So what we have done as part of our kind of company culture, and company manual, and company benefits, and goals is we provide as a company one-on-one life coaching for each one of our members.

Which again like you said, if we’re creating a space and we’re like, “Please go fail your way to success”, which feels awful at times. It sure does help to be like, “Oh, and by the way, they’re providing the support system and teaching me how to think about my thinking at a different level.” Which I think you also don’t see in a lot of companies. So, Haley is on the edge of her seat dying to tell us something. I can’t wait.

**Haley:** No, you guys are – the word that you’re both saying over and over again is support. And that’s the difference I think in what we have. It can be intimidating to join a team of really smart assertive people, and in our case, assertive smart women which we all are. And the difference is we all

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support each other, we all know each other and we all genuinely care about each other. So that that element of competition has been completely removed and replaced with support.

And that really allows for each of us to know what each other does and to support each other if somebody is on vacation, or somebody is out for a day the ball is constantly moving. And I think another big portion of that is so much bureaucracy has been cut out in the way that you facilitate this business. I've worked in big companies before and the amount of time that is spent just doing bureaucratic things because that's the way that it's always been done, there's none of that here.

**Tobi:** Like to make a decision or something, you have to go through all these hoops and stuff?

**Haley:** Yes, to make a decision, to document every single process and procedure versus just documenting the umbrella view of the way that something is done, the meat and potatoes of why we're doing what we're doing to reference later. Versus here are our teeny tiny steps that need to be followed because it's the way that we've always done it. So I think that's allowed all of us to – we all are able to run full speed without hesitation and without being held back by having to do things that don't matter.

**Tobi:** Yes. I love it. We're actually working on something outward facing for one of our trainings coming up that is the six words, Jess, our new Marketing Director, is helping me with that. And it's called something like the six words that'll kill your business, the way it's always been done. And we don't fall into the way it's always been done. We're always looking at what's the best way to do it now, that innovation.

The other thing I love that you said, which is so beautiful, and again I wouldn't have thought about it on my own is the lack of competition. And now that you're saying that I can see where when you don't have blame, and you don't have shame, and no one's going to get in trouble for making a mistake. Then no one has to be competitive, or finger pointing, or trying to one up someone, which I had never even thought of but it inherently kind

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of dissolves that. Because when you think of a competitive – I mean there are some people who are competitive.

And we by nature are trying to rise together as a team, not individually, so that helps too. But even just thinking about the fact that no one's going to get thrown under the bus for anything ever around here just sort of relaxes that whole need to compete, I think. Would you all agree with that?

Anybody have anything to add to that? Because I love this because I think it's one of the things that happens the most, especially when you put a bunch of women. We've got six women together and we literally have the best time and it doesn't feel competitive. Adrienne, what do you think?

**Adrienne:** Yeah. [Inaudible] support, but for me, I feel safe here. I feel safe to be who I am, where I am right now to do the best job that I can do. And to know that if I do fall short in some place, no harm, no fail, but what can we do to make that better?

**Tobi:** Yeah. And how is that different? I know you've had different experiences in some of your previous jobs, we've talked about it. So can you kind of speak a little bit to the difference of maybe at other times in your life or career how it didn't feel that way? Just so people can kind of understand the contrast. When you were feeling the opposite of no harm, no fail, kind of what was that feeling like?

**Adrienne:** Yeah. I mean just that there was no room for error or mistakes. And then I really think that the failure project coupled with honest and direct, and the growth mindset does really kind of take that to the place where I can use my voice, which I haven't always felt like I was invited to do that places where I worked, like we just need you to do this. Saying we don't really care how you feel about it or [inaudible]. So yeah, I think just that culture where I can say, "Here's what happened and here is how it made me feel."

**Tobi:** Yeah, Adrienne, April and I kind of think of you as the beautiful poster child for part of that in our company. Because there was a time several months back where we were having this very conversation. And you

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brought something to our attention which we were so glad you did. And you said, “I kind of feel left out about the diversity, equity and inclusion initiative.” Because you and April are kind of working on it together and at the time you were doing more in the design work and not really doing much of the curriculum or Design You stuff.

And so you kind of raised your hand and said, “I kind of actually got my feelings hurt a little bit because I heard it from an outside source.” And not only were we so thrilled that you said that and we wanted to make it right, it opened up such a beautiful opportunity for us to get in the habit of exactly what you’re talking about. And so I remember asking you to think about and send me, and then I’ve learned of course, being the extrovert I am, I’ve learned to work with so many other people.

And knowing you’re an introvert I was like, “Go think about this on your own time and come back when you’re ready and tell me kind of how you feel in general, what feels good about working here? What could you need more of? Where could we support you more?” And you gave us this really thoughtful response to which April was like, “I think I want to tell Tobi what all I need now too. I think I want to do the same exercise.” But what was that like for you?

Because I can imagine it was new territory, we all felt good about it. Nobody was upset or it wasn’t confrontational or weird, it was really loving and open. But as April said, it’s still uncomfortable sometimes because it’s very vulnerable, right?

**Adrienne:** And I think I said that. I think before I hit send I was like, “By the way I’m feeling very vulnerable here”, and then hit send. Because I mean it was just like, I don’t know, it was a lot of myself kind of to just lay bare and hand over to someone. But that’s good for me, but a challenge too, like I said, use my voice more.

**Tobi:** Yeah, we love to talk about our Enneagrams around here. And Adrienne is a peacemaker, Enneagram 9. And so I’m sure, my nephew, who’s one of my favorite people on the planet is also an Enneagram 9. And

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any level of anything that could feel like confrontation or asking for what you need.

**Adrienne:** Feels like confrontation.

**Tobi:** It's like, yeah, you're like, "Eek." That is so good. I love every bit of that so much. I was just thinking about how a lot, both you and April have referenced our values. And I think April's so right about when she was saying early on we hadn't decided, and solidified, and embodied our values as a company. And now not only have we written them but we've activated them. And we all know them off the top of our head because you just were naming them, like growth mindset and honest and direct. And so it's literally they're our guiding light as how we show up as a team. So I think that's really amazing too.

**April:** Yeah. And I want to add onto something Adrienne said. When I loved everything that happened in that scenario and that I want to point out that Adrienne brought something to. If you're looking from a company hierarchy, which a lot of people have in your company and they live by that. She brought something to the CEO and said, "You kind of did something that I didn't like." That is not normal to be comfortable to say that. And so I love that. And then I love that then our response is, "Oh crap, she's right, we didn't do that. And we need to right that."

Not, "Oh no, there's a plan and you have to wait." And not, there's not a lot of drama here. I mean I know we all have our emotions.

**Tobi:** Or excuses, right?

**April:** Yeah, or excuses, yeah, you're right, we didn't do it and that is a fail. And we should have done it and now we're going to fix it. So I loved all of that. And we want everyone on the team to feel like they can always go up, and down, and around to everyone.

**Tobi:** Yeah. And that's what we mean by no hierarchy. Obviously, we have people that are managers, or supervisors, or someone answers to another person. But we don't live by this hierarchical, or superiority, or seniority kind

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of, nobody cares who's – in fact we didn't even remember until we said it today, how long anybody's been here. It feels like we've all been here forever. So I agree with you, that's our favorite part.

And I did love, I was so impressed and moved that Adrienne did have the courage. And I'm sure it was because we are sitting here saying, "We promote honesty, and directness." Just like you did, April, too, with failing. You all both trusted me, thank goodness, which was hard. And you're like, "Okay, she said this, I'm going to do it." And I think it's only because the response was like you said, April, it was open, and listening and not excuses, not just from me, but from you and other people on the team, that allow our team to keep showing up.

Anybody else think about, well, anything you want to share and in particular if there's anything around the trust factor? Because I think that's a hard one for a lot of people.

**Loren:** Yeah. You and April made good plans about there not being so much of a hierarchy. And then the fact that you were like, "We make decisions more as a team." I think that's such a powerful thing. And I don't want anybody to underestimate that because I've heard some people say that or have concerns about their employees not caring about their company as much as, they're like, "My employees will never care as much as I care." Or just fears about having a virtual team.

But I think when you do allow them the ability to feel like their voice is heard. And you do make these decisions together. We have the communication filters. That's such a new thing for me on a team. And I just thought that was the most amazing thing because I know I can submit idea filters, or decision filters, and I know that they're going to be heard and considered. Because I've worked at some places where you can submit ideas but they kind of go into a black hole.

But I know with these here they're really taken seriously. And I've seen things being implemented so quickly, it blows my mind. And when that happens, it just makes you really care about the work you're doing for the

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company because it feels like we're all trying to achieve the same thing together. It's not just like I'm doing this just for you so you can succeed but it feels like a team effort.

**Tobi:** I love that so much, yeah. And one of the things that's coming to my mind when you're talking that I think plays a huge role in what you just talked about. Not just the decision filters which is a process we use that you can write out an idea or you can write out a decision that you're making from your position. And you just kind of run it up the chain of just whoever's ahead of you. And it's kind of like, "Hey, I'm going to make this decision unless you have another idea, or unless I hear back from you in a certain amount of time."

And so it's really a lot of autonomy. But what is coming to my mind when you're saying that is one of the reasons it works and it used to not work in our company is I'm not in the middle of a lot of that as the CEO at all. I've empowered other people. I've empowered you guys, or ladies may be better than guys, you all. Let's use the term, you all. And April and so we set a company vision and we set company goals. And that was a big process for me. It wasn't easy and it didn't happen overnight, to learn to get out of the way and me trust you all as much as you all trust me, it goes both ways.

But if I was having to see every single thing all the time, there's no way we would be making things happen as fast as we're making them happen. It would sit on my desk forever, just a few things that you all do need me to do. Just this morning I was like, "I'm so sorry, Loren, I didn't do that thing again for the fourth time." But the fact that I'm out of the way, I think, is what I'm noticing even as you're saying this is so imperative.

So when people are thinking about building this kind of culture, you can't build this kind of culture and not really get out of the way and let great people rise up and do their thing and be in their zone of genius I think, right?

**Loren:** Exactly, right.



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**Tobi:** Yeah, so good, Nichol, and then Sommer, yeah.

**Nichol:** Yeah, I was going to say about the company culture, that in past companies, they've more fed into my perfectionism which comes natural to me, which the culture here feeds into my strengths and growth. And so which is not always comfortable. So some things I might go into kicking and screaming like the communication filters because I can't be perfect if I have to come up with my own answer.

But it's forced me to stretch and to feel more comfortable, perhaps it's not right, but you're going to tell me what you liked about it and where we're actually going to go. And so now I have more perspective, so it just makes me better at my job.

**Tobi:** I love that so much, yeah. And you're an Enneagram 1, which is the perfectionist with the side of peacemaker. And so I love that you're saying that because that's the beautiful thing about those communication filters, it's beautiful on both sides. It doesn't leave all of the decisions to kind of the people at the top which can be overwhelming to that and bottleneck the whole company. But it also allows other people to rise and show us how you shine. And we would never think you all were all near as amazing as we do if we didn't get out of the way and let us show you what you've got.

And I think that happens so often in companies that there's a lot of talent and there's a lot of strength, and a lot of skill, and a lot of beauty in teams that never gets tapped into because the structure or the hierarchy never allows people. And I watch people leave companies, or get fired, or people not really understand what it could look like because the people at the top don't get out of the way, or the people in charge, or however you want to describe it, don't get out of the way, so I love that.

One other thing too that I told you I was going to bring up which is fun, whenever I first started talking to you, we were just getting started on our diversity, equity and inclusion, super conscious about our specific initiative. And so when I was hiring you, I sent that to you. And because I'm a white lady and you're a person of color and I was so excited. And I was like, "This

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is going to be amazing.” And I was telling you all the stuff. And I was like, “How do you feel about that?”

And you had the most beautiful honest response ever. And maybe if you remember you can tell us exactly what it was. But it was kind of like, “I mean it’s fun but I don’t really know if I trust it yet”, or something. So can you speak to that a little bit? Because that was the best thing you could have possibly ever said. Because I think when we start doing this work and me as a leader start doing this work for our company and stretch myself, I wanted everyone to validate me, as we can fall into, it was amazing, almost centering accidentally myself, patting me on the back that it was good work.

And here I go out to hire someone new and you immediately sort of shut that down a little bit. So can you tell me what your recollection is of that experience?

**Nichol:** I do remember. I remember getting the job description, and information about the company and everything, and seen the diversity inclusion on there. And I was like, “Okay, that’s nice but I don’t believe it.” Because a lot of companies, and we’ve seen it in the past year, a lot of companies said things that sounded good or sounded correct. But now where are they? And so I just skimmed past that part and like, okay, we’ll see.

But then when we were in the conversation, we’re at the end of it and you were asking questions. And you asked me what I thought about it. That was the first time that perhaps I could trust what you’re saying because if you didn’t care, if it wasn’t top of my mind, why would you even bring up the question? So I really appreciated that.

**Tobi:** And I remember being so uncomfortable to ask, like, “This is so awkward to ask.” And I don’t even know if I’m getting this all wrong and my consultant may tell me this is horrible. But can I ask you how you feel about that? And I have to say I was so uncomfortable, probably more so than you.

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**Nichol:** And then I remember taking a pause and then like, well, what do I have to lose? I'm just going to be honest. And so I told you that I didn't know if it was sincere or not. And so it just takes time to see that. And that's exactly what you've shown and it makes me proud of the company that I work for, that we're inclusive to everyone. And we back it up with our actions and our words.

**Tobi:** That makes me – I just want to hug you. I'm so glad you were honest. You read our values and you saw that it also said honest and direct. And I guess you were probably also like, "We'll see if this is also the truth. I don't have anything to lose. I don't work for this woman yet. I'm just going to rip the band-aid off, here we go." But I think that was the moment we probably both kind of felt in love with each other. We already liked each other on paper but I think that was that very first moment where I was like, "Ooh, there's something here. There's something special here."

And we're so lucky to have you but thank you for sharing that. And I did ask your consent before. That's one of the things I've learned too, to be really inclusive and safe as Adrienne said. April and I are both learning how to lead in a more equitable way. And it's something we really, really do try to put our money and our actions behind. So thank you for letting me bring that up. Okay, Sommer, we haven't let you talk yet and you're a good old extrovert, come on, tell us what you think.

**Sommer:** Okay. Well, what I love about the common thread of all of this is just really no ego from anyone involved in the team. And I think that does start from the top with Tobi. And so I appreciate that. I know coming on as a new success coach, week one we started doing the calls in Design You where Tobi was mainly the lead coach. And then at the end of every session she would invite Loren and myself to participate. And maybe you other designers can relate to this, when you're worried that if you bring someone else on they won't be able to do it the same way that you do.

The fact that Tobi asked us, "Hey, Sommer, Loren, what did I miss? What are you guys seeing?" I was like, "Oh, okay. She doesn't have an ego

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about this. She actually wants to hear what I have to say and how I can help members.” So that meant a lot to me. And I think that also speaks to this great quote that I heard from Brendon Burchard on leadership. And it’s that people support what they create. So when you’re building a team, really simple. If you want people to care about the company that you’re building, let them be a part of creating it.

**Tobi:** That is so good. And that’s exactly, I’m glad to have that quote now to put behind our actions because that is exactly, I think, our belief. But I love to put those words to it. That is so, so good. So anything else that you all have found either that you especially love about the company? We have some fun things coming up. I’m sure some of you are going to speak about some of the things we’re about to be doing.

But what are some of the other things that you love about how we operate, or our benefits, or our other things, or maybe something that you still find really hard? Because I want us always be telling the truth on both sides to kind of this process because it’s not a straight line like anything. It’s not that it’s always easy although it kind of has felt kind of exceptionally easy in most ways with this team. So tell me, yeah, tell me what you’re thinking, Haley?

**Haley:** One of the things and Sommer just giving us that quote, and the way that I have seen Adrienne pivot more into doing the teaching work that she’s doing and writing the SOPs and everything from primarily drawing design. For myself having three young kids and I’m a single mom right now. And because of the place that I’m at in my life and because of the role that I am doing for Tobi I’m super task driven right now. I love the ability to sit down and I have checked off x amount of tasks and they are done and complete.

But within our foundation and within the long term goals that we have for the company I see myself somewhere else in the company at a different point in my life and that’s because of the growth initiative that the company is taking. And because that we are growing, we, not just our initiatives that

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are in place. But look at how many people have joined our team since I have been here and the opportunities for a lifelong career are huge when you can see yourself as part of what we're building. And I think it's really cool.

**Tobi:** That's so fun. In a time where we think about people leaving jobs and not staying very long, I haven't really thought about it from this perspective. This is why you all are such geniuses. But how fun to think you could reinvent yourself three or four times in your lifetime and never even have to leave the company you're in, that's kind of an interesting thing to think about, that's pretty amazing. That's so cool.

**Haley:** Yeah. And I would say that we definitely speak to and want to know what people's other interests are, what their strengths are like that happened with Adrienne. She's like, "I really am good at this, and I like this, and I'd love to do more of this." And that can probably feel a little scary to say when you have this job and you're saying, "I want this."

**Tobi:** And even saying, "I kind of don't know how much I am excited about the job I'm doing anymore." I mean kind of still but maybe not too. So there's both sides of that, right?

**Haley:** Yeah. And I think we're really good at – well, I know we're really good at education. So I mean I've taken courses, you've suggested courses. I think we want the team, if they feel like they need to know more about something, part of that support isn't just words. And you don't have that knowledge and that's okay, where can we get it for you? We don't expect that you come to this knowing everything. We want you to keep learning and growing. And if there's a course you can take, how can we help you?

**Tobi:** Yeah, we pay for it, yeah, we want to pay for it. And we want you to take it on our time too, right?

**Haley:** Yeah, so that's part of helping someone grow into something. It helps everyone. And we're always interested in that, so I love that.

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**Tobi:** So good, I love that too. And I kind of forget that we do that. I love that you brought that back up, not only, and this might blow some people's minds listening. Not only will we pay for your training for things, then we also tell you to do it on our time while we're paying you because we don't expect you, and in fact we even kind of ask you not to work nights and weekends because we don't want a bunch of exhausted hustle culture kind of overwhelmed team members. So we love you to do that on our time. Yes, Adrienne.

**Adrienne:** I was going to say, I had continuing education blocked out on my calendar for an hour and a half every Friday afternoon. And I know that's been a totally more than acceptable way to spend my time here.

**Tobi:** Yeah. Nobody's saying, "What are you doing on Friday?" We're not like, "Adrienne's slacking again on Friday doing some internet stuff on our time", right?

**Adrienne:** And I love learning so whether it's design learning, or teaching learning, or process learning, it's amazing.

**Tobi:** Yeah, I love that, thank you.

**April:** Yeah, and I love, at a time when you were talking about what else have we seen. I love at a time where so many companies that were in person and then had to go into home offices during COVID and now we're kind of struggling with how to go back and what they're going to do. And I love when I hear companies or teams be like, "We don't know how to do it remote." And I'm like, "You just are not looking hard enough." We're doing it remote. And not only are we doing it remote and we always have.

But I said this once in a call when Tobi was talking to one of our members about their team. And I said, "Not only are we doing it remote, because of our systems, and our communication filters in our box, nobody ever checks on." Tobi's never asked me once in two years, "Where are you and what are you doing?" I don't think anybody has on this team. So it's just, you can have that trust and you can have that culture. It helps support that I think

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too. So nobody here is feeling like – it's nice to say, "Look, I'm going to be out for an hour, if you're going to need me, I'm not going to be here."

But we don't have this system where we have to constantly be checking in, and knowing where everyone is, and knowing what they're doing because we trust they're doing the rocks that we set and they're going to ask for help.

**Tobi:** Exactly. Well, yeah, because we would notice. If you weren't creating the output, if things weren't happening, like Loren said, we're doing so much and we make so much happen. We would notice if people weren't doing anything. And we'd also notice if you were missing the set meetings. But no one's being micromanaged around in their off time. And I would say I don't like to micromanage people but there were times in the past where maybe I didn't trust a team member. And so I'd find myself kind of doing that more or starting to question.

And so I think a big piece of this is also not only the exact people we have on our team, but the way we've written our roles, the way we've written our job descriptions, the way we've interviewed. We've invested money in different kinds of tests for some of you to be the right people to work together. And we've even moved the interview process to the team. So even I'm the second or third, sometimes, person to even interview candidates. The team is interviewing candidates. The team, depending on the department is interviewing who's going to work with them or for them.

And I think that plays such a big part because how often are people getting hired from some CEO that's never even going to work with them? And then all of a sudden they start going, "I wonder what that person's doing. I wonder if I'm getting my money's worth." And that's when that micromanaging comes in. And we never have that. And we love flexibility. If somebody's like, "My kid's sick, or can I change this meeting, or I'm not feeling well today." Or please take all your vacation.

How many companies are like, "You've got vacation time and you're not using it, please take days off." Which we've been really conscious about

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doing even more so this year. I think, April, you've been championing that, which we want because we want our people rested and happy to be at work, right? Anything else that's coming up for you all that you love? Anybody want to talk about our volunteer work we're going to do which I love, or anything that's really hard for you, that's still a struggle? Nichol.

**Nichol:** I'm just going to piggyback on speaking on the trust piece of it, that we wouldn't have this atmosphere and this culture without the trust. And the trust to ask for what you need and to take away what you don't want. So being able to talk to you or to April to say, "This isn't working", has been very helpful. It made me uncomfortable. But I could have gone about it the perfectionist way and just did the work and had one foot out of the door. But when a system issue came up that was, I felt was not a part of my job, I was like, "April, we need to find somebody to do this."

And so that's what we're working on and so otherwise I would have been staying up all night thinking, how am I going to do this, so stressed out and not doing my best. And so being able to bring issues up, to talk it through, to see what solutions can be found, it all starts with trust.

**Tobi:** Yeah. And that's so exciting and so opposite, I love that. And sometimes I'm not even privy to all of that stuff that you all are doing and fixing. But just it makes me so proud of us to be a company that instead of saying, "We don't have a lot of funds", or whatever, "We can't hire more people. Can you just wear seven more hats", which is what you see in a lot of places. And sometimes I get that people can't help it or don't have the money. But we try to be the opposite.

We're like, "What can we take off of you? What do you find yourself doing that probably shouldn't be yours? What could we outsource? What could we automate?" And I'm so proud of that. And I love when you all come back and share with me stories like this where we're actually again practicing, kind of walking the talk of what we say we're going to do. So good. Amazing. Haley?



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**Haley:** I was going to say something that is hard, as an extrovert sometimes being a completely virtual team I wish that we could all be together sometimes. And I think in the beginning as someone who had only worked in person to start, this was the first company I worked for where we're all virtual. Getting used to Zoom has been so clutch, because just seeing your faces and all of us having, like we kick off our team meetings every single week with either a fun fact or we all talk a little bit about ourselves.

Where we have our little Halloween chat going where everybody's sharing funny pictures of kids and ourselves. And it brings us feeling like we're all at least in the same place sometimes. Because we extroverts, we need our social time, we need to hear you guys laugh in person.

**Tobi:** And we just got together in person most of us, Sommer wasn't on the team yet. But we'll have her in person with us soon, at least a couple of times a year. But when we did get together, didn't it feel like we had all known each other forever? And I think it was because we had been so open. And April's our ringleader of joy and connection for the funny stories and all the things. And I love that so much, Loren, you were going to share something.

**Loren:** Yeah. I was just going to say the exact same thing as Haley was saying. The only hard thing is sometimes it does feel like we're in silos because I feel we're really good on a work level. We trust each other. But sometimes it's nice to be really close on a personal level too. But I do think that we are taking some steps towards that like Haley was saying. It was so funny seeing everybody's Halloween pictures this morning. And I know we've had one happy hour so far when we shared our Enneagrams, that was a lot of fun.

But I think moving forward I would definitely like to see more of a team building aspect, just so we can just get to know each other a little bit more.

**Tobi:** I love that. April and I just had our first advisory board meeting, which we're going to share some of those with you all. You all may even want to

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come to some of those with our new advisory board for Design You. And it's so fun when things mirror. And they were talking kind of about the same thing, because it's an online community. And they're like, "I want more engagement. I want more connection." And we were already in that headspace just yesterday of going, "Okay, let's bring that into a goal of community."

And so now that you're saying that I think we need to bring that as a goal across the whole company, internal and in our programs of community. And look, I'm already on it. I'm already on it.

**April:** I've assigned myself that as a rock, I'll be all over it, all over it, don't need a coach here, we're on it.

**Tobi:** I love it, yeah. And I love that people are, yeah, go ahead, Haley.

**Haley:** It's just such a compliment to the team that we have and the community that has been built on the advisory board. If everyone was miserable we wouldn't be asking to spend more time with each other, like all week together constantly. It's like we want more of each other and that's amazing.

**Tobi:** I agree. I talk all the time, especially to April. I'm like, "How did I go all those years thinking I was independent and didn't need anybody?" And now I'm like, "Who else can hang out with me while I work? Who else can help me with all? Can I have partners on all my tasks now?" And she's like, "No, go back to work." But it's just so much more fun when you get to do things together. There is a reason that we're wired for connection and belonging as Brené Brown says.

And that's something I was thinking earlier about Adrienne, speaking of Brené, Adrienne's comment about safety. I've been reading and I don't know why I'm so late to reading this book, Dare to Lead, just in time before her new book comes out in November. But she talks a lot about armored leadership. And it's the opposite of vulnerable leadership. And I think that's one of the things that we are doing really well is we all have the armor off.

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Nobody's armored up, that's kind of what Sommer was saying about the ego.

We don't have to suit up to go engage, or hear feedback, or hear honest, people's feelings, or emotions, or whatever. And you would think that that might create an environment of a lot of drama if everybody was just able to share all the time. But it's kind of the opposite. We're able to be honest but we kind of don't end up then creating all these narratives in our head offline because we can just talk about the actual thing I think, when something comes up. Does everybody feel the same about that?

**Haley:** Or we can say, "Okay. I feel like I've got my armor coming up here", and like it's totally normal. And you can think it through. And the person's not going to be like, "What do you mean?" It's like, well, you can work on it with your coach. There are ways to kind of keep that armor at bay and be aware of it.

**Tobi:** Yeah, somebody else was going to say something?

**Adrienne:** Well, I was just going to say that safe doesn't necessarily mean it's all rainbows and unicorns all the time. It's still a very challenging place to be and a place to work. And then just living out this culture is not easy.

**Tobi:** Yes. Yeah, and speak to that a little bit more. When you say challenging, not that I'm trying to make it rose colored glasses either. I mean it's like work is still hard, we still do things that stretch us and make us grow. We still try things we've never tried before. Anything else, to help people understand what you mean, living into the culture or values? Is it just because your personality wants to kind of tuck back into its comfort zone, and our values and our practices keep pulling you out of that and are stretching you, or how would you describe that?

**Adrienne:** Yeah, I mean definitely. Like I said, just knowing that it's a safe place to use my voice doesn't mean that it's easy to use my voice. Or the failure project, Nichol and I are kind of reverse, I'm a 9 with a little bit of 1 in there. And she's 1 with a little 9, those perfectionist tendency for that failure

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project and it's sort of turning in, retract and turning in B minus work. I would torture something to death before I turned it in. And then when I got feedback on it, it would hurt my feelings because I'd worked so hard on it.

And now that just takes so much off of me to be able to say, "It's not perfect. I know it's not perfect. We all know it's not perfect. But here it is, this is what I've got."

**Tobi:** What do you think about it, yeah.

**Adrienne:** Yeah, it's amazing.

**Tobi:** I love that too. And people don't even think about that. They almost think it would be worse because it's a draft. But I love that you're saying that. That's kind of taking your armor down too because you're like, "We are already all on the same page that we're getting the minimum viable version of this so we can all start crafting it to make sure it's going in the right direction." And so nobody's making any assumptions of did she think this was good, or is this really?

We're just coming at it, at the facts and going, "I like this part. Or let's add this. And this brings up another idea." And I feel we have that collaborative spirit because we're willing to work in that B minus way. Nichol.

**Nichol:** Speaking of that and also what I love about the company is being able to take the Kolbe test and to see how well I would work with others, especially with April. And so knowing that April can take something and turn it into something great. I don't feel uncomfortable turning in B minus work to her because I know that she's going to turn it around anyhow. So I feel comfortable putting more of my work out there because it's more of a team atmosphere rather than she's going to judge me and put it down.

**Tobi:** Yeah, that's so neat. We haven't had Sommer, and Loren, and Adrienne do the Kolbe test. But it started with the company I hired to help me find Haley, put us through it. And then I was like, "We're about to bring Nichol on full-time, I wonder if she and April work well together." And then we put you all through that test and [crosstalk].

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**April:** We got an A plus. We got an A plus, a 2 1 Enneagram, we got an A plus.

**Tobi:** I don't think Haley and I got – I think Haley and I got a C and they were like, "You're really good together, I promise." So I love that you all got A pluses, overachievers.

**April:** And we tell everyone, yeah, I'm like, "Tobi, we got an A plus, we got an A plus."

**Tobi:** Haley and I probably got a flat, skirt in on the seat of our pants kind of a B minus. But hey, it's working like a charm, isn't it, Haley?

**Haley:** It is.

**Tobi:** It's so good. Okay, well, this has been so much fun, you all, I knew would be amazing. I love that you've been so vulnerable. So last chance before we wrap up, anything else that anybody just can't bear to not share? And I did tease the fact that we were doing volunteer work. Everybody's like, "What does that mean?"

I do want them to know that we have this fun policy as a company that we give two paid days a year to volunteer. And we decide together what are some of the places that individually we're going to go out in our own communities and we're all going to volunteer but we're going to do it on the same day. And we've shared it together and we're all excited for each year. And then we've also decided together, we're giving a certain amount of money from the company for Giving Thursday, or Tuesday, or whatever it is in November.

And we've decided, we all get to decide together, we're voting right now where we're going to give money because I want it to be all of us getting that warm and fuzzy feeling, not just me. Because you all, all help make the money, create the money. So those are two fun exciting things that we're doing to give back which I know makes us all feel good. So anybody that wants to speak to that can, or anything else, any final words for the people that are thinking.

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Yeah, Sommer, I'll come to you next, the people that are out here listening and they're like, "I want that. And I'm thinking I would love to create that", so just anything else you want to share, Sommer.

**Sommer:** Yeah. What I really like that we've touched on throughout this whole conversation is what Tobi talked about with the volunteer work, is that's very much an intentional reflection of our values, showing that we're living that. But the contrast with that is with this conversation for example, Tobi did not give us a script. She did not give us, she didn't tell us anything before coming on this podcast.

And so that speaks to kind of this balance between being intentional with the way you're building your business but also letting things unfold organically which is something that I know I struggle with because I also fall into some of those perfectionist tendencies. And I still think that's probably to Loren's point about what we want to do with this company culture is be really intentional about what we're creating and how we can see each other as real people and feel seen outside of just the work aspect.

There is the intentional element but balancing that with the organic parts I think is so key and what I know I need to work on when I'm being really task focused. So I just appreciate that we're able to balance both and still very much figuring it out. But I think that's the thread that we've seen throughout this episode is the balance of both is what makes our company work.

**Tobi:** And I think we inspire each other. I think April's even said that and she said it earlier maybe that we inspire each other to be better people. When I see you all out doing something or sharing something you're doing, I'm like, "I want to be that kind of person. I want to feel like I'm doing that kind of work or living in that way." And I know that you all inspire each other too, so I love that. Anything else anybody wants to share as we wrap up? It's been so good.

**Haley:** I'm so excited about the volunteer effort. I'd love to volunteer. And I love that we're all volunteering on the same day and it's just such a great

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way for us to fill our cups and give back. And then come back and then talking about getting, you know, sharing together, some things we're doing on a personal level. So I'm really, really excited about that and I love watching what everyone's doing and can't wait to hear how it goes for everyone.

**Tobi:** I agree, I love that so much too. And I think that something like that, same thing with some of our initiatives for giving everybody coaching, providing that for people. I think that's one of those things where people are always thinking in their own life. I need to give back more, or I need to take more care of my mental health, or I need to do this other thing in my life. And we try to create an atmosphere where they can do that within the workday. Because how many of us have time to do that outside of the workday? It just doesn't happen.

And those are the things that are always on that I should be doing list. And so that's even another, a little bit of a different way that I've said that before which is so exciting to think, especially when we're talking about women. And we know women are a lot of times taking the brunt of all kinds of household work and different responsibilities in our lives. And so instead of perpetuating the overworked, overwhelmed female we are like, "How can we use work hours and work money to help us do some of those things, self-care, and volunteer work, and mental health on the job?"

And nothing makes me happier than that we're doing that together. So, Nichol, yes.

**Nichol:** I just wanted to say that and I can see people saying that that sounds nice, but this would never work for my team. And so I just want people to realize it wasn't a perfect, and I'm sure you can speak to, where it was in the beginning and where it is now. The people that came and went, and then being intentional about the great people that you brought on. And so give yourself the room and the space to feel your way to success when it comes to your business. And also give your team that space as well and you will reach it.

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**Tobi:** Yeah, because we've been doing this now for going on two years, that we've been building. I mean I started project fail as part of my master life coach training in March, I guess, yeah, two Marches ago. So it'll be two years next March. And so it's been 18 months of us, and I'm sure I was thinking about it and trying things even prior to that. But we've been consciously working on this. And to your point, this is our first time to do the volunteer work. We've known we were going to do it for a year and a half but we're just now starting it.

So we don't even start everything on the first day. We don't hire everybody on the first day. We can't pay for all the things on the first day but we can build our way up to when we make x dollars or when we do this other thing, this is how we're going to earmark it, or use it, or this is going to be our practice. So I love that you said that because it's definitely an evolution. And people tend to look at like we know, someone's highlight reel and compare where they are now to where we are now. And we weren't always here. This has been two years.

And I'm sure, check back in two years from now and it'll be a totally different story too. So such a great point. Okay, well, unless anybody else is dying to share, this has been beautiful. I think you are all amazing incredible humans. It's such an honor and joy to get to work with you every day and for you all to trust me and care about the company as Loren said, like it's your own and I'm super grateful for that and for you being here, so thank you so much.

**April:** Well, thank you, thank you all.

**Loren:** Thank you.

**Sommer:** Thank you.

**Tobi:** I love you ladies, okay.

**April:** Big hugs.

**Tobi:** Hugs everyone, group hug, virtual group hug.



## Ep #190: From Me to We: A Conversation with Team Tobi

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Alright. Was that amazing? I just feel so warm and fuzzy as we say on the episode. I want to hug everybody. I'm so glad I've met a lot of these women in person but you all, we work remotely every week and we love each other and we care for each other. And it's not all rainbows, and daisies, and lovey dovey all the time. We're honest and direct. Sometimes it's hard.

Sometimes it's stressful. But we have fun and we enjoy each other.

And at the end of the day, we truly respect each other, because we're embodying these company values and we're living by a culture that we all believe in and I absolutely want that for you too. So if you want help building that, stay tuned just a little bit longer because very soon in just a couple of weeks or so, and you'll get some sneak peeks even before that if you follow us on social media.

But very soon we're going to be opening back up our Millionaire Mentorship program which is for businesses that are making multiple six figures, or seven figures, or wanting to have sustainable seven figure growth in their business, but want the freedom and the health, wealth and joy in the company culture like we've talked about today, they want that.

Because there's one thing, there's one version of a million dollar, seven figure business that is unsustainable and exhausting and feels like you're on the treadmill and I've been there. And in that one for me at least with my team, that's when where there was all the turnover, and chaos, and it was just highly chaotic and stressful. That's not what we're helping people build.

We're helping you build a business that really reclaims your time, and your freedom and it's a business that you're super proud of and that you enjoy and that you even have time away from. Because you have incredible people like these people that are part of my team, that allow you to have a life. That's what we want for you. If you want that too then you definitely want to stay tuned for the information on the Millionaire Mentorship. And if you just can't bear to wait any longer send me a DM on Instagram and let me know, just say, "Tobi, tell me more about Millionaire Mentorship."

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And we'll start that conversation with you. We'll make sure you're on the list to get all of the information when the cart opens and when all the stuff happens, and to see if you're a fit for that program so you can build this kind of a company culture and experience for you and some amazing people that could be on your team too.

Okay, friends, that's what I have for you now for this week. I think next week is thanksgiving and I'm going to have another treat for you. If you're in the US it's thanksgiving, I'll say that. And if it is, after you stuff yourself with turkey and you're tired of family, remember the *Design You* podcast and come back and listen to the episode because it's going to be another really fun one. And if you're not in the US and you're not having thanksgiving and it's just a plain old workday, then I hope you'll listen too. And I can't wait to see you then. I will see you very soon, 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.

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