

## Ep #293: Navigating the Hard with Lee Waters



### 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 293.

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, I'm so glad you're here today. We are finishing this year strong as I told you we would with amazing guests. And today I have my friend Lee Waters, who is an amazing interior designer from Richmond, Virginia. She has been in my *Design You* program and my *Millionaire Mentorship* program. She's come to my house for thinktank. We've done all kinds of work together. But I wanted to bring her on because she is an action taker, which a lot of you know that I am an action taker too, and that's something that I really love.

And she has been doing everything from creating a course while she was in *Design You* a year or two ago to now launching a podcast for that course and a lot of other things. But I knew that she had also been sort of navigating a little bit of a tough season this year like we all have. And I wanted her to come on and talk about it because I know a lot of you are struggling with things, but you're struggling sort of by yourself. And you don't really want to talk about it. You don't want to be negative. You don't want to wish anything, a lack of business on yourself.

But things are hard right now. The economy's soft and I'm hearing from so many designers how slow their business is. My design business is pretty not slow this year, but my coaching business has been fairly slow. And so we're all impacted by the economy right now. And so when things feel really hard, as they have for all of us, myself included, I keep hearing myself saying over and over, "Why is everything so hard right now?" That is something that impacts how we show up every day as well.

And I knew Lee had been dealing with some things. So I wanted to bring her on so that we could sort of pull the curtain back on this and really give you sort of, I guess, something to resonate with, to see yourself in, to learn

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from. Because, you all, it's hard out there and nobody talks about how hard it is to be an entrepreneur. They just glamorize how amazing it is to own your own business and how you can set your own schedule and all the things. But you all, it is hard. It's not ever going to be super easy, but there's definitely going to be some seasons that are harder than others.

And I wanted to just give you a little, hopefully a little boost by at least knowing that you're not the only one that goes through hard things. And maybe give you some thoughts, some mindset, some tips that you can use to navigate rough waters when you're up against them as well. Okay, so here's my interview with my friend, Lee Waters.

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

Lee Waters: Thanks for having me.

Tobi: So we've probably talked about having you on before. We've known each other for quite some time, well, not that long. But we've gotten to know each other really well in kind of a short period of time, I would say, because we've worked together in consulting and other things. But I wanted you to come on today because I wanted you to talk about some of the things you've been doing. And we've both kind of collectively decided that this episode is about experience or gaining experience. It's in the midst of becoming experienced.

I would call it in the midst of the hard. And I feel like this entire year just for a lot of us has just felt hard. Everything about the year has just felt hard. Harder than you thought it was going to be, harder than it seemed like it needed to be but just not easy. So why don't you tell everybody a little bit first about who you are and what you do. And then let's get into this living through the hard conversation because I think a lot of people are going to resonate and probably have some big takeaways from our conversation.

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Lee: Absolutely. So I'm Lee Waters. I am Lee Waters Design. We do full service interior design here in Richmond, Virginia. I have a course for rebel moms called *Take Back Your Home*. And we recently launched a podcast of the same name, *Take Back Your Home* with Lee Waters. And that's kind of an in-depth look, look at what is going on behind the doors of that course. So that if you're considering taking it, you can kind of get an understanding of what is in there before you dive in.

And if you can't take it yet, it gives you an outline of the steps that you need to take to design a space because we understand that not everyone is going to hire us for full service interior design. So why not give them the knowledge and knowhow to transform their space because it makes your life so much better.

Tobi: I love it. So you've already done a lot of hard things obviously in life. You've started the business. You've been running it for a little while. Design in general is just hard because there's a million things that can go wrong at every moment. And then also putting yourself out and creating and launching and selling a course is hard. Creating and launching and putting yourself out with a podcast is hard. So let's just kind of start there.

When you think about this year in particular, how would you sum up what it's felt like? And then we can get into some examples because I know people are going to relate, of what it is to be in the midst of gaining experience. Because usually we don't like to be beginners at anything as humans. We only want to be experts at something and we want to avoid all the issues. But there's really no way around. It's always through, through the thing, which is really the definition of experience. So yeah, talk to us about it.

Lee: Well, I'm sure for a lot of home adjacent or home involved creatives 2020, 2021, 2022, there was a lot of people turning to us to help them make their homes amazing or create their dream home. And there was hard there because of logistics with shipping and part unavailability and lead times on things but we still had people coming to us. And I think 2023 with the predictions for the economy, a lot of people got very nervous, we

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got nervous. And so I think the contrast of 2022, kind of the height of my business.

And then 2023, it probably felt more difficult simply, instead of looking at as an ebb and flow, I think I've looked at it as a, "Wow, that year was awesome," 2022. Even though I thought it was hard at the time because of logistics which are nothing in the grand scheme of things. But yeah, and then this year, that contrast is not pretty. And so as I've reflected, I realized, but I have gotten a lot of learning from this hard. And so I'm trying to be appreciative of that as I look at 2023.

Tobi: It's the only time we really learn and grow is when things are hard. You don't learn very much when things are just clicking and rolling and you've got business and all the things. Yeah.

Lee: It's just like at the gym.

Tobi: Yeah, exactly, working out that muscle. It's got to be painful in the process, yeah. Well, and of course, sometimes we make it more painful in all kinds of ways than it has to be. But I think, yeah, consistently across the board. And still with a lot of people right now hearing the same thing, business is slow. Because people, maybe they have some business right now, but they don't have a full pipeline for the first quarter of next year, which is making everybody nervous. The economy's soft.

People are not wanting to spend money. High end clients are pulling back on spending money and all the things. And there are still, of course always pockets of people that are kind of untouched or insulated or individual clients. I have a client right now that they're not really pulling back on things. They'll get what they want and those are wonderful, thankfully, we have those in the midst of. But kind of the general consensus is not that. It's that things feel hard this year. And I feel like it's a conversation I'm having week after week after week.

So what are some of the, take us through a few of the instances that have felt particularly hard for you this year. We can take them a piece at a time. I

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know there's a few things. Well, I'm sure there's some hard with launching the podcast. I know there's hard with not having business at times and what do you do there? And then of course then just you were telling me about a really interesting design project. I think people would be fascinated to know about, that in and of itself is hard just to kind of validate and remind people, we're all going through the same stuff all the time.

Lee: We had a lot of contractor issues and we love our current contractor. But we had a client project where we were dealing with an ice bath. And at the beginning of that, our contractor at the time closed their business. And a lot of people were financially impacted by that, including our client. And so there was a lot of information for this really massive primary bedroom suite, including this amazing spa of a bathroom with a sauna and an ice tub and a regular tub and a double shower and all the fixings.

And there was all this data and product information that was kind of shuffled. It was like you took a bunch of papers and threw them up in the air. And so yeah, even though we kept the same project manager, she ended up becoming our general contractor, her and another employee from that contractor, the original one formed their own business. And so we're still using them and they're great.

But it felt hard to have done all this work, to prepare drawings and then have people come back and like, "Well, what are we doing here?" It's in the drawings in the email account, you can't access because that company that you originally worked with is no longer in business. And then so it was just a lot of stopping on our part to go back and revisit things. And then when the ice bath finally got here. It weighed, I don't know, five or so times what a regular ice bath would weigh. And what is even regular?

Most ice baths are in a spa or a gym or they're outside and then we have to put this thing on a second story level. So we had to get the structural engineer back out because he had done stuff based on whatever you Google a nice stock weighs and apparently just weighed way more. And so anyways, we worked it out with the contractor and the client. And that was thankfully not on us. That was on the contractor to sort through because



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they're responsible for the structural engineer aspect of the project but it put things on hold.

And then we had to flip the layout at least two more times after that, because it was okay if we run another steel I-beam through the roof, that means their kitchen's getting dumped on with ceiling stuff. But we can put the bath here. If they don't want to do that, we put footers on this other wall to make it an exterior wall then we can move it. So this ice bath is moving around constantly after the fact, after it's already been ordered. And as a designer, we thought through the function, we've got to get a lot of stuff in this bathroom.

All the things I listed and then [inaudible] like, "Well, would this work?" And I'm like, "I don't know. I'm going to need an hour or two to look at these drawings and move things around and think through all the stuff that I decided eight months ago." And so yeah, that was one of the contractor issues, we had personally bought another, a second home in another state and had somebody renovating that. And because I was busy with a charity project here for Saint Jude, that the project manager walked off site in the middle of.

I mean that was delayed, and then the ice bath bathroom drama. Because of all that, I kind of let down my professional guard on my own personal project. And that contractor in another city was not doing the work that he said he was doing. And so we got down there even though we double and triple checked with him. Yes, we're going to furniture install this day, it will be ready. We get there, it's a complete construction site and I have furniture delivered to a construction site. So that's just the contractor chapter of 2023.

Tobi: Which is just only one part of the hard. And so I think the interesting thing that comes up too is you'd shared that one of your team members also had shifted out of kind of the role she had been in. Because basically for this very reason. That she was sick of the kind of uncomfortable conversations you have to constantly have with clients about money and deadlines. And we're not going to make things.

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Lee: And mistakes are made.

Tobi: Yes, all of that. And we made mistakes, somebody else made mistakes. All of that is so uncomfortable and people underestimate how we kind of have to armor up on a daily basis to just go into a regular, even a good client and have these very uncomfortable, often loaded conversations. We don't know what that client's money story is or baggage is. We don't know what, I mean, we're bringing our own money baggage to the table.

And so if it weren't enough to have to go through those, then you have a team member who's like, "I'm not cut out for this." So then you had to shift team members.

Lee: Yeah. And so now it's starting and so yeah, there was this period probably, let's see. We're recording this 1<sup>st</sup> of November. I'm not sure when it'll air. But when we were hitting August, this is when the team member and I started to have some conversations. The kids are getting ready to go back to school. And I'm like, "This is when people start, the inquiries start to come in more." There's certain seasons for us and September is one of them.

And so I'm like, "I know there's been a lot of crud happening this year. I feel the way that you're responding to things, tells me you're not as comfortable. Is that true?" "Yes, that's true." And so we were able to make that shift and I knew who I needed, but this person was working in another job. So then I'm looking at, it's been a slower year. Can I afford to hire this person? And so I had to have that conversation. "Do you want to leave your job to give me a certain month trial to see how this will work?"

Tobi: That may or may not be something. Yes, you'll maybe have to take a risk and uproot your life, and maybe I can't afford to keep you.

Lee: I know. And so I said, "I have this much money set aside." Because I just felt like I spent a lot of time thinking about it. I can take action pretty quickly, sometimes too quickly. And so I actually spent a few weeks really



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thinking through all this and looking at stuff. And I was like, “Okay, I’ve put this money aside for this many months at this minimum of time per week. Do you want to do it knowing that?” And this person said, yes, thankfully. And so because I knew if she came and was what I thought she had, those qualities that I thought she had, which have nothing to do with design.

It’s all about comfort with uncomfortable conversations. Her life experience has just made her such a perfect fit and she happens to like design. So it’s been really great and she’s been an asset and I knew if I had the right person in here it would be painful to have to retrain but it would help ultimately bring in new people.

Because I heard her answer the phone today, and she’s got the hang of it now enough that she said everything I would have said and actually better because it’s not me and somebody calling. And there’s more than just one stressed out designer running around having to take care of everything. There’s another person and now, yeah, so now we’re two people or three of us total. And so I’m starting to kind of take a breath where even though we have a million proposals out right now, we’re waiting for people to sign.

And it’s never taken so long for clients to sign before, collectively, it’s weird. It’s almost like what is happening? I’m finally kind of just breathing, okay, it’s still hard. But I can see that I’m setting up the path for whatever good is coming. And I’m choosing to believe that something good is happening.

Tobi: Yeah. So you kind of described this topic to me when we started because we were going to just talk about your podcast. But I think this is such a timely conversation for so many people. And you said in your words, “I’ve been paid more in experience this year than in money”, which I think is a perfect way to say that. So yeah, talk about that a little bit more.

Lee: I have to give my friend, Laura, credit for those words. I don’t know if she came up with it or somebody else did, but she was the first person I’ve ever heard say that. And she just said, “Some years you get paid in money and some years you get paid in experience.” And obviously we’ve been

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paid for our work. But it's just not, you kind of expect with a business the dream is that every year we'll make [crosstalk].

Tobi: Grow. Yeah, grow.

Lee: And unfortunately this year hasn't happened. And I was complaining to her about it. And she said, and she works in luxury real estate and development. And so she's like, "Yeah. I feel you. I mean, I've had this kind of year and that kind of year." And she's like, "It's a roller-coaster. But you've got to look at the experience from those years where you're not as in the black as you want to be and take from it to prepare for those years." Because really without that experience, without those bigger muscles, you could say, you're not going to be able to lift the heavier thing down the road.

And that's what I want to do. I want to keep growing so that I can handle whatever's coming, that maybe there's another ice bath in my future.

Tobi: Well, I was just going to say. I was thinking about the ice bath in particular. And it is having gone through a scenario exactly like that and seeing all the things you didn't know and that other people didn't know that are all considered experts. You're all experts at the work you do and you still didn't know everything because it's impossible to know.

Those are the very things that actually give you confidence to go out and try other things and take on bigger projects and grow into saying, "I used to only could do a room at a time but now I can do a whole house." Because after I've been through that ice bath thing, there's nothing that we can't figure out no matter what it is, in framing or appliances or windows or any part of the house. Because you learn to be resilient. You learn to be really what I would call, you create self-confidence because you think I may not know all the answers, but I know I can depend on myself to figure it out.

Lee: Yeah, life is not going to end because this is happening.

Tobi: Right. Yeah. So what is the value of that kind of experience and confidence, do you think in a design business? What does it set you up for?

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I know you don't know exactly what's coming yet, but when you think about that, what does this kind of year set you up to be able to do?

Lee: Yeah. I think from a product delivery standpoint for the client, it sets me up to promote that calm, can do attitude which we realized the clients love. I get it. This sucks, what's happening right now, but let me tell you about this time when this thing happened and we got through it. We got to the other side. And so I think that's really good for clients to know, she's not just going to disappear on us. And my contractor loves to say that, "We're not going anywhere. Thank you for letting us know about this, we're going to handle it."

And that's really reassuring to our clients because the first contractor did go somewhere. Yeah, and so it's really reassuring. And so I can see that. And then from a personal development side, I think for me personally, I can tend to overwork. And so I'm learning, the problem is there. I've worked through these other problems. I cannot sit here and kind of do the clicking around on the computer searching for the answer, thinking I'm going to come up with it in 30 seconds. Get off the computer. Go walk the dog. Go to bed, read a book, whatever.

And think about this again tomorrow and just think of who I can call and not kind of get in that frantic, I can personally get in a space of frantic, I have to have the answer, I have to have it.

Tobi: It needs to be, yeah, I can't rest until the solution is found.

Lee: And also I don't want anyone to be mad at me at the end. So it's, yeah, good luck with that.

Tobi: So basically you just have to be okay with both of those things, which I think is one of the biggest challenges that people in the design industry go through day after day after day is being okay. If somebody's going to be mad at you at some point, and you can still deal with that and you will not die and you will figure it out. And deadlines are going to be missed and things aren't going to move as fast as people want them to, and that's also

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okay. You working 24/7 doesn't usually really speed it up that much because you just are fatigued and you're not being effective anyway.

Lee: Yeah. Another thing that I think it's made me realize is that I would like to give my clients more pre-framing. I don't know if that's right, but more pre-framing of things that will go wrong in the beginning. I used to do more of it and I've kind of gotten away from it. And now I think it's a reminder, hey, okay at the beginning of a project, thanks for the check.

Tobi: Set the expectations.

Lee: Yeah. Let's get a little bit or at least remind ourselves at certain points, okay, have we checked in with them? Have we checked in at least twice? I think it needs to be more than once because at the beginning we're all happy and we get the design and they write the check. And I feel like there needs to be another reminder. And so I'm actually going to create a note for myself after this.

A sauna, we're about to order for this new project that we just presented today and the clients love everything. So we're going to get that stuff ordered. And then I'm going to have that as a note to reach out to them next week and everything got ordered, great. But let's remember, here's what could go wrong. And if it does, we're going to figure out the solution and keep you updated with our weekly emails. And just a reminder, that's the purpose of the weekly up, the weekly [crosstalk].

Tobi: I've always called that the twilight zone for the client because they give you this big check and a lot of times it is big. A lot of times it's tens of thousands of dollars of [crosstalk] that we've ordered. And then you go off with their money and they just don't hear from you. And they're like, "Have they absconded? Did they leave the country? Are they sitting on a beach drinking my money in cocktails or has something actually been ordered?"

And there are plenty of horror stories where designers don't order things or don't have the money to order things or haven't managed their finances appropriately or whatever. And things don't go well. And then even if you've

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done everything right, like you said, the sofa's still going to come with a leg broken or with a stain on the back of it, or they upholstered the fabric going in the wrong direction, or all the different things that are going to go wrong because they just are.

And yeah, so I think that's so smart to remember that from their perspective, it literally feels like they're sort of just out of the loop. And it makes people very nervous and then a lot of times when clients, they take as much as they can take and then they start calling, freaking out and we have to talk them off the wall. And a lot of times, there wasn't even anything to freak out about, but we didn't stay in touch like you're saying.

Lee: And our weekly emails, we're good about that but I think just we're still in this happy, we don't know what's going to happen stage. And so I think it'll be okay, yeah, ordering is great. It went great. But just remember, as things come in, yeah, the sofa leg could be broken or the desk could have a big scratch on it or the desk could disappear. That's happened before, it could just disappear. So yeah, so just be aware, but never fear. If it happens, we will deal with it and so yeah, kind of prepping people.

It's like when you're pregnant, for anyone that's carried a child in their body. Everyone's telling you different things and I always appreciated people that were, maybe not everyone does. But I appreciated people who were like, "This thing could happen and it probably won't." But it's just kind of good to be aware of because things are happening and you're like, "Should this be happening?"

Tobi: Yeah, that's how I was after I had a baby and I had various things and I was like, "Why does nobody tell you this? I've never heard of this before."

Lee: Especially the afterbirth. Yes, especially the afterbirth.

Tobi: Yes. I had these weird night sweats and I would wake up literally my entire body sitting in a pool of sweat from hormones. And I could wring out my nightgown or my pajamas literally. And I would wake up freezing and shivering. And I'm like, "How in these nine and a half months did no one

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ever?” But afterwards I found several people that were like, “Yeah, I totally had those.” And I’m like, “You didn’t tell me about these things. What is this?” And so that’s the weird stuff that just like that on a design project, the weirdest things can happen in a home project.

And nobody’s like, “Why did you all not tell me to be prepared, that the desk could literally disappear or that it could take nine months to get here.” And then still come in and it’s the completely wrong item and we have to start over again, all of that stuff. It’s not a surprise to us as designers, but we forget that it might be good to let people in on a little bit of that process.

Lee: And why is that? Because I mean I kind of know, but I’m curious what your take is. Because I think it’s just, why did no one tell us about the postpartum night sweats? It wasn’t the highlight reel. And maybe we would think they were weird.

Tobi: They’re weird or at some level would people not want to have a baby if they heard all this? Or would people not ever start their project if they heard all of this? There’s some fear of changing the course of their decision making based on, shall we just keep that to ourselves? It’s not my responsibility. That’s how I feel about so often I’m so frustrated with contractors and even architects who won’t tell the truth about how much a project costs on the front end.

And they’ll let a client go all the way through a process, thinking they’re going to build a house for, I don’t know, in Arkansas, 700,000 or 800,000 when I’m like, “That’s 1.2 minimum before I even put furniture in it.” And they’re like, “Well, I mean, I’m not the contractor, I’m just the architect.” And I’m like, “But you know how much this costs.” That’s the kind of thing, that it’s the elephant in the room so often, but nobody wants to be the one to break the news. Nobody wants to be the disappointment. Nobody wants to be the bearer of bad news.

So we just, like you said, we only show the highlight reel and just hope and pray that thing doesn’t happen. And then when it does kind of all hell breaks loose because people are like...



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Lee: You could have told me this whole time.

Tobi: Yeah, you could have told me. I don't like surprises. You knew this was a possibility. And you didn't tell. Yeah, so interesting. So when you think about going through all the things that you've gone through this year, including the podcast, which I'm sure, I mean, you're fairly natural at that kind of stuff and you already made a course. But I know there probably was some learning there. And there's definitely some unknowns about where the podcast is going and what you're going to do with it in the future.

What kind of tools or mindsets do you find yourself kind of relying on? What keeps you going, what props you up? What sort of helps you through kind of being in the hard like we've been talking about?

Lee: A lot of my preparation for the podcast, launching that has been from coaching. And Tobi, you've been a great coach to me in the past through *Design You*, in the *Millionaire Mentorship*. And I've worked with other coaches. And so I think that that habit of developing a self-coaching practice has been helpful. And I'm not always perfect at it, but professional coaching, self-coaching, which you eventually start to do as you work with a coach.

That's been really helpful to get into this repeating narrative in your head of what happens if you try and fail? It's literally just a data point. It's nothing about you. Everything that is a great success in the world came after a series of failures, some of them, hundreds, thousands of years to get to sliced bread or a wheel that's rubber. And so it's just having that repeated by you and other coaches and other people in our groups. That's really been so helpful just to be like this literally is just a data point. And don't make it mean something that it doesn't mean.

So I think that's been the guiding thing. And for me, I'm a very learn by doing person. I guess that probably makes me a kinesthetic learner. But with my kids, they all have either July or September birthdays and I have two boys. And so everyone was like, "Well, you can't put your boys in

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kindergarten with a July and a September birthday because they're going to be the youngest ones and what if they have to repeat it?"

And it was kind of interesting because these decisions were made before I was working with a coach. But my attitude at the time was very much like, "Well, we won't know unless they do it. And it's free to try." It doesn't mean anything unless I tell them it means something. That was always my attitude about it.

Tobi: If you have to do kindergarten twice, it doesn't mean that you're dumb. It doesn't mean that you're incapable. It just means that you weren't quite ready and we're going to do it again and get better at it, yeah.

Lee: And the second guiding thing, to go back to the podcast, the second guiding mindset was, but what if it takes off? And then you've got the kindergarten scenario, all three of my kids are now past kindergarten. One is in middle school, one is in fourth and in advanced classes and doing great socially as well. And then the youngest one is in first grade and he's beginning to read. And I don't need them to be the smartest kids in the class, but it did take off for them, where they're able to stay grade level or slightly above depending on which kid it is and which subject.

But it did take off and I would not have known that if we hadn't tried. And if we had stayed home, and I'm not telling anyone. If you feel as a parent that your child needs to wait a year, please wait the year. But for me, I had kind of given birth to three old people. They just are little old souls and I just felt, it's not that they knew how to read before kindergarten, and I was like, "They're so smart, they have to go." It was just, I just feel like another year home just doesn't feel right and I didn't let social pressure...

Tobi: Yeah, I think what I'm hearing is you didn't want to make a decision from a place of fear. And I love that because if you're saying, "I'm not going to make the fact that we don't have as much business this year mean we're never going to have business, I'm not going to make it mean that I'm not a good designer. I'm not going to make it mean we should close the shop or

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the business.” I’m just going to make it mean we don’t have as much business as we had last year, the end.

But you don’t want to then take that one data point, not a whole group of data and make a major decision on that one thing because you’re going to make it from a place of fear and scarcity probably is what you’re saying. So keeping perspective is keeping you from making decisions from that scarcity place, so what if it doesn’t work kind of thing, right?

Lee: Right. Yeah. You’ve just got to wake up and look at what you do have and try to glean what you can from the hard. And that’s what I’ve been feeling when that fear started coming up in August, oh, my gosh, everything is going wrong. My personal home project is going wrong and the Saint Jude’s house, no one ever got to go in it because it was too delayed and legally it had to be given away through the state lottery, by a certain date. So no one got to go in it and yeah, because of that one project manager just leaving in the middle.

And then the other project, these poor homeowners have been waiting a year almost for this primary suite to be done. And yeah, I started feeling this fear and I just thought, is this the time to be doing a podcast? But I just was like, “No, you felt like you wanted to do it. It made sense to you, hiring another person, it makes sense long term. Let’s just push forward and see where these paths are going to take us.” And so, yeah, I’m feeling a lot better. I’m feeling a lot better for not giving into the fear for sure.

Tobi: Yeah, it’s so good. Well, and I think it just reminds us that we had a misunderstanding or a rose colored glasses or highlight reel expectation of entrepreneurship. When we think that every year is going to be growth and every year there’s going to be business and never is there going to be a downturn and once you go up, you keep going up forever. And I mean I’ve made that mistake before too. I heard somebody else yesterday just say that she thought, well, maybe this, I can’t remember what she said had happened.

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But she's like, "So maybe I've arrived at that point where that's going to keep happening." And I thought to myself, yeah, well, be careful with that. Not to be a Debbie Downer but just to remember, everything is going to ebb and flow. I thought when I got published on the cover of House Beautiful that they would take all my future amazing projects. And I sent them a second, literally \$1 million project and they were like, "Thanks but no thanks." And I was so shocked. I'm like, "Wait, but what?"

Lee: I thought we were together.

Tobi: Exactly. I thought we were married. This is a commitment. You're betraying me. And then I was like, "Oh, yeah, so maybe, yeah, maybe that's not how that works." And then later, two years later that project that we literally waited for two years did end up on the cover of Traditional Home so it worked out. But in the moment, we think that we have an expectation and usually it's only for the good or the growth or most of us.

There are some of us, I guess, in the world that are pessimists. But for me, I'm an eternal optimist and I get the expectation that it's going to keep going in a positive direction. And it's a good reminder that it's not always and like you said, it doesn't mean that you have to quit. It's just a reminder to be like, "This is how this is going to be." This isn't even an outlier. Those of us who intend to be in business for 10 or 20 or 30 more years, we're going to hit this multiple times because that's just how business works.

Lee: Yeah. Do you feel, as a little bit of a sidebar, do you feel as an optimist, because I would consider myself one too, that sometimes, and this probably ties into overworking as well. You're going up the hill and you're like, "No, it's going to get easier. No, it's going to get easier." You never take a break.

Tobi: Yes. And I'm going to finish. I'm going to, if I just work an hour longer, I will be finished. And then seven hours later you're only halfway there.

Lee: You sleep at your desk, but you're not sleeping and your hand is still moving. And so I would say if you identify with that, I actually feel like the

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great thing about pessimists is that they'll take breaks more and they'll just be like, "I give up." And hopefully they'll circle back around. But with optimists, sometimes I think we don't give up and I say, "If you're in this loop of feeling, if I just keep going, if I just keep trying."

Yes, you do want to keep trying, but you probably need to stop now. You probably need to stop for the day as we were kind of talking about earlier. And just be like, you know what, I give up for today. And give yourself that option to momentarily give up and release. And I feel like when I do that where I have a good cry or whatever. It doesn't mean I'm not an optimist. It just means I needed a freaking break from going [crosstalk].

Tobi: That's such a great point. That's a really good point and observation. My husband's an Enneagram six, and which is an eternal pessimist. But I will say, and partly I think this is the male gender is maybe better at this than us. I don't know. I don't want to be totally gendered, but a lot of men I know are better at compartmentalizing things and quitting things.

But he's so much better than me at taking a break, leaving work at work, going and playing tennis, having his weekends, being able to turn it off. And I have a really hard time ever turning it off for all the reasons you described. So this downturn, I'm actually going through the same thing at this moment. I have been really overworking this year. And I hadn't done that in a while. It's been several years since I was at that point. And for all very similar reasons like you, team leaving, things you weren't expecting, starting things and thinking everything else would keep going great.

And then the bottom would fall out someplace else. And so then I had two things so all the reasons. But like you're saying, I'm hitting a point right now. And just last night in particular, I was forcing myself to not work, to take a bath, to relax. And just reminding myself, this is still going to be here and we know, we think if we just run a little harder, we'll bring the money in or we'll finish the thing and send it off to the client or whatever that story is that we're racing towards.

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But it really doesn't ever work that way. And if you stop and take a break, I don't know, it speeds you up at some level. You come back fresh and things click a lot better.

Lee: Yeah. No, I agree. I agree completely and making that time for something that gives back to you is important. But I was also getting a little bit too overdoing it there too. In fact, I just quit my gym membership because I have a big dog. She's behind me there, but she needs consistent walks. She's a rescue, she doesn't play with toys. We don't know why. And so there's really no way to entertain her unless she's on a walk, that's pretty much, walk or food, that's it.

So she forces me to get outside. And what I was feeling with the gym is that even though I really like working out, having to feel, and I like to be in the classes, it was another obligation that I felt.

Tobi: I feel that way too. Yeah, I quit the gym right after COVID for the same reason. I tried to go back after COVID, and then I was like, "No, I can't have one more thing where I feel guilty if I don't show up or I'm racing to try to get there on time when this could be on my own terms, all the things." Yeah, I hear you. It's so interesting. So I loved this conversation. I'm so glad you were transparent and shared.

I know so many people are nodding and clapping and agreeing and understanding and having aha moments because this is actually, if we're being honest, just what life looks like.

Lee: It really is, yeah.

Tobi: Life looks like the messy and the hard mixed with the amazing and the good and all rolled up.

Lee: For everyone, yeah.

Tobi: Yes, all the time. If people want to find you, if they want to find your course, if they want to find your podcast, all the things, where do they go to do that?



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Lee: You can find me on Instagram if you want to chat about anything or check out, I would say both our technical IG highlight reel, because we have all of our highlights by project. But also we try to keep it pretty real on there and let people know about just the funny roll your eyes, throw your hands up in the air moments because they definitely happen. And then our glossier side is over at leewatersdesign.com and you can check out our *Take Back the Home* course on there. There's also a link for the podcast, which you can view on YouTube or listen to on Spotify or Apple Podcasts.

Tobi: Awesome. I love it. Well, I mean, even though it's felt hard, you're doing amazing things. And I love that you're continuing to keep going, so bravo. And so good to see you. I'm so happy you were here today.

Lee: It's so good to be with you. Thank you, Tobi.

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Okay friends, I hope that put a little wind back in your sails or if not quite put wind back in your sails, at least made you know that you're not alone. Gave you some tips and some ideas on how to navigate and move forward and think about next year because we're almost there, which is scary. But this year is really coming quickly to an end. And so it's time to be thinking about next year and really how we want to set ourselves up for success, what we want to do, how we want to think differently.

And hopefully maybe, maybe lean into some days and some weeks and some months that don't feel quite so hard. So that's what I have for you today. And I'll see you back here next week, same place, same time, well, it's on your time, actually, anytime you want, but same place right here with another great episode of *The Design You Podcast*. Bye for now.

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