

Ep #52: Time Tracking Troubles



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Ep #52: Time Tracking Troubles

Hey designer, you're listening to episode 52. This is one where I'm talking about the oh so important thing, time tracking. Why you need to do it, why it's been hard and how to make it easier.

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. I hope you are all doing well. I'm coming off a great weekend recording this. My husband and I celebrated 15 years of marriage, which I can hardly believe. I mean, in some ways it feels like yes, it's absolutely been that long. And in some ways I still feel like it was just yesterday that I met him, which was actually in fact a very long time ago. Way more than even 15 years.

But we were able to celebrate, which was really, really fantastic. We took the kids to the theater this weekend and just soaked up all of that last sunshine in Minneapolis before it's definitely going to turn to fall and I have to start putting on the layers.

Today we're going to be talking about time tracking. And now before you start yawning and thinking boring, stay with me. Time tracking makes you money. You want to make money in your business, that's one of the reasons you're in your business. So I hope that is an exciting reason to stick with me.

For some of my clients money isn't that motivating. Of course they need money to run their business and sustain their lifestyle. But what's even more motivating is that they want the creativity, the collaboration in their business, possibly leading a team or owning a storefront.

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And let me remind you that being profitable in your interior design business is how you create space in your day to day for what you love most because you don't have to take on a million projects. Instead, you take on fewer better projects, and you hire skilled support. Money isn't necessarily everything, and I get that some of you aren't necessarily motivated by it. But it is important and it's directly tied to how you intentionally use your time. And that involves the important skill of time tracking.

If you want the amount of money you create in your business to be under your control, then you need your time to be under control. And again, that requires time tracking. Before we fully dive into the episode, I want to give you a heads up that Out Of Overwhelm, my group coaching program, is opening up for enrollment very soon. Doors are opening November 13th, November 7th if you're on the waitlist and I have a really, really awesome bonus coming for you.

So if you're not on the waitlist, make sure you get on it because you're not only going to get first dibs on the limited spots, you're also going to get an amazing bonus when you join early. I'll have the link in the show notes for how to join the waitlist. But we're going to kick off in January of 2023.

If you struggle to focus and feel like your days are busy but you're not getting what you need to do done, or you're just feeling so stretched thin, or even that you want to just use your time more intentionally so that you can be more efficient, more profitable and more fulfilled in your business, this program is for you.

I've been working hard behind the scenes making updates to the program as it's been running for over three years now. And if you've heard me talk about Out Of Overwhelm in the past, I want you to know it's going to be a shorter time length and it's also going to be a lower investment price point. And I'm telling you about enrollment now so that you can start to plan for it.

One of the things that I hear from designers when it gets time for enrollment is they're worried about having time for the calls or time to implement. So let's start planning for it now, then you'll be ready to join me and finally take control of your

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time, your projects, your clients and your business and be that CEO that you are meant to be.

CEOs of design businesses know how they're spending their time. That is one of the first things that I have clients do in Out Of Overwhelm, is a time audit. Essentially tracking your time for the purpose of gathering data and then evaluating what you find. I know some of you don't want to track your time because you're a little bit worried about what you might find or kind of know what you're going to find but don't want to face that reality.

Totally get it, that used to be me. But it is really important to have an understanding of where your time is going so that you can then be intentional about how you choose to spend your time, where you get support in your business, and where you make improvements around your time management, because time leaves clues.

When I originally developed the program Out Of Overwhelm, I wanted it to be a time management program but I didn't want it to be just time management. We needed to look at all of the things that get in the way of following a plan, being intentional about how you use your time, such as people pleasing, boundaries, and your ability to focus on work and not distract yourself.

All of these things are really important. And when you're tracking your time, you see where you aren't delegating effectively or at all. Where you could be charging more and making more money. Where work is leaking into your personal time because you haven't set those clear expectations and boundaries.

When we look at how your time is being spent, which is what I'm describing with doing that time audit, I'm always thinking about the business that the clients I work with want to build. One that is efficient, one that's profitable, and one that is really a joy to run. None of it's possible if you want to do it in a sustainable way to have that thriving business without time management, and that starts with time tracking.

And you might be thinking, "Yep, I've tried to time track. I know it's important. I just can't do it. I've given up. I've started, I've stopped, it's a struggle." I get it.

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When time tracking feels difficult, as in there is a lot of resistance to it, you don't remember to do it, you're on again and off again with it. There are some common roadblocks that I see. And I'm going to share those now and also how to make time tracking easier for you so that you ultimately do it more.

The first thing that I want to share is that we have to acknowledge and remember that time tracking is a habit. If you're not consistently tracking your time already, you have to give yourself grace and have patience in building this new habit. Right now you're in the habit of not time tracking, and it might take a while to flip the habit. And that is totally normal and reasonable. What really matters is that you're committed to the process of time tracking consistently and getting better at doing it over time.

Often what I see is clients will say, "Well, I'm going to just buckle down and I'm going to do this time tracking." And they kind of willpower and force their way to doing it for a few days and then give up. And if the habit doesn't feel easy and seamless and light, then they're thinking it's not working. But with any behavior change, it's going to start with shifting your mindset, your attitude towards it and adjusting those behaviors as you go.

If any of you, which I'm sure all of you have started a new habit, whether that was working out or meditating or journaling, or just even taking a midday walk, it takes a while for a new habit to stick. So remember, if you decide after listening to me that you want to time track, and you maybe do it a little bit and then you don't do it or you don't do it right away, none of that is important. What is important is that you are committed to the process of it and seeing yourself build that new habit.

And this really ties into another thing that I see with time tracking is all or nothing thinking. Meaning you either time track or you don't time track. You think you're going to do it all the time and then when you don't, you figure you're just not going to do it at all.

And I want you to know, just because you don't record every minute of time, or if you do it for a few days and then you don't do it another day, or maybe you started the morning off doing it and then you kind of lost track for a few hours

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doesn't mean that the time you did track isn't valuable and worthwhile. And while it's not ideal, you can always go back and take your best guess and still then know where that time was accounted for.

So I want you to be thinking, Am I working toward tracking my time consistently? Of course. Does it have to be perfect? Absolutely not. Wanting it to be perfect is actually going to prevent you from doing the time tracking. I know that that seems backwards, but the perfection is getting in the way of what you actually want to do. So let it be imperfect and that will make time tracking be so much easier.

Another roadblock that I see happen is that we overcomplicate time tracking. There are lots of great apps and tools for tracking your time. My friends at Mydoma have built that into their software. A lot of my clients like Harvest, which is an app you can use to track and categorize your time. And with that being said, if learning a new piece of technology is preventing you from getting started, do what is simple and easy, use a notebook.

Put your daily time on a note card you carry with you. Put it in your notes app. You can just use paper and then at the end of the day, transfer it to digital if you want to have that record. We want to keep the barrier low so that you can start building that habit. So what would be the simplest way for you to get started?

This overcomplicating piece really ties into an objection that I hear a lot from designers about time tracking, that it takes too much time. And if it feels like it's taking a lot of time, I want you to clue into are you overcomplicating it? You're already doing the things throughout your day, now you just need to note it. So if it's taking a ton of time, take a look at this over complication and see how you can simplify.

Another barrier to time blocking or making it more difficult for you than it needs to be is that there's often a sign of a lot of unintentional or amorphous time in your day, meaning you're lacking clear structure and focus. And this is a big one and it's why I teach the specific planning process which includes decisions ahead of time in Out Of Overwhelm. We have to have specific clear plans to

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make the best use of our time. And it also makes time tracking so much more easy.

If you don't enter into your work with purpose, knowing what you're going to achieve in that time period, it's really easy to bob between tasks, different clients, et cetera. And when you do that, it's really hard to know how much time you spent on each thing.

Additionally, when you're not feeling sure I spent this much time on this client and this much time on this, you might just say oh well, and then not charge for it all. Or really underestimate how much time you actually did spend, which directly factors into profitability and how you space out your timelines and deadlines in your projects.

In addition to making decisions ahead of time about the what and how of your work, grouping like with like, meaning similar tasks or client work together makes it also a lot easier to time track in chunks versus that two minutes here, two minutes there, five minutes here, you get the idea. You can group client specific activities together, but you can also group activity types together. Like all of your communication is at set times, but then even within that, group like with like.

So scanning your email inbox to look for communication from this specific client, that gets filtered a certain way and addressed at once instead of just going down the rows and rows of emails switching back and forth from client to client. And then maybe you're doing an email from a bookkeeper. And then you get an email from your design assistant and it has nothing to do with this client that you were working on. So it just makes it easier to group the time and track it and account for it in a really efficient way.

Grouping like with like is one of the tips that I share in the Interior Designers Get It Done Daily Planner, and that is a completely free download that you can get just by clicking the link that I'll put in the show notes. And you'll get four additional great tips on managing your time. And also get a time template to help you schedule your day. So if that's something that you're interested in, go check that out.

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Another roadblock to managing your time is that maybe you're feeling a little guilty about charging for your time. Your brain can be sneaky, let me tell you this, and wants to avoid the tracking then because it doesn't want to be honest about how long that selection or that documentation or the ordering is actually taking and how much you actually need to charge the client and be compensated in a certain way. So trying to avoid the guilt is leading to avoiding the time tracking.

Here's what I want you to remember, if this is the one that really resonates for you. Think about the emotional turmoil and the time that goes into the details of completing a project. Now imagine leaving that to your client and letting them fend for themselves. It is absolutely worth it for your ideal client to pay you for what you need to charge. So be aware if guilt is getting in the way of you accurately recording your time.

I'll also add, wouldn't you rather know how much time something actually takes so that you can plan for it appropriately with your workload and fees? If we don't have that time tracking data, we often think that we take less time than we actually do. And then especially with a flat fee, you set your fee around imaginary numbers and then you end up very underpaid.

And remember, we want to be appropriately compensated so that we can have the business and life that we want and the support that we want in each and serve our clients at the level we want to serve them at.

The last obstacle to time tracking I'm going to share is that you really don't want to face the facts. I talked about this a little bit earlier, but that can be a reason to avoid the time tracking. And I often talk to my Out Of Overwhelm clients about the math of the calendar. You don't have a time block plan so that you can follow that plan perfectly. I think that's a huge misconception about time blocking. And yes, some people teach it that way, that's definitely not how I teach it.

The reason that you plan is so that you can make intentional decisions about your resources and also do a fact check. Do you actually have time to take on that project, do that thing or set that meeting? If you just guess or tell yourself things won't take that long, but you never know how long they actually take, you're for sure going to end up overextended and stressed.

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Not wanting to face the reality that there are a certain number of hours in a day is getting in your way. No matter how efficient you are or how many staff members you have, eventually you have to make choices about what you say yes and no to. Time tracking is how you get the data to make these decisions about yes and no much more quickly and with much less stress, but only if you're willing to face the facts.

One of the things I like to do is, let's just be honest with ourselves. I don't even have to do anything with this information at this point. But let's at least be honest so we know what we're dealing with. And then we can start to consider how you want to move forward.

This week I want you to consider and pay attention to why are you avoiding time tracking? Is it expecting perfection, avoiding the facts or the feelings associated with time tracking? Or do you just need a system in place to make it simple and easy? What is it? Let's figure it out so that we can solve the issue and get you on the path of knowing how you spend your time and making sure that the time is best utilized for your profits, productivity and overall enjoyment of your life and business.

Tracking your time gives you so much information to go off in your business, which ultimately is going to give you more freedom and more of what you want. And frankly, just tracking your time alone is going to make you more intentional about how you use it. When you know that you are writing down how much you're spending on each thing, you're going to be a lot less likely to distract yourself because you're not going to want to write that down.

Here's what I really want you to know, time tracking doesn't have to be perfect. It doesn't have to be laborious, and it doesn't have to take a lot of time. But it does need to happen in order to have that profitable, efficient interior design business that I know you want.

That's what I have for you today. Next week, I'll be back with a new episode as always, and until then I'm wishing you a beautiful week. I'll talk to you in the next episode.

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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.

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