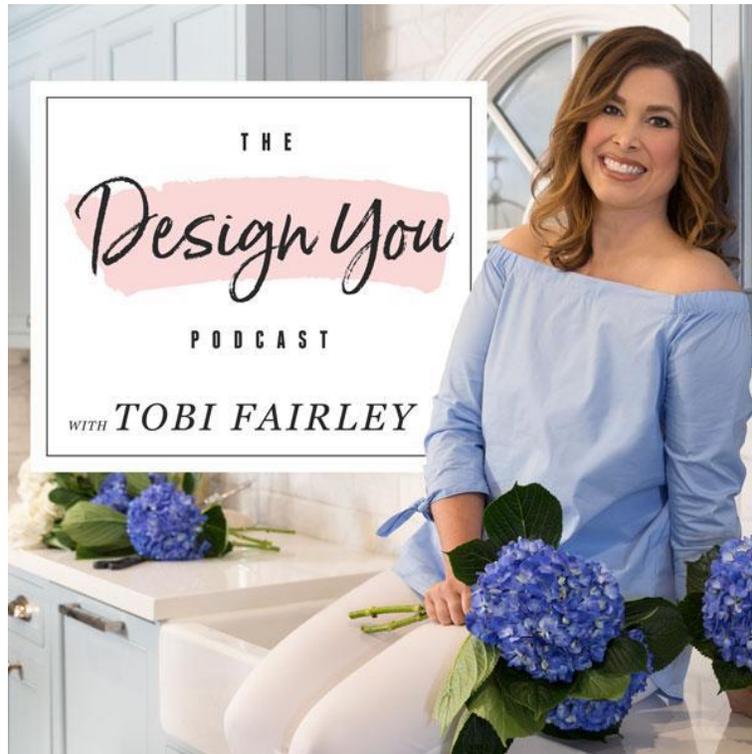


Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time



Full Episode Transcript

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Tobi Fairley

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Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time

You are listening to the *Design You* podcast with Tobi Fairley, episode number 214.

Welcome to the *Design You* podcast. A show where interior designers and creatives learn to say no to busy and say yes to more health, wealth and joy, here's your host, Tobi Fairley.

Hey friends, welcome to part four of the Creative Entrepreneur series. I hope you have had as much fun as I have talking about how we creatives show up in life and business. So far we've covered creative entrepreneurs and what holds us back most from business success, remember that list? I think there were 19 things and a few more. And then what mindsets get in our way in business and in life and what our money blocks look like and sound like.

So now it's time to tackle time. I often say that the two most important things that I've ever done to change my life and change the success in my business was learn to manage my thoughts and learn to manage myself with time. So, it's a little different then time management but manage me with regard to time.

And let's just be clear about that statement for a minute, of all the things I've done in my life, I've done a lot of things you all, of all the things I've done or learned these are the two most important. So, of all the things, that includes getting three degrees, having all sorts of experiences in business for 23 years. Starting three different versions of my business and growing each of them to a million dollar business. It includes all the books I've read, and the seminars I've attended, and the self-help gurus I've learned from, and the therapists, and coaches, and consultants I've hired.

And everything else I've ever invested in or done in my life, those two things, learning to manage my mind and learning to manage myself with regard to time are the two most important to my success both as a creative entrepreneur and also just as a human being. And they're related actually because the issues I had with time which were so painful, I never really

Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time

understood them at all until I learned how to understand my mind, until I understood my brain.

So, let's break this down in detail. Because of all the things that hold us creative entrepreneurs back, I think our thoughts about time, and the way we show up with time, and our thoughts about our schedules and our calendars, and how we interact with time. That one thing, time is really one of our biggest obstacles, in fact it may be the biggest one but it doesn't have to be. So, it starts, the problem that is, the problem starts with how we think of ourselves specifically and also kind of in general how we think about creatives especially when it comes to time.

So, I know, I know you, I'm one of you, I'm very similar to you so I know you've said things like this probably a million times about yourself and probably about other creatives too or creatives in general. You've said things like, "I'm not good with time or time management. I only like a paper calendar, they're so fun to write on. But I sure can't do any of those digital calendar things, or keeping my calendar on my phone, no, just not how I work."

We've also said things like, "I'm not good with sticking to a calendar. Being really scheduled stifles my creativity. It makes me feel trapped." That was my go to for years. My calendar or scheduling makes me feel trapped. We've also said things like, "Creatives just don't work that way", on a schedule that is. Or, "I hate time blocking or calendaring, I'm awful at it." Or we've said things like, "It's really fun at the beginning. I get my calendar all organized and I'm so excited for a few days and it looks so pretty and amazing. And I have all those little colored squares but yeah, I never stick to it."

Or we might say something like, "Well, the minute I get off even for a day then I start thinking how awful I am at this and I scrap the whole thing." We often also say things like, "I'm really bad at estimating how long things take." As if other people are good at that, but we say it all the time. "I'm

Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time

really bad at estimating how long things take, I always get that wrong and it just throws off my whole day.”

And this one we talked a little bit about recently, “I work best on a deadline or at the last minute. I’m really better when I just let myself do what I feel like most of the time. And then at the last minute I get super motivated and I crank everything out.” And maybe you’re like me, you’ve said things like, “Time is my enemy or time is my nemesis. I wake up every day and I’m already behind.” And you’ve for sure said, “If I only had more time in the day. I never have enough time in the day.”

And I know you’ve also said, “I’m terrible at follow through. I love starting things but not finishing them. What is wrong with me?” We’ve said them all. To be successful as a creative I need to be able to do what I feel like doing, not what’s on the schedule. I could go on, and on, and on. And I know you’ve uttered a whole lot of these and a whole lot of other things, thoughts and beliefs about time, and calendars, and schedules that really aren’t very helpful or positive, am I right?

In fact, I think most of us creatives think that time and creativity don’t mix. In a lot of ways, I would agree, we need space to be creative. And we also have to get things done. But would it surprise you if I said that it’s not time that is the problem? It’s a lot of our thoughts that are getting in the way of time. That is the issue. It’s always thoughts, it’s always our mind. So how do I know that for sure? Well, it’s because after years, and I mean years of struggling, and resisting, and wrestling with my calendar, and time management.

And people trying to help me and wanting to schedule for me which felt like the worst idea in the whole wide world because I knew they would schedule me for things I didn’t want to be scheduled for or somehow I’d be accountable to them. And it all sounded miserable but after years and years of struggling I finally figured out how to be successful with my time and not feel trapped. And that’s huge because freedom is one of my

Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time

biggest goals, it's one of my biggest values. And trapped and freedom are enemies, they're opposites.

But I learned how to manage myself with regard to time and not feel trapped but it took practice. And it took being really bad at it for a while. And it took me being willing to feel a whole bunch of negative emotions while sticking with what I had planned and not quitting. But here's the thing, those three things that we creative entrepreneurs never seem to want to do, we don't really like to practice. We don't like being bad at things, in fact we hate that. And we especially don't like feeling negative emotions and that's not just creatives. It's really just humans.

And why do we not like those things? Why do we not like practicing, or being bad at things, or feeling negative emotions? Well, it's because our perfectionism gets in the way. Our perfectionism gets in the way of beginner's mind, like being a beginner at something and enjoying being a beginner. Our perfectionism gets in the way of failing our way to success at things. But a lot of us really don't understand perfectionism and the problem with perfectionism.

Most of us think that being a perfectionist is mostly just about doing everything perfectly. And we don't always think that that's even a bad thing. In fact, we pride ourselves on our high standards. We sort of think of it as like a compliment to be a perfectionist. And if we do find a problem with perfectionism it's usually just that we wear ourselves out trying to do things so well. It can be a real challenge. So having super high standards and pushing ourselves too hard to reach them can look and feel a whole lot like hustling.

And for some of us that, the hustling is the main problem with perfectionism. And that's true, it really can be a problem. But here's what I want you to know. There's a much bigger problem with perfectionism. And it's what really impacts a whole lot of people and it's not just that we have super high standards. What really happens for most of us is that since we

Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time

only want to do things perfectly there's a giant risk of being imperfect every single time we try something.

And oftentimes especially when we're trying something new we don't even really believe that we'll be good at it or that we can succeed at it so we don't do it at all. We don't do anything. We don't even try. We hold ourselves small and we quit on ourselves or we even quit ahead of time before trying all the time. And it's all under the excuse of, well, I didn't do it right which really means I didn't do it perfectly so I quit.

And that is true more often than not for creatives that I see struggling with time blocking, or time management, or calendaring, or schedules, it is that, they don't want to not do it perfectly. So, to take this really even a step further, it's not even getting the calendaring, or the time blocking system or practice right or not getting it wrong that is the real problem.

The real problem is even a layer under that. It's that you don't want to feel the feelings that come up for you when you think you've done something wrong, or that you've failed at it, or that you've done it imperfectly. Because you don't like to be wrong ever. Your standards of success say this is not how we roll, creative. Mediocre is not okay with us. So, what you don't realize is perfectionism is really just our excuse to exit those negative emotions really quickly, or avoid them altogether. And in doing that we're really avoiding all the negative things we have to say about ourselves.

We're avoiding that mean girl and her thoughts, the self-criticism, the self-doubt, the self-loathing that comes up when we aren't perfect. You all, that, that criticism, those feelings, the self-doubt, that is what we're trying to avoid even more than doing things in a mediocre way, even more than failing. It's not just the failing at something, it's how we're going to talk to ourselves about it and what feelings we're going to create that we want to avoid at all cost because it feels awful.

So, we use our perfectionism and our unwillingness to fail or to be a beginner as a way to not try things all the time. And it's the perfect, pun intended, it's the perfect excuse to not put our imperfect selves out in the

Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time

world. Perfectionism is the perfect excuse. And when we quit this way all the time on ourselves, when we choose to believe that we're bad with time, or with calendaring, or sticking to a plan, or follow through, our boundaries, or all the things that are related to time then it's so easy to quit.

But the truth is that choosing to not plan and choosing to procrastinate is a way to keep from feeling our negative feelings, like shame, or insecurity, or fear. So, it's this tricky little kind of wool that we're pulling over our own eyes. We think we're not planning because we told ourselves we're bad at planning. But really choosing not to plan is just keeping those negative feelings at bay. Crazy. Crazy how tricky our brains are about this stuff. Who knew that what we thought was a problem with time was really just avoidance of shame, or guilt, or fear?

It's really just avoidance of how horribly we talk to ourselves when we don't do stuff what we think is exactly right. And we will go to all sorts of lengths to avoid those feelings but one of the easiest avoidance tactics is just saying, "Yeah, we tried it, we tried to fix it, I tried to use time blocking. I tried to manage my time, it just didn't work so I gave that up." I see it every day in my Design You program.

But I also see the other people, the ones who push through the resistance to feeling these feelings, the ones who practice just allowing those negative feelings to be there while continuing to use the time management tools and system. And not quitting just because the negative feelings were there. I see that too and it's amazing. But let's be honest, I see way more of the people quitting because they don't want to feel negative emotions. So, let's dig into this a bit more.

Now, I've spoken about how I do time blocking before way back in episode 54, I think. I talk a lot about how I think about time and this tool I created called Zero Balanced Time Blocking. Or sometimes I call it 24 Hour Time Blocking, hence the name of our time blocking program, 24 To Freedom that you can get in Design You. But what it is, is about four or five years ago, maybe longer now, I created this time management system for myself.

Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time

And it's one of the things that we do teach in the program but we teach it because it was transformational for me.

And the way the system works is that you use all 24 hours of your day and you organize it in these fun, creative, friendly, color coded blocks to help you become aware of how you're using your time. And also help you get all the things that really matter to you that you really either think would make a difference in your business, or in your life, or that you value, how to get those things into your schedule. Even though you typically feel there's not enough time in the day for the things that really matter.

So, this is my goal for you, is to help you align with your values, to do the stuff that really matters and get that stuff in your schedule. But one of the immediate issues that creatives have with my system is that they feel like it's extreme. It sounds so extreme. As a creative I just can't imagine mapping every single hour for a 24 hour day. And they don't really understand the reason we do that. In fact, a lot of people don't even get to the system because they already have a preconceived notion about how that would feel constraining or they'd feel trapped.

And I get it, I felt that way too. So, before they even start there are all sorts of thoughts and feelings about why this approach doesn't align with us, and our thoughts, and ourselves as creatives. But I want to tell you that it does. There are also a lot of assumptions besides those thoughts about how you feel about the concept of 24 hour time blocking. But there's also a lot of assumptions that are incorrect, that our members, before they've done the system, assume is my goal for you with this tool.

It's like, Tobi, yeah, she just wants me to be super duper productive 24/7. And she really wants me to change how I work and who I am as a creative. And yeah, I'm not here for that. I don't want to be less spontaneous or less fun. And here's the thing, you all, that is not my agenda at all. In fact, I don't even have really an agenda for you other than showing you what you're doing with your time. So, it's not to finally make you start doing a bunch of stuff you hate or turn you into someone you're not.

Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time

And that's exactly what I was afraid of myself when I was always resisting figuring out how to work with time instead of against it. I was always resisting that. So, I created a system that doesn't do that to us. I wish that all I had to do was make up a system and suddenly, like a time blocking tool, and suddenly we were these magical humans that can do all the things we hate. And I'm pretty good but I'm not that good. And honestly those are all the exact opposites of the purpose of this system.

So, do you know what the real purpose of the tool I created is? Just one purpose and it's a really simple one. Anybody get, no? Say it to yourself right now if you're walking or in the car, what do you think it is? Did any of you say awareness? That's it, awareness, just awareness, awareness of how you spend your time, awareness of what things you keep starting and stopping, awareness of what all you procrastinate on all the time. And this isn't even really to get you to stop procrastinating, so hang with me for a minute.

Awareness of your bedtime and how much sleep you're getting because if you're tired all the time, that matters. Awareness about how much time you spend on yourself, and in self-care, and with your health, and with your family. And all the things that really can make a difference in your life, the reason is not really even to make you finish things or to stop procrastinating. If you want to stop procrastinating or start finishing more things then certainly you can get traction with this tool.

But I don't have an agenda for you other than my real goal being to help you notice how you're spending your time. And notice all the things you're trying to force yourself to do and be that you don't really want to do or be. And notice that instead of continuing to procrastinate on things, maybe it would serve you more to just remove those things altogether because you don't really want to do them. Or at the very least, if they get to stay they don't stay on your calendar, maybe you delegate them, or you hire someone.

Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time

But the most interesting part of what happens when people start trying to use time blocking is it's not me trying to change you but they are the ones who are trying to use this tool to make them be less of themselves.

Because at some level, if not a lot of levels, as a creative and a perfectionist you think that how you are as a person is bad or wrong. Or at least as businessperson you think you should be different especially if you want to be successful and especially with regard to your time.

And you think there surely must be some magical system to make wearing all those hats easy and doable, even the hats you hate. So, I see people take the system that I've created or other systems and start trying to be perfect at the system. And the perfectionism is so easy to spot. When I take a look at the calendars people create, they start the system and they're like, "Here, Tobi, look at my calendar." Or they'll use, even in Design You, we have a feature called critiques. And one of the thing you can get critiqued is your time blocking, your calendar.

And so, when we look at those calendars the schedules that people create with all the pretty, pretty blocks and colors are the least realistic, the least enjoyable versions of a calendar that I could possibly imagine. And they're the least aligned with who the person really is. When we look at those calendars the days are jam packed with meeting after meeting.

And every single block is filled to the brim with a ton of work, only a fraction of which is even going to get completed in that amount of time, hence the I'm terrible at estimating. Which really just means, I'm not really terrible at procrastinating but I feel some kind of pressure to get so much done in the world that I'll just cram it all into this block and surely I can pull that off. Knowing full well we're not being honest with ourselves.

And when I look at those calendars that only a fraction of the stuff is getting done and they're cram packed, and filled to the brim, guess what's not in there? There is not a single ounce of fun in those calendars at all. There are typically no breaks, no naps, no watching TV, not even any lunchbreaks or bathroom breaks. There's no room for checking email or

Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time

chatting with your friends, or with your mom, or your spouse, or your coworkers. There's no time for doing nothing.

Hey, we're humans. How many of us do nothing at least at some point every day? Raise your hand. All of us. But it's not in the calendar. There's no time for procrastinating. There's no time for scrolling Instagram. And you may think this sounds crazy but the way I teach you to become aware of how you use your time, not to change it but just to be honest with yourself is really accurately recording what you really do with your time. And let's be real, you all, we are all going to do all of those things like watching TV, and taking naps, and doing nothing, and scrolling.

And just pretending otherwise and leaving them off the calendar doesn't make us not do them. It just makes us lie to ourselves about the calendar. And it also makes us quit time blocking or whatever system we're using because these perfectionist schedules they always show up, every time I see a creative, a perfectionist creative start to try to change how they show up with regard to time. I even see things like people saying, "I'm going to wake up at 6:00am." Even though they know they hate getting up at 6:00am and that their perfect time to get up is 7:30.

And I see them put all of these rigorous exercise routines and all these things that they think they should be doing. The perfectionist calendar is really full of shoulds. And it is so unrealistic, it will have people working eight to ten hours a day even though they know that they're going to get tired after five or six and scrap those last four blocks.

It's as if the time blocking system or tool is a weapon that we are suddenly going to use to hold ourselves hostage to become some perfect human. One that would fit all the hustle culture and success standards that our world tells us we should hit if we really want to make something of ourselves. And us creatives, yeah, we're the ones for sure who the world thinks needs corralling the most because we can't be trusted to be successful on our own. We're the starving artist.

Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time

We are the people who like to be free and fly by the seat of our pants yet these scheduling systems when we try to use them, there is no flying by the seat of our pants in the calendar to be found. No wonder we don't think we're good at time management. No one other than a computer or a robot can operate the way we try to operate when we make these perfectionist calendars. And even trying it for a day, much less a week feels absolutely awful.

But again, if we can believe that there's a right and a wrong way of time management and that this is the right way then we're going to quit every single time. And that's exactly what we believe. People tell me all the time, I'm not doing my time management right. I'm bad at time management. And every time they say they're bad at it, I say, "Do you notice you're believing there's a right and wrong way to do it?" Because here's the thing, this system really did change my life but it only changed my life when I changed my mindset about time and the tool and myself.

That's why I say those two things go hand in hand. And if you heard my episode recently on black and white thinking you may recall the trouble with thinking there's a right and a wrong way of doing things, this binary thinking. Because any time our brain believes we have to get something right which is code for perfect the chances of us quitting the tool or the habit when we get it wrong is really, really high.

Think about any time you've tried to be perfect, even in other areas of your life, maybe on a diet, or eating plan, or getting up early, or some other goal that you had, going to the gym. When you try to be perfect but then you go off the plan because life happened or you went on a vacation, or you felt sick one day or whatever, you just procrastinated, you didn't follow through. When you did something 'wrong', what happens? Well, first you judge yourself and berate yourself like the mean girl that we talked about earlier, mean girl or boy.

And secondly, after you make yourself feel sufficiently horrible you think, fuck it, forget it. I've already screwed this thing up for the day, or week, or

Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time

whichever, I might as well just eat whatever I want. Or I might as well just sleep in, whatever the opposite is of what we were planning to do. And then we say something like, “I’ll start over tomorrow, or Monday, or next week.” We pick a time.

And after a few rounds of that cycle of I did something wrong, I beat myself up, I quit for the day or the week, guess what happens? We typically quit altogether and then we blame both ourselves and the tool. Sometimes we don’t even blame the tool. Sometimes we just blame ourselves. That’s what blows my mind about diet culture, nobody blames the diet. We’re just like, “I’m horrible at this.” But here’s the thing, it’s not the diet or the tool, it’s the perfectionism.

When we think I am terrible at this, and this stupid tool, or plan, or diet doesn’t work, because I’m not perfect, it always leads us to thinking things like, well, I’ve tried everything. And I guess I’m just not that kind of person who can, fill in the blank, stay on a diet, or an eating plan, go to the gym, manage my time. Whatever thing you were trying to do perfectly, if you drop it in the blank, you’re going to believe yourself every single time. I’m not the kind of person who can do that.

But there’s one thing we haven’t tried, you all, there’s one thing, do you know what it is? There’s one thing we haven’t tried. We haven’t tried giving up perfectionism. We haven’t tried giving up the black and white thinking that perfectionism brings. We haven’t tried giving up on trying to do it right. We haven’t given that up.

And I have to tell you, when I finally stopped trying to get time and time management right and I made the goal, just the awareness of how I was using my time and why I was using it that way. And really just becoming clear on why and how I was showing up every day realistically, honestly, that’s when everything changed. So, here’s your big aha for this episode, time is not the real enemy of creativity, perfectionism is.

And for some reason when we creatives start trying to use time management tools, including the one I’ve created, we start from a place of

Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time

perfectionism which never works. So, I agree with you, that kind of managing yourself with time it never works and it never will. So, what would it take for you my creative entrepreneur friend to be willing to be bad at managing yourself around time at least for a while, if not forever?

And what would it take for you to be willing to feel the feeling of being bad at it and to not buffer those feelings or cover up those feelings and not quit on using the system? You may have heard the idea that to master anything, to become really, really good, like Yo-Yo Ma or at the violin, or anybody that's like a star athlete. You've heard that to get to that level you need to practice for a minimum of 10,000 hours. Now, think about that for a moment, how good do you think you would be at time management or time blocking if you were willing to practice it for 10,000 hours?

And during those 10,000 hours, a lot of those 10,000 hours, you're going to be off track. You're going to suck at it. You're going to estimate time blocks terribly wrong. You're not going to complete things in the time you planned. You're going to have to move things and reschedule things. There's going to be tons of procrastination, and whining, and complaining, and beating yourself up. It's going to be messy as hell when we're learning. It's messy when we're practicing.

In fact, it may surprise you but it's going to be messy forever because we're humans but what if you were willing to be messy and not quit. Most of us don't arrive at getting really good at time management ever. There's no such thing as perfect, you all. We just learn to drop the criticism over time and use systems like my 24 To Freedom system as a tool, as an aid, as an assistant, as an awareness exercise in helping us show up in the way we want to, including embracing our messiness, and our creativity, and our unique personalities.

But creating more success than ever because we don't quit on ourselves. We're not bad at time management any differently than anybody else. We just quit so we don't have to be bad. And it's the quitting that keeps us from our goals. When we're willing to be honest with ourselves, when we're

Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time

willing to allow ourselves to be humans, when we are willing to put on our calendar what we really spend our time doing. Then and only then will we ever really want to use a time management system to support us being ourselves, our true selves and becoming our best selves.

Or if you don't even want to be your best self, I kind of don't want to be my best self. It kind of blows people's minds when I say I don't want to fulfill my potential. But my potential is huge and that shit's exhausting. But I do want to be great. And if I want to be great, allowing myself to be messy with my time management system but to be honest, that's when I become really great. That's when we get good with time as creatives because we think differently about time. That's it.

Okay friends, that wraps our four part series on Creative Entrepreneurs. I think and I hope that I've blown all of our minds collectively for another four weeks in a row. And I bet there were a lot of moments where you were like, "Damn, Tobi, how are you always in my brain? How is it like you're talking directly to me?" And yeah, it's because you and I, we have a lot in common. I know us really well, guess why? Because I use a lot of tools for awareness about my time, about my brain, I really, really know us very well.

But I hope that in this series you've really allowed yourself to consider what it would be like to stop trying to change yourself so much and rather lean into all your younice, as I call it, as a creative entrepreneur, you, uniquely you. And awareness of who we are, and how we think, and what is getting in our way of our goals and our dreams, it can be the most powerful tool for making all of our dreams come true, yes, awareness, put that at the top of your list. Awareness is gold.

Okay friends, that's what I have for you this week. I will see you next week with another great episode of The Design You Podcast, I promise to blow your mind and mine but I'll see you then, same time, same place. 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

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

Ep #214: The Creative Entrepreneur Series Part 4: Creatives and Time

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