

Ep #80: Create Your Summer Slow Down



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With Your Host

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Hey designer, you're listening to episode 80. In this one we're talking about a summer slow down, or sometimes I call it a rest period, both in how I'm planning my summer in a way that's different from years past, which include slowing down even more than usual and how you can create your own summer slow down to take it easier without worrying your interior design business is going to fall apart.

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 all are having an incredible week. I just have to share this client experience example that I'm just coming off of, and so it's really fresh in my mind. But this morning I took my daughter, she's 7, so kind of early for orthodontia, but she's going to probably need an expander to create some space.

Anyways, we've already been to one orthodontist and that one just didn't work out for us. And a couple of people have recommended this other place to us in town. And we went this morning and I just have to say I was blown away by the level of customer service and attention to the clients' needs in this process.

I had called ahead to talk to the staff about my daughter's specific needs and her individual worries about going into dental offices. And first, when I submitted the request online to talk to somebody, they got back to me within one business day, so it was really prompt. But of course it wasn't like they dropped everything to get back to me, it was just they got back to me in a timely manner.

I'm telling you that specifically, designers, for all of you who think you need to respond to every last text and phone call within 10 seconds of receiving it or always picking it up. So that was a little tangent, but I just want you to notice I

Ep #80: Create Your Summer Slow Down

feel like I got excellent customer care from someone when they had the time, attending to my question and giving me their presence so that I could get what I needed to feel confident actually booking the appointment.

So by the time we got to meeting with the orthodontist and their staff in person, the staff was so friendly, greeted us when we came in. There were expectations set, there was some construction going on outside the building and so we had gotten a text message ahead of time letting us know exactly where we could park with this construction going on. Also giving us a heads-up that we might want to leave a little extra time before we went.

And then we were greeted with such kindness when we walked in. Clearly the staff member who was taking us through the process and the orthodontist had been given the notes from my phone call that I had with their staff ahead of time. They knew exactly what my daughter needed, not just from an orthodontic standpoint, but really what she needed emotionally.

And they were so open to my questions, they took their time, we felt like we were their priority in that moment. And I think that's so important to call out in that it's the simple things sometimes that make clients and customers feel appreciated, seen and noticed.

And so we had a really great visit and then also just their branding was just top notch. I love a good branded environment, and that's probably coming from my corporate interior design background. But the office had some great design, they had all these t-shirts with really interesting graphics that you could select from for the kids, and of course that's great marketing for them to have out. And then when you leave there's this old-fashioned dial up telephone that you can pick up. And when the kid picks it up, they bring out a treat for you after you pick up the phone. So it's just like all these fun elements.

This is something I've been talking to a lot of clients about with client experience and how we can help the people that we really want to work with and that would be best suited with our style of work and the way we serve clients, how can we really help them feel supported and seen and taken care of in that process? And this orthodontist was exactly that.

Ep #80: Create Your Summer Slow Down

That ended up being kind of a longer explanation of that process than I wanted it to be, but hopefully it was helpful in you thinking about how you serve your clients. Let's get into the episode without further ado, as they say.

The reason I wanted to bring the topic of a summer slow down or rest period to the podcast is because, one, summer is not far away. So whatever you want your summer to look like, now is the time to start making decisions for your future self so that your future self will thank you when summer comes for the decisions you're making now.

And two, I've been going through this process of designing summer with more slowness and more space in mind, and I thought I'd take you along for the ride so you can learn from what I've been navigating and apply it to your business.

This is going to be kind of a behind the scenes of how I'm creating my own summer slow down, but definitely as always, I'm going to be applying it to you and how you can create this for yourself in your interior design business. And that can be whether it's taking Fridays off so you always have a three-day weekend, taking a vacation or two, or just even shortening your days to fit in a little bit more fun or pick kids up from activities. This is going to be really valuable and it's the right time to be thinking about this.

I am in the process of wrapping up enrollment for my new mastermind, The Designer CEO, where I'm going to be supporting my established interior design business owners in really building a thriving business that can also work with the ebb and flow or you as the human behind the business.

And if that sounds appealing, if what we're talking about today is piquing your interest, definitely check this program out. It's desiid.com/designerceo, you'll find all the information there. And it's a really intimate, high-touch coaching experience that pairs one-on-one coaching with me, along with the power of being in a group of like-minded individuals.

I'm sure what we're talking about today on the podcast is going to be coming up for the designers I'm working with in that program. And if you want to be one of those eight designers, please reach out and let me know, because like I said, we

Ep #80: Create Your Summer Slow Down

are wrapping up enrollment so that I can get everyone on boarded and ready to go.

As I mentioned, I am in the process of looking at seasonal changes in my business. Right now, of course, it's spring. And of course, it being Minnesota, last week it was 80 degrees, today it's 30. So who knows what tomorrow will bring. But what I do know is that my summer schedule is definitely going to be changing and I need to acknowledge those changes.

Just like we see the seasons change around us, there are seasons of our lives and of our business. And those periods of change must be acknowledged because they will come whether we address them or not. And for many of my listeners, a big change with the summer months can be kids being off school or travel and all that that requires you to coordinate and manage.

And even if you don't have kids or your kids are older and more self-sufficient, or maybe just even completely out of the house, you'll find activities are different. The daylight is different and so your rhythm is different. And maybe what you want to do and how you want to do it throughout the day can change.

I'm going to be talking about summer scheduling in reference to slowing down your pace, but really what I'm sharing could be applied at any time of the year when your personal capacity, your responsibilities or priorities are shifting. So just wherever I'm saying summer, you can insert your unique circumstance and apply the exact same principles.

I want to begin by just telling you where I'm at. As a reminder, I do have two kids, currently they're 7 and 10, and I do tend to work less over the summers. Last summer was when I was completing my master coach training and that was a period of probably the most that I had cut back in my business during those summer months.

And in my master coach training, the reason I bring that up is that we each had to develop our own project that felt very impossible to accomplish. And that was a part of becoming master coach certified. And what I had decided was that I was going to cut an additional five hours off my work week while still executing the latest launch for Out Of Overwhelm.

Ep #80: Create Your Summer Slow Down

This really was a huge stretch because I had already taken so much of what I teach my clients, and especially like that low hanging fruit, that streamlining, that dialing in for constraining my schedule, streamlining my processes, and really all the things that I teach my clients. But I had to put this to the test even further. I had to use them at the next level. Because I had done so much of that work already, it felt like I had to take what I had in place and stretch it to the next level and break through to that next stage of streamlining and efficiency and effectiveness.

If you want to hear more about that process, definitely go back and check out episode 36 and 37. It's a two-part episode, it's called cut five hours from your week or something like that. And I explained the process both from a strategic perspective and a mindset perspective. So I did accomplish that goal and it was great. And that summer felt really nice. It was great to have that extra space.

And this summer, what I'm going to be doing is I'm going to be reducing my hours even further. As I was looking ahead at our schedule for the summer months, both in the ways that I wanted to support my kids, my mom who's being treated for a recent diagnosis, the times that we have set aside to be together as a family, I started realizing, okay, this summer needs to look different than the summer looked last year.

I was having that awareness just kind of paging through. Oh, that sounds so old fashioned, paging through, you know, clicking through on my Google calendar. Not actually paging through on paper, although I do use some paper in my business, but that's another episode. And I noticed this just visually from the calendar. And then I got to doing the math.

This is why I always recommend doing the math. I was starting to look at what are my commitments to current clients? What are the regular marketing activities that I'm engaging with? When am I going to need to be available for certain personal things? And really just took a look at what that math was. These are the number of hours that I have available for how I want to set this summer up. And these are the hours that I'm currently committed to in my business.

Ep #80: Create Your Summer Slow Down

And the math did not work. There was an imbalance there. And I'm really glad that, although I felt a little disappointed when I saw the numbers at first, I'm really glad I figured it out now instead of trying to make something impossible work over the summer.

So I explained how there's a lot of personal priorities that I want to turn my attention to this summer, along with I just love summer. I love taking long walks and being out in the sunshine and all of those good things. But it's also important to remember I have a business to run. I have monthly expenses to pay, goals I've set for contributions to make to retirement accounts and to our family. And of course, clients I really adore and want to be able to support in some way.

And going back to what I was talking about with my master coach project of cutting those five hours, often when we think about working less, we think about how we can fit the same amount of work into less time. And that's really what I was doing last summer, where I was finding those little bits and pieces of where am I still overthinking? Where am I still over-perfecting in my business or not making decisions quickly and sticking with them, right?

And that really helped clear up a lot of that time. And that's something to definitely look at. And it's something I work with my clients on, especially if they struggle to focus, get caught in procrastination or perfectionism, aren't planning realistically, all those things. Those are a lot of improvements that can be made to fit the same amount of work into less time. And at a certain point, sometimes the workload does need to be reduced to match the number of hours you want to be working.

So if you're considering a summer slow down, there are those foundational productivity teachings that I work with clients on and mindset tools that are going to support creating less time for you with a similar amount of output. But sometimes other things do need to shift, and that's what I was finding for myself.

If you're thinking about creating a rest period for yourself over the summer, you're likely going to need to make some shifts aside from productivity practices, maybe in the way you're working or how you're working with your clients, to

Ep #80: Create Your Summer Slow Down

accommodate a reduced schedule for a period of time. And that's really where I want to put my focus today.

So let's talk about exactly how you do this. How do you create a summer slow down or rest period? If you want to have more space and flexibility to do things outside of work, the very first thing you're going to need to do is decide what you want your schedule to be. And then part two of this, equally important, is giving yourself permission to do it.

You're of course going to have to get to the decision-making and the how and the logistics of your plan, but what I can tell you is that planning and problem solving for creating results in your business while also taking space for yourself is so much easier when you give yourself a defined container in which to work and also give yourself permission to fully make that decision.

I've known I've wanted to do this summer in a certain way for a few months now. And it's something I've been really having to actively work on giving myself permission to do. I could really sense this feeling of, is this okay? I mean, I know I'm all about creating a business and life that work in tandem, but this might be pushing it too far.

And in full transparency, this has been a journey for me and something I've had to coach myself on a lot and get coaching on from my coach, because it feels like there is a new set of rules that I'm about to break. A set of rules that I didn't even realize I had, and of course, rules that I created. So I have that authority to break them, but that doesn't always mean that it's easy to break them.

And I tell you that to say, if you don't give yourself permission to do what you want, you're going to be fighting yourself, I know I was certainly fighting myself along the way, as you figure out exactly how this is going to look for your unique business.

The other part, of course, is I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to define your work hours. Set your business hours, do not just try and squeeze things in as a work less method. Then you are, one, not going to ever feel like you are on top of things or getting enough done. And you're also going to feel like you're always working because you're going to try and be putting work in the

[The Interior Design Business CEO](#) with Desi Creswell

Ep #80: Create Your Summer Slow Down

nooks and crannies of your day and just constantly looping and having that background buzz. You might as well just decide to work more at that point.

Usually when you're trying to hide some truth to yourself about how you need to prioritize your commitments and say no, or maybe even hiding the actual amount of work you have to complete, it's often because you haven't given yourself permission and made an intentional decision to work the hours you want. And what ends up happening is you just slyly undermine yourself.

And if you want to dive into that topic in particular around setting office hours for yourself, I did do an episode on that. It's episode 26 and it's called What Office Hours, as in I don't have any.

Okay, so that's the first piece. If you want to create a summer slow down or rest period, that's what I'm calling it when we take the month of August off in The Designer CEO, you do have to define the work hours and give yourself permission to own your decision and move forward with that decision.

Here are a few other things I want you to consider in creating your summer slow down. The first is, yes, you're slowing down and working less, but my guess is that you still want to make some money. Maybe you don't, and that can be totally an okay decision too. But if you do still want to be bringing money into the business, consider what types of services you want to offer during this period of time, and maybe if you need to adapt your services and marketing to promote whatever it is that you're going to be providing to clients to better align with what you want in the coming months.

Maybe you decide to take on some décor only projects, which maybe have some more flexibility around timelines or having to be on site versus like a construction or remodel project. Maybe you're going to only offer paid consultations during the summer, this is something you can turn on and off around your schedule. Or maybe you're going to continue to sell and promote your full service design packages, but you're going to only serve existing clients and then start a wait list and accept deposits for new clients to get started sometime in the fall.

Ep #80: Create Your Summer Slow Down

This is something I'm doing where I'm modifying my services. So I'm going to be continuing to serve my existing one-on-one clients this summer, but I'm not going to be taking on any new one-on-one clients. So if you do want to work with me one-on-one this summer, the only way you can do that as a new client is through The Designer CEO. And then I'm going to be starting a waitlist for fall.

You also are probably going to need to modify some of your existing commitments. Let's say maybe you're really active in a professional organization and need to adjust expectations of what you're going to contribute in the next few months. Or maybe you always do a certain type of marketing and you're going to reduce what your definition of consistency is.

This is what I'm doing. When I did that math of my summer hours and the amount of time that it takes for my regular commitments, there was a big gap. So I had to make some decisions. And one of those is that this podcast is going to go to every other week for the summer. And I actually think I'm going to do a special summer series for you all that I'm pretty excited about. So stay tuned on that.

But what I saw very clearly was that these podcast episodes, and I do track my time so I know how much time these episodes take to outline and record and promote. It's a significant amount of my week every week. And I love putting it out for you and I didn't want it to totally disappear. But at the same time, I had to face the facts of knowing that the way I've been doing it, with the weekly cadence, over the summer was not going to be ideal for how I wanted to set up my work for the week.

If part of your slow down is that you want to take days of the week off consistently or blocks of time, weeks off, long weekends, whatever it is for you, it's important to block them off on your calendar now. That way when you're scheduling clients or other work in your business, you'll know exactly where things fall and don't end up in a bind with overlapping deadlines or forgetting that you wanted to take that three-day weekend and all of a sudden you have a big appointment scheduled on that Friday. So block it off now.

Ep #80: Create Your Summer Slow Down

And then also remember runway. This is something I talked about in episode 20, which is where you're blocking off a little bit of time before you leave for the trip and a little bit of time after you return so that you can ease out and then ease back in.

Another thing I want you to remember if you're creating a slow down for yourself, is that now is the time to start setting expectations with existing clients and projects that are going to run through the summer months while you have your reduced schedule. Clients are going to be much more likely to be amenable to any changes if you address them early and assure them that they will be taken care of.

If you have a team, you're also going to need to set expectations and prep them for your reduced schedule. This might be having them identify some projects that they can work on where you don't have to be as involved in, whether that's your back-end systems work, or maybe you've got some projects that are coming in that aren't your total ideal client, but still would be a pretty good fit for the business. And someone else on your team could lead that project, bringing design work into the business, but without the same level of your involvement.

It could be that they're working on something like systems or getting the office organized while you're doing a more reduced schedule. The other piece of this is you might need to come to terms with an employee not being fully utilized while you are stepping back just a little bit. Now, I know that can be very painful, but I also don't want you deciding about how you're wanting to work from a place of, I need to keep them busy.

There's very much an element of that, and you have to balance the workflow with the cash output you have to invest in an employee and bring business in and all of that. But if it's a very defined period of time, there are going to be seasons where maybe they're going to be a little under capacity, but you know you're going to pick back up when you're ready to go back and jump back into the work yourself. And so if there's maybe a couple months where they aren't working at full capacity, that can be okay, and so I want you to consider that.

Ep #80: Create Your Summer Slow Down

The other thing you can do to make your summer slow down successful is identify your goals for fall and pencil those in now. What this does is it helps you know what to expect when you are ready to dive back in, whether that's projects that you plan to start, financially what you can expect from your projects, all those things that can help calm your mind down and also not have it feel so jarring when you transition from the slow down to maybe a higher capacity workload.

And the last thing I want to say about this is that you're probably going to need to remind yourself about why you made this decision to slow down and that you liked that decision at the time. And really remind yourself of that when your brain tells you that you should be doing more or you're getting behind or whatever it's going to tell you.

The worst thing is when you make a decision that serves you and then you spend the whole time living out that decision while also blaming and judging yourself for what you're doing. I know that can be easier said than done, but I just want to bring it to your attention that slowing down might be uncomfortable, even if it's something that you desire because so many of us are conditioned to derive worth from our productivity and accomplishment.

And although that can be uncomfortable, it's worth it to wade through that and get to the other side because if some type of slowing down, creating that extra space for life is calling to you, let that whisper be heard and see what happens. It can be a really beautiful thing.

And as a reminder, starting May 14th, I'm going to be working with an intimate group of established interior designers inside The Designer CEO, and we can do this work together. I'm recording this in advance, so I don't know if the group is at capacity or not, but if the idea of giving yourself space to ebb and flow as the business owner, alongside building a really successful firm is calling to you, go to desiid.com/designerceo and schedule a time to talk about joining us.

This program is going to be a blend of mindset and strategy when it comes to all things, supporting you as your business's greatest asset in how you see yourself creating a strong vision for the business, stepping into your role as a leader and

Ep #80: Create Your Summer Slow Down

your identity as a leader. We're going to talk marketing. We're going to talk about collaborations. We're going to talk about setting financial goals and long-term planning. We're going to cover it all, and we're going to do it in a really holistic way, keeping in mind the way you want to run your business.

That is what I have for you today about creating that summer slow down. I would love to hear what you think of this episode. You can always send me a DM on Instagram or reply to one of my emails and let me know how you're applying what I shared today to your own business and life. I'll be back next Wednesday with a brand new episode. And until then, I'm wishing you a beautiful week. I'll talk to you soon.

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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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