

# Ep #290: How to Pivot in Your Business with Amber Guyton



## Full Episode Transcript

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**Tobi Fairley**

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You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 290.

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

Hey, hey friends, we are almost at episode 300, 10 to go. It's kind of fun that episode 300 is the last episode of 2023. It's just neat and tidy and clean and lands right there on that last Thursday of the year. So it'll be here before you know it. I hope you're getting your Christmas shopping done. I hope you are planning for 2024, all of the things.

Today I have an awesome interview with my friend Amber Guyton. So, Amber, if you don't know her and most of you are going to know her, I hope. But yeah, we might introduce a few of you to a new face, Amber. She is amazing. She is the founder of *Blessed Little Bungalow*, which started out as a blog once upon a time and turned into a full-fledged design business, an influencer business. And she's just amazing. I love Amber. She's beautiful, she's talented, she's kind. She has the best smile. The cutest dog you have ever seen, Ralph.

And just a whole lot of wisdom for her, what I call very young number of years that she's been here on the Earth. So we're going to have a great conversation today. I know you're going to love it. It's about truth telling. It's about what it's really like to be in these businesses. It's about everything from burnout to comparison to jealousy. To all the feelings that come up when we are trying to go out in the world and build something and be something and you all, it's just freaking hard.

So Amber and I have a lot of very real raw conversations about this just in our friendship regularly. And I wanted to bring her back on the podcast to talk about these things with all of us because I think her words will resonate with so many of you. So enjoy my interview with Amber Guyton.

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Tobi: Hey, Amber, welcome to *The Design You Podcast*. I'm so glad you're here.

Amber Guyton: Thank you, Tobi. I'm so grateful to be here.

Tobi: So we can't even start the podcast today because we're too busy just chit chatting it up. My podcast editor is going to be like, "That is the longest beginning of a recording that I have to cut off in history."

Amber: We know each other, it's [crosstalk].

Tobi: I know, we're friends. We're friends, it's so good. I love to catch up with you and get as much time with you as possible. But for those people listening that might live under a rock and not know your company and you. Why don't you tell them about who you are and what you do, and we're going to have a juicy conversation today.

Amber: I think so. I think so. So hello everyone. My name is Amber Guyton. I am the founder, creator, interior designer, content creator, all things behind *Blessed Little Bungalow*. I started *Blessed Little Bungalow* as a blog and a creative outlet back in 2016. And as I come up on eight years next year, I just think about, okay, this started as a creative outlet. I always loved to decorate and repaint and rearrange my room as a child.

But then I went to school for advertising and marketing and then went for my MBA and worked in corporate and financial services and tech. And my heart led me back to what I enjoyed as a child. And so I started working with clients and made kind of side hustle money through BLB. And as my audience grew and my client portfolio grew, decided after five years of doing things on the side to take this full-time.

So during the pandemic I was one of those people in the great resignation and decided to quit my tech job and take a leap of faith and pursue *Blessed*

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*Little Bungalow* full-time. So for the past two and half years I've been a full-time entrepreneur. The content creation piece has made me into more of an influencer sometimes some days than an interior designer. But I think we're going to talk about pivoting and shifting and kind of the season I'm in now and what that looks like. So that's all about me.

Tobi: I love it, yeah. There's something else? Yeah.

Amber: I was born and raised in South Carolina so I'm a southern girl. I love to travel, and this little man in my lap who your audience can't see is my dog, Ralph. So he's my roommate.

Tobi: He's so cute, you all. If they've ever been on your Instagram, they've seen Ralph. He's the star. I mean I love you, but he might be my favorite. I can't tell which one of you is the cutest. Look at that face. Oh my gosh, [crosstalk].

Amber: Listen, the followers I have that are just like, "Oh, my God, how is Ralph doing?" [inaudible] his own page yet. What does Ralph think of the sofa?" [inaudible].

Tobi: He's so cute. So, so many good things in what you were talking about. And we are going to talk about a lot of that influencing. We're going to talk about the whole thing today, the pivoting, the influencing. I always love to be reminded that you first had a career in advertising and marketing, because it makes so much sense that you are so good in the social media space. Because I know a lot of people look from the outside and think I want a business like hers, which they definitely can have.

But you do have a leg up in that space because that is part of your expertise as well, part of your training, part of your experience and all of that too, which I think is so interesting.

Amber: Yes, but I'm still an introvert and I'm so awkward. People get on my nerves sometimes. So it's still a struggle because I am brave enough to just

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post this and put my thoughts on it. But then there are all these folks that might disagree, or why did you put that pillow there? Why did you arrange? Especially on TikTok, people are very critical about gallery wall arrangement and things like that.

So it's those things, I'm human, those things still kind of get to me and whatever. But I have just to remember your people are your people. They're here for you. Block the noise and keep it moving. You're doing something right. You've been around this long, it's okay.

Tobi: Yeah, it's so good. Well, and it's good that you know, not only do you know the ins and outs of marketing, but you have some perspective on, yeah, that whole idea of the animal that social media is and can be. And we're going to get into a lot of things like burnout, and we're going to get into all kinds of things today. But I think what's interesting and what I love about this conversation is I think in our minds, once you start something, once you become an interior designer, that's all you're supposed to be sort of.

But there are so many of us that are multi-passionate, multi-taskers, interested in a million things, creatives, love to dabble, love to change, love to dip in and out of things. And kind of, I don't know, culture might tell us that that is flaky or that's not stable or we're all over the place. And I've really been enjoying personally kind of claiming this multi-purpose, multi-passionate part of myself the last few years and I recognize it in other people.

And so that's what I love about the way you're creating your business, because you're allowing yourself to do different things that interest you. And when one thing is feeling exceptionally hard or difficult or not working, you have another place to move. It's not pivoting your whole business all the time, it's dipping into these different buckets I feel like, that you can tap into and let them sort of ebb and flow at any given moment. Is that how it feels to you, is that a correct perception?

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Amber: Yes. I have not heard anyone say multi-passionate before. I feel like the buzzword now that's being more accepted amongst creators is multi-hyphenate. And so that is kind of the same thing. I have a friend, David, [crosstalk].

Tobi: He's fabulous.

Amber: He's everything. I met him. I followed him and then I met him at a conference and I just feel like he's my design bestie. I just love him so much. But the thing about David is that he was a Zumba instructor. He tried interior design and it wasn't working out. And then he was a Zumba instructor and then he worked for St. Jude. And then he also designed jewelry. And then put his foot back into interior design. But he's also an incredible content creator.

His personality is so infectious and so no matter what he's doing, you're dialed in, you're listening, you're laughing, you're dancing right along with him. And I think he is a great example to me that, Amber, you don't have to abandon financial services and building wealth and all of those things because you're not in the financial services industry anymore. You can still talk about those things. You can talk about fashion. You can tell people what products are in your hair. And you can talk about your world travels and how that fulfills you and your family and your niece and nephews.

And you don't have to put yourself in a box because you expect society to, you expect your followers to. And I think that truly creates a space where you can be authentic and true to yourself and transparent. I talk a lot about my mental health struggles on my page, and some people are probably like, "Hey, I'm following her for her pretty colorful pattern filled spaces that she creates. I don't want to hear that. I don't want to hear about war and how she feels about it in the world." And that's fine and you can unsubscribe and you can unfollow and it's fine.

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Tobi: Yeah. And I think that we're kind of past the days for most people that are truly creating their own content like you, like me, the person behind the Instagram account. I think we're getting past the days of all of us being willing for other people to tell us what we get to talk about and put us in the box they want us to be in. We're like, "I'm a whole 360 degree human being and I'm just not willing to tap dance because you told me to, anymore. I'm going to be me and you can decide if you come and stay or come and leave or whatever."

Amber: And it's empowering. And then it's also, as you're building your confidence, I'm almost eight years into this thing and I'm still like, "I don't know what I'm doing."

Tobi: Right. Well, I'm almost 25 years in and [crosstalk] I think I don't know what I'm doing either ever, Amber.

Amber: I'm just here kind of trying to fund my dog's Farmer's Dog meal plan and take a trip every now and then. And this design stuff and content creation, it's all in between. And I think that's as I'm aging, that's that shift of what's important. Because people are fickle. You can do everything by the book and have those beautiful 60 second or 16 second reels on Instagram and all the things. And people are fickle and they'll be like, "She always posts the same stuff. She always has the same paint colors."

There's always going to be something that somebody has to say. It's okay to just do and just go and put it out in the world, and if it sticks, great. If not, you pivot, you try something else. You look at your analytics and you do something different. You get that feedback from that one client and you decide, well, let me tweak this in my contract or let me change this in my business model. It's okay to change, you have to embrace the change and the fear that comes with it.

Tobi: Yeah. That's reminding me of a story that Lauren, who's on my team, was just telling me. And I've mentioned it in some of our trainings recently



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that she had read about this guy who was, during COVID, he's a musician and would make beats on his, whatever, I'm not a musician.

Amber: His beat maker.

Tobi: Yeah, on his beat maker, I call it from the 90s, it's his synthesizer. He's over there with his little electric piano. It's really his computer. But he would make beats every day and posted them every single day during COVID and beyond. So for three years he posted a beat a day. And then now three years later, he's getting these huge record contracts and commercials and all these things. And so I was thinking about it, which is an amazing story, and it shows the power of media and social media and YouTube and all the things.

But what struck me when I was thinking about it was, if you put out a beat a day for three years, at least 80, 90, 95% of those are probably going to kind of, if you look at the analytics of them, look like they were crap. But it's one or five or 12 or 20 go viral out of, I mean a beat a day for three years, that's 1,000. But if you had 20 or 30 or something really connect but people are forgetting that. So we put out this content and we think every single piece we put out in the world is supposed to be an A plus home run.

And so now I have this whole new perspective to think well, 80 to 90 to 95 to 99% of the crap I put out that I think is good, can be crap according to other people. And I can still grow my business and my Instagram and have some home runs. And so I think we know that old adage about Babe Ruth or whatever struck out 10 times more than he ever hit a home run but we forget that.

And what you're saying is so interesting because I see people all the time think every single thing they post needs to get likes and engagement. And that's really kind of not the objective anymore for me and it probably should never have been for any of us.



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Amber: Exactly. And I know exactly who you're talking about with the 'beat maker'. I follow him. I've had reels, I've used his sound and I see his face but I can't think of his name at the moment. But yes, think about not just the courage to put things out there every day for people to dislike or like or comment on. But also the consistency and discipline that takes to put something out every day for three years. Discipline is not my thing.

Tobi: Yeah, me either.

Amber: It's not my thing.

Tobi: That's not how I'm wired.

Amber: It's something I struggle with. It's just, it's not my strength. It's not my ministry, but I'm getting better at it. And I think just folks that go to the gym every day and I've got to meet my trainer at 4:30 and I'm already thinking about ways to get out of it.

Tobi: Some of us are not wired that way. I've also been studying human design, and at least it told me I'm not wired to be disciplined, so that also gave me a lot of, yeah, I don't know, solace.

Amber: Yes. But as humans we're also not created to just sit at a computer all day. We're not created to sleep four hours like I did last night because I stayed up working on something. So, okay, what are the unhealthy things I'm doing and how can I shift? And maybe the discipline will come with that.

Tobi: Yeah, that's so good. Okay, so let's talk a little bit about burnout. And I want to talk about it in both camps. I want to talk about, let's start with interior design because people on the outside not working in this industry have no idea how hard it is to do interior design. They have no idea how hard it is to deal with clients, even good clients. They have no idea how many decisions go into any single room or how long it can literally take to make every single not just make the decision, but then implement.

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The decision making is pretty fast for me, but the implementation of things is so just labor intensive and there's so much minutiae. But I think a lot of the burnout comes from the pressure and the expectations of the clients. And then we'll talk about the same thing on the influencer side because there's burnout there too. But it's not just burnout, you and I have talked a lot lately about everything from burnout to self-doubt to comparing ourselves to others to jealousy of others.

All of those emotions that humans have are all valid and all real, stress, overwhelm, everything, and they all come up. So let's start with the design business because I want a little truth telling here. And I think this is what's fun about being, as you called it, multi-hyphenate, I call it multi-passionate.

The thing that's fun about multi-passionate businesses is that when you feel too overwhelmed in one area, you can dip over here for a while and get a little relief or do something else that breaks it up. But let's talk first a little bit about your experience. What has your experience been with the design business, the highs and the lows and kind of where are you with that right now, or do you even know?

Amber: Well, let me take a deep breath. So I think when you're starting out, whether it's a hobby or a side hustle or you're just getting started as an entrepreneur. You are hungry. You are hungry to just be given a shot. You have rates that are super low, if at all. You might be giving, I mean my first project was free. So it was a gift to a friend of mine. They had their first child and he called me to tell me that they were expecting and I was just like, "I'm going to do the nursery. That's my gift to you."

So I was just anxious to design and all the things you get in it for. You just enjoy it. You're passionate about it. You want to affect the way people feel. And you want them to walk into their home and see themselves and feel like they belong and they deserve nice things regardless of their income and where they are in life. And a lot of my clients were couples that got married and they're buying their first home together. Or people just starting

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out and they're buying their first home or they're transitioning from a move or whatever the case may be. I just wanted to please them.

I just wanted to give them everything their hearts desires. I heard this phrase recently and I was just like, "Oh my God, that's me." I am a recovering overachiever. I am used to getting the all A's. I'm used to working late and it paying off at corporate and getting that promotion and going for that advanced degree. I am used to being an overachiever and so I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to overachieve in this." And then you realize that sometimes nothing is good enough and you beat yourself up because you're a people pleaser and you just want.

I'm also a Virgo, so all the Virgos out there, you all know, you all know we're perfectionists, we're people pleasers. We want to check all the boxes. So that in combination with people pleasing, in combination with being a creative, it can be a nightmare because you become your own worst enemy. You don't have boundaries. You allow people to continue to add on things to the list regardless of if they paid for them or not, because you're just wanting to please them and do your best.

And then in year one that might be okay because you're just starting out and you want to build your portfolio and you want to gain people's trust and have their repeat business and be referred. And maybe even in year two and but then by the time you get to year three or four, if you are blessed enough to see that because a lot of small businesses fail. I think the stat is half in the first two years and then after that.

Tobi: Another half in the first 10 years and a huge number at about 10 years. It's a huge number, yeah.

Amber: Yeah. So that statistical dip, most people are a part of that and you're not. And so you just feel like, okay, well, I must be doing something right so let me continue to kill myself for other people. And that turns into burnout. So, I'm in year seven and a half. Last summer I really felt the

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burnout. Of course I was year one of full-time entrepreneurship and I'm thinking, I have so much more time because I'm not working my full-time job eight hours a day. So this is going to be great.

But then you realize, okay, I need help. I need to outsource. I need to tell people no. No is a complete sentence. This person is a fan or they admire your work and they follow you and they praise you but that doesn't mean they're your ideal client. That doesn't mean they have to trust you and allow you to make decisions for them. That doesn't mean that that modern farmhouse, French country, whatever they like is a good fit because that's not your style, [crosstalk].

And every time there's a red flag or there's something that I ignore, I regret it. I regret it no matter what the money is and on both sides, on the influencer side, but also on the client side. And so when all of those things start to build up and it snowballs, you are at the bottom of the hill underneath all that snow and it's painful. And so then last summer I started experiencing it and then this summer I wanted to quit. I'm just like, "You know what? I'm done with clients. I'm done with this."

My best client that I had this year, or whom I thought was my best client, and my biggest project we had a disagreement. And it was the first time I kind of had a client dispute and I'm just like, "Wait a minute. What? I went above and beyond for this person and this is such an amazing project. And I would have never predicted that this outcome would happen." But then you think back and you're like, "Yes, you would have because [crosstalk] and said, "Girl, that's a red flag. Don't do that. No, she said that, don't do that. Don't go." So it's good money and it's a good person and they like you.

Tobi: And they look great in your portfolio and yeah, and it would lead to bigger jobs and all the things, yes.

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Amber: All the things you fantasize, and the way you talked yourself into it is costing you now. And so then one day I just kind of looked up and said in the midst of my anxiety and depression and life, I looked and said, “Well, if that big thing, amazing thing can turn into”, can I curse, can I curse here?”

Tobi: Yeah, I was about to say shit, turn into shit.

Amber: So if that can turn into shit, then what am I doing all this for? And what is all this for? Why did you put [crosstalk] to yourself dry and for yourself? I’m probably my worst boss and employee.

Tobi: I know. There’s a part in the book, the *E-Myth*, it’s an old time great business book. And I remember the first time I read it, because it was talking about that people who are good at a craft and then decide to go into business for themselves and maybe aren’t prepared or shouldn’t be or there’s a lot to learn or whatever. And there’s a sentence in there that says, “And you realize you’re working for a lunatic and the lunatic is you.” And I underlined it and I photographed it and I put it everywhere and I was like, “The lunatic is you.” I mean, it is.

Amber: It is. Have you ever seen that meme, that Spiderman meme when all the Spidermen are pointing at each other?

Tobi: No.

Amber: I will send it to you later. That is exactly what it is. It’s girl, it’s you, it’s you. And so then you go into that, oh, my God, it’s all my fault. And self-deprecating thoughts and self-doubt. And then yeah and for the first time since I quit my job in summer, spring of 2021, I thought maybe I should go on LinkedIn and see what it’s looking like. Maybe I should just start passively applying the things from the contractor or whatever I can do, working here in Atlanta or working from home.

Because I’ve always been of the mindset of that if this doesn’t work out I’m not too good to work in Target. I’m not too good to ...

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Tobi: Girl, you've got to go to Home Goods, not Target, Home Goods is your place.

Amber: No, if I go to Home Goods, I will not have a check. I will just be buying things with whatever they're paying me. But yeah, I've always been of the mindset of, it's okay, I've worked at West Elm part-time. There are other things that I can do. I'm not too good to whip out my Jeep and drive for Uber. I will figure it out. I've always been a figure-it-outer.

Tobi: I love that.

Amber: It's scary because you think, is this failure? Am I becoming part of that statistic that starts a business and fails? But then you get that magazine cover or article or that lovely client review or that one email that asks you to collaborate on a project or a product. And that starts to fill your cup again. But I don't know what could have prepared me for this besides doing.

Tobi: Exactly. Well, nobody really, really helps you understand entrepreneurship. It is its own thing. And I think everything you're describing just is entrepreneurship. And so in those low moments, when we think about quitting, I mean how many times I'm like, "I'm burning this whole effing place down?" I mean I've said it so many times and along all the paths. When I had a retail store the last time, then when I started a business and when I had a bunch of employees and when I had no employees, I'm like, "I'm burning it all down."

I've tried to burn it down 70 times. And then I get back up and I'm like, "Yeah, but no, this is what you love and it feeds you. And this is just part of the journey." But nobody tells you that that's part of the journey. And so it's so confusing when you hit those moments, it's so confusing.

Amber: Yes. I'm definitely a millennial so I speak in memes. Have you seen that meme where the house is on fire and the little girl is in the front, she's just smirking?

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Tobi: Yes, totally.

Amber: That is what I have felt with burnout, it's just like just burn this shit down and just you can be proud of your accomplishments but that doesn't mean that you need to continue down this path. And I think even in tech, people found companies and then they realize, I'm just an innovator and a visionary. And someone else needs to run this show. So you be the CEO. I am not going to allow my ego to convince myself that I am qualified to be this CFO, CEO, all these people, marketing. Let me bring a Chief Marketing Officer in here. It's the same thing.

And I think for creatives it's that too. You have to remember, yes you can, you can create it, but does that mean that you should still go down that path? Does that mean you still have to do all the things? Does that mean that you are a leader? Because sometimes I feel as many leadership positions as I've been in, in high school and college and grad school and different corporations, I might not necessarily need to lead my own business.

I have a 'CFO' which is my CPA that is also sort of like a therapist that I trust to help me make those decisions. I have a wealth advisor. I have a therapist that I speak to weekly. If I can trust these experts in their fields to guide me in these other things, why can't I do that with my own brand and business?

Tobi: Yeah, it's good. Yeah. One of the things, when you were talking about a recovering overachiever, that's so me. I think achiever might be my number one on the StrengthsFinders test and I'm the same as you. If we're going to do this, we're going all the way, the biggest, all the way. And so I've done that for 25 years. And I'm in a season now, my daughter, as you know, just went to college. I'm 51, 50s are awesome, 40s were awesome, 50s are awesome. But I find it really difficult to let go of the building big, big, big, not necessarily me being big.



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I'm fine for me to go grow my Instagram following bigger and that kind of stuff. But I have a hard time letting go of feeling I should have all these employees or all these people that I am responsible for. And we've built this big company and it makes this huge impact. And right now I'm really playing with because as I've told, you know this and some people have heard this on the podcast that a couple of my key people have left recently. And I was at a crossroads. Do I just add them back and keep going on the vision I had or do I stop and say, "Okay, you have an opportunity to do something different. What would it look like if you were smaller?"

What would it look like if you just leaned into even more content creation? What if you let yourself just do the things you want to?" And it's really difficult for me to step away from that. But now I'm supposed to go have all these people on my team and all this stuff and all these parts and pieces to my business. So it's fun listening to you talk. It's inspiring to me actually, because I'm really toying with, will I hit some of my current goals more if I am a smaller business and even doing a lot of things kind of on my own with contractors?

And that feels so foreign to me. And it also feels exhilarating and fun to me, and terrifying and not what I know, because I've always built the big things. But what we're talking about here is just in general kind of giving yourself permission that whatever you're feeling or whatever is presenting itself to you, that you're at least open to considering other options. We don't have to be so attached to that vision we had before we knew all the things we know. It's okay to change your mind. It's okay to start some things and then stop some things, and you could always pick them back up later.

It's okay to evolve and to make decisions right now in the moment that might not be the decision you want a year from now or five years from now.

Amber: Yeah, absolutely. I wrote down what you said. I've always built the big things because that's just, I've always been good at this thing. Why am I not good at this anymore? Why is this such a challenge for me? Why do I

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feel like I am ripping my heart out to achieve this thing? And it's hard not to have an answer. You just figuring it out and pivoting can look like failure and it's scary. But going back to what you said about knowing what your goals are and it's okay to shift in that.

So my goal from the beginning was never to be a full service interior designer. Never to have that big firm with 30 people. I get that the success of a lot of the big names like Chip and Joanna Gaines, and Studio McGee and a lot of people that are successful, they have teams behind them. They have trusted contractors and they offer full service interior design and there is a reward in that.

But in carving out my own lane and maybe a part of this was imposter syndrome too is I didn't go to school for this. So I'm going to just dabble in this, and I'm going to be an eDesigner and just create things from the comfort of my own home and mood boards and shopping lists and email them to my clients no matter where they live and they can execute it. And they like my vision and they're trusting me for that and I'm going to help them.

And this is going to help more people because a lot of people can't pay for \$100,000 plus project with a full service interior designer. So they will work with me. And as some eDesign projects, our clients have gone awry or haven't been a good fit or whatever, there has been the thought of well, girl, maybe you should be a full service interior designer. Maybe that's the solution. Maybe you should change your business model and shift in that and do what other people do instead of this lane that you've built for yourself.

And then another thought is well, if the goal was never to have a big firm, the goal for *Blessed Little Bungalow* is to be more than a business, but to be a true brand. And the biggest goal and dream I have is to have a pillow in Target, to see my BLB brand on products in stores that anybody can pick up and bring into their home and make it happier. That is what I dream of.

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That would be, I've been on a cover of a magazine. I've had my work in different publications. I've spoken on panels and podcasts and events, etc., but if that happened, then I can really quit all these things because that's the dream.

Tobi: The box is checked.

Amber: Yeah, the passive income of licensing and all these things. That's what I want to do. So I can just flip houses, little bungalows around the world, and spend time with my family and travel. That is what I want. And so I think that taking some time to understand that, okay, girl, all these things, whether you are enjoying them, whether they fail or succeed, all of these are stepping stones to get to that place. And so embracing what feels like failure and understanding, okay, what am I learning from this? What am I gaining from this?

A client dispute. Now, you've worked with an attorney to make a stronger, better agreement. You have worked with this brand that was awful and kept asking for revisions and moving deadlines and things like that. So now you know okay, well, here's what I'm going to tolerate. And here's what is a true partnership for any brand that I partner with in the future. Because they're a big national name and you liking their product or walking in their store isn't enough to work with me. So you build boundaries, you build confidence with that.

You better understand yourself and some things are not my strengths. And it's okay not to be good at everything. It's okay to not overachieve. And at 37, it feels like in your 30s, you say you love your 40s and really love the 50s. I feel like in my 30s, it felt so much better than the 20s because you were like, "I've got a little money. I feel a lot more confident about who I am." But I feel like I have been in a quarter life crisis every two years.

Tobi: I mean the 30s were really fun and exciting and a lot happened for me and they were also extremely exhausting but you care so much more. All

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the stuff you've described, the pleasing, the what people think of you, the comparing, the all the things are so much stronger when you're younger. And thankfully that stuff, you can already see it closer to 40 I'm sure. But it gets less and less and less until you're like, "I don't really care."

Amber: I'm a good auntie, I'm a good human being and a good dog mom.

Tobi: Yeah, that's the beauty of, I guess it's designed that way because if you're going to get older and you're going to have more wrinkles and other things, you can pick yourself apart. Then you'd naturally stop caring that people are looking at your wrinkles. You're like, "Screw it. I earned those bitches."

Amber: [Crosstalk], all these gray hairs you can see, I've earned all of them.

Tobi: Yeah, love it. Let's talk a little bit about influencing or a lot. I love this topic. And it's so funny, I mean definitely that whole word 'influencer', it has mixed emotions for people. And then we kind of think there's a definition and you have to be doing certain things to be an influencer. But in reality, if you're on Instagram and you've got people following you and asking you where you got something, you are an influencer. That's just kind of by nature of sharing.

But when we talk about influencer work, what we're really talking about is getting paid to do campaigns or promotions or advertisements or that kind of thing for people. And so you have done that some. And I think you've done a lot of that on your own. You maybe have worked with a few companies or agencies that have helped you place some of those. Can you tell us a little bit about what that has looked like for you, what your goals are there, what people should know about that?

Because I'm sure there's just as many highs and lows, just as many wins and losses in that as anything else. But yeah I want to hear what your thoughts are about that.

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Amber: So being an influencer, there's as much imposter syndrome, with me saying that I'm an influencer as there is I'm an interior designer because I follow so many influencers. And even if you're comfortable with Instagram and have been there from the beginning in 2010, you're still like, "Okay, I don't want to step on anyone's toes. I don't want to offend anyone. I don't want to seem arrogant or like I know it all." There's so many things that you consider and think about.

But I think because I went to school for journalism, advertising, marketing, I'm comfortable in that space of just writing and putting things out there. And whether it's a 15 second reel with some funny audio behind it and I just write three sentences, or who can relate or whatever in the caption. And putting it out there and people responding, it's a great feeling because you know that you're making someone laugh or you're making them think about something. Or they've decided to build a gallery wall in their living room because of the time lapse that you posted two hours ago.

So it feels good. I have followers. So I started my business when I lived, I started *Blessed Little Bungalow* when I lived in San Antonio, Texas. And I moved there in 2015. And when I started my business in 2016, so many of my early followers, well, really all my early followers were random people in San Antonio. my fellow USA employees and family and friends and that was it. There were no designers following me. There were no brands, there were none of that. So it was truly, I built it from the ground up.

And I remember when I first hit 1,000 followers and I was just like, "Oh my gosh, this is happening. This is amazing. People are loyal followers and excited when I post and comment and share and we might have something here." And then it was a really slow climb for four years. And then I finally hit 20,000 and I was just like, "Oh my gosh." I remember speaking to some people trying to figure out, how do I get paid to do this? And everyone was like, "Well, you've got to have at least 10,000 followers." I think it's nano or micro influencer or whatever.

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And then there was a time where on Instagram, you couldn't put a link in your stories until you had 10,000 followers.

Tobi: Yes, for a long time. That's not that long ago that that changed.

Amber: I feel like that was like a year or two ago, I think that that restriction was lifted. So all of a sudden reels happens and I go from 40,000 to 80,000 because that's the other thing. You can easily be a slave to the algorithm like "Oh my God, why didn't I get that many posts on this or get many comments on this?" And then all of a sudden something just explodes.

Tobi: Yeah, same, I had the same experience, yeah.

Amber: Yeah. So you've just got to put things out there and trust that your audience will, if they see it, that they'll like it, and if they don't, it's okay, post something else. It's okay to take breaks. There was a time where I was like, "I have to post every day." Actually I'll post multiple times a day and then you realize, dude, just you can post once every two weeks and people will get excited because they missed you. And then that will have 2500 likes on it by noon. So learning all those things over the course of time.

And then I hit 100,000 followers last year which seemed so crazy and I think a lot of the brand partnerships, they started definitely after I hit 50,000 followers, but it's still a struggle. There's people that are getting paid a million plus a year with all these influencer deals. And you're like, "Oh well, I made 120,000 followers and I might have gotten \$50,000, \$60,000 of income this year." Which is not anything to cough at, but there still feels like I'm not doing enough. I don't have enough followers for this. I don't have the engagement or whatever.

It's always the comparison game. And then when you have friends in the same field that are influencers or interior designers and they get that one partnership. I have to tell you this story. And I guess I don't know if they'll ever hear this.

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But anyway, Samsung, Samsung approached me about doing a partnership and I was so excited. It was early last year or the year before, 20/21. And I was so excited when their agency reached out. And then after giving them my rate and coming up with a concept and all these things, they ghosted me. The agency ghosted me. And three months go by of me following up emails. Nothing. And then six months later I have two friends that have partnerships with Samsung for their bespoke campaign. And I'm like, "What the hell, why?" I was so angry.

And then come to find out, they switched agencies. And then I reached out to my agency. I'm like, "How can you get this and that?" And then we still haven't been successful. So it's me thinking, oh, man, this was a great partnership. Even if they come to you, it's so flaky. The industry is so whatever. You can't take anything personally and that sucks. Same thing with being an interior designer, you can't take anything personally. Well, my designs are personal. I put [crosstalk], I'm going to take it personally.

So there are ebbs and flows and frustration and comparison is the thief of joy and all of these things with the influencer field too. But you just have to remember, I think the thing that keeps me grounded is that I follow people, influencers that now their feed feels like just one long infomercial. And I always said, "I do not want to be that. I don't want people following me, feeling like I'm always selling them something. I want all the content to feel super organic."

I have a partnership with this paint company that I posted for last month and we've got two more posts to go. And as they're giving me feedback, the agency, I'm just like, "Well, I'm not going to say it this way because that doesn't sound like me. I'm going to say it this way." And if they're a good partner, they're going to be like, "That totally makes sense." Because they want it to feel authentic.

Tobi: Authentic, yeah.



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Amber: So I'm still learning and growing. And hopefully one day the income from the influencing and other things I'm working on, licensing and other partnerships, hopefully that will exceed the client revenue. I pray that it does because I want to do less of the client work and just pick and choose projects that I want to work on.

Tobi: I love that you say that. I love that you're brave enough to say that. Earlier when you said, "What I really want to do is have a line in Target and do little bungalows all over the world." That felt so true. I felt that at my core that that is true for you. And so it's so interesting because like you said, so many people think, well, I'm an interior designer. I have to go to the top of the exact path that all these other interior designers do.

And what I love about what you're saying is you're like, "No, I can go find the different ways that work for me to fund the dream." And that is so much more interesting to me than just getting on a path and taking the same path that you think everybody takes in a certain industry. It's so much more interesting.

Amber: There is only one Kelly Wearstler, only one Kelly Wearstler. There's only one, Justina Blakeney. There's only one Nate Berkus. It's all part of their own path and they also did things that probably would surprise us. They just stumbled across this or this [inaudible] run your own race.

Tobi: Yes, I was just talking to somebody who used to work for Nate Berkus last week. And she was saying, he is and has for a long time, just mostly been a media company. I mean, he has an interior design firm, that's not really all him. He does some of that stuff and he is a designer for sure, of course. But yeah, he's really a media company.

Amber: His name is on the door but he's not necessarily and that's okay because I think the thing that trips us up is, well, if I'm involved, I have to really be involved, maybe be in the weeds with everything.

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Tobi: Exactly, I love that. That's such a great point. So if somebody's thinking about getting more into influencing, do they need an agent? Do they just start signing up for influencer platforms? How does that start in the beginning? How do you go there?

Amber: So I would say, just post, just post and do your thing. And the thing that helped me, I would say is I have always been and this is I guess kind of anti-interior design or it can be controversial. But I always tag all the brands that I use in my car. This sofa's from West Elm. This rug is from Jaipur. This light is from Lamps Plus. I am always tagging. And if you tag enough they will like it, they will comment, they will follow you. And eventually you'll get an email or DM that says, "Hey, we would love to talk more about collaborating on this."

And everything I've worked on this product that is coming out soon that I've been working on tirelessly, this collab, it was because I used their product and any time I had this type of product in my client spaces, I would say 40% of the time it was theirs. And so eventually they noticed. And then I got press with certain publications and they saw their product in my images. And so things can happen organically. It could take seven months, it could take seven years.

But people want to partner with folks that actually believe in their product because they want it to be authentic. I would also say in addition to posting and tagging the brands, I also created a pitch list. So I said, "Okay, if I were to work with 20 brands based on the products and services that I already use, things I do in my sleep, things I would do anyway like me going into Home Goods twice a week and just perusing and posting about that. Who is on that list?"

And put the brand names, the company names, the categories and go on LinkedIn and see and just search social media influencing or partnerships or whomever and find a contact. A lot of times you can just DM these companies and they'll give you the contact. But make that list and then say

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“Okay, well, if Sherwin-Williams is on the list, who’s their competition? Okay, let’s put Behr on there. Let’s put Benjamin Moore, Clare Paint.” For every wish list brand, who are their top five competitors and let’s add them to the list too.

And so I did that and of course like anything with cold calling, you send 100 emails you get two replies.

Tobi: Right. Well, totally, but still you got two.

Amber: Yeah, it’s further than you would have been. And then eventually late last year I did start working with a PR agency and they have an influencer and sponsorship arm. So I have a person on the team that works with me on all partnerships, on licensing, on TV things, all the negotiation and stuff. And honestly, even working with an agency and providing them with, here’s my wish list of partners. I’m still getting a lot of those inquiries for partnerships directly.

They’re not necessarily pulling them in, but they’re helping me negotiate. So if I would have accepted \$3,000 for this reel, they’re like, “No, girl, your rate is \$8,000 and you’re not doing this and they don’t have exclusivity on this and they have 30 days of whitelisting on this.” So it’s okay to, oh, well, maybe they’re not bringing in, but they’re helping me retain the business. They’re helping me make more, and they’re paying for themselves. So it’s been a journey.

But I think more than anything I use my simple Herman trash can every day. I use the simple Herman bags. I’m not going to use this random brand and pretend I like them just for the sake of a dollar. I want to partner with brands that are truly partners. It’s a collaboration, what’s in it for you, what’s in it for me. And I think if you just keep that mindset, the money will come. The breaks will come. And it’s so easy to feel defeated in this space because there’s so many people that are successful in doing it but it’s been a fun ride.

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Tobi: I love that. Thank you for sharing. You're always so open. I love that. I think you inspired so many people with this conversation all the way around, design, influencing, your dreams, all the things. So I thank you so much. Is there anything, did we hit it all? Was there any last advice or caveats? Did we hit the beware of in the influencer space? We covered a lot.

Amber: I think we covered a lot. Yeah, I'm really appreciative of this conversation. I think if there's anything we didn't cover and I think we kind of talked about it before we jumped on the call is that rest is not a reward, it's a requirement. And the older I get, not that I'm 'old' but I realize, especially in entrepreneurship, if I don't get eight hours of sleep, I'm not serving anyone well. I'm not answering anybody's emails well. I'm not showing up to my clients' house well. I'm not getting on the Zoom with this brand well. I'm not creating. I'm not doing my best work.

And so getting rest, embracing positive, healthy mental health because that's something that I've really struggled with this year. And personally, I'm just so grateful for my tribe and people that have poured into me and wrapped their arms around me because there have been some really, really difficult moments beyond just *Blessed Little Bungalow*. And I think a big piece of that has been BLB has been at the center and Amber's just getting in where she could fit in.

Whereas Amber being at the center and *Blessed Little Bungalow* being on the outskirts, just like user centered design. You have to think about your business in that same way. You as the CEO or the founder and creator, you have to take care of you because you can't fill from an empty cup. You can't do well whether you have clients or not. *Blessed Little Bungalow* can't be healthy without a healthy Amber.

So I would encourage your listeners to take care of themselves, take that walk, breathe, sleep. I'm also a poor eater. I'll go a whole day and not eat till 6:00pm. That's not what you're supposed to be doing. And then I'll

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randomly get COVID or the flu and I'll be like, "Okay, this is the universe telling me."

Tobi: You've got to eat, girl, you've got to sleep, yes.

Amber: Got to eat, sleep and take care of yourself for sure.

Tobi: Yeah. So good. Thank you so much. So tell them, I mean, we've talked about it a million times, but tell them the places they find you, Instagram, *Blessed Little Bungalow*, any place else?

Amber: Yeah, at *blessedlittlebungalow*, all one word or blessed, as some people say. And I'm on YouTube. I'm on TikTok, Pinterest, you name it. My website's *blessedlittlebungalow.com*. Would love to hear from you all, so if you have any feedback feel free to email me [amber@blessedlittlebungalow](mailto:amber@blessedlittlebungalow). And yeah, I'm usually on Instagram, that's where I hang out the most.

Tobi: And you embrace TikTok again, because for a minute you were like, "I'm done with TikTok. I hate TikTok." Are you back on TikTok?

Amber: So my virtual assistant takes my Instagram reels and posts them on TikTok. So I'll go on there to respond to comments. But I'm not a TikTok scroller.

Tobi: You're not a TikToker?

Amber: I'm not. I'm not a TikToker or TikTaker. I'm not that person, but I'm a senior millennial and I feel like Instagram is where it stops. I wasn't really on Snapchat or Vine or a lot of those things that happened later. And TikTok is kind of in that same category.

Tobi: Yes, I understand. Okay, well, awesome. Well, we will look for you in all those places. Thank you again. I loved every minute of this and I'll talk to you soon.

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Amber: Yeah, thank you, Tobi.

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Okay, friends, follow Amber out there on the web. She's doing great things, *Blessed Little Bungalow*. She's got big, fun stuff coming up soon. She's got some announcements she'll be telling us about that she couldn't quite reveal. Just so many fun things happening for her. She's been on fire for the last year and a half or two, press and partnerships and all the things. But I love that she came to share with us that it's not just all roses. It's not all fun and games. There's the other side of life always happening even when things are going well.

So I hope this episode inspired you. Let Amber and I know what you think. And if you want help from me showing up in a big way on social media like I do, like Amber does, then you can still get my social media, three-part training called Show Up on Social Media like a pro. Head to [tobifairley.com/getsocial](http://tobifairley.com/getsocial) and you can grab it. It is so good. It's going to really help you show up and tap into a lot of your creativity and go after a lot of your dreams.

So grab that training, 297, [tobifairley.com/getsocial](http://tobifairley.com/getsocial) and I'll see you back next week with another great episode with somebody else doing big things in the social media space, and I know you're going to love it. Okay, see you then, bye for now.

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