

Ep #79: The Evolution of a Designer CEO with Client Heather Peterson



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With Your Host

Desi Creswell

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Hey designer, you're listening to episode 79. In this one I'm talking to my very first client, Heather Peterson, who has grown an incredible design practice, going from solopreneur to designer CEO with a staff of five and a gorgeous studio space and being widely published. Today we're talking about her journey and the evolution of a designer CEO from her viewpoint. Whether you're in the earlier stages of your business or have been in the industry for decades, you are going to get so much from listening to Heather and I talk about challenges, opportunities and what's next.

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.

Desi: Hello, designer. Welcome back to the podcast. So glad to have you here today. Today is a very special day. I have my long-time client and very first client, Heather Peterson of Heather Peterson Design joining us. And I'm just so thrilled to have her here. Welcome Heather.

Heather: Thanks Desi, I'm so thrilled to be here.

Desi: It feels like a long time coming.

Heather: I would agree. I would agree. I would say in addition to having now a many years working relationship, I've also listened to every episode of the podcast.

Desi: Oh, I didn't know that. That is fun.

Heather: Everyone. And it's been fun to hear myself referred to every once in a while when you're talking about client stories and sometimes I recognize myself.

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Desi: Yes. Oh, that is true. That is true. Okay, I love to hear that. I didn't know that. So there we have it.

Heather: Yes, of course.

Desi: All right, we kind of dove right in. But before we do that, why don't we let everyone know who you are? I obviously do, but there's some people who are listening who might be new to you. So why don't you share what your business is, how long you've been in business and why you love what you do?

Heather: Sounds good. So the name of my business is Heather Peterson Design. We are a small boutique interior design firm based in Minneapolis and working with clients across the country. I'm a self-trained designer and came to this work when I had moved home to Minnesota from a long time in New York and was decorating my own home and sharing it on a blog back in the blogging days. And people started to ask me if they could hire me.

And over the course of the past decade, I have built from learning on the job solopreneur to a team of six women. And we specialize in working with clients to find their style and to really create homes with personality that tell the story of the people who live there.

Desi: Yes, and you do such a brilliant job at that. I'll of course, let all the listeners know where to find you later, but just as a heads up, you're going to want to go check out Heather's Instagram account and her website and see all the work. Pretty amazing.

And then I was thinking about the blogging background and I had kind of forgotten how you had the background in the blogging. And when we were talking about how we originally met, I thought that's how we connected originally, was through some of your writing needs or something like that. But we had originally connected through Kelly Kegans, she's the editor of Minneapolis St. Paul Magazine. And you had reminded me of that and I'd completely forgotten that was how we originally connected.

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And I think I'd love for you to speak a little bit, at some point in this interview, just about your ability to storytell and secure press. But that just had me thinking about that original meeting and us in your garden-level studio space.

Heather: Probably five years ago or so.

Desi: Yeah.

Heather: And I was thinking more about it and I think Kelly, for some reason or another, Kelly suggested that you reach out to me. And at the time, I had a full-time position posted. I was about to hire my first full-time hire, it was an interior design position.

And I think you reached out and said, I'm not interested in the job, but there are elements here that I could help you with in the meantime. And some of those were related to, maybe related to social media or marketing, because I had posted a very broad job description, which I think often happens when you are going from one to two. Even if you know you need a specific role, that person will need to fill in on some other things as well.

And so we met to discuss some of those possibilities. And in fact, we did end up doing that work together. It was before you were doing what you do now, we were both in transition. And so our first scope of work together was very tactical. And you worked with me.

I actually went back and looked at some of our old worksheets and some of the kind of homework you had given me. And I see a lot of seeds of the work you still do now, which is interesting. But we did also craft language around our ideal client and our niche. And you really were instrumental as I was moving into a more serious phase of my business and helping to establish what I wanted to do and who I wanted to be as a designer.

Desi: Yeah, and that was part of what I wanted to bring you on for, and it felt like a good time now, is there has been this evolution of you as the business owner of your business, for sure, the types of projects that you're completing. And we recently wrapped up our latest round of coaching together. And it just felt so

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evident of this arc and transition of growth that happens really from those initial stages of being a solopreneur to being someone who is leading a studio, who's getting published, who is putting out incredible work.

And I think what has been so amazing about the long-term nature of our relationship is that not only, of course, do I get to see the more flashy or exterior rewards of becoming known in the industry for your work, but also seeing you as the person behind the business evolve as well.

And during this last round that we worked together, I think it took more of a personal tone than either of us would have initially anticipated. And it was really fun to have that simultaneously in progress as I was developing the new mastermind, which you're going to be a part of, The Designer CEO. And like you said, the seeds of my work have always been there and it feels like it's coming together.

It's been really important to me, as I've crafted that, to remember that there is that arc, even if your business is very specific to you, which of course it is, it's a personal business. But there are sort of those evolution points that I think all designers go through as they build their business.

Heather: Absolutely. And I was thinking about it, so I think we've done three rounds of direct private coaching at this point. The first one that I just referred to was very tactical and it's not the kind of work you do anymore, but it really was setting me up to go from solo to starting to build and starting to scale.

And because I am self-taught and didn't come up through another studio, there was a ton to figure out just very practical and brass tacks. I mean, I didn't have a letter of agreement. I didn't have a marketing plan. I only had a website that my husband and I had made. And so there was a lot of sort of real professional development.

The second time we worked together was sort of building on the more established business. I think I was sort of at one employee and maybe looking to hire the next round. And one of our big focuses in our second round of coaching

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was really around billing and value. And at the time there was a practical piece to that, but I think that the personal starts to really come into it because we do, like our brains do, put up barriers.

And in a creative industry where, in a way, people are paying for our artistry, it can feel very personal to ask for money. I'm putting that in quotes, because it is so tied to something personal and that feels different than a lot of businesses. And so that was our first real work together on the mindset that allowed me to charge my value, which of course, then allows you to continue to scale.

Desi: Yeah. And I think that the first round that we worked together was really identifying who that ideal client was and fleshing that out more, and I can't remember if we focused on the website in that round or if it was the second round or not. I think it might have been in the first. But I think that there is a real mindset component to acknowledging and owning who it is that you want to serve and your unique capabilities or viewpoint as a designer. What do you think about that?

Heather: I absolutely agree. And I also think what's interesting about this is I have really resisted niching down. I think you probably said to me, if you are trying to talk to everyone, you're talking to no one. And it's interesting to go back to that early work that we did together because all of the seeds of how we think about our niche now are there.

And I think it's because it comes from who I am and what I have always wanted to do. But the process over these years has been refining and refining because there is so much that goes into the ideal client. It's the type of work that you want to do. It's the type of properties you want to work on. It's the budgets that you want. But it's also personality and chemistry. And there are just so many factors in identifying and developing that ideal client, that it's something that you can continue to come back to with a different lens.

And in fact, this most recent round of coaching, I came to you because I felt like I was at this big crossroad. I had built my team to six. Our lease was coming up

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here in the design center in Minneapolis. And I had this big open-ended question of, what's next?

And we worked together. And the ultimate outcome was that what's next isn't some big product for me, but it really is continuing to refine how we serve that ideal client now that we've gotten to a point where they're coming to us and we're working with them. And so much of that has been about understanding that it's not always like the next shiny object, but that sometimes it is just about going deeper and getting more and more clear.

Desi: For sure. And I think just to touch on niche a little bit, I do think it is really important to have a perspective or viewpoint or a differentiator that you're signaling to potential clients to help them see you and your work online or the words you write and say, that person is for me.

And I also think niche goes way beyond saying that I'm a coastal designer or a modern designer. And I think you were beginning to speak to that, but I think it's important to call out because the elements of niche can be the personality of the space even. It could be the personality of the client or what the dynamic of the working relationship is between the client and the designer.

So I think there's so many different ways of looking at that versus saying like, I've got a really defined tagline that describes my style. And I mean, that was something that we did come up with taglines when we were working on the website. And that's when we came up with the mix master, calling you the mix master.

And I also think it's so rooted in what are your values around design? What are your values in relationships? What are your values in the spaces that you create? And that very much informs the niche as much as, if not more than, kind of just trying to put a label on it.

Heather: I agree. And I think too, I'll use your example of coastal, right? Like there's probably hundreds of designers who do a coastal style. And so then to

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really define your niche, it does have to go beyond that, right? Like what makes someone choose that particular coastal designer?

And I would say for me personally, my style is more about the mix. It's eclectic. And so it is harder to pin it down from a specific aesthetic. And I think that early on I started to identify the way that I wanted to work with people that I valued educating my clients, which was maybe because I was educating myself at the same time.

But I do think it's really important to think about what you offer that's different in the working relationship, especially in this industry where it is so personal and so sort of intimate, your relationship with your clients. You're in their house, you're spending their money, you need to be a good fit in the way that you work as well as the product that you ultimately produce.

Desi: Yeah. And I think that really goes back to when you were saying about when we did that initial work, knowing what you wanted, having an idea of how you wanted to work with people, and then letting there be that process of refinement over the years of your business.

And that is, I think, the internal growth of continuing to revisit those core elements and digging deeper and then expressing them more. Because it takes a level of boldness and confidence to be able to declare that this is how you want to do your work. And not to say that you want to put your exact style on somebody else, but it is a declaration of this is who I am to some extent in this space. And then the invitation, do you want to come along on this ride with me?

Heather: And that can be so scary.

Desi: Yeah.

Heather: It's a vulnerable place to be. And I think, well, you do know, that has been part of my most recent journey, where because I have quite a bit of flexibility in my design style and ability, we would take on projects where it felt fun to learn. I'll use coastal again, right? Where it felt fun, like, oh, let's try that out.

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And a huge part of this sort of most recent transformation has been saying, we can do it. It doesn't mean we're the right people to do it. Let the coastal designers do coastal. And so really trying to look at taking on projects that we are the only right designer to work on that project with that client in this particular moment, which is exciting and sort of terrifying.

Desi: Yes. I have another private client where we're working on this specific thing, because it is terrifying. You're starting to build evidence of, yes, people want to work with us because of what we are doing specifically and want to work with us as the firm and like we're the choice. We've got that evidence.

And there's that gremlin in your brain that is like, what if this is the last person who ever wants to work with me? Or like, what if I'm being too bold? What if this is audacious of me to put this out here and say that this is what we're doing? And there is that tension that naturally is going to exist as you grow.

Heather: Well, and I think there are so many different layers of this question of they only want to work with me because. And for a while mine was, I actually saw this in some old documentation from, I think, our second round of coaching, where we were working on fees. And I think at the time we were working on moving to a flat fee basis.

And I had this belief that when past clients came back, it was uncomfortable to tell them that I cost more, even though I was offering a more established service. Like there were all of these reasons that were perfectly valid and logical, but I was holding onto this belief that they had hired me the first time around because I was inexpensive and that they wouldn't come back now that I had sort of right sized my fees.

And of course that never came to pass. And in fact, they all, because they had worked with me, they really did understand my value and knew I had been undervaluing myself. But I think there are stories we tell ourselves and that was one of mine along the way.

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Desi: Yeah, and I think that's why it's so important to have that outside perspective of a coach or mentor or whoever you work with, because those are sentences that just are on repeat. And it's like we tell them to ourselves so much and they feel so true that we don't even stop to question them. And then all of a sudden that's how we're operating the business.

Heather: Yes. And I think especially when you're a solo or if you just have, I shouldn't say just, but if you have an assistant, someone who's not a senior level that you don't feel like can be a sort of sounding board, it can be very hard to see outside of yourself. As I now have a fabulous business manager who in my non-Desi times will pose Desi questions when I say, we can't do that. And Kate will say, why?

And it's really helpful to have those assumptions or those beliefs that you don't even realize are beliefs as opposed to truths, to have them challenged.

Desi: Yeah. And I also have to say, I think this is really a testament to the culture that you've built within your business as well of, yes, you are the leader of the business. And you really recognize the value and strengths that each of your employees brings to the table, because I don't think that it's true that in every studio, someone like Kate could say why.

Heather: Yeah, that is probably true.

Desi: So I just have to acknowledge that I have seen you be very intentional about growing your business and establishing your culture, even in how you structure the days or have your get organized day that you were telling me about and benefits that you offer to your employees. It's all very thoughtful and you have the team to prove it, that it does work, that you can be supportive of yourself, be supportive of the employees. And everyone's going to rise because of it.

So what I'd love for you to share is we've talked a little bit now about where you were when we started working together and we've talked about how you've built this team. The team consists of six women, but let's talk a little bit about the

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evolution of that team. Who was the first person that you brought on? What were some of the challenges with that transition? And then maybe we can talk about some of those other transition points that have come along the way.

Heather: Sure. So when you and I met, I was on my own. I had previously had two part-time assistants, sequentially, not at the same time. And so I was sort of in this moment of reset and realized that I was starting to have a backup in my pipeline and that I needed more full-time support.

And I also realized that as I was growing into more complicated projects, I needed people who had skills that I don't have. As I've mentioned, I'm self-taught, so I didn't have CAD skills or all those things that you learn in design school.

My first hire was a designer position. And it's interesting in hindsight, the job was just interior designer. I didn't have great knowledge of the levels, junior, senior, et cetera. And Lauren came on in 2019, and it was the two of us as we headed into Covid, which I will say added layers to the typical challenges. But for sure, determining roles and clarity on who does what when at the time a lot of work was really shared.

I just found this documentation that we worked on together, Desi, about establishing sort of what the communication patterns would look like. And it's funny because now it's all very clear. We have a weekly team meeting and we've got systems in place that have evolved over the past couple of years. But we did really have to establish all of that.

And then Covid hit and we had to reestablish all of it to do long distance. We both worked from home independently. And of course, the Covid increase in demand for interior design services coincided with my own growth trajectory, and so we quickly had enough of a pipeline to support hiring a design assistant.

So Rachel came on in November of 2020, which also meant we needed to move out of that garden-level studio that only really could support two humans. And so

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we moved to International Market Square into a space that at the time felt vast and like we would never fill it up.

And I will say that hiring, rather than creating new challenges, actually clarified some things because I think when you start to have more of a clear hierarchy, there's a little more simplicity in determining roles.

And the next hire quickly after was Kate, our business manager, who joined us in, I think, March of 2021. And that's when it felt like we were really sort of off to the races. We still had this sort of full pipeline, again, I think in part because of Covid and that increased demand. But that's when I was able to offload a lot of the sort of administrative work that I had been doing.

After I hired Kate, I'd filled out this worksheet that comes from EOS, Entrepreneurial Operating System. I don't remember if this was a Desi introduction or if I found it on my own. But basically, it's this quadrant where you put the parts of your business that you are good at and love to do down to the ones that you dislike and are bad at.

And I realized after hiring Kate, that her entire job description was from my bad at, dislike quadrant. So it was a little bit backwards, but we got there.

Desi: So you and Kate were looking at job descriptions and you realized everything she had was like, I don't want to do this. Is that what you're saying? That's where we were, right? Or like what I was bad at?

Heather: Yeah, after hiring her I did that exercise. Not as a hiring exercise. Who knows why? I like worksheets. I like all of that. But I realized that her job was that whole quadrant of things that I really had no business doing.

And I think that's advice that people give often, is to supplement, don't hire more of yourself, supplement with the skills that you don't have or bring to the table. And I will say that putting someone in that seat really unlocked the potential of the business for a number of different reasons.

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Probably top of the list would be that she handles billing. And we're at a point now where I actually don't see the invoices when they go out, like the time billing invoices. And it has been very freeing to, I think every designer knows that thing that happens where you look at your time billing and you go, oh, well, maybe we should just shave a little off here or there. And Kate would say, why? Did we do the work? Yes, we did work. Then why wouldn't we bill for it?

And so surrounding yourself with helpful lenses is a really good practice.

Desi: Yeah. Yeah. I love that you brought up the EOS thing. I don't remember if I gave that to you. It's possible I gave that to you. But it is really interesting to go back and reflect on what it is that you put down and find those types of things. I have something from EOS that was up on my bulletin board for the longest time. And it was like, I can't remember if it was a three or five year growth plan for the business.

And I came across it and it's like, it's all happened. And just like the power of writing something down and the clarity that gives you, partly, I think it's just that you pause to even think about it. But it's like the writing, I think, makes you really slow your brain down and think through what it is that you're setting out to accomplish or what that type of support is that you want to bring into your business.

And that's something that I always have appreciated about you, is that you're willing to take that time to slow it down. And I think that it shows in the results that you're able to produce, whether that's in the level of support that you have from your team and the quality of the team members, the business growth, all of those things.

And so for anyone who's listening, even if you can have your own 15 minute CEO moment, which of course you're not going to solve all the problems in your business in 15 minutes, but just taking that moment to pause and think through what it is you're setting out to accomplish is so, so powerful.

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Heather: I agree. It's funny, my mom gave me a book, maybe when I was in college or when I was sort of early in my first career called Write It Down, Make It Happen. And I read it on the plane. She must've given it to me as I was going back to New York if I was home in Minnesota for a break.

And I don't remember anything from the book, but the title kind of sums it up. And it is amazing how powerful that can be. I am often not consistent in practices and I had this funny moment where I think I had written goals for one year and then didn't refer to them. So that's the bad. That's the inconsistent practice. Didn't refer to them or hadn't done the sort of proper intentional planning for the goals for the year, but I had written them all down.

And at the end of the year, I sort of found the document and realized that I had in fact accomplished them all. I think that if I hadn't taken that moment to really identify what I was setting out for, there's no way it would have happened, especially since there was no concrete planning around them.

Desi: Yeah, and I see that happen so often with clients. I just had another client where that exact same thing happened, where she had set some goals in our coaching partnership. And of course, I'm keeping them in the back of my mind as we're coaching. I haven't forgotten them. But she was like, wait, what did I want to do? Things are feeling better, but why?

And we looked back and it's like, oh yeah, those two main objectives you wanted to create in the past couple of months, they happened. And I think the way the brain works is so fascinating. It's like that idea of you getting a new car and you didn't realize anyone has that car. And then you're driving down the road one day, riding in your new car, and there's like five of them right next to you.

Heather: Totally.

Desi: It's not that everyone else bought the other car. It's just that you're noticing them. And so it's like, as you get clarity around those goals, that's one of the things that we're going to be doing at the very start of the Designer CEO is

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getting specific about what it is you want to use that environment for. But it's like your brain gets to work for you. It starts seeing opportunities. It starts thinking in solutions. And it's really neat how even if you don't have this perfectly plotted out plan in a full-on Asana or spreadsheet or whatever it is, you can still accomplish a lot of things with that seed of intention. So I'm so glad you shared that.

Heather: Yeah, it's good to sort of set a direction for your energy. And it's in there in your brain, even if you're not actively, like you said, putting it in Asana.

Desi: Yeah, Asana. All I hear about is Asana. I don't know if you – I know. I'm a ClickUp person personally, but I know the designers love Asana. So I don't try to convert anyone.

Heather: Well, I will say this was also, this is a great lesson in using the talents around you. So we got Asana, I think we had it for an embarrassing amount of time, like a year where we were really not using it or like we would make sort of half-hearted attempts. And then I actually attended a webinar with Dakota Design Company.

Desi: Oh yeah, Katie. I love Katie.

Heather: And because it's such a flexible tool, and I know I'm sort of off-topic here, but it's such a flexible tool, it can be very difficult to figure out how to set it up. That webinar showed me the possibilities. And then at one point, I don't know if I was out of town or something, but basically my team got together and figured out templates for our business. Like a client template and some of the other things that I could then respond to. And there's no way I ever would have done that on my own.

And so sometimes you just have to get out of the way and let people take care of things.

Desi: Yeah, and I mean that totally goes back to what you were saying about making sure you're charging appropriately for the services and results that you're providing. Because then you do have the cash flow in your business to have somebody who can set those things up for you and make it all better, right?

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Your daily experience, the experience that clients have from a well-managed project, really benefits everyone by having those fees appropriately set.

One of the things you mentioned as we were talking about team members and getting out of your own way, that sparked something in me, was thinking about the evolution of your own job description in the business, where as you have pulled in additional support and been able to release some of the things that maybe, as you said, you have no business doing, and really step into creating more space for what you are really meant to do. Can you tell us a little bit more about that transition and what it's been like?

Heather: Sure. So I'll loop back to our hiring pattern, because I left off after Kate. The biggest transition, I would say, was filling out the design team in a way that puts me into a creative director role. So nine months ago we brought on a second senior designer, Anna. And in between there, we had also hired a procurement person, Pam.

And when Anna came on, we shifted to this structure where basically each of the senior designers has a portfolio of projects and I oversee all of it. And then Pam and Rachel support all of it. But really, it is taking me out of the driver's seat of day-to-day designing and really having me focus on the bigger picture of our design work, but also the bigger picture of the business.

And so I would say that my CEO-to-technician split has shifted. And I will say that I neglected to write myself a new job description when Anna came on. I think I was more focused on an org chart and what the sort of task flow looked like. But recently, Kate and I have been talking about her growth into a director of operations role, which I'm really excited about.

And so really just a few weeks ago, she started to generate a job description for what that more leadership position looked like. It's a lot of the same buckets as she has now, but it's really stepping into more leadership. And so I realized that to really understand that role, it was time for me to write a new job description. So I just did it a couple weeks ago.

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And it was very interesting to see how much more big picture my job is now. And I've really gotten out of the day-to-day of the super nitty-gritty details in our design work. I still sort of review everything, but the idea is that it will free me up to do that sort of niche refinement that we were talking about, to really focus our marketing efforts on those ideal clients as we continue to refine who they are, where they are, what that looks like.

It was really interesting to see that Kate's role and my role have a lot of the same buckets, like strategic planning or like marketing, but that we had to define within that what each of us does. And so I'm now much more in idea generation strategy setting, and Kate can be my tactical partner.

Desi: Yeah. So what I think was interesting, we were talking about the initial aspects of the business of being that solopreneur. You want to get in the driver's seat because you get too in the weeds. And then I think there's points along the way where it's kind of like you get in the weeds in different ways and then have to pull back and get back in the driver's seat. And I think that's a real part of the evolution of becoming CEO, becoming really the leader of your business.

And that's been something that I've been thinking about a lot, is at new stages of your business, there's always going to be those new challenges to solve for and new ways that you're redefining who you are in the business. And I think sometimes that is almost a little bit disappointing for some people, because I think when you're in those early stages of business, you think of being where you're at right now. And it's like, that is the pinnacle of achievement.

And that is to say, it is a great achievement. And it also doesn't mean that all the challenges and obstacles of running a business go away, or that they become little nuisances, maybe, that you have to dust off the desk. There's real challenges that evolve. And I'd love to hear what your perspective is on that. I think it can be disappointing or liberating to think about that as just the evolution of being a business owner.

Heather: Well, and I think I've been through both disappointed and liberated. And I've had these funny moments where I think you and I were actually just

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recently talking about this, where everybody on my team is moving into these bigger roles, I had that moment where I thought, well, wait, what am I going to do? And realized that as you build a team and have much more defined roles and systems, that the CEO really is about leadership and really is about setting the course and making sure that you stay on it, and also making sure that your pipeline is full enough and that you are meeting payroll and all of those things.

I'm going to go back to EOS that we mentioned earlier. I think EOS is the E Myth, right?

Desi: Traction. EOS is traction.

Heather: Oh, you're right. Okay. Well, I'm conflating these two things, but –

Desi: E Myth is a really good book, too.

Heather: E Myth is a great book. And the E Myth, in a nutshell, talks about how every business will have a manager, a technician, and an entrepreneur. And that when you're a solo, you have to play all of those roles. And that as you build your business, you hire people into those roles. And I was always really uncomfortable with the idea that I was the entrepreneur.

And I think it's because I had this very specific idea of what an entrepreneur is, and that it was either wrapped up in technology or about sort of like the invention of wholly new things. And I think for me, the biggest evolution has been realizing that while I can play a technician role and I can play a manager role, I really am an entrepreneur.

And what that ultimately means is that for me, it's really exciting to get into that place where I don't have to do the technical and I don't have to do the managing. And in fact, I get to think big, dream up where we're going, set the tone, and lead us all there.

Desi: Yeah. And along the way, I think it is really important that you develop the skills of the technician, of the manager, to a certain extent, so that as you bring

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people on, you know what it is that you want them to be doing, if they're doing a good job, all of those things.

Heather: Agree.

Desi: We don't want to necessarily in our evolution, jump from, I don't know, I don't play video games, but I imagine there's level one and then there's level 50. There's a reason there's a progression so that you can have an understanding of those roles, even if you do want to shed them at some point.

Heather: Yeah, and I will say everything we do in our business, I have done. And I think that it does give me good inside information of what my team is doing, what struggles they might be having, how it all works together, but I think also how valuable they are.

Desi: Absolutely. And I do, I love that you're using the term leadership, and that's going to be a big part of The Designer CEO. Those are the three types of leadership, in my opinion, of self-leadership, design leadership, and business leadership. It comes down to that of creating that thriving business. And that really requires you to grow as a person and shift your identity into that of a leader. Because I'm sure when you started, you didn't necessarily think of yourself as a leader, even though you have to be a leader to start a business.

Heather: Right.

Desi: The way that you see yourself has evolved so much over the years as well.

Heather: Yeah, I agree. I've had leadership roles in former careers, but it is different when you are leading something that you also created. I mean, it's a very different relationship to the business. And I think it can, I'm going to share something silly, just because the external shows that we're in a certain place, doesn't mean that our internal has always caught up.

So yesterday, I had to make an international wire transfer, and I told my team that every time I do it, this little voice inside my head says, "I'm a fancy lady who

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makes international wire transfers,” because it just seems so sort of crazy that I’m wiring money to Europe to buy fancy antiques. And so it’s that silly little lens that is sort of just reminding me that I’m in a very different place than when I started. And I think sometimes there’s that sort of slow catch up of your sort of self identity.

Desi: Yeah, I 100% agree. I think that is something that is always something that I’m working on. And I think I see with so many of my clients, too, where it’s like the self concept or that identity you have of yourself hasn’t caught up. It’s always kind of a little bit behind. And I think what’s brilliant is you can recognize that voice. The voice has a humorous tone to it at this point, versus somebody who’s there going, you don’t deserve to be doing this, or who are you to be wiring money across the ocean? I can’t believe it.

Heather: Exactly.

Desi: But that’s why self concept, I think, is so important, is because we have to have an understanding of what we believe about ourselves, what we believe about our capabilities, and really actively work on growing the self concept to keep pace with the results that we create in the business, because what I see happen, otherwise, if the gap gets really big, it’s almost like you start to self sabotage in some little ways because there’s such a big gap, or there’s discomfort around this cognitive dissonance, essentially, is what you’re experiencing of external evidence, but internal experience.

And so that’s why it’s so important to be thinking about your thoughts, essentially, like, what do I think about me? How do I view myself? All those good things.

Heather: Right. And I think what’s great about coaching is having someone help identify that gap so that you can close it.

Desi: Yeah, for sure. As we’ve kind of spanned the last chunk of years, we’ve talked about the continuous up-leveling of clientele, dialing in that marketing and that is one thing that I think you really used your previous skill sets in your

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previous career to help understand how to market and publicize the business and your design work.

And I think it'd be really valuable for everyone listening if you have just a little bit to share about how you view marketing or PR specifically, within the business as a part of your strategy.

Heather: So I was actually a creative writing major in college and I think one of my superpowers is a sense of narrative. We were talking earlier about there are facts, and then there's the good story. And I think especially in such a personal business like this, like so much of what we do is about storytelling.

And so I think when you are sharing the work you do, there's the visual, but there are always so many stories to creating interiors. And I think marketing really needs to be about what is it that I want to share about this project. And that's what press is looking for, right? There are so many beautiful images out there, but what's the narrative behind these beautiful images?

And so sometimes you can frame it to yourself as like, what was the problem that I solved? That doesn't feel as romantic to me, but if you're fact-driven that can be a way to think about it. And so I think that I've just, the way that we approach Instagram, the way that we approach all of our client documentation, it really is about storytelling and bringing people into dialogue.

Desi: I do think it's really interesting that you mentioned that the marketing and the PR is about that dialogue and storytelling. That goes back to what Molly was saying in, I think it was last week's episode. I'll make sure it gets linked in the show notes, about having that narrative or what's the unique angle. And I love to have that lens that you bring to your projects. I'm sure that shows up in the actual design work as well.

I'm so curious, what is next for you in marketing, do you think? As you've said, you're continuing to refine the way that you approach your ideal clients and call them in. Do you mind sharing?

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Heather: Sure. So we recently completed a really beautiful promotional booklet with the idea that we can share it both with potential clients and with potential partners. And the idea was to gather a group of projects that are all quite different from each other, but that communicate the way that we work with clients to bring forward their stories in their homes.

There's a letter from me to a potential client about how we love to work. There is a section that talks about our sort of design philosophy and the core sort of moves that we make in every project outside of style. And then this group of five or six projects across the country. And we have recently sent out our first batch and we're getting really great feedback.

But I've always loved shelter magazines. I've always loved design books. I would love to do a design book. That's probably a ways in the future. So it's been really wonderful to see our work presented in this branded way where we had sort of control over the story that we were telling.

Desi: That's right, I forgot. You had mentioned that, and one of the exercises we did in this last round of coaching was around writing a letter to your client. And I remember you were revisiting that letter that you're going to include in the book. And, oh, I'm so excited. I didn't realize it was in print at this point. I just knew it was in progress.

Heather: Yes.

Desi: Well, I would love a copy if I'll just be so bold.

Heather: Actually we did, we printed – This is interesting, it was a long process. We printed a test run and we got the test run. And I realized when I saw it in this bound version, that I was still trying to talk broadly rather than specifically. And so I edited the group of projects to be as narrow as possible instead of as broad as possible.

It was a very interesting exercise to take out those projects that we really stand by and thought were beautiful, but that another designer could have probably

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done something similar. Now it showcases the six projects that we think are really most unique to Heather Peterson Design.

Desi: Yeah. That's amazing. I'm so excited to see that. I will proudly display that. It all goes back to that idea of where we've started this conversation, of those seeds of the work you want to do in the world and continuing to let that be more and more pinpointed and clear to you and to the client. So I'm really excited to see that.

All right, Heather.

Heather: Well you will see that the taglines that you wrote for me five years ago are on the cover of the book.

Desi: Oh, how exciting. And I've actually started doing more of that work again with clients. It's been really fun. I just recently worked with a client in New York to revamp all of her copy on her website because, again, I'm finding it so much about who you want to be and like noticing your own, I'll use the word genius for lack of a better word. It's a little cliché, but like seeing where you really shine and being willing to put it out there.

So as we wrap up and talk about that evolution of a business owner, I'd love for you to share with listeners anything you think would be important for them to know or understand about the impact of coaching and specifically how coaching in the way that I think I bring coaching to the table has really supported you in your journey.

Heather: Well, I can legitimately say that I would not be where I am today without you, Desi. And I feel very lucky to have sort of chanced into this relationship in the beginning because I'm not sure that I would have thought to look for coaching or to look for this kind of relationship. And it has been truly transformative.

We've talked a little bit about the sort of different phases where you've been along for the ride, and each phase has had a different impact and different sort of outcome on me personally and on my business. I think that early on, having

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an outside lens is really critical. Having someone who can bring specific knowledge to the table that you maybe otherwise don't have access to is really critical.

As I've grown, personal work has become more important. And I think that we haven't really talked too much about mindset, but I think your listeners, of course, know that you are a mindset coach. And working on your own, building something from scratch, working in a very visible, creative, vulnerable industry carries a lot of challenges. And we've talked a little bit about how we can get in our own way.

And I think the power of coaching is someone to support you through the process of sort of getting out of your own way and closing that gap we talked about between who and how you see yourself and how you're performing in the world. And I've always appreciated the gentle pushback from you challenging the stories that I was telling myself that weren't necessarily true. And I think that has really allowed me to unlock all the potential that was there. And I'm so grateful for it.

Desi: Thank you. I am so grateful that we encountered each other. I mean, it was a chance encounter. It was, I don't know what made me reach out to Kelly. I don't know what made Kelly say, hey, you should talk to Heather. I don't know what made me reveal my secret desires to do some coaching and for you to be so game and take what really kind of was a risk of this person you were just meeting and saying, sure, I'll go into this intimate relationship with you.

Heather: Let's get married. Well, and I think that's the advice, right? Like you have to be open to the surprises that life puts in front of you. You have to say yes.

Desi: Yeah, absolutely. Well, that feels like a really good place for us to wrap up.

Heather: Agree.

Desi: Thank you for being here, Heather.

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Heather: Thank you for having me.

Desi: I'd love for you to share before we sign off, where can people find you?

Heather: Sure. So our website is heatherpetersondesign.com. On Instagram we are @HPetersonDesign, and those are the two best places to look for us.

Desi: And in some magazines and online and all the other places you show up, just to give you an extra plug.

Heather: Yes, all of those places too.

Desi: Yes. Yes. Oh, it was so great having you here. And I don't know, it feels like we've just been chit-chatting for, I don't even know how long. But I know that you shared some incredible pieces of advice and wisdom and guidance for everyone listening. Thank you again.

Heather: Thank you, it was fun to kind of go back through the whole journey.

Desi: Yeah. So I'll be back, everyone, next week. It'll be a solo episode. And if you're interested in joining me in The Designer CEO to do this work together of creating self-leadership, design leadership, and business leadership, I'd love to have you. You can go to desiid.com/designerceo and schedule a time for us to talk.

Until I'm in your AirPods next week, I am wishing you a beautiful week and I'll talk to you soon.

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