

## Ep #218: Living Up to Your Potential



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Tobi Fairley**

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You are listening to the *Design You* podcast with Tobi Fairley, episode number 218.

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.

Hi, friends, how are you? Happy summer. It is summer. I hope you have some exciting plans for the coming months, weeks, and months. We definitely do. My daughter is about to start her senior year of high school, so hard to believe, in a couple of months. So, we're definitely having a lot of excitement around here this year. She's got a birthday. We have some travel. We'll have to get her senior pics made, all kinds of stuff happening. So, I know the next year's just going to fly by. And I'm so excited for her and what's to come and for me and what's to come.

I think a lot about what her future holds. There are so many possibilities for her. And that's actually not unlike what today's episode is about which is on reaching our potential. The exciting thing is that she may be just starting out as an adult soon and I am 50 but I still have a lot of my life to live too and a lot of opportunity ahead of me. And you do too, no matter what age you are. I feel like I'm starting the second half of my life and I love planning and dreaming about what I want to do with it.

And I hope she loves planning and dreaming about what's ahead of her. And so much is possible. But I have a little different perspective about her future than I think maybe my parents had for mine. Life is different now in a lot of wonderful ways. And I recently posted a quote on Instagram that said I no longer want to live up to my potential and I for sure don't want to be all I can be. And it's not a joke although I do think it's funny.

Something I had said here on the podcast probably when we were talking about hustle culture or redefining success, you may remember that. But when I posted it on Instagram most people responded with a hell yes or I needed to hear this today or thank you. But a couple of people were really dumbfounded. One person said, "You need to turn around and take that

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down right now.” And another person said, “I’ve looked at this multiple times and I’m just speechless, why would anybody say this?”

I often post things intentionally to be a bit polarizing or at least to get people’s attention. And that was definitely my intent here but it’s still the truth for me. And I’m going to explain why in just a sec. But I also wanted to share a perspective of one of my besties, Gail who called me on the phone and she was like, “Girl, I need to talk to you about this Instagram post.” And she brought up such a great point.

She said, “You know, I was thinking that maybe as a white woman you have the privilege to not live up to your potential if you want to. But as a Black woman I don’t feel like that I have that option. We have to constantly be excellent. We have to always be proving ourselves because the world always sees us as less than.” So, point taken, Gail, and she’s not wrong and I get that. But I did say to her, “What would happen if you just released that expectation, if you just released that idea that even in an identity that is marginalized by the world, what if you just let it go, what would happen?”

Is that even a possibility for her? I don’t know. I don’t have that lived experience. But I asked her the question and she said she would definitely ponder how that would change how she showed up in the world. So let me explain my point that I was making because it was certainly not about being mediocre. It was certainly not about having the privilege to do nothing. I mean some moments it’s about having the privilege to do nothing I guess. But it was not about being mediocre but rather a response to the expectations of the world.

There is so much socialization and patriarchal conditioning in the world that impacts what the world thinks we are supposed to do, especially we as women and my daughter as a young woman. When I was graduating high school like my daughter’s about to in about a year, for me it was 30 years ago, more than. There were a lot of expectations about what I should be or do. First of all, my parents said almost every day of my childhood and teen years, “Don’t get married until you’re at least 25 and have at least one college degree.”

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They had gotten married really young before college degrees and way before 25. So, I get where they were coming from and I listened, and I was such a good daughter. I got married at 30 with two bachelors and a master's. I maybe took it a little far. And don't get me wrong, I don't regret those decisions, they have served me for sure. But my point is the world, other people decide what our potential is.

I was also told to pick a degree that would create a firm foundation, be a doctor or a lawyer. Or if I didn't want one of those, at least get an accounting degree so I could use it in business. I would have a firm foundation. I would always have something to fall back on. So, for my first year of college, I was premed, a biology student. Decided didn't like that and then switched to accounting, suffered through finishing my accounting degree. I mean damn, it was miserable, tax accounting, cost accounting, ugh.

But before I decided what I really wanted to be, which was ultimately an interior designer and a lot of other things as you know now, life coach, health coach, who knows. I'm going to be an author, who knows what else will be. But before I decided my career choice of interior design and decided to go back to school and turned around and went back to school, I finished my accounting degree first in misery. There were moments I didn't know if I was going to finish and I'm a good student, you all.

I just barely eked by on one of those classes, maybe tax accounting, I feel like I had a D, I don't know. I got whatever counted and I gladly took it and got the heck out of dodge. But it was miserable in a lot of ways. Thankfully my parents did support me going back to school to get my design degree. I wonder if they hadn't would I have done it anyway? Would I have paid for it myself and done it anyway? Because they did pay for me to go back to school which is certainly a privilege. Or would I have just gotten a job as an accountant or something else?

Man, if I'd gotten a job as an accountant I would have been so miserable. This story and thinking of myself makes me think of one of my other besties, Krisha, who is a doctor. She's an allergist and an immunologist but

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she no longer practices medicine, she checked all the boxes though coming out of high school, and into college, and into med school. She checked every box for reaching her potential, yet she was not fulfilled. And she was so confused by it, and felt guilt about it, and really agonized about making a different decision.

But she decided ultimately to walk away from medicine and went back to school to be an interior designer. And in that moment and many moments since how many of her family members and peers, definitely her medical peers have likely thought she was not living up to her potential and that she could have been 'so much more' had she not walked away from her medical career? You know people have thought that, thankfully she knew she wasn't happy. She wanted more. She wanted different. And she's kind of still deciding what she wants next.

She currently does interior design and teaches interior design classes to doctors so they can create homes that support them as they work hard and raise their families. But I think that my comment to not reach my potential and not be all I can be isn't in jest, isn't a lie, isn't a joke, it's real and I really mean it. But there is a difference in that and being mediocre. I want to do big things in my life. Krisha wants to do big things in her life. Gail wants to do big things in her life. I want to live my life in amazing ways. But it won't look the way the world would have me live.

And it no longer involves hustle culture and killing myself to prove my worthiness. As women we are socialized to believe we are at our most worthy, most valuable when we are sacrificing ourselves for other people, for our families, for our children, for our work, for our clients. And that we aren't inherently worthy otherwise, that our value comes from our work as nurturers and caring for all the duties in our homes and in our heteronormative relationships that the world says we should have. We should be caring for our husbands.

But we know that many women don't want that. Many women don't want children at all. And when they choose that the world looks at them as odd and not natural, and that something is wrong with them, or that they are

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selfish, and that they're definitely not living up to their potential. Also, many women don't want to be married to men, or maybe married at all. And that doesn't mean we haven't lived up to our potential either. It just means we made our own choice, but the world would tell us that we have not.

When I think of being all that I can be, at this point in my life that sounds absolutely exhausting, honestly I tried that in my 30s and it was miserable. Trying to be a perfect mom, a perfect designer, a perfect boss, a perfect leader, I tried to do it all. A lot of things suffered. My marriage suffered a lot. My health suffered even more. Today I live with autoimmune disease and chronic pain that I know 100% was caused by the overworking and the oversteering, and the trying to live up to my potential and the being all that I could be for so many years, the trying to do it all.

So those of us who grew up in the 80s, we really got this messaging loud and clear that women could be anything. Women were really coming into the workforce in a whole new way. And that we should be things, we should have careers, and it was all available to us. But as I've talked about before on other episodes about anti-hustle or on Redefining Success, we just added the potential to be great in our careers and business on top of everything else.

But we weren't allowed or expected to drop any of the other responsibilities that we're socialized to believe are our jobs as women, as moms, as wives. And though we may be able to do it all, maybe not all at once and definitely not all well, and certainly not in a healthy or sustainable way. So, I absolutely plan to do a lot more amazing things in my life. But being all I can be, no way. I am not signing up for that kind of self-abandonment and self-abuse ever again. I am constantly rethinking what is expected of me.

I assumed the role a long time ago was like second in command in the matriarchy lineage of my family, meaning I am my mom's mini me. And a few years ago, I took over hosting holidays and I felt obligated to carry on all our family traditions into the next generation at some point when my parents are no longer here. But I now allow myself to question exactly how much I want to be obligated to. I think that maybe in the future my husband,

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and my daughter, and I might just want to travel some years for holidays. And we're going to choose that.

But whatever we do I want to feel free to make my own choices, not 'live up to the potential' that I should as the person who must keep everything going, and keep the family together. And not let traditions die and all the things. And it doesn't mean that I don't love traditions, or family, or entertaining, don't get me wrong. I adore my family. And we will likely stay close knit forever, but I am just loosening the expectations that I have felt for so long and giving myself the options, all the options of how I'm allowed to show up and what choices I'm allowed to make.

And I want you to consider if it serves you, that you have far more options of how you can show up than you likely believe you do. Where are you falling in line with socialization for your gender, or your family expectations? And where are they holding you back? Where do you feel stifled by having demands placed on you by someone other than yourself? Or maybe it's coming from you but not because you freely chose it but rather someone else planted the seed of how you should be.

I fully intend to get to the end of my life and be so proud of the fact that the second half of my life I lived on my terms. And I constantly encourage my daughter to make her own choices, to live by her own rules. Yes, I have thoughts and expectations, but I work to let those go because it's not her job to live up to what I believe she should be. I used to think it was my job to train her up to be the third generation to carry on all the holiday duties, and entertaining, and hostess-ing with the moistest-ing. And yes, she has picked up a lot from watching me and my mom do all those things for years.

But now I tell her that she has a choice, she doesn't have to do any of that stuff. And it sounds crazy, all of those of you listening that are designers and entertainers like me. The thought of not having our children carry on these traditions feels almost like sacrilege or a shame at some level. But the cost to that is her giving up her own choices. It's so much hard work.

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And if she chooses to do it sometimes or in some ways, that's wonderful as long as it's her choice, truly her choice.

But I don't want to hand over a three inch thick manual of how she should be or that her job to keep people connected and in our traditions, and carrying the torch in lieu of living her life in her own way. So, what's coming up for you as you listen to this? Are you uncomfortable? Are you having a hard time imagining or even wanting this kind of freedom? Are you like the other women who told me to turn around and take down my social post, take down those podcasts right now, unsay all these words?

Are you wondering like they were, how anyone could want anything besides living up to their potential, the one the world has for us, or our family has for us, and to be all that we can be? You all, we are capable of a lot as humans, I mean a lot, I tried it. It sucked. I don't want to be all I can be. I'm a powerhouse. It's a lot. And my life is so much better now that I have lowered some of my expectations for myself. I still have amazing expectations but in that integrated in them is freedom that I haven't really felt before.

I've given up a lot of perfectionism I was taught. I can actually relax on weekends now even when my house isn't perfectly clean and tidy, I can sit down or take a nap. You all, I had to learn that skill literally. I had to teach myself how to be idle. I had to reclaim lazy and learn how to sit and do nothing without judging myself. I had to learn that you don't have to work really hard to make a lot of money, that you can make money in easier ways, a lot of money. I had to learn that my worth doesn't come from my work, or my busyness, or my productivity.

And I had to learn that I get to unlearn a lot of beliefs that were handed down to me that I didn't choose for myself. I get to decide for myself if I want to keep those beliefs or if I want to choose new ones and replace those. So will you consider what it means to reach your potential? Is there anything you want to change about that story, or that expectation, or that obligation? I choose freedom over potential.

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I choose creativity over productivity. I choose joy over obligation. And that doesn't mean I will be mediocre, it just means I will be intentional and honest with myself about what I want. This is a new way of thinking and living, and it feels amazing. And I want you to know it's available to you too if you want it.

Okay friends, that's it for today. I hope it was an inspirational episode. It was a short one, but I think it was power packed with a big idea that I just want you to sit with, and to ponder, and to chew on. You get to be whatever you want to be on your own terms in a way that is healthy, and sustainable, and right for you. And you can claim it, and you can go for it. I can't wait to be inspired by the life that you create, that is anything but what the world would say is living up to your potential. You can do it. I'll see you next week. Bye for now.

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