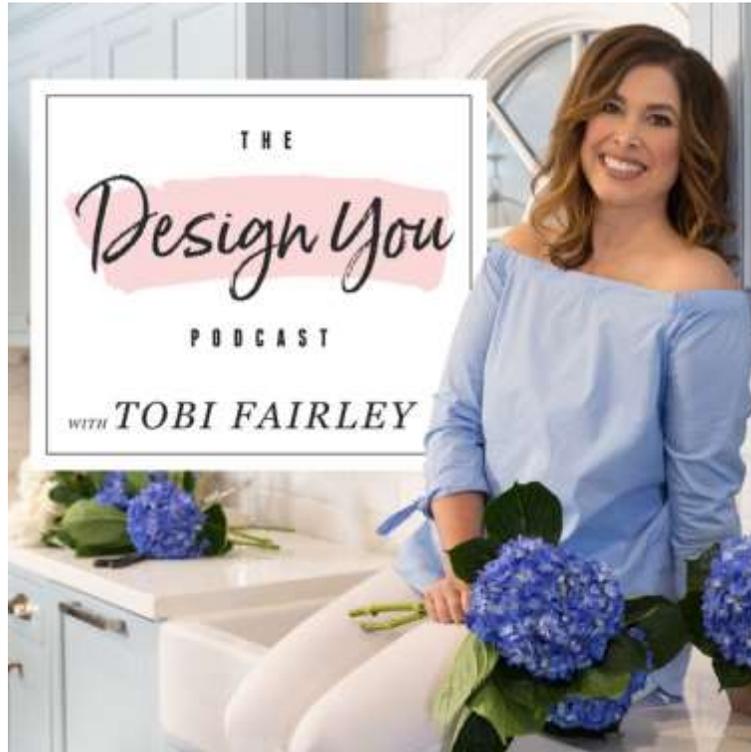


## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Tobi Fairley**

[The Design You Podcast](#) with Tobi Fairley

## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader

You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 108.

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 there, friends. I'm so happy to be coming to you with a solo show today. It's been a little bit since I've done this and I did some bonus episodes, but I've had a lot of guests lately too and I know we've been bringing you so much value during this time that seems so different for most of us. But today I want to talk to you about something that I call thought leadership, really the difference between thought leadership and being a service provider.

Before we do that, I just want to know how you are. How are you doing? Are you feeling afraid still? Are you struggling? Are you thriving? Have you used this sense of urgency to move you into a lot of goals and dreams that you've been putting off or that you felt like you had time and now all of a sudden you're like, "We got to roll"? I hope that's you. I hope you are in that place of using this and turning into the silver lining that it can be for so many of us.

I'm seeing that in my Design You community and I'm really loving it that so many people who had a lot of reservations about doing things that were uncomfortable that they know really at their gut level that they need to do it, but they just didn't really want to and now they're feeling a whole different sense of motivation that they need money or the time is now or they don't ever want to find themselves in this place again.

I can completely relate to that because that's definitely where I was during the recession of 2008-2009 and I remember thinking, "I will never find myself in this place again." Where I feel like I don't have clients and I don't have multiple ways to make money, a value ladder or multiple revenue streams and that I really couldn't sustain my business if everything came to a screeching halt. So, I did a lot of things to put myself in a completely

[The Design You Podcast](#) with Tobi Fairley

## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader

different place and I hope that if you're finding yourself in that place right now you're using it as leverage for yourself, too.

Because this really is a time instead of saying, "I'm done, I quit," and really rolling over in this what's for most of us a scary situation I think it's a time that you can really rise to the challenge. That's what I'm here to do today is to help you rise to a whole other level. Here's what I'm talking about today, how to be a thought leader.

This is something I talk about in my community all the time. I talk about it in my Digital Marketing for Creatives course that I just taught live again last week, so if you're not in Design You get in there because this is a brand new version of how to create an online business, an online product, and services, and courses, and digital marketing, and all the things, and one of the key pieces of it is really this idea of thought leadership.

So many people just want to know the logistics and the steps. "Just tell me how to do digital marketing, Tobi. Just tell me how to have an email list. Just tell me how to have a course." That's not the first place that you need to start and I think a lot about how when I hire different professionals whether it's a marketing person like my Chief Marketing Officer, or when I hire my publicist, Selina, or when I have hired graphic designers or a video company or a stylist or a photographer or any other people that I work with to help grow my brand and go next level, the Facebook Ads company I use, all the different people that play a role in really building, growing, sustaining my brand one of the things I hear more often than not from the people I work with is that I'm a dream client.

I always jokingly say, "I know it's because of my charming personality." They're like, "Well, maybe." But here's the real answer, the real answer is because I have so much for them to work with and they all individually, every single time no matter what kind of business it is, no matter what kind of consultant it is, they always tell me time and again that for them and most of their clients the biggest problem they have when they're hired to help build a brand or get exposure or help somebody make more money is they have almost nothing to work with.

[The Design You Podcast](#) with Tobi Fairley

## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader

For me, they have now, since that last recession they have 10 or 11 or 12 years, depending on the stuff I had maybe created a little prior to that of content, of thought leadership, of courses, and classes, and downloads, and ideas, and now we're at 108 podcast episodes and 11 or 12 years of blogging. I think it makes such a difference for them to be able to help me expand my reach and help other people because I have so much content that is valuable content, that is unique to me, that is a compilation of my ideas, my concepts, things I've learned from other people.

Sometimes it's me being the expert, sometimes it's me knowledge brokering somebody else's great ideas that I took in and used in another way, but the point being that they're always blown away by the just ridiculous amount of content and assets, digital assets, written assets, video assets, podcast assets that I have amassed over the last 10 or 12 years.

It always makes me feel so good, but I know that they're right. We always laugh and say – I can literally stop right now and not make another piece of content and you would probably not run out of things to use and promote for a good three or four or five years if not longer.

So, really I'm prolific in creating content and ideas. It's one of my favorite things to do. I know that that's not everybody's favorite thing to do, but I want you to know that it's not just something that came absolutely natural for me. Maybe in some ways, I do love to communicate, I do love to help people, but it is a practice. It is a choice to really be a thought leader.

So, I want to talk to you about that today. I want you to see the difference in being a thought leader and really an expert on a lot of topics, but you don't have to just be an expert to be in that role. I sometimes wear the thought leader, expert hat and again, sometimes I'm a knowledge broker, sometimes I'm a connector, sometimes an interviewer, sometimes I'm a moderator, sometimes I am a reporter in a sense, but all of those things are part of what makes up my brand and the content that I create.

## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader

So, the opposite of that is, in my opinion, is what I would just call a service provider. We definitely need service providers in the world, right? I'm so glad that we have so many of them and my family's business is providing service in the telecom industry and there's so many amazing service providers that I use all the time, everything from one-on-one custom service providers like my hairdresser and the person who does my nails and my personal trainer that I'm really missing right now during this pandemic, during this quarantine.

Then there's all kinds of other service providers; the people that provide our Internet, the people that provide our water, the people that provide – I mean, gosh, the list is endless. But I want you to see the difference in the businesses and the personalities and the people out in the world that are service providers versus those that are really thought leaders and they're two totally different things.

What I've noticed over the years is that especially if you're a one-person show or a small business, being a service provider really does not pay you and afford you the financial opportunities at the same level as being a thought leader does or being an expert does. Some of you even think you are an expert and you probably are, but you're not showing up as an expert in your business. You're not having an opinion or a point of view on anything or if you're keeping it to yourself and you're really just providing service every day and you're wondering why your financials reflect service provider instead of thought leader.

Because when people need to be led, when people are scared, when people don't know what to do, when people want a guide, when people want someone else to help them make decisions, who are they turning to? They're turning to the thought leaders. Right now, you can see that out in the world. You can see what's happening on Instagram and how so many of us who were thought leaders already had a presence, a voice, a practice and a habit of showing up, again, whether it's podcast or Facebook or Instagram Live or something like that.

## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader

Some of you had a voice in you, but you were waiting and this was the push you needed to step into that and then others of you are sitting there going, “I feel like I need to be showing up. I hear everybody telling me I need to get on Instagram Live or talk to my audience or be there for them or meet them where they are yet I don’t know what to say.”

A lot of times what I find when I’m working with people, when I first start working with them in my Design You coaching program and they haven’t done this work yet, not only do they not know what to say, they don’t really understand fully what they do outside of maybe their industry. Outside of, “I’m an interior designer and I make pretty rooms,” or, “I’m an architect,” or, “I’m an event planner,” or, “I’m a photographer,” or whatever, but they don’t really get it at the core level of how am I different? Why me over somebody else for this particular client?

I’m not a big fan of thinking about competition because I don’t really think there is competition if you do this right and I guess this is the piece that really makes competition null and void is whether or not you’re stepping into your business, your brand and really stepping into that thought leader role. Really thinking of yourself as not just a person who does a skill or a craft or a thing, but a person who is a brand and who does have a tribe and who does have something to say.

So, that’s what I really want you thinking about today because now is the time more than ever, if you’ve been sitting on the sidelines, if you’ve not been stepping into really what you believe or getting in touch with that, if you’ve not been leading a tribe of people to become a better of themselves or solve a problem that’s specific to them then now is your time. This is your time.

I talk a lot about niche strategies or niche strategies whichever you want to call them, I call them both all the time. I go interchangeably back and forth in one sentence as I just did, but here’s the thing, a lot of people are afraid to niche down. They’re afraid to carve out that group of people because they feel like, “I’m pigeonholing myself and I’m cutting myself off from all of these other people that I could be helping.”

[The Design You Podcast](#) with Tobi Fairley

## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader

Here's what I tell them time and time again. It is so much easier to be heard when you're talking to a specific group of people. When we really think about this idea of thought leadership it is so much easier to lead, to start a smaller group of people that you can connect with, that you know what their fears are, you know what their needs are, you know what their voids are, you know how to show up and really provide solutions for what they're struggling with.

That's all the more reason why I really encourage people to have a niche strategy. It's also really a big differentiator to me of being able to provide real value. This is where I see a lot of businesses falling flat right now because you have been stuck in the service provider not really a thought leader necessarily pretty much providing products or services that are replaceable by a lot of other people. There's a lot of other designers or caterers or literally insert industry here that could do a pretty good job of replacing you which really starts to make you more of a commodity.

So, then people start looking at you based on price because they're like, if there's really no difference that they can tell even though you know there is, there's really no difference on the surface of this business or this business why would I not pick the one that's the least expensive?

So, really learning to be able to add real value, and I mean real value and solve real problems, important problems for people all fits into this concept of being a thought leader instead of just a service provider and really talking to a specific niche or tribe day in and day out no matter what, okay?

So, I really just wanted to talk about this today and this is going to be a pretty short episode because it's really nothing that I need to belabor, but it needs to be discussed. I'm watching and it's so fascinating right now the surge of people coming online which is great, I love it. I absolutely love that in the midst of something horrible so many of us have the push we needed to show up in a different way.

It makes me so happy. Like, I would say it's probably the number one silver lining that I'm seeing and there's many. But in my opinion, I love this

## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader

leverage on ourself. But amongst those people who are talking out on the web, there's the ones that have something to say to a specific group of people that they're really helping and they then connect that to some kind of an offer or something for sale which they can monetize which is going to be what not only supports them through this pandemic, but helps them survive on the other side.

Then there's everybody else who are just more talking which is still – I love that they're doing it because they can evolve to a better version of their message, but they leaped in the arena which is way better than standing on the sidelines, in my opinion, but they really don't know who they're talking to or what they're talking to them about or who they serve.

So, I really want you to get clear on this. I want you to know, I don't want you to ever have another reason to think, "I don't know what to say." I'm literally never at a loss for words, of podcast episodes, Instagram Lives, videos, courses to teach, something to say in my community because I'm so dialed into my people and who I help and I can think their thoughts almost faster and more clearly than they think them themselves.

In other words, I know what they need before they even need because I spend so much time knowing exactly who I help and thinking about them. In fact, one of the things I do now that I learned from a friend and mentor, Corrine Crabtree, is that instead of just journaling about my own thoughts these days, I journal every week and most of the time every day about what my client, my tribe, my ideal people are thinking, what they're worried about, what's on their mind, what they need a solution to.

It is incredible the amount of ideas and fodder and opportunity that is created just through that one practice alone. So, here's what I want you to do today. You have some homework actually today. I want you to check in with yourself and say, "Am I being a thought leader?" And, "What does that mean? Am I having a specific point of view? Am I taking a stand on things? Am I teaching people things or helping guide them through specific ideas and concepts?"

## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader

To be a thought leader and to take a stand you really have to cut off some other ideas. You can't straddle the fence. You can't, as I always say, I love the quote, you can't have one foot on the dock and set sail. So, for those of you who want to stay in your comfort zone and who want to be in safety land and who never want to repel anybody as a client, who never want to be polarizing in any way – and that doesn't necessarily mean negative to being polarizing. I mean, I guess it's in the eye of the beholder.

But what I teach is that the whole goal in business is to repel the people that aren't a fit for you so you can attract the people who are. If you're afraid to do that, if you don't like that feeling. If you think people are going to feel left out and you just want to love on everybody and give them a big old hug, chances are you're really not stepping into thought leadership and you're not taking a stand on anything.

So, I want you to decide which camp you're in and I want you to decide right now if you're willing to do what it takes even if it feels scary and uncomfortable to step into this idea of leader and thought leader for the people who you serve. That's a totally different thing than being a service provider, but to be a leader for the people that you serve.

So, if you're like, "That sounds great, Tobi, but I never know what that even means. I don't know how to take a stand really on something or what I should even be thinking about or what makes me different or what sets me apart or why me over other businesses." It's just because you haven't practiced this and why haven't you practiced it? Because it's not naturally comfortable until you get used to it.

Here's what I want you to do. I want you to start asking yourself, what am I really passionate about doing for other people? It's so interesting when I ask this question. More often than not people don't know. They haven't really thought about it. They haven't articulated it, quantified it, written it down. They're like, "I don't know. I just like to make rooms pretty. I like to make people happy. I love it when they come in and see a space I designed or an event I designed or a photo I've taken and it makes them feel good."

## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader

I get that, but being a thought leader doesn't always feel warm and fuzzy all the time. It does for the people you're serving, but for everybody else it potentially, again, repels them, right? So, it's really important you start practicing this if you want to step into a leadership role for your firm or tribe of people.

If you want to have an audience, if you want to have a brand, if you want to be able to monetize at a financial level that you haven't been able to before you can't have it both ways. You can't be super comfy and super likeable to everybody and super appealing to the whole world while also having an opinion on stuff.

I'm not meaning go out and do something that shoots yourself in the foot. I mean, some people do take a stand on things that are super controversial. It's not necessary to be controversial to be a thought leader, but it forces you to make some decisions about what you believe, about what's important to you, about where you want to serve, who you want to help and to do that, by nature of the concept, have to cut some other people out. That's what so many people call pigeonholing.

I want you to really reframe the negative part of this concept of pigeonholing and how do you get there? If you're like, "I don't really know. I don't really know what I'm passionate about." Then ask yourself what lights you up, like on fire, like motivates the heck out of you? Or what makes you angry is another to come about it?

When I ask myself those questions I'm like, well what lights me up is helping people who are already trying to help themselves, but need more. They need more guidance. They need me to be the guinea pig. They need me to invest my money to go figure out the solutions and bring it to them.

The part that makes me angry is when I see all of these incredibly talented and creative human beings that are trying every way they possibly know how to be successful yet they're falling short. So, they're overworked, overwhelmed, underpaid, exhausted, that's taking a toll on themselves and their family and they don't have the financial rewards to show for it.

## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader

That makes me so mad, not at them, but at the issue, at the situation. So, what lights me up is helping creative people, especially creative women, especially creative moms get out from under that cycle, off the treadmill and really stepping into the ways that they can become exactly what we're talking about, the thought leader, the leader of a tribe and using their skills and their talents and being paid for them at the level that they really deserve.

So, yeah, that makes me mad and what lights me up is to think, "Yeah, I want to make millionaires not just out of myself, which I've done already, had multiple 7-figure businesses, but I want to make millionaires out of other people." The better way to say it is help them make millionaires out of themselves. That completely lights me up.

So, whether it's me designing their house so that they can then go do the work they need to do in the world or me helping them design their business so they can go do their work in the world or me helping them design their mind, their thinking, their mindset so they can go out and do what they need to in the world, every one of those are a possibility for me all the time.

Then, I know exactly what I stand for and I know exactly what I stand for and I know exactly what my business stands for and I know which parts I don't agree with or believe in, I know how I think the old creative, starving artist traditional business model for creatives is broken, I know that I firmly believe people need an online and to be a thought leader and have points of view and have products and services that meet people where they are at different price points, and how they shouldn't just shove into their top level service so much so that they end dumbing it down and really lowering the price or not charging their worth because they can't seem to figure out another way to make money.

All of that stuff I'm so clear on and I know that I do this work by transforming people's schedules and mindsets and business models, and I know I do that through time blocking and the thought model and the life coaching training I've learned and teaching them everything I know about creating an online business, and online courses and scalable products, and

[The Design You Podcast](#) with Tobi Fairley

## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader

niche strategies, and all the stuff I do. I'm so, so clear about every single piece of that and I know how I help people design homes and offices and spaces that increase their productivity and their profitability and the way they feel and their mental well-being and health.

I could literally go on and on because I'm so clear because by choice I have decided what all the things are that I stand for and what all the things are that I won't stand for anymore in the world which is watching all of these creatives basically struggle and starve to death and when something like a pandemic happens or a big change in the industry or an economic recession I watch the rug be ripped out from under these people who haven't built the foundation of a business that's going to sustain them and really help a specific group of people need them and want to hire them.

I want you to see that you have to have this level of understanding and thought leadership in your own business and for your own tribe. It's really important. When people start working on this the very first steps, I get it, they're like, "Well, I think this is what I'm passionate about. How does this sound?" They basically describe something that could be the description of any other service provider in their industry.

So, for example, interior designers may say, "I really love helping people," and they'll list something like enhance the details in their house and up level the creativity or add color or work in a modern style or whatever. This is just the design industry alone. Every industry comes with their obvious things and it's the first step.

It's, of course, where our brain is going to go to first and my answer is always this or my question back to them, I say, "If what you just posted for me to review or just asked me in a conversation if it's your thing, if it's enough then I won't be able to literally insert any other person I know or that you know that's in your industry or has a somewhat similar business to you. I wouldn't be able to plug their name into that spot where yours is right now and those also easily be all of their passions and their skill sets and their competitive advantage and the thing that they do to meet people where they are, too."

## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader

I know this is frustrating work because you've got to dig deep and you've got to get really in touch with who you are and what you believe and why it matters to you. To me, I always say it's the stuff that when you lay your head on your pillow at night or even that you're thinking about it. You go to bed thinking about and dreaming about, or that wakes you up because you can't wait to jump out of bed to go help somebody with it, that's the kind of stuff I'm talking about. It's an emotional tug on you if you've really gotten in touch with this stuff for yourself and really about your audience and for your audience.

I want you to ask yourself if the things you've been saying about yourself or your business or what you do for other people and the problems you solve. If you could just literally pluck your name out and insert any other service provider in your industry and it would still be true and still make then you're not on to it yet. You haven't gotten in touch with the things that really are going to allow you to rise into a place of thought leadership for a specific group of people.

One more thing you have to ask yourself is how do I really differentiate what matters, what makes a difference, what serves someone? What is something that can more easily be monetized? That, to me, the litmus test for that is, is the thing you're talking about just nice to have or is it an urgent need?

Trust me, there's plenty of nice to have things that you can absolutely build a business around all day long. I'm not saying that that's not true and I'm not saying there's not a component of it. But when we find ourselves in situations like we are in right now it's so much easier for the consumer to justify not purchasing the nice-to-haves and taking all of their time, attention, and money and focus to the urgent needs.

So, even if your industry, your business, your skillset, your thing you do is more right now of a nice-to-have how can you change the conversation around what you do and not blow smoke, and not smoke and mirrors? Because if it's not legit, what you're saying, people are going to see right

## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader

through it. It's not going to be authentic and you're not going to convince anybody.

But I promise you there is so much more than you realize that you're taking for granted that you're just kind of believing, "Oh, everybody knows that" about what you do that is truly important. When we think about things like beauty, when we think about things like our environment absolutely, they can be life and death. Absolutely they can be life-changing and play a role just like I said when I do people's homes and help them increase their productivity and their profits, their bottom line by the way we design their space, that matters right?

So, I want you to get super focused on this. Put your inspector hat on and go start investigated or what I love to excavating around your particular business and your skillset and see what you can find that is far more urgent or important than you thought. Or it might require a little bit of a pivot for this to be true.

Right now is the time, you're hearing a lot of people and I completely agree with it, now is the time to consider a slight or even big, but often it only takes a slight pivot to really start connecting with a specific group of people on something that they desperately need that if you don't provide it they're going to be getting it from somebody else.

So, it's not like we're taking advantage of people. This has nothing to do with that. It's truly finding a real need, a real void in the market or your particular area where you might have to pivot just a little bit to get in their but start making a difference. Start having a point of view, an opinion, and being a thought leader on that thing because with it you could absolutely change people's lives and serve the world in a way that you absolutely haven't done before.

Think about this for your business, are you noticing that you're way more of a listener and less of a leader? Because listening is super important and leaders definitely need to listen to their customers' wants and needs and desires and all of the things they're saying. But if you really tend to only

## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader

listen and hang in the back, and stand on the sidelines, and never take a stand, and you're wondering why your business is struggling more, especially in times like these then I want you to get really clear about that and say, "Of course, I'm a bystander. I'm not a key player for a group of people making a difference in their life."

That's what I have for you today, friends. I think this is so very important. Again, it's not just about more noise. It is absolutely the opposite of more noise. There's a lot of noise out there right now and I'm not being critical because, again, trust me as opposed to less noise and people still standing on the sidelines I would rather people at least start with noise and then find their voice than not starting at all.

But I just want you to know, this is not about more noise. This is about truly deciding where you want to make a difference, deciding what you believe about that area, that thing, the people you're going to help and stepping fully and completely into a role of leader and really leading a tribe of people to a better version of themselves or something else that they need in their life. Because you can absolutely do it.

If you want my help, get your buns, as I say all the time in Design You, because I teach you this exact skill and it's hard. It's hard. You're going to feel stuck. You're going to want to say, "I don't know." You're going to be like, "I don't have anything. I don't have any passions. I don't have any skills. I don't have any people," but it's not true. You absolutely do.

Actually, it's not even finding them, it's deciding who they are and then doing the deep mindset work around the discomfort and the fear of rejection that comes up so that you can actually step in and lead. That's what I want to help you do. So, hopefully either this podcast by itself has moved you to do that or you come in and work with me and we help you do that, but either way the time is now.

The time is now to lead. The time is now to make a difference. Stop just standing on the sidelines. Get out there and be every single thing that you were put on this planet to be because I know you've got it in you. I see it in

## Ep #108: Becoming a Thought Leader

all of you all of the time, and I want you to not only believe in it, but go make a difference because the world needs you, okay? I'll see you again next week, everybody, with another episode of *The Design You Podcast*. Bye for now, friends.

Thank you so much for listening to *The Design You Podcast* and if you are ready to dig deep and do the important work we talk about here on the podcast of transforming your mindset and creating a scalable online business model there has never been a more important time than right now. So, join me and the incredible creative entrepreneurs in my Design You coaching program today. You can get all the details at [TobiFairley.com](http://TobiFairley.com).