

Ep #44: The Truth about To-Do Lists



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Ep #44: The Truth about To-Do Lists

Hey designer, you're listening to episode 44. This is the one where I'm sharing the truth about your to-do list. It's time to clear a few things up and you need to listen to this one.

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. As always, so glad to have you here. I am recording this episode right after my birthday weekend and getting a little bit ahead on these episodes. It's always kind of time bendy when I think about when these are going to air and when I'm recording. But I am getting ahead because we're going to be leaving on a family trip to Washington State at the end of the week and I want to make sure that these are reliably popping up in your feed.

I had a really great birthday weekend. We were out of town for the state swim meet, which my son participated in. He made state last year but we'd already had a trip planned, which state was just not on our radar. So we made sure to be around this year for state if he made it again. And he did and it was great because he had just aged up.

And anyways, he left state with two metals and that was just really exciting. And then my husband and kids made me a delicious breakfast. I love breakfast, especially if you can sit outside and the weather's beautiful. We sat out on our porch and were super leisurely. My husband got me one of those Ember cups.

Have you heard of these? They're a cup that keeps your coffee warm. I've heard from other people that these are amazing and didn't quite get it. And now I used it for the first time this morning and now I get it. It's really cool that you can walk around and have your coffee stay hot.

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And then my mom got me a couple of books I've been wanting to read, which books are always my go-to gifts. And I got to do yoga at a new studio here in town. And we went on a couple of bike rides as a family. So it was just an all around great weekend.

Because it is the day following the weekend, that makes it a Monday that I am recording this. And I'm about to start a new project this week that is going to be coming to you in September. So I've been reviewing my quarterly plan, which to you could look like a giant to-do list.

And also the other reason this is a bit timely, this topic, is that we're getting into the time management section and planning foundations with my new group of Out Of Overwhelm clients. They are an incredible group and I'm so excited to dive in with them. So I thought this would be a great time to talk about to-do lists.

I do want to share a really special review that MM left me. MM says, "This is one of the podcasts I look forward to listening to every week. Desi breaks down so many thoughts in our heads and helps take the drama out of life. I've been an avid follower of Desi for many years. Desi has privately coached me and I've enrolled in Out Of Overwhelm.

I look back at my last few years and I'm amazed at how much growth I've accomplished and how much stronger of a person and designer I have become. So much is because of Desi, thank you." Well, thank you MM, I am so proud of you and everything that you have accomplished. And I so appreciate you leaving that review, it really means a lot to me.

And as a reminder to all of you, if you haven't left a review, what are you waiting for? I actually have a giveaway coming up where you can win a private coaching session with me. So all you have to do is leave a rating and review for the podcast and then I've got a link in the show notes where you'll let me know that you left that rating and review, otherwise, I don't know how to contact you. And you will be entered to win a private coaching session with me.

All you have to do is leave that rating and review and fill out the super quick form so I know how to contact you if you are the winner.

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And speaking of private coaching, I have not integrated private coaching into my practice for over a year and I'm bringing it back for just a limited number of clients. So if you've been wanting to work with me one on one, check the link in the show notes to learn all about how I work with clients one on one and to schedule your complimentary consultation.

All right, let's dive into this topic of to-do lists. Now, everyone has a to-do list so I think we can all relate to this topic. Whether your to-do list is a bunch of sticky notes stuck everywhere or in a giant pile, it might be in a few different notebooks, or it might be in an app or other digital format. Or the to-do list might just be swirling in your head, possibly at 2am when you're trying to sleep. It might even be all of the above.

We all have a to-do list and some way that we use to keep track of things we want to do or have a responsibility to do. While the to-do list is so common, I do see a ton of misconceptions and inefficiencies when it comes to to-do lists, and that's why I want to be here today to tell you the truth and clear things up.

I no longer want your to-do list to be your enemy. We are not in a fight against the list, it is a partner in making effective use of your time. And to have any kind of time management approach work for you, you need to partner with time and that's going to start with diving into the five truths about to-do lists that I'm about to share with you.

All right, to-do list truth number one. To-do lists are not inherently overwhelming or anxiety provoking. Wait, what? Did you just need to pause that? Yes, that's right. Your to-do list is not inherently overwhelming or anxiety provoking, or dread inducing, whatever emotion you relate to. Your thoughts about your to-do list are what create that emotion and that experience for you.

A to-do list is just a set of letters, words, numbers strung together. It's pixels on a screen or graphite or ink on a paper. And when you see your to-do list, your brain offers up thoughts. And these thoughts are going to be whatever you're used to thinking, whatever those well practiced narratives are.

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And then those thoughts generate an emotion in the body that creates the feeling. It's never the to-do list itself. And we know this is true because you can feel overwhelmed or anxious when you have three things on your list or 10 things on your list. And two different designers can look at the very same to-do list and have different thoughts and feelings about it. Some might think it's not that much, some might think it's a lot.

If this is really intriguing to you, you're definitely going to want to check out episode two where I talk about how overwhelm is optional. But for right now I really want you to pay attention to that inner dialogue you have around your to-dos. Are you telling yourself I'm behind, or there's so much to do, or I'll never get this done?

Yes, I want to honor that you might be over capacity and asking yourself to do more in a day or a week than is humanly possible. But that's a separate issue I'll help you address. We don't need to take an overcapacity issue and then layer on emotional strain because of the way you're thinking about that to-do list. We're much better able to address the capacity issue when we do that from a place of calm, grounded energy, which is exactly what I teach my clients to do.

Even if you do nothing with the amount of things on your list, if you learn to fuel your actions from this steady, grounded place believing thoughts like I'm going to focus on the next best step, or the most important thing is the thing I'm choosing to do right now, or there's lots of other ways you could talk about it, but you will be more effective, more efficient, be able to prioritize and you will be in action versus procrastinating and avoiding the to-do list.

To-do list truth number two is that to-do lists are a tool, not your master. I recently had a client say that they like to write out their to-do lists because it makes them get things done. Now, some of you might agree with that and find a to-do list effective for managing your tasks you're going to complete. But what I want you to understand is that your to-do list can't make you do anything. You are the source of the action.

The to-do List is a tool. It's the same with time management apps, calendars, project management tools like Asana, that cute new planner you bought. They're

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all tools that will help you accomplish projects and goals in your business. But you are the one that actually is the creator of the results. I want you to think about this in terms of drawing software, like CAD or Chief Architect, whatever you use.

The program CAD can draw lines, it can put the pixels on the screen, but you decide where the lines go, how they come together in a full drawing and eventually what that built environment is going to look like. CAD will never create the drawings without your input.

CAD helps produce a result, it helps you send those drawings to the cabinet maker so they can make the cabinets and install them and get them in the hands of your client, but again, you're the originator of those ideas and the drawings to get to the end result.

This might feel like a tiny little nuance to you and you're like, why is she talking about this, but let's talk about why this is important. The reason I want to make sure that you're clear that a to-do list is a tool not your master, is because when you say your to-do list makes you do something, you give all of your power away to that list.

It becomes kind of a mean boss that you have to obey and don't have a say in what stays on the list, what goes and how things get done. When you recognize that you're the creator of your results, you step into that role of CEO and start to lead yourself.

Which brings me to truth number three. To-do list truth number three is that most of what's on your to-do list doesn't actually need to be done. Yep, that's right. There's actually this really fascinating observation I've made of myself in the past and now I see it with clients. And that is when our brains are creating the feeling of anxiety, stress and overwhelm, I see that we often end up putting more on the to-do list.

Have you noticed that? You're telling yourself you have so much to do, and then bam, your brain offers up this and this and this, and we have to do this and go there and that and this. It's so weird. Instead of recognizing that there is a need

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to prioritize and be methodical with planning, your brain's knee jerk response is, let's just pile on some more.

And this was why the mindset component of time management and planning is so important. If you're in the habit of thinking everything has to be done and everything is of equal importance, those are the thoughts that are going to drive your actions and you're going to be stuck in this habitual thought loop of never enough.

You use mindset work to break that pattern so you can objectively look at the list and decide what's most important right now. Because no matter how well you're able to master time management, there's always going to be choices you have to make. Choices of what stays, what goes, what gets deferred, what gets done when, by whom. There's always choices.

When you're creating your to-do list I want you to ask yourself three important questions to help prioritize and also get rid of things that don't actually need to be done. In the planner I created just for Out Of Overwhelm there are questions my clients review every day to get in this habit to really get clear on what's important, and I want to give you a way to start implementing this as well.

The first question being does this have to be done at all? And, of course, your brain is going to offer up, yeah, of course it has to be done. But I want you to question that. Why do you think it has to be done? Is it because someone told you it had to be done? Is it because you think you should or if you don't do it you won't be successful? Get clear on the why.

And then I want you to ask yourself, does this actually have to be done by me? You might be surprised at what you could delegate. And then if you choose to make it be something that needs to be done, either by you or someone else, does it have to be done right now? And again, that big question, why?

I would bet money that there are things on your to do list right now that you do not need to be doing. And because of truth number two, putting that to-do list in the place of power, you haven't questioned whether that item needs to stay or go.

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Let's talk about truth number four of to-do lists. To-do lists aren't actually about what you're doing, they are meant to define the results you're creating. As CEOs we don't just do things to do things. We do things to create results and outcomes in our businesses.

When you're creating a to-do list or any kind of plan, you want to be focused on the results you're going to create in that work period. This is really important because if you're just focused on doing, there's no defined start or end. You can perpetually be in motion.

This really is the example between putting make selections on your to-do list and putting three sofa options selected on your to-do list. You could be making selections all day long, you have no idea which ones you're making or if they're good enough. You want to make sure that there is an outcome that's clearly defined as a result of the doing.

There's a concept I teach my clients called mini-results and it really addresses this issue that most to-do lists, unless you've worked with me, are not specific or broken down enough. They're vague, directionless and leave you chasing a finish line that you don't allow yourself to reach because there's always more.

Which really brings me to the final truth. Truth number five about your to-do list is that your to-do list will never be done. As I say that, you might be feeling one of two ways. You might be feeling really disappointed or you might be feeling really relieved.

Let me tell you, I resisted this truth that a to-do list will never be done so hard when I was a designer. I thought if I pushed hard enough, raced the clock and worked more hours, I would get to that finish line. Except, as I already told you, the finish line never comes. And I can tell you that landed me feeling burned out, tired and not liking my business one bit.

What I really hope for you is that you feel relieved by this truth. That your shoulders are dropping a little, you're taking a deeper breath and that you can relax a little. Every day there are going to be more things to do. You're going to

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cross some things off your list and then you're going to add some more, that is just how it works.

This is where you, the CEO of your interior design business, gets to decide your definition of enough. Enough in your business, enough for the day, what's really important and what can wait and what never even needs to be done. If you don't accept this as a truth, you will always work more than you want to. You are always going to be chasing that dangling carrot, hoping to catch up, but there's nothing to catch up to.

Personally, I choose to hold the belief that there will always be more that I want to do, more that I want to read or learn than I'm going to ever have time for. And that's amazing, I'll never get bored. And then with that truth in mind, I can decide what's most important for myself, my business and my life. To me, that is true freedom.

That was the fifth and final truth. Let's do a quick recap before we sign off for today. Truth number one, to-do lists are not inherently overwhelming and anxiety provoking. Truth number two, to-do lists are a tool, not your master. Truth number three, most of what is on your to-do list doesn't actually need to be done.

Truth number four, to-do lists aren't about what you're doing, they're about results you're creating. And truth number five, your to-do list will never get done and I hope you breathe a sigh of relief.

Of course, if you want to dive into managing your time, managing your mindset to create freedom from a streamlined schedule and business, head on over to my website and check out the ways we can work together. That's what I have for you today, I'll be back after my vacation with a brand new episode and probably some sightseeing updates as well. Until then, I'm wishing you a beautiful week and I'll talk to you in the next episode.

Have you ever wished I could be your coach? If so, keep listening. For a limited time when you leave a rating and review for the podcast you'll be entered to win

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a one on one coaching session with me. I can answer your questions and coach you on your unique challenges.

All you have to do is scroll down to the bottom of your podcast app, tap the five stars and leave a review. Tell me your favorite episode, why you look forward to listening every week, or why another designer needs to check out the show. It won't take long, and as a thank you for leaving a rating and review you'll have the opportunity to win a private coaching session with me.

Just click the link in the show notes to submit your review so I know how to get in touch. I can't wait to select a winner and it might be you. 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.