

Ep #20: Take Time Off from Your Interior Design Business



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Desi Creswell

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Hey designer, you're listening to episode 20. This is the one where I'm sharing how to take time off from your interior design business.

Welcome to *The Interior Design Business CEO*, the only show for designers who are ready to confidently run and grow their businesses without the stress and anxiety. If you're ready to develop a bigger vision for your interior design business, free up your time, and streamline your days for productivity and profit, you're in the right place. I'm Desi Creswell, an award-winning interior designer and certified life and business coach. I help interior designers just like you stop feeling overwhelmed so they can build profitable businesses they love to run. Are you ready to confidently lead your business, clients, and projects? Let's go.

Hello, designer. Welcome back to the podcast. It is episode 20. That feels like kind of a big deal to me so I think we should celebrate. If you've ever been in one of my communities or as a private client, you know that I highly encourage celebrating and recognizing your successes, big and small. And this feels like a big deal, 20 episodes. It already kind of feels like I've been doing the podcast for a long time.

It was really only at the end of last fall that I started. And with any of the content that I create in my business I've really been developing a process around it. The planning of creating the content, when I do it, when I record the format, the time parameters I put on its completion. And it really feels like I'm starting to hit my stride with this podcasting format. And that really feels amazing.

One of the things that I did when I started the podcast was I committed to doing it for a year, which would give me plenty of time to work out the kinks, see what I like about it, what I don't like about it, what I want to change, what resonates with you, what doesn't. So we're just on our way and I'm here for it all.

I will throw in a quick tip here of creating content. If there is any kind of content in your business, marketing, I know, so many, I hear from you, there's lots of mind drama about Instagram and posts for that. But if there's any content in your business you want to be creating consistently, consider setting up some parameters and processes around the content creation and production so that you can make it easier on yourself.

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Just like I was talking about how I create this content. How I have a process for capturing ideas. How I have a process for completing the outline. How I record, all of that. It's just going to make it so much more simple for you to do.

And one of the questions I love to ask is how can I make this easy or reduce the friction for myself? So if there is some type of content you want to be creating more consistently in your business, ask yourself that question and see what comes up.

Today I'm starting to get ahead of recording episodes to prepare for our upcoming spring break trip. I've been doing a lot of recording in advance in general since I started the podcast with some of the trips that our family has taken. We took two weeks off as a family at the end of last year. And for spring break my kids actually have two weeks off so we're going to be doing a longer spring break trip as well. So I have to get ahead of things.

And you might be getting ready to take some spring break trips as well, or just get yourself out of the middle of winter doldrums with stepping away from your business. So I thought this would be the perfect time to talk about this topic. And the reason I feel like I'm the perfect person to talk about it is because last year, we actually took, as a family, 10 weeks of vacation. And we're planning on taking the same amount this year.

And this isn't to say that that's the right amount of time to take off, or that you should take more time than that, or less time. I'm just sharing that for reference and as a way of saying I have had to navigate this personally and have come up with ways to make it possible.

Traveling is something that we're really prioritizing as a family right now. And I've had to make some pretty significant shifts in my business and the way that I'm working so that I wasn't paying for the vacation in overworking before and after the time off because, to me, that just doesn't feel worth it. And I'm guessing you would probably agree with me.

Taking time away from your business is something that comes up in a lot of my coaching relationships and it, of course, relates directly to time management.

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And my clients that come to work with me in Out Of Overwhelm, they want to learn to manage their time and take back control of their schedule. And that includes stepping away from the business from time to time.

And it's so important because of the ripple effects that it creates, both for your business, your effectiveness, your creativity in your business, your emotional and mental well being, your relationships, whether that is your work relationships or your personal relationships. The impact of creating space for yourself is truly priceless.

What I'm going to be sharing could definitely be vacation time, or it could just be time away from work. Whether that's on the weekend where you have a weekend that is truly free of work, an evening, or a day during the week that you take to yourself, the skill of creating time just for you, or just for you and the people that you hold dear, is so valuable.

I actually just had an Out Of Overwhelm client celebrating in our community about how she had planned an entire afternoon for herself on Friday. And she was going to get a massage and visit some friends. And it was just so amazing to see her taking that time for herself when, when she joined the program, it felt like she was just on the hamster wheel.

And if this sounds dreamy to you, I want you to get on the waitlist for Out Of Overwhelm because this is so possible for you. Enrollment is going to be opening mid-May for the summer session, which starts mid-July. There are going to be limited spots for this session, and that's why it's so important to get on the waitlist.

There's only going to be 15 designers in the group, and the waitlist is how you get first dibs on those limited spots. The link will be in the show notes so you can get your name on the waitlist. And then also I have a pretty fun bonus coming your way as well, so you'll also receive that when you join the waitlist.

Similar to what I was saying with the client who was planning that afternoon for herself, so many clients when they're first presented with this idea of taking time away, they love the idea of it but they have a lot of objections. They feel like they

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just constantly have to be on and available, always checking their email, always checking their phone, and available around the clock to their clients, or maybe they're allowed a little sleep window. I'm joking a little here, but you know what I mean.

Or I hear like it's not a good time because projects are always in XYZ phase, you name it, it's never a good time. Or they'll tell me they're the only one in their business, or even if they have a team they'll tell me they're the only one that can handle those things. And believe me, I get this.

I mean, I can remember being called while I was in Hawaii, this was before we had kids. But I was in Hawaii with my husband. It was bright and early in the morning, the sun was coming up in Hawaii, and I remember getting a call from a contractor about a bathtub. And it was like the wrong bathtub had been delivered or something like that. And it was so stressful. So I get it, I get it. Sometimes you are the point person, we're going to be talking about that.

The other thing I hear is that you're afraid to tell clients you're going to be gone because you want them to think that you're always working on their project. This is kind of similar to that first one of feeling like you always have to be checking. So I'm guessing, I would bet money that some of these are sounding familiar to you. I hope you're nodding your head.

And if you want to step away from your business, if you want to take time off, it really comes down to three things, it's pretty simple. It's planning ahead with intention. It's setting expectations with yourself and others. And the last one is letting it be uncomfortable at first.

What I want you to remember as I'm sharing how to take time off from your interior design business is that it doesn't have to be a long vacation. You can use what I'm sharing for a long weekend. You could use it if you wanted to start creating regular days off in your week. You could use it for maternity leave. You can use this however it's applicable in the way that you want to take time away from your business.

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So here's how you're going to prepare for vacation, actually take the vacation, and make a smooth transition back into work refreshed and ready to go. The very first thing is to plan for the time off in advance. Decide how much time you want to take off and put it on your calendar. Block it on your calendar, even if you don't know exactly what you're going to be doing during that time, block it off so it has a holding space.

When I'm teaching clients about time management, I often share about Parkinson's Law. And it's this law that work expands to the time that we give it. I see this being so true with managing your time day to day. And it's also when you look at long-term planning. If you don't schedule time off, you will always find other ways to fill the time.

Making sure that the time is blocked off on your calendar is also a visual cue, a very important visual cue so that you don't put anything on your calendar during that time. If it's not on your calendar, and you're booking appointments and setting project milestones you're going to schedule over yourself. When that happens, you either keep putting off the time or you're going to have to go through a whole lot of internal negotiations on convincing yourself that you can reschedule. And, frankly, that takes time to reschedule too.

So just get it on your calendar. And then you can even look forward to it. I remember reading a really long time ago, back when I was an employee at a commercial interior design firm, I'd read The New York Times in the morning while I'd have a little breakfast, checking my email. But I remember reading this article all about how the anticipation and looking forward to a vacation is a huge part of the pleasure that we get from taking time off.

So if you put the time on your calendar, you get the double benefit of not only taking time off, but you get all of that anticipatory joy as well. With the planning and blocking time off on your calendar for the days you're going to be away, you also want to make sure you're giving yourself runway. This is kind of how I picture it, as a plane, you're the plane. And you have a very long airstrip. And you need to have space for you to ramp up and take off and start to glide through the air, meaning take vacation.

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And then you also need time to descend and come to a complete stop on the other end of the airstrip. And so when I talk about runway, it's really this buffer you put around your vacation or time off. I like to have at least a day blocked with no meetings or client calls on either end of a time off. And this gets to be especially true if I'm going to be out of the office for an extended period of time because naturally, just more things are going to come in that I'm going to need to follow up with when I return.

If you already have feelings of guilt or anxiety around taking time off, this might make you feel a little twitchy to add even more days blocked off on your calendar. And I totally get it, this used to be me too. But I am telling you, the runway is essential to creating a really nice experience for you of taking vacation.

Before I really developed this concept of runway and implemented it for myself, I'd be trying to essentially, you can't see my air bunnies, but make up for the time off by working up to the last second, cramming a bunch in before I left, and then hitting the ground running literally as soon as I got back.

This comes from a thought error that if you put pedal to the metal before and after, it kind of makes it more okay or justifiable to step away. But really what ends up happening is you exhaust yourself and stress yourself out.

Think of how unnecessarily stressful it is to have an 8 am appointment or presentation. I have actually had designers who've said they'd done this, where they have a client presentation at 8 am the day they get back. Which, of course, you can always opt to do that, but I recommend that you don't.

But they'd have a set appointment immediately the day after they got back. And that's, of course, you have a million emails that haven't been followed up on and you're looking for some space to settle in because vacation pace is very different than work pace. So just make it easier on yourself and plan for this runway.

The other essential piece of taking vacation from your interior design business is setting expectations with yourself and others. And I want you to really notice that

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I said with yourself and others. I want to do an entire episode on this topic specifically, setting expectations and boundaries with yourself, because I think so often we talk about doing it with others and we forget about the most important piece, setting them with ourselves. But that'll be for another day.

So set expectations with yourself and others. And this will include letting others know you are going to be gone. Don't try and hide it. Clients, tradespeople, employees, contractors, let them all know with plenty of time in advance. My suggestion here is to send out an email and make sure that your notice of being gone allows time for setting up appointments and check-ins before you leave. Preferably, again with that runway, at least a few days in advance of you leaving.

This is going to help you head off a bunch of questions, requests, communications coming in while you're away if you get on top of it before you leave. Also really important, if there is something you need from one of these parties before you leave in order to do some type of action, make it explicit to them. You could also let them know what will happen if you don't receive whatever you've requested.

I see this a lot with furniture orders, when a client will have a proposal out to their clients for some furniture, and they haven't set an expectation around when that proposal needs to be approved in order to place the order before they're going to be heading out of town. And then, of course, the client takes their nice sweet time and then gets the order in at the 11th hour. And then the designer is working on their vacation or working overtime to the last minute before they leave, to try and get that in, when that could have been avoided.

So in this example, what might happen is that you politely tell the client that if their proposal is not approved, and deposit received, or payment in full if you do that, before a certain date, then the order will be placed after your return. And you probably want to fill them in on why that's so important, especially with today's lead times and things going out of stock. Yes, you want to be on top of their order and get it made as soon as possible. And also they can do what they need to do on their end to fulfill their part of the relationship.

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The other part of expectations is deciding in advance if you are going to work at all on vacation. And if you are going to be checking in at all, whether that's email, or texts, or voice memos, however you communicate either with your team, your clients, your trade partners. It is not inherently right or wrong to work or not work during your vacation.

I've taken vacations where I don't check in at all. I've taken vacations where I have done certain days of that trip where I've worked. I have clients who've gone entire weeks without checking in with their team because they've set up things in advance.

I had a client who decided that she was renting this really cute beach house with her family, and that she wanted to work on a very specific project that she had been wanting to complete in her business, and she was gonna get it done while she was there. And the rest of the time she was going to have fun.

So it's not inherently right or wrong to check in, or work, or do anything on your vacation. It's your vacation, you get to do it. But what I am saying is make a decision ahead of time so that you're making a conscious decision and that you really love your reasons for your decision.

If you are checking in, be sure to communicate with anyone who might need that information, the when and the how. So are you going to be checking in daily? Is it going to be Monday, Wednesday, Friday? Are you going to be available during certain hours for phone calls? Be clear on what the parameters are, or otherwise you're going to feel like you're constantly in checking mode with different devices wondering if anyone needs you.

And, of course, part of this then is following through on that. If you tell clients, you will not be checking your email and then they email you and you respond, then you have broken your own boundary. And then it's only natural for them to start to expect you to continue to break that boundary with yourself.

So if you really can't help yourself, set it so that it is a draft maybe or you schedule the email. But do your best to honor those commitments that you make

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to yourself and show the others that you're working with that you are serious about those decisions.

And then if you aren't checking in, you want to be clear about that as well. With the scenario where you are checking in, you might be clear about how you'd be getting back to the person within 24 hours or 48 hours. And if you are going to be not checking in for an extended period of time, let them know what day they can expect a response from you.

The other thing you can do is direct them to somebody who can help them while you're away. This can be in the format of an auto responder, it might be even something really explicit or if you have a question about this, contact this person. If you need this, this is the process for that. So think about what are the things that you're going to be contacted about and solve them ahead of time as much as possible when you're going to be taking time off.

During a recent trip I posted on Instagram that I was going to be doing this episode and asked for questions. And I got a really great one in, so I want to answer that now because it relates to what we're talking about. And the question the designer had is, what happens when she's gone and typically the contractor who she really trusts could maybe handle something, but the client really wants her to weigh in on a design element, and she doesn't want to delay the construction?

This is such a great question. And I think something that is likely to come up at some point for you. If you do have someone great on your team or the contractor is someone you really trust and you can direct them to, that is great. And I would say make sure that the client is interfacing with the person you're delegating the decision to ahead of the vacation, and has a relationship with that person to build trust ahead of time so that they start to see that person as a part of the project team as much as possible.

This is going to make it easier, and also they're going to be more confident with your delegation of that decision and more trusting of how that process will work if they have a relationship with the person already. Part of this is just going to be explaining ahead of time that that person will be the one making the decision,

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and offering reassurance around why that will work, why it's the best thing, and folding it into the conversation as if this is just part of your process, because it's going to be.

The other thing you could consider is to have a conversation with a contractor who's on site and decide what really needs your consultation or what doesn't? You can always decide what's an emergency or what are the design elements I really care about and want you to call me about? Or what am I okay with you making decisions on?

And then the last thing I'd say is sometimes you might want to decide that you do want to be available for those types of questions, whether that is because there's some decisions that you feel really strongly about and want to be a part of, or you feel like it would be really beneficial for the project in some way. And again, this is when it becomes really important to communicate and decide how often you're going to be checking in and when.

Yes, if you're checking in once a day, that might mean that that decision is on hold for a little bit of time. But I want you to consider that maybe a few hours is not going to be the end of the world while waiting on that decision. We're not on-call physicians that need to be called in to triage a car accident, it's going to be okay.

And the last piece of this is know that it might feel uncomfortable. I know I'm always talking about this, designers, but it's true. You are listening to this podcast because you want to do things differently. And sometimes, more often than not, doing things in a different way can feel kind of uncomfortable. You're doing something new, you're building new skills, you're developing a new way of being and that's all okay.

The way to make taking time away from your business feel less uncomfortable is to practice stepping away from your business. So I highly encourage you to get started now. Go block off some time on your calendar, even if it's just a day to help you start to build this skill and see what is available to you.

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I know the concern is that you're worried if you take time off things are going to slow down, the projects are going to be delayed, something's going to be missed or fall through the cracks with you gone. But not taking necessary breaks and eventually wearing yourself out, this is how you actually slow down the effectiveness of your work. This is how you start to let those things slip through the cracks. Not to mention, you start to feel really resentful of your clients and your business, like they are running you instead of you running it.

I want you to have time and space away for your creativity, for your relationships, for your mental health. This is really important, just as important as all those other things in your business.

So remember, taking time is all about these three simple things, planning for the time off in advance, setting expectations with yourself and others, including making decisions ahead of time about how and when you check in, if you are going to be checking in. And then letting it be uncomfortable.

When you're used to working nonstop, this is going to feel a little bit difficult to relax, and it also means you shouldn't do it. In the next episode I'm actually going to be answering another listener question about delegating without micromanaging. And if you have a question for me or an idea that you want to hear shared on the show, the best way to do that is to send me a message on Instagram, @DesiCreswell.

If you know me, if you've been a client of mine, you know I love to delegate. So I can't wait to dive into that topic and I know that you are going to benefit from it immensely. Until then I'm wishing you a beautiful week and I'll talk to you in the next episode.

I'm going to make the bold assumption that you enjoyed today's topic. Let's make sure you never miss an episode; follow the show now wherever you listen to your podcasts. If you haven't already, I would really appreciate it if you'd make the time to leave me a rating and review. This is how I know what you're loving so I can share more of it.

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And it's also how you can help others find *The Interior Design Business CEO*. As a thank you for leaving a rating and review, I want to send you a little midweek pick-me-up in the mail. Simply screenshot your review and send me a message on Instagram, @DesiCreswell. I'll talk to you next week.

Thanks for joining me for this week's episode of *The Interior Design Business CEO*. If you want more tips, tools and strategies visit www.desicreswell.com. And if you're ready to take what you've learned on the podcast to the next level, I would love for you to check out my signature group coaching program, Out of Overwhelm.