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Resourceful Designer Episode 344: Be Careful What You Ask: A Lesson in Getting Valuable Feedback.

It's funny where I get ideas for podcast episodes sometimes. In some instances, I think long and hard on, a topic and how I'm gonna discuss it and all that. And other times, topics just pop out of nowhere, and I decide to run with it, which is the case this time. I was actually listening to another podcast, a friend of mine, his show. And he said one small thing in the episode.

And it had nothing to do with design. It had nothing to do with running a business. It was just a simple sentence. And that sentence just stuck in my head so much so that I had to stop his podcast, call up Evernote, and quickly just write a quick note on this is an episode I wanna do. And it was all triggered from a sentence that had nothing to do with what I'm gonna be talking about today. Now as a creative person, I'm sure you can relate to that. Sometimes, you know, you'll get, an idea, some inspiration that'll come out of absolutely the weirdest places. You know, maybe you're emptying the dishwasher, putting the dishes away, and the pattern that's on the dishes all of a sudden triggers something, and you get an idea for a logo for a client.

Or you're taking a walk through a park and all of a sudden the petals on a flower remind you of something, or maybe it's the color of the flowers. And it gives you an idea for some sort of design. It's really fascinating the way our minds work and how the the most innocuous things can trigger creativity. Well, today, I wanna talk about questions. And even though the title is called Des careful what you ask, maybe a more accurate description of this episode is be careful how you ask. Now in order to bring you up to speed on the full context of what I'm thinking, I wanna talk a little bit about another podcast of mine, or maybe I should say podcasts. You see, maybe you know this or not, but I got into podcasting not doing Resourceful Designer, but as a TV show fan podcaster. Meaning, I would podcast about TV shows.

I started in 2,013, and I've had podcasts covering the TV shows Under the Dome, Orphan Black, Killjoys, The Expanse, Rings of Power, The Last of Us. And now I'm bringing back the Orphan Black Podcast to talk about a new series, Orphan Black Echoes, that premieres later this month in North America. And the lesson I wanna talk to you about today is something I actually learned while doing those shows. Now if you're interested in any of those, by the way, you can find them all at my website, solotalkmedia.com. That's the home for all of these shows. An interesting side note, solotalkmedia.com is actually the very first WordPress website that I ever built. Before that, I was a web designer for many, many years and I was hand coding all my websites. I did everything by hand.

And to me, at the time, WordPress, that was faking it. In my mind, thinking that, you know, you had to find a theme, which means you weren't really designing something, you were relying on something that somebody else designed. There was no creativity in it. So I brushed off WordPress as, no, that's not what designers use. Now, of course, that was my naivete of the time. But when I started podcasting, I reached out to a friend of mine, and he told me that I needed an RSS feed. And in order to do that, the easiest way is to create a WordPress website. So reluctantly, I created solotalkmedia.com using WordPress in order to generate a a feed for my podcast.

And the rest is history. I I decided that it wasn't as bad as I thought it was. Then when I discovered Divi from Elegant Themes that allowed you to do so much with websites, I decided to give it a try and I started a couple of clients I used WordPress for. At first, I actually would build a hand coded website and then just install WordPress for the blog page. And then after doing that a few times, I ended up switching to WordPress. And now I do all my websites in WordPress exclu-

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sively. Anyway, so that's just a funny little side story that the reason I design in WordPress is because of podcasting. Now back to the whole topic of questions.

When I first started SolaTalk Media, the very first show I podcasted about was the television show Under the Dome, which is based on a Stephen King book. It was a very fun show to podcast about, but it wasn't a very good television show. In fact, that's one of the reasons why it was fun to podcast about is just how bad the show actually was. Now you have to understand that just like Resourceful Designer, I didn't have a co host back then. I never wanted a co host. Hence, the name I created for the network, Solo Talk Media. It was just me. Where most television podcasters that I knew, and I got to know a lot of them, had 2 or 3 Cotes.

And they would discuss the shows amongst them. Now I didn't wanna do that. I didn't wanna be tied down to a schedule with somebody else. So I created a format where it was me and my listeners. My listeners would send in feedback. I would play it on air, and I would respond to their feedback. Now that very first season of Under the Dome is when I got my feet wet on podcasting. Every week, I would tell people once you watch the next week's episode, please send me in some feedback.

Let me know what you thought of the episode. And just like every other podcaster that was talking about TV shows that I knew, I would get 3, 4, if I was lucky, 5 people would submit some feedback. You know, giving me their thoughts, a little rundown of the things they liked and didn't like about the show. And that was great. But I wanted more. I didn't have a cohost, as I said, to bounce ideas off of. I was relying on my audience to submit things so that I can then bounce the ideas or discuss what they were talking about in order to build content for my show. So after the 1st season of Under the Dome, and I did the 1st season of Orphan Black as well in the same manner, I decided to change things up a little bit.

For season 2 of Under the Dome, I introduced what I called a double take episode. Now this was a short podcast that I wasn't really discussing or talking about the television show. It was released either the same night or the next morning after the show aired on television. And I used it to ask specific questions. Instead of just giving a general, let me know what you thought about the show, I would ask 3 questions. And they would be very targeted question. Did you think that this such and such a character made the right decision when he did this instead of doing that? Or maybe it was something like, what do you think is behind the locked door they found in the basement? Or maybe, do you think character a is gonna find the whatever it is before nemesis character c discovers it. Whatever.

Every question was specific to a certain thing in the show. And I would ask 3 every week. And an amazing thing happened. When I started releasing these double takes, where I was asking very pinpointed questions, I started getting more and more feedback submitted. It was now not unheard of getting 12, 15, sometimes 20 people submitting feedback. Now all my other friends that did TV show podcast were shocked and amazed by the numbers that I was getting. I think my record so far was for one of the season finales for The Expanse. I can't remember if it was, season 3 or season 4.

I had almost 70 people. I think it was 68 or 69 people submit feedback for that episode. So by asking specific questions instead of just generic, what did you think, I was getting responses from people. People no longer had to think, well, okay. What did I think about the episode? Well, the episode was good. What else do I say? You know? Now I was asking specific things. Do you think this character made the right decision? Well, now they could weigh in. Yes.

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I think that character made the right decision. Or no. I think that was a terrible decision they made. They had a specific thing to talk about. Now I have a feeling you know where I'm going with this. This because obviously this is resourceful designer and not one of my solo talk media shows. So I wanna talk about your design business. And of course, the topic of this episode is be careful what you ask.

And that's because many times as designers, you may just ask a client. You show them a design, and you may ask, well, what do you think? Well, that sort of question is rarely helpful or beneficial to you. Neither is the question, do you like it? Do you like it is subjective. It doesn't matter if they like it or not. Does the design meet the goals? Does it meet the criteria that was outlaid in the design brief or the to reach a certain target market? You need to be more specific. Instead of, what do you think? Ask more directed. What do you think about the color choices? What do you think about the shape? What do you think about the layout? What do you think about the font choices? By asking more specific questions, you actually make it easier for the client to answer. If you just ask them what do you think, they have to come up with something to answer and they're not sure what direction to take.

But if you pinpoint, what do you think about the fonts? Now they know what to focus on. And it's much easier for them to look and go, oh, I really like the fonts. It's a good choice. I think it balances well. Or, you no, I really thought that a serif font would work better than that sans serif. By giving them something more focused, they can give you a better, more precise answer. A question like, do you like it, can be changed into, do you like the spacing? Do you like the hierarchy? Do you like the flow of the text? Do you like the image? Do you like this specific image? Again, the more precise your questions are, the easier it is for the client to answer. And that's really the whole point of this episode.

It's just to remind you that asking a client, well, what did you think, is never the right choice. Give them something specific in order to answer you. Now if you're not sure what sort of questions to ask, I did put a podcast episode out way at the beginning. It's episode 15 of the podcast. 50 questions to ask before every new design project. And you can listen to that one at resourcefuldesigner.com/episode15. And that's actually either the top or the second most downloaded episode of Resourceful Designer all time. And there's a reason for it.

There's a lot of value in that episode with 50 different questions you can ask. Now, of course, you don't ask all the questions, but it gives you a great idea of what sort of questions you can ask whenever you're starting a new design project. So that's what I wanted to share with you today. I wanted to keep it very simple and share a lesson that I learned through podcasting that if you ask specific questions, you get a lot more and better feedback. In my case with the podcast, by asking specific questions, more people were willing to contribute. Instead of getting 4 or 5, I was getting 20 people per episode. But the same thing applies to our design business. If you want more constructive, more creative, more specific answers from your clients, then you need to ask more specific, more precise questions.