

Ep #272: Is Perfectionism Paralyzing You?



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Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 272.

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, I am here with my first solo show in a while. And I'm going to keep this one really short and sweet because I'm about to fly to Atlanta market to buy some more adorable things for shop Fairley Fancy, our new store. You all, if you haven't checked out Fairley Fancy, it is adorable. We have so much amazing stuff online and in our tiny boutique. And I will, I promise, I told you I will be coming back and telling you more about the whole process of setting up an ecommerce shop and what that's been like.

I am getting so many questions from people right now about that from designers, "How did you do it? What was it like? How much did it involve? How expensive was it? How much work was it?" All the things. So I promise that's coming soon when I get a second. But today, I wanted to talk to you about perfectionism because this conversation has come up multiple times this week alone. It comes up all the time. I think it's one of the things that I coach creatives on the absolute most.

And I wanted to give us just a short reminder here of what that is doing to our businesses and our lives and how it's really holding us back. So here's what you need to know. And you may have heard me say this before but it needs to be said again. Perfectionism is the enemy of progress. And perfectionism is the enemy of creativity, you all. When we create, think about it, if you were painting something you aren't afraid or you may be afraid.

But if you're being creative you go ahead and put that yellow swish of paint on there to see if it works or not, and you're not afraid of failure. You're like, "Let's see what happens when I do this?" And you may say, "Ooh, no, don't like it, let's paint over it." But you're willing to try. You have progress. You put that stroke of paint on the canvas. But what I see you doing over and

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over again is the opposite. Because perfectionism is the enemy of a whole lot of things but especially progress. And that's what I want to talk about today.

I have always been so fascinated to see that people become very frustrated when they're not getting results, not having clients, not making money, not growing their businesses. Yet because of perfectionism they do nothing about it. They become paralyzed. They stay stuck. And it's really confusing because you think to yourself, I want this so badly. I think about this all the time. It's all I think about. But you're taking zero action. And I think one of the really confusing parts is that you're also taking zero action while thinking a ton which is really practicing what I would call passive action.

You're not putting anything out in the world, you're not interacting with people. You're just thinking and thinking and thinking and thinking yourself right into paralysis and you're exhausted by all of the thinking. Because most of the time, manual labor is not what burns us out, the thinking is. And thinking is so deceiving because it feels like you're doing something about your problems, it's worrying or second guessing, just those thought loops over and over and over that you're going through and asking yourself questions and considering things.

And should I tweak it? And will this work? And will people like it? And will they judge me? And will I look silly and dumb? And what if it fails? And what if nobody buys it, and all the things. Most people tell me that they have tried everything and nothing works. Yet, I go to their social media and there's no post. I go to their website and they haven't launched anything. They haven't put their course out in the world or written that book or launched a new service.

They have not gotten their work published. They haven't pitched themselves to magazines. They haven't just shown up. And they think they have done everything but they have just thought everything. You have thought and thought and thought and tried nothing or almost nothing,

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because again, perfectionism is the enemy of progress. Many of us were taught to believe that we should do something right or don't do it at all.

And a lot of us who have this grand vision and this high standard of what things should look like in our homes and in our work and in photography. It's even the next level, it's not do it right or don't do it at all. It's do it perfectly or don't do it at all. And being taught this was a huge disservice to us. I am not advocating for going half-ass. Don't hear me and think she wants me to do a terrible job and put it out in the world. That's not what I'm saying.

We love to say in my company that we only whole-ass over here. There's no half-assing, just whole-assing. But there's a difference in the whole-assing and perfectionism. Because seriously, in my company and on my team we are willing to show up imperfectly, show up with a version or an iteration of something knowing that we will continue to tweak it. We will continue to elevate it. We will continue to evolve it over time. But if we're never willing to put out the imperfect version, the version that has a lot of amazing things done with it but it doesn't feel finished. It's not where we could take it.

If we're not willing to put that version out in the world then there's nothing to tweak. There's nothing to evolve if you haven't started somewhere. And I get so many questions about the things that I'm doing and creating and how I do it all, just like I was saying at the beginning of this episode. So many questions about the shop and the store and the ecommerce and all of the things and how I do it so perfectly they think. But it's fascinating because it shows me that our human brains are so much harder on ourselves than other people.

I mean I was just coaching someone yesterday who said, "I saw that amazing photoshoot that you did for the shop with all the clothes and all the things." And I said, "You know when I did that, you know when we did that photoshoot, we did it on June 1st, the day the shop launched." And then by that afternoon my photographer was sending me all the files for social

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media so I could put it out that day. You all, we were scrambling. We were running out the time and we just did it anyway.

We pulled it off, we said, “It will be as good as it will be.” And it looks amazing. But we could have procrastinated or postponed if we were in perfectionist mode, and we were not. I see other designers and business owners looking from the outside, seeing what I'm doing and believing it's amazing and perfect, you all, it's not, it's neither of those things. It's good, sometimes it's even great. But we're always on that path of let's just get started and then we'll keep making it better.

And when it comes to others taking the same path, they don't, they get stuck. And I may be talking to you when I say others. It may be that you won't take the same path, you stay stuck. The voice in your head is judging you and judging your creations and it's so loud in your brain that you never start. I see so many people tweaking things over and over and over again before they put it out in the world.

Now, I'm not saying I always go with my first draft of everything, but these days, sometimes pretty close because I don't want to start tweaking things and take something away that my audience would have preferred. So I say to people all the time, “Why are you continuing to tweak that to death instead of putting it out and letting your audience tell you if anything needs to be tweaked, if anything's missing, if they would like to see something else?”

I was just telling one of my clients this week who's creating a course, this very thing, “Why are you changing all of those things before you even see what people want, before you even launch? What if you launch and your customers come back and say they want something that was the version you had two times ago. And you've already changed it and now you go and change it back.” That's a waste of time. It's so inefficient. Perfectionism and that tendency to tweak and tweak and tweak, again, tweak the life out of something before we even put it out in the world is so fascinating.

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And as I just said, so inefficient and so ineffective, so if that is you and you're tweaking the life out of everything and thinking everything to death but not launching anything. I really want you to think what would I have to believe or think or practice thinking to be willing to go live or put this out in the world and let the world tell me what they like and don't like. I think for one, you would have to believe that request from other people is not a criticism of you and your work or the quality of your work. But usually we do the opposite.

Someone gives us constructive criticism or even just criticism and we immediately make it mean we are stupid, we are bad, we are inept, our thing is awful. We should be embarrassed. We should be ashamed. How could we have done that? We make it mean something about us instead of just making it mean, interesting they have a preference that we add this other thing in. Or they would have liked to see it this other way. Okay, we'll keep that in mind or maybe we'll tweak it or maybe there's a 3rd person or 15th person or 50th person that has said that same thing.

So now we have evidence to know that it's time to tweak. Here is the thing, none of that negative self-talk about you and you being stupid or you being bad or you needing to be ashamed is true. I like to just think that their requests are simply their preferences and everybody is different. We all have our own preferences. And I also like to remember that just because somebody asks for something doesn't even mean I have to tweak anything to accommodate them, I can if I want to.

I can consider it now or in the future but their opinions and their suggestions and their preferences don't mean anything about me or my work. It doesn't make my work not good. It may just mean that my work is for a different audience. If they prefer it this way and I did it a different way, I can keep it exactly how it is and go find the people who prefer it that way.

You all, everything you want, everything, everything you dream of all the money you want to make, the business you want to build, all of that is on the other side of perfectionism. It comes with progress and perfectionism is killing your progress. You going live on a reel or a TikTok and not being

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great at it, is the very thing that will start to sell your services and build a following. The world doesn't even want perfection anymore. I don't know if they ever did, maybe at some level. And some people of course still love the inspired version of seeing something look perfect.

But most people want to do business with people and want to interact with real people. So most of the time on social media, if you're trying to be perfect you're actually holding people at arm's length or even pushing them away. And people, myself included, find you so courageous and so inspiring when you show up. I hear so many people say, "I don't want to do those silly dances on TikTok. I don't want to be goofy and silly on TikTok or reels."

You know what, when I ask myself the question, what kind of content do I like on reels and TikTok? It always includes some of the stuff that makes me belly laugh because people are courageous enough to be silly and to show up and to have a good time and to not take themselves so seriously, you all. So ask yourself, what kind of content do I even enjoy? And why am I afraid to show up in that way?

You are the thing in the way of your dreams and life is so much more fun to go live when you're willing to show up with all your imperfections whether it's on Instagram or launching a course or launching a new service offering or something completely different, writing a book. Because done feels so damn good and staying stuck feels absolutely awful. And beating ourselves up with our thoughts over and over again, that feels even worse than awful. It feels like self-abuse, honestly a lot of times and it's all optional to you.

You can just decide to stop that thought loop, to stop those narratives, to stop picking yourself apart because that is what is creating the procrastination. Honestly, showing up imperfectly doesn't feel any worse than beating ourselves up. It may feel a little different. It may feel a little more vulnerable at first, a little more exposed when you put yourself out there and are waiting to see if people like you or not. But guess what, if you're ever going to go live, you have to feel that anyway.

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So why wouldn't you just rip the band-aid off and feel that sooner than tweaking things seven billion times and then still having to go through the will they like me part because that part never changes. So the more you practice showing up imperfectly, the more you practice launching way sooner than you would like to or showing up way sooner than you feel ready, the less and less fear you will have about it, you will practice and become good at showing up.

Okay, friends that's it for you today, that's my quick public service announcement for the week. But if you do struggle with perfectionism, if it is stopping you from your dreams, if it is holding you back from showing up on Instagram or writing that book or reaching out to a client you would love to work with and pitching to them and telling them they are your dream client and you want to work with them. If any of that is being stopped because of perfectionism and fear of failure then I want you to do one thing.

I want you to head over to Instagram and I want you to send me a DM about it @tobifairley. Because I want to hear from you. I want to connect with you over this and I want to hear exactly what it is that you're thinking that you're telling yourself that you're afraid to do. And I want to know what the thing is that you dream of, that's being held back by this perfectionism. Because that thing is just on the other side. It's just right there almost within your reach and all you've got to do is kick perfectionist to the curb.

Now, easier said than done, but it absolutely can be done. So I want to hear from you. DM me and tell me all the things. Okay friends, that's what I have for you today. I am off to Atlanta market with my daughter and my mom, my two favorite people on the planet. We're going to go search for some more fabulous fun things for Fairley Fancy. And if you haven't already, head over on Instagram or TikTok or both and follow us. You can follow us @shopfairleyfancy.

And if you're a designer, we have a very exciting trade program coming for you later this month. So we're putting the final touches on that right now, so stay tuned for that because it's got a big, exciting perk that I think you are all going to love that you won't expect, so that's in the works. But I'm off to

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market so I'll see you really soon, in fact I'll see you here next week, same time, same place. Bye for now you all.

Thanks for listening to *The Design You Podcast*, and if you're an interior designer or creative looking to uplevel your business, I have something for you. It's my Build a Better Business guide, because burnout, rampant undercharging and the feast and famine cycle are epidemic in the design industry. And there's a better way to run your business.

So head to tobifairley.com/betterbusiness and get my manifesto and guide that will have you on your way to a business with more ease, more joy and more money. That's tobifairley.com/betterbusiness.