

## Ep #70: Your Role as Designer CEO: Ready for Your Next Evolution?



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With Your Host

**Desi Creswell**

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Hey designer, you're listening to episode 70. In this one I'm sharing the type of thinking that is going to be required of you, as the business owner, to take your interior design business to the next level, whether you're just starting out or you've already grown your business and it's ready for its next evolution.

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. So glad to have you here. It is episode 70, we are inching towards 100. I'm going to have to start thinking about what I should do for that 100th episode. If you have any ideas, let me know.

Today's episode is really brought to you by Starbucks. Or I should say recently I read *Onward* by Howard Schultz, the CEO of Starbucks, and in this book he tells the story and leadership lessons behind the coffee company's comeback and continued success. And it was really interesting to read from a business perspective, and I also learned some facts about coffee too, which was kind of fun as well. You know I love some good coffee.

What this book really got me thinking about though is the level of thinking that is required of a CEO. While Starbucks is a global brand and certainly far bigger than the design firms I work with, it really sparked some reflection in me about the personal development of the clients I work with as they become designer CEOs and evolve in this role.

There are, of course, lots of strategies that support their growth, whether it's marketing, PR, building a team, financial literacy, but so much of stepping into the role of a designer CEO is about continuously upgrading your level of thinking to support the level of your business. You might have even heard that phrase:

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the business can only grow to the extent at which the business owner grows. And I think that is so true.

And if you're not in the place in your business where you are thinking of increasing team, or maybe you are still wrapping your head around that shift of, oh yes, I am a CEO, I still want you to keep listening because this type of thinking is what is going to get you to that place in your business and well beyond.

There's really three categories of strategic thinking that I see in my clients who continue to grow and expand creatively and as business owners. That's what I want to share with you today and then elaborate on each of those.

So the first one is they have a very strong and evolving vision for the company and their life. And they use this vision as a way to filter out and execute projects that are going to move the business toward that vision, versus away or keeping it in the same position. They're using that vision to guide their team and their execution. And it really shifts into a much higher level of thinking and strategy in terms of the planning process.

And you'll notice I also said an evolving vision, there is that continuous evolution about who they are in the business and who the business serves and what their business stands for in the marketplace. I was actually coaching a private client on this recently and this client is someone that I've worked with over the years and I have seen her go from solopreneur to studio owner where she has a team and a gorgeous office space and the press and the projects that she's really aiming to bring into that studio space.

And at the same time, she's also ready for that next evolution and she's pausing to really consider what's next for her and the business. And no matter what level of business you're at, you can start to run on default. Your default setting might look different when you're two to five years in the business versus five years and maybe to ten years and ten years and beyond, but it can still become a default.

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And I want to encourage you to continue to elevate your thinking around the vision for the company and asking yourself what is it that I really want? Who am I in this space? And what does it look like to run a business where clients are coming to the firm because of my authentic style and really stepping into that role as a creative director?

Often we set goals and have a vision for our company and then we arrive there and we forget that we need to do it again. So this level of thinking, of remembering that this vision is ever evolving and it's a strong vision and it's really steering the ship is something that's so important to keep you growing and evolving in the business and as you as the business owner.

And of course we want to keep your lifestyle involved in the vision as well, because as the business grows there is going to be bigger challenges, bigger obstacles to overcome, there's going to be structural things or your availability that needs to be present maybe in an office when you have a full staff when you didn't have that before. So we want to keep in mind what's important to you on the life side of the vision as well so that you can make decisions about what that next iteration of your business is going to be.

If you want help starting to think about what that business and life vision is, I've got a great resource for you. I'll link it in the show notes, but it's a free download for a business and life vision journal. It's got a series of questions where I walk you through really starting to think about where is my business going? Where is my life going? And how the two work in tandem. And if you want to go to the link, it's [desiid.com/vision](https://desiid.com/vision).

Let's talk about the next iteration of your thinking, where your thinking really has to progress, and that is around a strong focus on values and experience. This is what's going to set you apart in addition to your design aesthetic. The value piece is really important. It is what you value as a person and what you stand for.

And this is going to be woven into everything from your company culture to communicating what you value in a design project through your marketing and

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onboarding materials and intake even, so that you're calling in clients that not only love your style, but have a shared set of values.

As your business continues to grow and evolve, you want to make sure that your clients are in alignment with the things that you value. It's going to make your job as a designer so much easier in terms of what you show them, what you sell them, the risks maybe you encourage them to take. All of those things are going to come to values.

Of course, with a strong focus on values, that's going to require you to get clear on what your values are and own that as a part of your brand. You're not going to be for everyone, and when you're aligned with your values, that becomes okay. And the right clients are going to love you even more for this.

I also mentioned that strong focus on experience. That is also another place where you're going to have to elevate your thinking, and that's really about shifting from thinking about yourself as being a service provider to being an experience provider. You're, of course, still going to deliver an amazing design outcome for your client. That's of course going to happen. And we also want to start thinking about how do we create an incredible experience along the way that supports that level of design?

Everything from how they're greeted when they call, the types of questions you ask in onboarding, how you set the stage at a meeting, the type of paper you use, all of these as your business evolves start to be touch points and moments where you can use your design thinking brain and tap into your ability as a designer to create an experience and think about how do I bring that vision to life for my client?

That's going to look different and the angles that you approach it with are going to be different for every designer. And making this shift in thinking from being a service provider to an experience provider is really going to position you as a leader in your market and help you stand out.

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The last level of thinking you're going to have to upgrade as you evolve your business is really the skill of asking high quality questions. Asking better questions is something I work on with all of my clients. Before we start training our brain to elevate our thinking, our level of thinking usually is not that great. Most of us walk around asking some pretty lame questions or we could just call them crappy, meaning negatively framed questions which are going to then create not useful answers that often leave you feeling worse.

Let me give you an example of this. Let's say you have a junior designer and they have missed a deadline and your negatively framed question about this is, why can't she just meet the deadlines? And then your brain is going to answer back with some negative responses. Because they never follow through and they expect me to pick up all the slack. Can you see how no good is going to come from this line of thought?

This might even be kind of a good question of why is the deadline being missed, but the energy behind it lacks curiosity and openness to finding a solution. If you think to yourself, "They missed the deadline three times in a row, I wonder why." Then you can get curious and start to think, did I set a clear deadline? Did they think maybe something else was a priority? Have I not held them accountable when they missed the deadline the first two times?

Now we're getting somewhere. You really shift from the victim mode and that negative mode to empowerment. And as you continue to develop as the leader of your business, setting and achieving bigger goals, you just don't have the time or energy for that negative nonsense thinking. You're going to have to develop the skill of shifting from thinking focused on problems, to thinking that is focused on solutions.

If you continually ask yourself better questions, if you practice that skill, because it is a skill that's going to be required of you as the leader of your business, your brain gets so much practice and it starts to naturally think this way and see the solutions and look for the opportunities and you're going to move through your day with so much more ease and you're going to be so much more effective.



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You can then use that energy that was wasted on poor quality questions and put it into something that continues to up-level your business, or even better, be free from the rumination that that line of thinking causes in your downtime.

I want to recap here. As you continually grow your business, you are going to be required to grow as the business owner. And as you take it to the next level, whatever the next level looks like for you, you need to focus on these three types of thinking. Creating a strong vision for the company, and of course, remembering your life in that vision as well. Focusing on your values, what they are and how that trickles into your business. And shifting from a service provider mindset to an experience provider mindset. And lastly, we must develop the skill of asking high quality questions.

These three types of strategic thinking are going to help you take your business where you want to go. And it's going to help you set yourself apart in addition to that strong design aesthetic. If you want to elevate your thinking, if you want to grow as a business owner alongside growing your business, and you want to do it with my support, I will have an opening or two for private coaching to start this spring.

So if you're interested in this, it's a very intimate, completely customized approach to a coaching partnership. There's so much support for you. And that is why I call it a partnership because I am there right there with you. Whenever I work with someone privately, we always start with a consultation to talk about their goals and ensure it's a great fit for both of us.

And if you want to schedule a consultation, get on my calendar, the link is going to be in the show notes. And we can find a time to talk about private coaching and how it could support you as you grow yourself and your business.

That's what I have for you this week. I'll be back next Wednesday with a brand new topic. 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.

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](http://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.