

Ep #281: How to Leverage Storytelling in Your Business with Jude Charles



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Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 281.

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.

Okay, friends, by the time you're listening to this, I survived the college move in of my daughter and my niece. And you may be enjoying right about now seeing all the fun things we did to their dorm, so much fun, so exciting, we loved it. I'm sharing that over on my Tobi Fairley Instagram, just really adorable. And I know they're going to have a great time because college is the most fun time ever. I went for nine years. I stretched it out for a long time, but ultimately it all became part of the vision. And that is exactly what we're talking about in today's episode.

I have my new friend Jude Charles on the show today. I've been getting to know him for the last several months. As you'll hear on the show, we've been trying to connect and get this recorded for a while, but I'm so glad that it finally came together. You're going to learn about him, his video production company, the way he thinks, why his why is at the core of what he does. And he'll teach you how to think about that too.

And I think you'll just be inspired because every time I spend time with him, I am inspired to tap back into the next version of myself, the best version of myself. And I know that's going to happen for you, too. So enjoy this episode with Jude Charles. I hope you'll think differently about the way you present yourself to the world, and I'll see you in just a little bit at the end of the episode.

Tobi: Hey, Jude, welcome to *The Design You Podcast*. This one has kind of been a long time coming, but we're finally recording this episode and I'm so happy about it, so welcome.

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Jude: Tobi, thank you for having me, yeah, it's been a long time coming, but I know it's going to be a great conversation so definitely looking forward to it.

Tobi: I think it always works out that when I try to connect with somebody over and over again to get them on the podcast and get things recorded. It's beautiful that it almost happened on purpose because some story will come up or some piece or part will come up that wouldn't have even been known had we recorded six months ago, when we started having this conversation, or however, a year ago, however long ago that was. So I agree, we're going to have some magic that comes up today I think.

Jude: Yeah, I agree too. Yeah, I think it's been, I almost want to say it's been a year, until you said it, I don't think I realized how long it's been, but I think it's been just about that long. And truthfully, I think us sitting here today is a part of the conversation, part of what we'll talk about today is tenacity. And I think it's just the ability to keep showing up, to keep saying, "No, we're going to make this happen. One way or another we're going to make this happen." And I think that's a big part of that conversation today.

Tobi: Yeah, I love that. Okay, so for those people who haven't heard of you, haven't met you, haven't found you on other podcasts, because I mean, hey, they have had a chance because you have been the podcast king for a few years. Which, again, is about tenacity, but in case they missed you or just kind of forgot some of the details, why don't you give us an intro of who you are and a little about your story?

Jude: Yeah. So at 17 years old, I sat in the back of a TV production classroom. And my teacher at the time, Mrs. Donnelly, she was the teacher of video production, and she decided to teach me everything that she knew about video production. So filming, editing, how to produce a story, all those things. And then at the end of my junior year of high school, she says to me, "Jude, you're really talented at video production, you should start a

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business.” I had no idea what it meant to start a business, to be an entrepreneur.

I am the youngest of 10 children. My father worked as a construction worker. My mom worked at a chair factory. But on the following day that she said that to me, May 5th, 2006, I’ll never forget it, Toby. She said to me, “Here, here’s this yellow envelope.” And she handed me this yellow envelope and when I looked inside of this yellow envelope was my very first set of business cards. That was 17 years ago. And today that is the same business I’m running today. It’s a video production business where I help entrepreneurs tell their story, bring their stories to life.

I am a filmmaker and storyteller, and yes, occasionally I’m on a podcast every now and then, but that’s how I got started and that’s how I’m sitting here with you today.

Tobi: I love that so much. Okay, so before we get into the what it takes to be sitting here 17 years later I want to know a little bit more and have our audience know a little bit more of what you mean, filmmaker, video producer, helping people tell their stories. What does that mean?

Jude: So that means as entrepreneurs we have this origin story, sometimes of how we got started. I just told you a story about Mrs. Donnelly and handing me the business cards. What will happen oftentimes is I will meet an entrepreneur who wants to tell their story, who wants to market and promote themselves better, they want to elevate their brand. And what I do is literally just, I put a camera in front of them, I interview them about who they are, what they’re about, and then I’ll also be a fly on the wall and film them.

So we have a good friend, LuAnn Nigara, who I recently filmed a docuseries for, three-part docuseries. I followed her for six months behind the scenes of her meeting audience members who have listened to the podcast or speaking on stage when she’s speaking on stage. I’ve even

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spent time with her and her family in New Jersey, we were filming her spending time with Vinnie and her kids.

And so that's what that means to be a filmmaker, at least on my end, as specialized in creating documentaries for entrepreneurs. These documentaries are used to just help an entrepreneur show other people who they really are and what they're about.

Tobi: That's so good. And why do we need that? Why do we have so much trouble? Because I think we do have trouble and I think we do need it, but why do we have so much trouble showing the world who we actually are or the parts that they want to hear? Because I think it has something to do with Instagram and just the design industry in general, we've been so conditioned to show the highlight reel or the smoking mirrors. But how do you break down, kind of get beyond that wall and why is that important?

Jude: Yeah. So in the design industry it's all about polish. You have to look perfect and things have to be perfect. Where life isn't perfect, life is messy. And there are these vulnerable moments that happen in our lives that allow us to have the experiences that we have. that keeps us going. So I'll give you an example and again you'll kind of understand the theater of the mind, when you hear this story you'll be able to then see this is different, Jude is different.

This was about 2011, I woke up early one morning to the sounds of chains hitting the ground. And it had always been a nightmare for me to hear these chains hitting the ground. Well, I jumped up out of bed, ran to the front window, when I looked outside, it was a tow truck driver coming to repossess my car for the second time in eight months. I went back in my room, sat on the edge of the bed, my head in my hands and I'm thinking, you know what, at this point I had been in business for five years, I've given it a good five year run. I'm still in my early 20s.

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I could maybe go back to school because I had decided not to go to college in order to run this business full-time. And as I'm sitting there in this soup of anxiety I get a phone call from a client that I'd been working with. Her name is Keyshia Dior. I had been filming with Keyshia. She started a cosmetic company, built it from the ground up, but I had been filming the behind the scenes of it. We put out the documentary a year prior to this phone call.

And she calls me in excitement and she's like, "Jude, Jude, you won't believe it. You won't believe it." I'm like, "What happened, Keyshia?" And she said, "I just got off the phone with my accountant and he said we did it. We made \$1 million, we crossed over the seven figure mark." Now, Tobi, for context, I at the time had only gotten paid \$3,000 to do this documentary. Keyshia had made \$1 million. I was struggling to make \$20,000 a year, five years in business, she had made \$1 million in one year in business.

And in that moment I had two different routes I could go down, two different lenses I was looking at. One, this could be proof that you know what, maybe I'm not good at what I do. Here's a client that has made \$1 million in one year, here's proof of that. Or here's proof that I have created something valuable, I just need to learn how to charge enough for it. I decided to go down the second route, which is going back to learn marketing and sales, to understand how do I communicate value and vision to a client so that they will pay me more than I would actually want to be paid.

Stories like that are important because it tells you so much more about me than just this is a filmmaker who does videos for clients. No, this is someone who understands what it means to struggle in business. This is someone who understands what it looks like to persevere and have a different perspective. That is so important when you're sitting across from a client for them to understand not just what you do.

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There are many other people that can do what you do theoretically, but they can't be who you are, even if you have a team that's working under you, you are still the leader of that team. You are still the person that put that team together, that dream team together. And it's because of that, then they will decide to invest and work with you.

Tobi: Yeah, I love that so much. And every time that we talk, which has been multiple times, not yet until today on podcasts. Those were just something you and I were privy to but you really pushed me to think at a different level. You've asked me questions about who am I or what's important to me or what gets me up in the morning or what makes me do what I do, all of those things which I think are such important questions. And I think a lot of times you and I have come back to this idea of, as Simon Sinek said, it starts with why. But we've also talked about how that has become a little buzzword.

It has become a little bit, sometimes things that catch on because they're so true, end up becoming a little desensitized to them because they become overused. And we think we know our why but I don't know that we actually, a lot of people stop and know their why. And we're going to get into a minute, one of the things that you're really focused on is helping entrepreneurs have just this relentless, unwavering courage to keep going forward, just like you did in that moment when your car was being repossessed.

But I know that that starts with why, but I want to hear you talk about what that even means when you say you've got to know your why and why the why is so important. Because I think we get disconnected from our whys a lot of times and if we're not connected to it, we can have unwavering courage, we're going to give up, we're going to quit.

Jude: Yeah, it's hard to dig deep into your why. I think a lot of people aren't able to do it just because it takes a lot of thought and it takes time to slow down to say, "Okay, this is why." But why is it important to know your why?

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That's the deeper motivation. That's what keeps you going when you're facing obstacles that almost seem unbearable and it is that why when you find it that you hold on to it. It's that why that helps you even continue with your team. If they're teammates that are having a hard time, why do you care to show up for them?

How I go about doing that, so there's a couple of different ways I do it in my personal life and then I'll talk about also how I do it with clients. In my personal life I take two months off every year, it used to be November, December. It now is June and December, which is a much better cadence than November, December was because I would race to the end of the year in November and be completely burnt out and take a full month to decompress.

But the reason that I take that time off in June and December, I ask myself a set of questions, and sometimes those questions are, what do you want to stop doing? Or are you living out your purpose? And If you are, great, where is the proof of that, where is the evidence? If you're not, what's distracting you from living out your purpose? Other questions I might ask is what are three ways that you've personally developed? Because I believe strongly in personal development, it's not just about making money, it's also who are you as a human being.

The question is important because otherwise you flail around in life and you kind of run in a circle and not realizing you repeat the same patterns and not realizing it was really all along, I just need to understand why I was doing something. In 2020, I burned out. I had been in business at that point, 14 years, but I burned out to a point that my body physically gave out. I woke up one morning, my heart was racing, teeth clenched, sweating, but I could not physically move. Later I was diagnosed with burnout, depression and anxiety.

But a part of that was that I needed to redefine my why, I needed to better understand, what worked for me in my 20s no longer works for me in my

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30s. And maybe even what I thought was my why is no longer my why. I was having an identity crisis. And so that why, again, just taking the time to slow down to constantly redefine it, to constantly make sure that you're on the right path.

That is so critical to continue to have that tenacity, to have the courage because when you have the why, you have the courage to do things that might seem crazy, but to you it's what life is worth. That's what it's all about.

Tobi: Yeah, so good. So then when you try to take that framework and use it with clients when you're interviewing them, is there anything else you add? It's one thing to be reflective of yourself, you know yourself so well, you also know all the BS that you're going to try to pull on yourself. But when you're going to have a conversation with clients and you want to get to that transparent kind of deeper meaning, what is it that you do that helps you tap into that other level of understanding?

Jude: That's a great question. So the first thing is that it's funny that you mentioned it's with ourselves we know the BS that we might try to tell ourselves. Honestly, I think that happens in meetings with clients because I think there are questions that you have not been asked and that you have not thought about. And so you say the first thing on your mind versus slowing down to say, "No, let me think about it." And what I love to do is I'll often push back with, "That sounded great, but what's the real answer here?" So I do a thing called a road-mapping strategy session.

In the first two hours we spend time going all the way back to childhood to now. And literally putting the puzzle pieces together of understanding why did you do that? But why did you go that route? Why not the other route? Often when I tell people the story of the car repossession, many people will say, "It would have been okay to stop at that point, you had given it a good five year run. Why did you decide to continue when you were already struggling?"

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For me, I know I grew up, so I already mentioned my father was a construction worker. My father worked seven days a week and one thing that was, he never said it but I think one thing that was ingrained in me is you never give up. My parents are also immigrant parents, they came from the country of Haiti, poorest country in the western hemisphere. And they came to America to give us a better life and to work hard. And so work ethic was ingrained in me.

And I always understood as long as you don't stop, you win. That's just the way I saw it. That's the way I always understood it, but I think over time, what I also learned is courage, which is part of my why to lead and empower entrepreneurs to have endless courage. I have noticed every time I've stepped up to just go past what I thought I couldn't do, have the courage to just keep going, I'd do something that actually surprises myself. It doesn't mean it's not scary. It doesn't mean that I don't have any fear, it's just I have decided to lean into courage more than fear.

I've watched my parents do that and that's what's also led me. So I like to end my sessions with my clients, I like to go all the way back to childhood to now to better understand what has influenced you over time because that will also determine part of your why.

Tobi: Yeah, that's so good. I'm just sitting in that for a minute because even the word courage, I think people don't always understand the real definition or meaning of courage. I think maybe they think it is without fear. Courage only happens in the presence of fear.

Jude: You have to have the fear in order to be courageous. You don't step up to be bold and courageous unless there's something, an obstacle in your way.

Tobi: Yeah. And usually the fear for most of us as entrepreneurs is fear of failure, whatever that means, financial failure, falling on our face, having people think we look dumb, having to close a business that we started,

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whatever that looks like. And so your why, let's talk about that again, can you say it again?

Jude: To lead and empower entrepreneurs to have relentless, unwavering courage.

Tobi: And when you're working with creatives like you do, a lot like you did and LuAnn's story, talking with me. And a lot of designers and creatives are listening right now to this. What is it that you are typically helping people overcome? Is it financial fear? Is it being seen? Talk to us about what that looks like.

Jude: It is the fear of being vulnerable, the fear of being seen for who they really are. Now, these words are very important, to lead and empower entrepreneurs to have relentless courage. Every word in that sentence is incredibly important. I again had to redefine this back in 2020. So I want to take the time. I don't want to rush through it and I want to take the time to help others understand what it means to get to a why that drives you beyond yourself.

In 2014, I went to a leadership conference in Spokane, Washington. Now, I live in Florida. Spokane, Washington I had never been to at this point, but it reminds me so much of Florida. Florida is very eclectic, has a lot of cultures and different diversity in people that are here, and Spokane, Washington is the same. Washington state is the farthest northwest point of America. Florida is the farthest southeast point of America.

So Tobi, I have this crazy idea that after coming from this three day conference where I knew I'd need to digest the information that I was taking in, that I would take a greyhound bus from northwest to southeast. I'm 25 at the time and figured this would never happen again. Well, here was literally the dumbest decision I ever made. By day two, I get to Chicago, Illinois, and I'm miserable because there's just a lot of weird people on a greyhound bus.

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I turned back on my phone, so I had turned off my phone because I wanted to take in this information and take in, I just came from this leadership conference, what have I learned? What am I going back home with? But I turned back on my phone and I get this text message from my sister. And it says, "Call me back. It's urgent." And I begin to brace myself because in 2014, my mother had been diagnosed with depression and had attempted suicide. My father was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

So when my sister texts me, "Call me back, it's urgent", I know it's either mom or dad. Called my sister back, unfortunately, she says to me, "They found my dad unresponsive in the home." Now I'm on the road, I know what that means, they just don't want to tell me that he's passed away, but I know that means that he's passed away. So I take the first flight back home, I get off the bus and I take the first flight back home from Chicago to Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

My brother James comes to pick me up, he comes with his daughter, my niece, Ayanna. And I hug my brother, I don't say a word, I hug my niece, I don't say a word. But I sit in the back seat with my niece because at this point of my life, I'm 25 years old, youngest of 10 children. My dad would never get to see me get married or have kids. And I'm staring out the window, just lost, feeling lost.

And Ayanna, who's only nine years old, she looks at me and she says, "Uncle, why did grandpa have to die?" And I didn't know how to respond to her so I just stared at her. She said it again, "Why did grandpa have to die?" As we make it to my father's house, we're making funeral arrangements, that question rang in my ear.

Well, on August 9th, 2014, as we are laying my father to rest, I got a piece of that answer and part of it was because even though I'm the youngest of 10 children, not the only male, I am asked to give my father's eulogy. And it's in this season of life, this moment that I realized that leading wasn't just important to me, it was leading through these difficult moments, that when

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these difficult moments happen, I am called on to help guide. Now, part of preparing for this eulogy, I had to look up the word leadership because I had to look up the word lead because I had always ran away from leadership.

And when you look in the dictionary, lead means to guide a group of people along a journey, that's it. And that's literally in the business that I had started in 2006, that is what I had been doing and so I understood that. Well, Tobi, that story is the story I open up with when I do my road-mapping sessions because I want my clients to understand I'm not here to help you learn how to tell stories. I'm not even here to help you create a video.

I'm here to just lead you through this difficult process where I'll ask you uncomfortable questions. And those uncomfortable questions oftentimes brings out the real you that you've been hiding all along because in business, we're not taught to be vulnerable. We're taught, if you're vulnerable, you're weak. Whereas I understand it very clearly that it is only through your vulnerability that people actually want to work with you because you hold something that is powerful. There is strength in your vulnerability that allows you to be who you are in life in general.

And so to me in these sessions that I have with my client, how I'm looking to illustrate my why is important. And that why to lead and empower entrepreneurs to have limitless courage to lead, which is to guide them and empower them because I want them to walk away with it. You don't need Jude to continue to have courage. I want you to be empowered enough to have it, to obtain it and that it's relentless, unwavering that means it never ends.

Even again in the most difficult moments, if no one else listens to this podcast episode, but I have changed you which you have said previously with just the conversations we're having, that's it for me. It's not about millions or thousands. It's about the one that I get to speak to and can they

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be changed in that moment? So yeah, that's my why and that's how I've gotten to it over time.

Tobi: Yeah, it's so powerful. And a lot of things come to my mind as I hear you talk. One of the things that has popped up in my mind at least three times, if not 10, in this conversation is I think that so often as entrepreneurs, as people I know, for me as a woman, as an American, the way that our culture works. We confuse doing with our why, we confuse productivity with the why. We confuse the output with the why, which is why a lot of us end up at the burnout phase as opposed to, in this sort of more meaningful, more sustainable version of ourselves.

And I want to hear what you think about that. And do you think that's true, that those things get confused, output or productivity? If that's not your why, that could be a lot of different things from us running from our why, us proving our worth, all of these things. But I think that that's one of the first things that people get confused about. And it's a lesson that I keep learning over and over again.

I have been so busy this summer. I've taken on new things. I've started this ecommerce store with my daughter which is connected to my why for sure and definitely hers and her dream but a lot of times it manifests into busyness and busyness is not sustainable. And busyness, I just don't think, maybe in fits and spurts it has connected to our why, but it's not a long term strategy for staying connected to your why, right?

Jude: Yeah, I learned that lesson the hard way too, being versus doing for a very long time. So I talk about burning out. And a big part of my burnout was that I got so busy doing, you've heard me say a lot that it's about who you are, who you are and that who you are is the being part. That being part is so difficult to understand, but I will do my best to break it down.

I think that we as human beings are taught that your value comes from the work that you do. I learned the same thing. I started the business at 17

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years old. And 17 years later it's the same business I'm doing, but I only saw the value of who I was in the work that I do. And when I burned out in 2020, I was told that I could no longer work in the same way that I used to work. I prided myself on the time I spent working and how I work, but now what worked in my 20s will no longer work in my 30s.

And I had to slow down and that's where the identity crisis came from, because it was like, wait, if I can't work the way that I used to work, who am I because that's all I knew. In this season, so it was October 2020 when I got diagnosed with burnout. About less than a year later, September of 2021 I went to the grocery store one day. And as I was getting out of the car to walk inside of the grocery store, I heard a loud bang to my left. And when I looked over what it is and I'm not exaggerating, there's a picture of it on Instagram. It is a Tesla, white Tesla car on top of another car.

It was a car accident and this person that was trying to, I guess, back out of the driveway. They ended up going forward instead of backward and ended up on top of another car. Well, I ran over to make sure everyone was okay. There were two other guys standing there and I'm like, "Did anybody call 911?" And these guys are, they're zoned out because it's a crazy scene to see. And I said it again, "Did anyone call 911?" Well, no one had called 911, and I ended up calling 911 and fire came and all of that.

But that moment, walking into the grocery store, I remember vividly what I was thinking on the drive there and then getting ready to walk into the store. I felt worthless because I no longer understood how to live life because I couldn't work in the same way, Yet here's this moment that happens, now, I'm a man of faith and I strongly believe that God has sent this moment to happen to show me, no, who you are is so much bigger than video production.

Video production is just a small piece, a small extension of who you are, but it's not who you are. Again, I go back to this lead and empower through relentless courage because I understood in this difficult moment, while

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everyone else doesn't know what to do, Jude calmly walks in, calls 911, gives them the exact location of where it is. Because it was actually towards, it was a weird place in the parking lot to get the fire department there.

And there are these moments and this is why, so going back to, in my strategy sessions I go back to childhood, who you are, the why of who you are needs to be disconnected from your work. Your work is an illustration of it, but that work may change. It's just a demonstration, it's just proof of you living out your why but that may change over time.

And so I have these moments in my life, that was one of them, the Tesla car accident where it was shown, this is how you be. And it's because of how you be, how you show up to these meetings, how you show up to a podcast interview, how you show up in conversations that makes the doing important, but the doing isn't who you are. And it's hard to detach those two.

Tobi: Yeah, definitely.

Jude: That's what leads to burnout is because we try to do so much, but doing doesn't get you there. There's always more to do.

Tobi: Right, always, yes. And I think what's so hard for a lot of us as you said earlier, that you were taught the strong work ethic and as long as you don't stop, you win. And I was taught something very similar. It was exactly what you're saying, don't ever be lazy, and your worth really is the work that you do. It's like, how much have you done today? What time did you get up? What time did you start the day? How many things did you check off the list?

And really this idea of you have to work really hard to make a lot of money and making a lot of money is the goal. Was really what I was taught. And I must have gotten it, as you did, a few more times than some people or either my personality is just one to latch on to a concept like this because I

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took that to the nth degree. And I think it's so hard to untether. I mean, I still, I've hit burnout twice, 39 and at 44, it was different the second time, it wasn't as severe. It was more of, yeah, I kind of forgot I wasn't going to go back to working this way.

And that was really, I think, just an extension of not having fully sort of separated, like you just said, who I am and my worth with the thing that I do and it's still something that I struggle with. Right now, getting all excited to build something is my strength. I love to start things and build things and that always looks like all the busyness and all the tasks and how many things did you check off the list. But it really leaves a doers hangover that doesn't feel good, that doesn't feel productive.

And having been through burnout a couple of times, it's sort of not a good taste. You're like, "I forgot that I don't like this. I don't like this feeling or this taste." I like what it feels like to create and do things, but I don't like the doers hangover. And so I'm sure you've experienced something similar. How have you personally or maybe you've seen your clients, how have you started to separate the doing and the being in an actionable way?

Because we forget, you didn't have the experience like I did of childbirth, but you've heard the saying, you forget childbirth. It's terrible and you forget about it so you're willing to do it again. That's kind of how I relate birthing something and business and it sort of comes with that doers hangover. Is it possible to prevent those? Do they just get fewer and smaller in your experience? Is the goal to not have them at all? Because for doers like me and you that were raised in your work is your worth, how do we start to know how to be and not fall back into those old patterns, I guess is what I'm trying to say?

Jude: A very practical way, so I'll tell you how I do it, the very practical way is the two months off and everything. Now, I mentioned I used to do it in November, December. It didn't change until 2020 when I went through this burnout phase that it changed to June and December because what I

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would do is race. Again, I was just like you, I would do, do, do, do all the way to November and then be completely exhausted in November. So that's one of the practical ways is in very simple terms, just taking time off.

Now, here's the other way that I actually found very fascinating as I've started researching this is that there are some people who will work seven weeks and then take seven weeks off. Or I was in a mastermind with a guy and he said to me, he's an introvert, he needs downtime. So he comes to the mastermind for let's say five days. But then when he goes back home, he takes off five days to decompress.

Now, you have to find what works for you but the point is I think, most entrepreneurs are builders, we're doers, we enjoy that, we thrive off of it but you also have to build in the downtime. For me, June and December is great because I work five months and take a month off, work another five months and take a month off. I am forced because it's built in, I do tell my clients I'm taking the time off. I am forced to take it off because I've already said it out loud publicly. So now I've got to do it.

But in that season it's hard to slow down but it's also, I'll tell you what I do during my time off. So June is more like a slowing down. I don't go completely off the grid, June is slowing down. I will take long walks outside, read a lot of books. Just intentionally slow down. In December, I go completely off the grid. I don't see anyone. I don't talk to anyone. No texting, no social media, none of that. And it's just you have to be intentional with it.

You also have to learn yourself because you change over time. And in those seasons, in that moment, I learned what has changed about me. What no longer interests me anymore? The last part I'll say about that is we live in the reality that there are seasons. There are four seasons and the leaves will get green and then sometimes they die off, but it doesn't mean they have died completely, it doesn't mean the tree has died. It just means it's taking a break so that it can recuperate and come back to life.

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I think as entrepreneurs, that's what we need to learn, is the cadence of working and being comfortable in working. I think it's important to work, but then that time of taking time off and what does that look like for you? For me, like I said, it's walking. I've been to a cabin before where I'm just completely off the grid in a cabin. What does that look like for you? What do you need in order to be able to come back rejuvenated to start again.

Tobi: Yeah, that's so good. You reminded me that with your tree analogy, I've heard of a quote that says we're not mad at the flower because it doesn't bloom 365 days of the year. But we are really a lot of times mad at ourselves because we're not blooming as we would call it 365 days of the year. And we forget that things do have seasons and they have to go dormant and they have to be a seed and they have to close and they have to fall off and then they have to come back and yeah, all of those things.

I will ask this too, from a practical standpoint, there's probably a lot of people listening that say, "Well, that must be nice to be able to not produce income for two whole months of the year. "How do you balance that work? Are you making sure that in those two five month stints that you're making, what would be the equivalent of six months, do you press harder? Do you manage your finances in a different way?"

Because I think that's where I would see a lot of people struggle and maybe myself too at times to say no. You have the grandest plans to be off but then it comes time and you're like, "I can't, I need these funds." So practically as an entrepreneur, how do you financially go two months without creating income?

Jude: Okay, so in 2013, I started this and when I couldn't afford it. And what I mean by that is there was no income coming in those two months. And I had to learn the hard way that it has to be built in. And so I charge for it. In a very practical way I work with luxury clients and so like I said, in the beginning, my clients are very aware I take these two months off. But I also charge a premium price that allows me to take that time off. And so you

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have to build it in. If you know you need, let's actually take it project by project based, because this is the way I actually recommend it.

If you know you're working on a project let's say hypothetically three months. There should be a week built in, that as soon as this project is over you're taking a week off. You bill for that week off because you wouldn't be able to do the project had you not taken the time off.

Tobi: That's good.

Jude: So that is a very practical way, but in my business the way that I do it, for a very long time until I released a book in 2022, I had basically saved enough for that month. I knew what I needed that month off and I would save for that time in order to make sure bills were paid. And because the month that I come back doesn't mean I get paid that month. So it's really three months that I'm getting. And I am in a service based business. Now, what I've done recently is that I have a book, *Dramatic Demonstration* that I also sell, which has, it's not a lot of money, but it's supplemented some of that income as well.

I speak, which supplements some of that income and there's a third thing that I do I can't think of now. So there's other things now in my personal brand that allows that money to come in, but very practical, what still is 90% of the money is I save for it. I save for it. And I want to get it to a point where I'm not only just saving for it for myself but saving for it for my team, for the people that work for me. And it's still a working progress. So it's not that I've arrived to this.

I know it works for me and I know that I'm able to do it but I also want to be able to do it for my team or the people that work with me. But yeah, practical ways, you bill for it. You bill for it and you justify it by this is what it takes. This is the cost of doing business. It makes no difference if you work 365 days, but then the following year, you can't move.

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Tobi: Right. And I have done that also. I have done all of these things like you have, yeah.

Jude: Yeah. And so this is the cost of doing business. It does mean you increase your price. It means you invest in yourself. It means, I mean that's one thing I should have said a long time ago is I have seen a therapist and continue to see a therapist. All those things are the cost of doing business and so you build it in.

Tobi: But I love that practical example you gave of, for example for you to have the stamina to do this, that you either have a week off at the beginning or you have a week off at the end. But at some point there has to be recuperation in this process. So you're billing for four weeks, not three weeks. I think people get that if that means six months versus seven months or six days versus, whatever, six months. Working for six months, billing for seven, working for six days, billing for seven, whatever way you want to quantify it in, depending on how your business works.

You're basically just saying charge for the creative time, the downtime, the recuperate. Your brain does not come up with those brilliant ideas because you're working 24/7. It comes up with those ideas because you go to the beach or you take a month off in the summer or you completely go off the grid of social media and allow all of that, the ideas to simmer and to come to the surface, and that is also part of the creation process that we don't bill for a lot of times.

Jude: Yeah, it's a big part of it. I've gotten no pushback from clients taking the time off or billing for it. Now, again, just very practically, I don't put a line item that says I'm billing for my time.

Tobi: You're paying for me to take a month vacation \$2,000.

Jude: Right. But it's still very much understood, this is a part of what it takes for me to run this business at a high level.

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Tobi: Yeah, I love it.

Jude: And I communicate that. I don't hide from it. LuAnn was a very high level client. And I worked with others that I don't hide from it. They know it, they respect it and that's really important to me too, they have to respect it. And once they do, and of course, I'm still delivering, in the season that I am working or the five months, let's just say January to May that I'm working, I'm still delivering. There's nothing that's not being delivered during that time. And so as long as you do what is required of you, there is no pushback that you'll get from clients.

And again, I started this at a point where I couldn't afford it. I'm grateful that now I can, but I started it because I knew it was important and I knew I wouldn't be able to sustain this business if I didn't take time off.

Tobi: Well, and as I hear you say, what you just said about delivering, I think, but I mean we could go into a whole other podcast just about this. But I think part of the reason that this in theory wouldn't work for a lot of people is because we're already undercharging all the time if we're not careful and we're taking on more work than we even have the capacity to do to try to make ends meet. So then you don't deliver in those five months because you're two or three months behind and people are waiting on you.

So then they just blow right through the time they were supposed to be off because they have already not been honest with themselves or their client of what it takes to build this, how much money or time. And so the system is broken. The timeline is broken. The capacity and machine behind the production is broken. And a lot of that's happening more often than not, as you know and I know because people are afraid to charge what they're worth or they haven't found the customer who will pay it.

So they just keep on the treadmill and the treadmill is not the take two months a year off. The treadmill is conveyor belt 365, just like your dad was working, just like your mom was working. And that's a completely different

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model, that is not this model and it's based on a commodity price and not a luxury price.

Jude: It's the craziest thing and I went through it too, but you didn't get into business to be broke or to be working non-stop. And I learned that in the project that I mentioned at the very beginning with Keyshia Dior, where I charged only 3,000 for six months' worth of work. And now 17 years later, I'm at a point where it is a six figure investment to work with me. It took time to build to that, but immediately following Keyshia's project, when I went back to learn marketing and sales, a big piece of it was what is it going to take to do this in a sustainable way?

I mentioned the cost of doing business. What entrepreneurs often don't pay attention to is all the cost that it takes, not just for the project, but in general, hypothetically rough numbers, if you want to run a \$100,000 business. So for a very long time, a big dream of mine was to run a \$100,000 business with only two or three clients. Now, I only work with five clients a year, but it's way past 100,000.

But the point is you have to break down what is it going to take, how long is it going to take and what does that mean to be able to do that? So if you wanted four clients at 25,000 apiece, is that sustainable in your interior design business? Is that sustainable to take time off based off of maybe a mortgage that you have or car payments that you have? Because you should still be paying yourself as well. And so it took time to build to that. I started at 3,000, the very next project I took after learning marketing and sales was 15,000 and then it grew over time, 15,000 per client.

And then it grew over time, but you have to run the numbers. And if you run the numbers and you realize where you want to be, you can baby step your way there like I did. Again, I went from 3,000 to 15,000. It was very nerve wracking, the project that paid for 15,000 but you can baby step your way there in order to get to the point of where you want to be. But the point is to continue to grow to that level. It's not just, I didn't wake up like this. I didn't

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get here overnight, but I did get here, because I was intentional and I knew what I wanted and I continued to go after it.

And even in burnout where I had to redefine what that looks like or to think differently about the kind of work that I do is still just being intentional and seeing there's more than enough clients out there, especially at a high level. But you also have to play a high level game. And are you there? Do you have the right mindset for it? All those things are important, but it's possible, it's more than possible. And that's why, for me, relentless courage is not just about one time. It's not about doing it one time.

It's continuing to show up over and over and over and over again, even in moments where you have no idea what you're doing. You mentioned at the beginning of this that I have been on quite a few podcasts, over 150 podcasts. I had no idea what I was doing day one, but I started and then I built up to it over time to where there's many podcasts I've been on three or four times because I've learned the skill of public speaking or I've learned how to communicate what I do in a way that's valuable for others.

It happens overnight and I just want to encourage people, all this sounds great, but get started, don't think that this is good for Jude, but not good for me. No, this is good for you too. This is what it means to run a sustainable interior design business.

Tobi: Yeah, you and I've had a couple of conversations and I think it's worth saying as we're wrapping up a very powerful conversation. I think you and I have had several conversations about the difference between those who are really successful and those who aren't is based on what you're willing to do for your business.

And now that we've had this conversation, I would also say it's based on what you're willing to do, which is that courageous piece to do things that other people aren't doing. But I would also say it's also about what you're willing to stop doing. That's the other side of the coin, because just having

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a super busy to-do list all the time and proving your worth, your to-do list is going to kill your business. And so charging what is uncomfortable at \$6,000, which feels like a lot of money, but is a fraction of what you're charging now and you're charging five or six figures.

So am I willing to stop charging \$6,000 and start charging \$50,000? What does that look like? And it's such a good reminder of me and the busy season that I have found myself in this summer and this year really is to remind myself that I've been doing way more addition and not enough subtraction. And yeah, it's just as much about not only what you're willing to do, but what you're willing to not do or stop doing.

Jude: Yeah, or you're willing to be, I think that's the third question. Who are you willing to be? What do you want that to look like, that person? And you work towards it. And again, it's not something that happens overnight, but what are you willing to do? What are you not willing to do? I made a very clear decision a long time ago when I started this journey of being on podcasts that I was going to do more than I ever imagined doing. But one thing I wasn't willing to do is do it non-stop.

So I've mentioned yes, 150, but it's been 150 over the last two years, three years. There was a cadence to it, I might do 20 or 30 at a time and then pause, do another 20 or 30 at a time and pause. So what are you willing to do? What are you not willing to do? And who are you willing to be? Those are important questions to ask because for me, podcasting as a guest is a big part of my why, part of getting the message out there. And so I'm willing to do what it takes to get it out there. It means going on podcast after podcast. It means following up with Tobi.

Tobi: I was just about to say, it means taking a dang year or seven months or some ridiculous amount of time to keep following up and keep following up until we make this happen. And giving your time and energy to me and getting to know me and me trusting you. And I mean it was never a trust

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factor. It was always a yes. We just hit some road bumps. We hit a tech issue.

Then we hit another issue where I don't even remember, one day I was like, "This is the weirdest thing but I'm waiting for the bank to call me back for this weird wire transfer for a client. And they might call me any minute and so I can't start a podcast with you." It was all random stuff but if you didn't have that relentless courage and tenacity you'd have been like, "This lady is too much trouble, I am not coming back." So yeah, you're right, but yeah, it is all of those things and so fun.

Such a joy to get to know you in the process. Thank you for your time, your energy, your generosity. I know people are going to be moved by this. Where can they find you? And some people will want to be some of those exclusive high end clients that hire you, but for the people that maybe aren't that, what else can they do, they read your book, how do they stay inspired by you? Tell us all the things.

Jude: Yeah. So first and foremost, everything will live at judecharles.co. I have a book called *Dramatic Demonstration: How to Attract Premium Clients Through Visual Storytelling*, and it is available on the website. But I really highly recommend the audiobook. Audiobook, it's not just me reading the book but it's also podcasts that I've been on. That will illustrate the ideas better, segments of those podcasts that I decided that it wouldn't just be, I read maybe one or two chapters, but then you hear a podcast about the ideas that I'm sharing.

And so judecharles.co, *Dramatic Demonstration*, it is my life's work, how I go about telling these stories, crafting these stories. It is a mini road-mapping session, but judecharles.co. That is the best way to get started on this journey and understanding everything that Tobi and I have been talking about, what does that look like? [Judecharles.co](http://judecharles.co). I also have *Dramatic Leverage Newsletter*, which is on that same site where I write about these

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same ideas, mindset and leverage and just understanding how to take your business to the next level, judecharles.co.

Tobi: Love it. Thank you so much. Well, it was worth the wait. And as I've told you before, your energy that is so much slower and calmer, is always a good little shot in the arm for me, because I tend to run at a high speed. And it's just always a good reminder to come back into contact with the people who are building in white space that I do as much as possible and then I kind of forget.

So you gave me just a good reboot today to remember to do that again. So thank you. I know you've given the same blessing to a lot of people listening and we are really so grateful that you're here.

Jude: Thank you. Thank you for having me, Tobi.

Okay, friends, connect with Jude, he's amazing, follow him, get his book. Also take his advice. I think if you start thinking differently about how you're showing up, what you're willing to do for your business, how to show that real, authentic version of you online in a new way, it's going to revolutionize your business. So I'll see you back next week with another great episode. You all, I'm almost an empty nester, any moment now school is actually starting. She's moved in, not quite through sorority rush when I'm recording this, but maybe probably pretty close to being through it by the time you hear this.

And all of those amazing milestones will soon be behind us and she'll be settling in for her first year of college and I'll be settling into empty nesting. And don't you worry a bit. I am bringing you episodes about that. I'm bringing you some thoughts from Ellison, bringing you how I'm thinking about the future and what it's going to look like for me and what I'm excited about because some of you may be going through the same transition right

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now as well. Okay, friends, I'll see you back next week with another great episode of *The Design You Podcast*. Bye for now.

Thank you for listening to *The Design You Podcast*. And if you want to discover a new path to success in the interior design industry, then join me for my three part training called How to Create Additional Revenue Streams. In this training I'll teach you the strategies to launch innovative income streams and free you from the limitations of traditional design services. Don't miss this opportunity to revolutionize your business and thrive in today's competitive landscape. Grab the training series now to prepare you and your business for today and beyond. Go to tobifairley.com/revenuestreams.