

Ep #10: Creating a Life on Purpose with Sarah Wittenbraker



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Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 10.

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 is your host, Tobi Fairley.

Hey everybody, it's Tobi Fairley, as you know, and I am so excited to be here today because we - me and my friend Sarah, are bringing you my first ever podcast style interview to *The Design You Podcast*.

So let me tell you about my special guest. So my guest is my long-time friend, Sarah Wittenbraker, who is a fabulously creative interior designer from Austin, Texas, and she's going to tell you more about herself and who she is and what she does and what she believes in because today what we're going to talk about is just really this sort of almost struggle that we have as women entrepreneurs and mompreneurs of creating our life on purpose. You know, a life that's authentic and one that we can have work life balance and we can have all the things we dream of.

Tobi: So without any further ado and talking about you like you're not here, Sarah, I want to welcome you, Sarah Wittenbraker to *The Design You Podcast*. Welcome.

Sarah: Thank you, Tobi. It's exciting. I'm really flattered to be your first guest.

Tobi: Well, this is fun, and you know, I had to polish up on my interview skills because I'm really good at talking and telling people a lot of things on podcasts but it's a whole different ball of wax when you get into interviews, so we'll see how I do, but I'm so excited that you're the guest.

Sarah: Oh, this is going to be fun.

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Tobi: Okay, well tell everybody the important stuff that I haven't told them yet about who you are, besides an interior designer from Austin, Texas. So who are you? What do you do?

Sarah: Okay, I'm Sarah Wittenbraker, Austin, Texas, got that right. I have three kids, specifically three redheads, as you know, and gosh, I don't know, I feel like I'm someone who did it - who jumped into an interior design career and did everything wrong, and I had to come to you to pull me out of the deep end and bring me back to life. So yeah, I don't know, I run my interior design business, we run a fashion interior design website called Worn + Domestic, that's kind of a little branch off the design business that's super fun, and I'm a mom all the time.

Tobi: So that's all. You don't do anything. You have loads of free time.

Sarah: I have so much free time, exactly, just like you.

Tobi: Well, I think that's why we're here today though you know, because the reality that I know about you that everybody else doesn't probably know about you yet is that you had similar - sort of a similar path to mine and that most people have when we start these businesses and we have these grand dreams, and then the next thing we know we're on that treadmill that is, you know, no balance, no white space, killing ourselves, trying to make a living, trying to keep our head above water, trying to keep all 27 plates spinning, right? So tell us a little bit about that, sort of what that path looked like for you and then we're going to talk a lot about how it looks entirely different now because you've made some huge changes and some huge growth to start what I call designing your life on purpose. So tell us a little bit about that journey.

Sarah: Well, let's see. I jumped into the design business during a recession, which I know sounds crazy, but you know, my husband and I struggled significantly in those years and I kind of decided to make my design business a business and not a hobby anymore, or at least I thought I was doing that. And so like I said, I belly flopped in the deep end and just was learning as I go, find by the seat of my pants, all of a sudden had all

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these clients, and no idea how to manage it all. And I think soon I found myself in that world of I'm going to be 100% mom all the time, this is not going to affect me as a mom, you know, I'm going to pick them up from school, I'm going to go to every activity, I'm going to cook every meal, pack every lunch, and while they're asleep or while they're at school, I'm going to give all my time to my clients and somehow it's all going to work beautifully and magically and everyone's going to be happy. And instead what happened was, you know, as you know, exhaustion, the same old story, complete exhaustion, not being present with my family, not really doing a good job running a business at all, thinking I was making money, making no money once you forced me to look at my financials. And I think just thinking that busy meant being productive, and that I had to be earning this living and killing myself or I wasn't working hard enough or I wasn't doing enough, or I would never grow the business or be a good enough mom. And I just could never come down from this so-called productivity, which now looking back was just frantic busyness, skimming across the earth, you know, not rooted anywhere.

You know, I think I've told you this, like before I started the business, we were that family who was dancing in the kitchen and laying in the grass and painting outside, and then the next thing I knew that was just this memory, and I was with my family but not with my family and I don't know how personal you want to get, but you know, we had kind of a series of, you know, big time personal events happen. We had a sick child, as you know, Tobi, and sick parents, loss of a parent. I mean, so many difficult sobering experiences that were kind of just lined up during this time. And I mean, if that's not enough to make you stop and take pause and reevaluate your life, I mean, those hard times I think just really shaped us and guided us towards what's really important and that we have one life. And like you said, let's design it, let's live it deliberately and with purpose. Identify our priorities and focus on them. And it's so much easier said than done, but that's kind of what got me out of this fog of frantic aimless busyness. And made me focus on what do we really want and what do we want our life to look like and how do we get there.

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Tobi: So yeah, Sarah, I love that story because so many people can relate to that, and I think that you know, we've been there where we don't know how to stop the stuff we don't want to be doing until something either tragic or very serious happens. So we can relate to that, and that being sort of that eye opener. But I also think that so many women especially, struggle then at that moment they're like, okay, I get it, like, I got to get back to what's important, but I think they have a hard time even sort of defining and maybe they're just afraid to say out loud what they really want their life to look like. So how did you figure out now that you had this wakeup call or two or three of them, how did you figure out what you really did want your life to look like and that the way you were living it wasn't what you wanted it to look like?

Sarah: I think that's a good question. I mean, I think it's so easy for us to if you said, "What do you want in life?" it's so easy to spout off an answer. You know, I want to be a good mom, a good wife, a good friend, and a successful business. Well, okay, but what does that mean? I thought that's what I was doing, right? I think you actually have - it sounds silly, but you have to like, envision it, right? And just like you envision decorating a room, what do I see our family doing? Where do I see my business going? And just taking pause to actually envision it. And I think for me - maybe all women feel this way, I think admitting what we want is so hard. I think for me, it was hard because it's almost saying what I have now isn't good enough, and that's not really how I feel. My family is everything to me, I feel blessed beyond belief to have them, my friends, you know, my health, my job, I'm grateful for all of it. But it's more how I run it that I need to design. You know, do I want to be the one running to the mailbox every day for work? No, that's not really how I want to run my business.

I'd like someone else to do that, and then admitting that. You know, being able to admit that or do I want to - do I have to cook dinner every night to be a good mom? Some people might say yes, that's what their passion is. For me, it's maybe three nights a week, you know. Or what do we want to do as a family? Well, to be honest, I want to travel. Okay, well how do we do that? Well, I have to make some money. I mean, it's just kind of - it

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sounds silly but they're just kind of simple questions to ask yourself and then have the courage to do it.

Tobi: Yeah, so let's talk about that. So then you map it out and it's on paper and you're like, that looks amazing, like that's fantastic and I want it to look and feel just like I pictured it and mapped it out, but then there is that whole courage piece that you have to take the leap. So any other insights you can give us on how you did leap from the trying to be all things to all people and be it all perfectly, to now what you've shared with me outside this podcast, sort of what your life currently looks like, which is every - you can tell us, but I know that you take walks after you drop your kids off, and you spend time with your husband, and tell us - kind of tell us what you did ultimately start to put into place in your life and if you have any tips for, you know - or just insight on what allowed you to be courageous enough to do that stuff that really mattered.

Sarah: Well first, I mean, I think the first step for anyone is to try and simplify. I mean, simplification, there's such peace in it, and I think to simplify, you have to delegate. If you want to get direct about business wise what I did, it was start delegating. And you know, I think we just tell ourselves this lie that we have to do it all and I think too, especially for designers who are just starting out, I was totally this way my first few years. You know, thinking I can't spend a dime to anyone else to do a task. I'm going to do it all. Well, that doesn't work. And one thing I've learned is I'm not great at everything. It's very obvious. You know, number one, hire a bookkeeper. That tax stuff is scary and you have to be a genius to figure it out, in my opinion, so that's an easy one, bookkeeper. And just take that off your plate, don't even worry about it. And you know, hire an assistant or an intern to run errands.

I mean, it sounds so silly and simple but it's a life changer. And I mean, if I'm completely honest, I tell my assistants from the beginning like, I'm a working mom, you're going to be running personal and business errands, and I'm sorry, that's just the way it is. Because I used to think that was rude, you know? I'm not going to ask her to break down those boxes and

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take them to the dumpster, she'll think I'm entitled so I'm not going to do it, I'll do it. Or I hire - you know my friend Anne, who I've hired and has saved my business, I swear, she's the best, and is my project manager. If she were here, she could shed some light on what a freak I was because I basically hired her and then gave her no work because I was too scared not that she would mess it up but that I would lose control somehow or - and in truth, she's so much better at it than I am. The pricing and budgeting and ordering and all of that stuff that I could do, but it takes me longer, I'm less efficient than she is, and now I can just really design. So I come into my office and I design.

I mean, duh, like that's why I started this whole business. But somehow that got lost. So I think delegation - and I can go home too, you know, whatever, pay people to do whatever you want, but you know, the truth is I like cooking, I like going to the grocery store, I kind of like cleaning and folding laundry, you know, that. So whatever your thing is you need off your plate, have the courage to spend a little money and delegate. And I know it sounds really scary but there's so much freedom in it and your business will run so much more smoothly.

Tobi: Well, and what I love that you said about all of that whole kind of tip of delegating and everything that goes with it, one of the things I noticed, I observed is that you're really good or you're really clear on delegating the stuff that either A, you're not good at, or B, that you don't like to do. And I think I see a lot of women who are kind of feeling like you were at first who feel like, oh, they're going to think I'm a diva or entitled or whatever. They end up delegating what they think is kind of their sweet spot because they're like, I won't make anybody else do the bad stuff, the breaking down of the boxes. And I think that's just amazing that you were able to get the clarity that I hang on to the stuff that I do the best and I don't feel guilty about allowing people to help me or paying people to do the rest of the stuff.

Sarah: Well, you taught me that.

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Tobi: I hope I did.

Sarah: I think you not only taught me that, you made me do it.

Tobi: Well good. Well, I didn't know, but it was really - I mean, I was just really just being an observer of going, "Wow she did that so well," because you know, I see people struggle with that a lot. And I've struggled with it too, especially the part about you don't want to look like a diva or like you're unkind or that things are beneath you or any of that. Another thing that I was thinking of when you were talking about that was the part that you said - let me think how you said it. Oh, the losing of control. So help us understand that a little bit more, and all of this - the point of this question was also we want to get to hearing what your life is like with those walks in the morning and all that, so you'll have to tell us about that in a second. But before we get there, tell us about what ultimately allowed you to be able to give up that control and not panic? Because I think so many people - we even call ourselves control freaks and we're like, "Oh, I could never do that." But we're holding ourselves back from the balance and the joy because we're afraid of losing control. So tell us how you did that.

Sarah: Oh gosh. Well, I think one thing you just said is I think I lost joy in my business. I think I was so wrapped up in the day in day out tasks and next thing I knew, all I was doing was budget sheets. And all that kind of stuff, yeah, I can do, but it's not my sweet spot, it's not what I'm great at, and I was like, how did I start a design business where I design like, 5% of the time? And I had lost all the joy in it, and so I think I kind of got to that point where I just had to have a major restructuring or I was going to have to leave my job. I mean, you know, I couldn't continue on doing something I wasn't passionate about anymore.

Tobi: So you hit like, a crossroads that you're like, either I let her or somebody else help me or I'm just quitting the whole thing.

Sarah: And also, I think what's the worst that can happen? I kind of - after some of the stuff we've been through, I'm like, what's the worst that can happen? What? I mean, she forgets to order something or she prices

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something wrong and I have to eat a little bit of money - and guess what? That's never happened. I mean, you know that thing about fear, fearing of things that aren't real? Every fear I had never happened, most don't, and so it's all been just such a bonus because now I'm doing - I'm excited to go to work, I'm excited to dream up these projects and know that they're being handled by very capable people who are more capable than I am. And everything just runs like clockwork.

Tobi: Well, and I think that...

Sarah: There's peace in that.

Tobi: Yeah, oh gosh, so much peace. And I think that's funny what you said because I think that too where like, "Oh, what if she made a mistake and forgot to order something or ordered something late," and we're like, because while I was spinning my 27 plates in the air I never forgot anything and I never misordered anything and I never made a mistake. You're like, seriously, I made so many - it's going to be a savings to let somebody else start doing something, you know?

Sarah: Exactly.

Tobi: So funny how our mind tricks us into thinking that you know, it's scarier to actually let ourselves thrive than to be mediocre all the time. Okay, so now tell us the part about what all of these changes and this courage that you had and this letting go of control, like, what was the benefits you got to reap? Like, what does your life look like now that it didn't look like when you were on the hamster wheel?

Sarah: Oh gosh. I mean, and look, there's always that wheel. I mean, I have three kids that I'm driving to activities and I'm still trying to cook every meal and all that. But you know, I think for me, life - like I said, we've learned so many lessons as a family over the past few years. And I think just creating those rituals, like I've learned I'm a creature of habit. I love spontaneity, but I'm a true creature of habit and I like rituals. Like, I like to get up and have my tea and create that. You know, I like to make

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breakfast, pack lunches, get them to school, I like to take a long walk every morning and no one messes with it.

I'm not going to schedule an eight-o clock meeting anymore because that eats out a couple more hours in the day. You know, I'm going to take a bath every night. This is new for me, I'm never been a bather because it was a waste of time, but everything was a waste of time. Any sort of self-care was such a waste of time for me. But you know, it's like, okay, my kids, if you're already doing your homework, I'm going to go take a bath. Like, no one goes, "Oh my gosh, you're so self-indulgent." No one says that. They think it's normal that someone would want to take a bath or whatever it is. You know, or say I'm not going to cook dinner tonight, we're getting Indian food and we're all going to watch The Sound of Music because that's what I want to do tonight even though it's a school night we're staying up and anything like that, I think I just create little rituals in my day that create some of that white space you like to talk about that's so important, and just know that everything - you know how I am, Tobi. My woo woo-ness.

Tobi: Hey I'm as woo woo as you, that's why we relate so well.

Sarah: I think I really know that the universe is just laying everything out in due time and me squeezing four more hours of work into the day and working until midnight after the kids go to bed is not propelling anything. It's just not. It's just a lie I tell myself and spending time with people I love and being present without my computer on my lap is what's actually creating more work for myself.

Tobi: Yes, and I think that - what's also an observation I'm making about what you're saying because I'm just smiling from ear to ear hearing those descriptions is you know, we think we have this pressure that we have to cook every meal every night, but our kids don't grow up and 20 years later go, "Oh, my mom always cooked a meal every single night and was grumpy." Well, they might if we're grumpy, but what they are going to remember is, "Oh, my mom is so cool. Sometimes she would just order in

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Indian food and we would all watch The Sound of Music and stay up late on a school night and it was my favorite memory." So we don't even know how much we're holding our families back from thriving I think with these rules we set for ourselves too, don't you think?

Sarah: That is so true. You know, it's so funny you just said that. I was just talking to one of my brothers about this and you know, I tell my husband all the time, we have no control over the memories the kids are going to have. You know, like, we can't control it. They might have - they might remember my worst day and that's just - you know, I can't do anything about it. But one of my brothers and I were just talking about my favorite memory of my mom, and my mom was the perfect mom too, right? Did it all perfectly.

Tobi: Or it seemed so to you anyway, yeah.

Sarah: Exactly. And my favorite memory of her is once some movie came on, I think it was probably over our age range, you know, a little inappropriate, but something made her laugh and she laughed so hard she fell out of her chair, which was so uncharacteristic because she was pretty buttoned up, and I just have this memory of her laying on the ground laughing and I was like, "Is that my mom?" You know, and that's what I think about when I think of her because it was so fun to see her break the mold and just let it go, right? It felt so authentic to see her like that and I just loved it and I think about it all the time.

Tobi: And when we're wound so tight, type A personality, striving, hustling on the treadmill, there is never any letting go, is there? Unless we just steadily lose it, and those are not the memories we want our kids to have of us. But yeah, love that story. Awesome. Okay, well let's go into this idea then that a lot of people have because I'm sure people are relating and loving this, and you're giving everybody permission to start adding more joy into their life because if you can do it, they can do it, right? We can all do it. But then a lot of people deal with this idea of like, what we'd call like, the imposter syndrome. Because you're like, well, that sounds great and it looks wonderful on paper and let me go create all this space in my life, and

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then with my job, that means I've got to make the most money I can in the least amount of time, and that means I have to charge more for my work and actually value myself, and then all of this sort of mind stuff comes up. This mental stuff, these negative thought patterns, all this old - what I call gunk from the past comes into our brain and you and I have both talked about what it feels like to deal with this imposter syndrome, and it feels like a real thing. Like, the truth. So tell us about that because I know you said you're dealt with it, and how that played out in this journey from overworked to really a life on purpose.

Sarah: Oh gosh. Well, I mean it started when I - that whole imposter syndrome is so real and it's - especially for women. And when I first started my design business, it was so, so heavily weighted on me. I mean, as you know, I have no design training, I didn't go to business school, and so now I'm like, I want to be a designer and start a business. I mean, that's - for my ego, that was two huge hurdles to jump over, right? So you set your monetary value at you know, ground zero, nothing, and basically work for free to prove yourself. And look, there's value in that. I think we all probably had to do that to some extent, right? But I think what happens is it gets addicting and it becomes this truth you say about yourself that's hard to climb out from under, you know? And I think too, I was so passionate about interior design, especially in the beginning - I mean, always, but I felt like that should be enough. You know, I'm so passionate about it and I swoon at the idea of being a starving artist that I'm not going to really charge, I'm just going to do it kind of pro bono. I mean, it's so silly, that gets old so fast, and it's time away from your family and no time for yourself, and you're just proving, proving, proving, proving, and no one else even seems to care. No one's ever asked to see my resume, no one's ever asked me one time have I ever been to design school. It's like, here are some projects I did and they say great, how much is it going to cost? I'm like, basically nothing.

Tobi: It's free, you're going to love it.

Sarah: Yeah, it's the best part. So I mean, it's so dumb when I hear myself say it but that's how I think we think sometimes. And I think our business to

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the outside world looks so fun, that they're like, "Oh, I wish I could do that, I wish that was my job," and it is so fun. A lot of it is, but it's running a business, and people in all industries are running businesses, they're passionate about it, but they intend to turn a profit. I don't know why we're so hard on ourselves that we don't deserve it. But I think just coming to terms with that and really - and you were such a help with that too, Tobi, of just restructuring business, working smarter not harder, and charging what you're worth and having the courage to do it. I think it's that first time, like when I switched from hourly to flat fee, that first proposal were like, I think I hit send and like, ran and hid under my bed. I was so nervous. And you know what? They were like, sure, sounds great.

Tobi: You're like, dang, I left money - I should have charged double.

Sarah: Oh my gosh, I could have charged double. But I think it's just a little bit of courage and knowing that your creative value is worth so much to people. It's not just the hours you're going to put into it, but you know, to someone else for you to make their home beautiful, there's so much value in that, and I think we have to just be confident in that.

Tobi: Yeah, well, and I love - I know you've told me many times about your sort of money mindset or like, the challenges you've have there and I work on that myself and with other people, and so you had this sort of unspoken belief or inner belief of you know, the right thing to do is be the starving artist. But then at some point you decided that A, that wasn't fun, but tell us about that. Like, how did you flip that switch to go okay, not only am I sick of making no money, like, I've got some stuff I want my family - like, I want us to do some things. What was that? What made you have like, a goal or it's kind of like that creating a life on purpose. You said you get a plan and then all of a sudden, you're like, well dang, I'm going to need some money for that, right?

Sarah: Exactly. Oh, it's such a struggle. It always has been for me. I think since childhood, I've had this fear of money or fear of wanting money, I guess, that that would make me greedy or shallow, and I'm pretty sure I'm

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neither. But I think so many women struggle with this. Men don't seem to have that problem. They don't seem to have that hang up at all. And I felt like if I earned money, I was taking from somebody. And I think that shift is thinking well no, I'm actually putting value out and earning it. You know, it's not like I'm taking it. I'm willing to pay people to do stuff all the time. I pay somebody to scoop the dog poop in my backyard because you know what, I'm tired...

Tobi: That's the best money you could ever spend, right?

Sarah: I'm tired of arguing about it. I'm tired of asking people to do it. I don't want to do it. I don't want to ask my husband to do it. You know, I'm just tired of it so I just hired somebody. Guess what? Every time I pay that bill each month, I'm like oh my gosh, it's the best money ever spent. Because also, I have a Great Dane, not to get too gross, but okay. So I think I've had to say like, I'm providing value to somebody and it's okay to be paid for it. And yes, like you said, you know, what do we want to do? Well, I'd like to - I want to have a beautiful home to raise my children in. I think that's okay to want that, and I would like for us to go on trips and build memories with my children while they're still living at home with us and I don't think that's bad. I'd like to be able to give to our favorite charities, I'd like to be able to, I don't know, go get my nails done and not feel guilty. Whatever it may be. I mean, everyone has their priorities. For mine, it's really our home and travel and memories. I want to be able - you know, I'm not talking anything lavish or what if I am? It doesn't matter. I just think knowing that it's okay for me to earn a living to be able to provide those things for our family is not a bad thing. But it's hard to learn that. For me it was.

Tobi: Well I think it is. I think a lot of women struggle and I think they can even sometimes get closer to the let me provide for my children but like, the getting my own nails done and especially like, leaving work in the middle of the day to get my nails done, like, they just can't even fathom what that would look like, spending the time or the money on themselves. And I love that you're in the place, maybe you always have been on some of those things, but that you're in a place where you believe that you're

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worth that. And I think that leads us into this topic that we really wanted to talk about today that I don't want to take too much time with other things and not get this one squeezed in because it's awesome is that idea of being authentic and choosing the life that's right for you.

So you know, if people do get the courage to start designing a life on purpose, sometimes they fall into the trap of designing the life that they think everybody else believes they should have instead of having the courage to go, "No, I want the life where the guy picks up after the dog in the backyard and I get my nails done in the middle of the day while I'm also doing a bunch of other amazing things to add value to my family and the world, and that it can all look that way and it's okay and it's acceptable." And so help me help other women live an authentic life. What would you tell them to be able to do that? Or what did you do maybe that helped you know that that was okay? And even figuring out what's right for you because I know you said to me too, you kind of had to figure out your own version of healthy and your own version of balance, and it doesn't look the same for everybody. We want it to, we want to look at what other people are doing and go, well, I'll just do that, but that's not what it's about. So let's talk about this sort of quest and really the discovery of real authenticity.

Sarah: I mean, I think in a nutshell, being authentic means trusting your gut. That can be a decision from what fabric do I put on this pillow to making a major life or business decision. You know, I read once - I may have told you this, I mean, you know, you and me with the self-help books, I mean, good gracious. Good gracious, I can't remember what came from what book, but I read once that most decisions don't require that much thought and that we all know innately kind of immediately what our answer is from somewhere deep in our gut, but then we like to talk ourselves immediately out of it and confuse ourselves with all these options that we're probably never going to choose anyway and go back to the gut feeling. And I believe that for myself at least, when I get detached from that and try to push myself into an ill-fitting box is when I don't feel grounded and I don't feel authentic, and I lose confidence. And you know, personally and professionally. You know like when you've taken a job and you really didn't

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want to take it and you took it and it starts out this negative energy and every time you have to go to the client's house you're just like, "Oh my gosh, is this job ever going to be over?" And you know you probably never should have taken in, you saw the red flag. Or like the blog thing, Tobi. You know when I started...

Tobi: Yes, oh, we've got to - if we're going to talk about authenticity, we have to talk about social media and blogging. So talk about the blog.

Sarah: Tobi was like, "Got to start a blog, Sarah. Got to start a blog." And I had been a writer for a year, worked as a freelance writer for years, and now I'm doing design and oh my gosh, match made in heaven, write a design blog. And I read a million design blogs so I live them, and I was like, no, I'm not doing it. "Sarah, you have to write a design blog," "No, not going to do it." And then every time I'd even try and entertain the idea, it would make me feel so miserable just the thought of having to sit down and write every day, I just said, "You know what, it's not me, I'm not going to do it." And so I didn't do it, and then years later, I was like, you know, maybe I'll start, I kind of want to do something on the side, and that's how Worn + Domestic started. Well actually, you know there, Tobi, that's again, Worn + Domestic actually started - I wanted to do an online store since I love fashion as much as I love interior design, I was going to do a fashion and interior design store. And we started signing vendors and I was like, "I don't want to do this. I'm not an online store person. This isn't me." I'm banging my head against a wall, so we made it the all shop no talk blog, the anti-blog blog, but we don't...

Tobi: I love it.

Sarah: We don't write anything, my friend Anne and I partner on it and we do Worn, you know, we have a theme, Worn is what you'd wear to say, I don't know, Kentucky Derby and then Domestic is how you decorate for the Kentucky Derby party, but we don't write anything on it. And then like, this is me. I don't want to say anything, I just want to design something. And

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that's been - I need to tell you later, that's going in a fun direction with more to come on that.

Tobi: I can't wait to hear.

Sarah: It's evolving. So anyway, I think my advice is if you're banging your head against a wall because this designer next to you has, you know, 20,000 followers on Instagram and this is what she does so I'm going to do it too, if it's miserable for you, your followers aren't going to connect with it. I really don't think they will. Like, you're such a natural speaker and you're so good with people and bringing people together, that's your talent, and it's - you know, not everyone has the same talent, and it's authentic and that's why we follow you, Tobi, with what you do, right? And I think you have to find what speaks to you and just not try to - there's no one way, right?

Tobi: No, but I will definitely say that the podcast is my sweet spot over blogging because I've blogged for 10 years and it made a huge difference in my business in many ways, and there were moments that I loved it, but there were also moments when I despised it and it felt like a chore. And the podcast I guess I just, as everyone who knows me well knows I have no trouble talking. But it's just faster and easier and I don't know, it's just a fit. So that's, you know, kind of like you, the anti-blog blog, you know, the podcast is really definitely moved into my favorite position over blogging the old-fashioned way.

Sarah: If you and I aren't careful, we could sit here and talk for three hours.

Tobi: That is for sure. Well, let's - here's something else I want to talk about before we go. So when people are hearing our stories, and our successes, and you know, the beautiful lives we're creating and the white space and the walks by the lake in the morning and all of that stuff, I think that we leave out the - it's not not the truth, it's just sort of the highlight reel. And we're not always talking about some of the other stuff that is really reality also and kind of a harsh reality sometimes. So I don't want to leave without talking about the fact that just because you create a life on purpose and you design things and you constrain and you say no and you simplify,

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doesn't mean that life is always going to be easy, right? It's going to be easier, but it's not always going to be easy and there are going to be some lulls in your business too. You have a beautiful way of thinking about that because it doesn't mean that you get everything right in your life and then you're going to have like, wealth, you know, all the time and clients flocking to your door and you know, all of that. So tell me about this idea that you have, this philosophy about it's still worth doing all of this and yeah, there's going to be lulls in your business, or there's going to be moments that feel uninspired in your life, but how do you think of those and how can you inspire others to think differently about those not so perfect moments?

Sarah: Oh, it's so funny you're bringing this up this week because I've had - again, with the universe, I'm in kind of a weird lull right now and I used to freak out when I saw the lull coming. Like, if I knew I was wrapping up a few projects and I was like, oh my gosh, I am not starting, no one's called, the phone's not ringing, I have no new work coming in, and it was panic inducing. You know, I'll never work again, that's it, I'm going to work at Starbucks. And I'm now - it took me a while to realize that with every lull I've had has been a gift, and I started realizing that any breathing room from work meant something else was coming, and for the good or the bad. I mean, my son's illness, you know, that was bad, but guess what, I had to be in the hospital for weeks and multiple times, and it actually worked out. It's so weird. I'm like, how did I do that? Because the day before that, I would have thought I couldn't have five minutes. You know, but then now I can have months. It's just crazy.

Or like, one of my big lulls where I was going, oh my gosh, oh my gosh, how am I going to put food on the table, well, we found our house and we weren't even looking. Found this house and launched into this huge remodel. It was this whirlwind, but I had the time. I had the open space for it to land in our laps and to be able to recognize it, and then to be able to work on it. And then the work comes. You know, then the next thing you know the phone's ringing again and it all balances itself out. So I think I just see lulls as something is coming. You know what I think about it? Do you remember when our babies were little and they would go through a phase

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where they're not sleeping at night and you're like, what is going on? What is going on? And then you'd go in in the morning and they'd be sitting up or they'd be standing and you're like...

Tobi: Rolling over, walking, all that stuff.

Sarah: And you're like - or clapping their hands and you're like, oh my gosh, you learned something. Oh, that's what it was. And it's kind of how I feel about it. Like, I mean...

Tobi: Like a growth spurt sort of in a way.

Sarah: Exactly. Like, I had kind of a lull feeling last week where I was kind of getting down on myself. Well, the phone rang yesterday and it was an old friend who has this really cool idea for a project and wants to loot me in and I was like, oh my gosh, who saw this coming? You know what I mean? It's just something's always coming, be grateful for the lulls or use it to think differently about a business venture or work on yourself. I mean, plan a trip, it's a gift. The work will come.

Tobi: Yeah, be grateful for the lulls. I love that. That's a new mantra I'm going to adopt. Be grateful for the lulls. Okay, so as we wrap this up because this has been so full of juicy nuggets, and you just have such a refreshing way that you look at life now, and maybe you always did. You have that creative spark anyway so I know you always looked at things differently, but it's been so inspiring. So as we wrap up and we kind of just send people on their journey, on their way to create a life on purpose and to do some of these things maybe you've inspired them to do, what can we leave people with as far as really kind of what I think of is one of my books is Essentialism and the author Greg McKeown talks about saying no to the trivial many so we can say yes to the vital few. That's really what you've been talking about here. Like, you've been seeking out those vital few things. So what would you leave people with if you're going to help them, you know, live that authentic life or find balance and create a life on purpose? And you may have given us all the nuggets because there were a

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ton, but if there's any kind of last words or parting thoughts to send them into this journey, what would you like to say?

Sarah: Well, I think living authentically is so important. I think what you say yes to is so important and probably even more important what you say no to, right? Like, for me, if it's business or personal, I have to only say yes to things that nourish or nurture. Nurture my business and my creativity, or nourish me as a person or my family, right? I mean, even though it's just a social commitment, is this really - you know, I know we all do stuff we don't want to do here and there, but really just be mindful about what you do and also to never do anything out of fear. I feel like when I take a design job, again with the lull, you hit the wall and then the job comes and you're like, I would never take this a month ago but now I have to. That never works out, and I think just trusting that things are coming your way as long as you kind of lead with an open heart and open door and be able to look up and recognize opportunity instead of having your face down in the muck just getting through the day. Everything just kind of gets a little more peaceful, right? Just trimming the fat, you know, and I don't know, I try to not live out of fear and make decisions out of fear but out of what really is going to feed us here.

Tobi: Yeah, so both of those things to make sure something nurtures or nourishes you and then to not take the things that you know aren't right for you. So both of those are obviously your authentic, but what came to my mind was really you just honor yourself and what you value in every decision is what it sounds like to me.

Sarah: I try to. I mean, I don't know if I think about it that deeply when I'm making choices, I think you know, how we are as working moms, you're making every decision on the fly. That's why I think that just trust your gut. I don't know that I even think too deeply about it, but it's just like, no that's not for us. And I think the more you practice that the easier it is, and you don't have to explain by the way, if you say no. I mean, don't we all justify and over explain every time we say no? It's so silly.

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Tobi: Send a five-paragraph email of why you can't commit to writing a guest post on someone's blog or something. Yeah, totally. Well, I cannot thank you enough. This has been so rich with just again, you know, tips and real-life ideas of how we can be our best self, and really, even if it might not feel like it, I definitely see how you are honoring yourself and your family and your values in all of the growth that you have had, and it's just - it's really, really beautiful not to be super woo woo, but I guess I am. And I'm just grateful that you shared that all with us because it makes it easier for other people not to just listen to my thoughts and ideas and you know, advice, but to hear real life people who are having success creating their life on purpose. So thank you so much for sharing that with us today.

Sarah: Oh my gosh, thanks for having me. Well, you've been such a teacher and mentor to me for all these years and oh my gosh, I can't even imagine where I would be without you having to - putting that mirror up in front of me and going, "Look at your business girl, you've got to turn this around." So I'm so grateful and I love your podcast. This is such a good fit and I just look forward to it every week.

Tobi: Well, thank you so much and I'll have you back on again later because again, as you said, we could talk for three hours but I think we got some important nuggets in and I just can't wait to hear people's feedback. So thank you again, and thanks everybody for listening to this conversation with Sarah Wittenbraker today, I hope that you found some truly inspiring ideas that can help you make your life better so that you can design both the life and a business that you truly love. We'll see you next week. Bye bye.

Thank you so much for joining me for this episode of *The Design You Podcast*. And if you'd like even more support for designing a business and a life that you love, then check out my exclusive monthly coaching program Design You at tobifairley.com.