Intro:	00:16	[inaudible].
Chris Mears:	00:16	Hello and welcome to Design Untangled with me Chris Mears and Carla Lindarte for another episode. How's it going?
Carla Lindarte:	00:23	I'm very good. How are you?
Chris Mears:	00:26	Yeah, I'm pretty good. So I'm enjoying my first week of the summer of fun employment, which is very relevant to what we're going to be talking today about. I'm a free man for a couple of months.
Carla Lindarte:	00:36	Wow, that's amazing that you can just do that. That's like the dream, isn't it?
Chris Mears:	00:41	Well, yeah, it is the dream, but it's also something that I've never taken advantage of before because yeah, I posted a thing on linkedin awhile ago and contractors theoretically, you know, you pick up a gig here and there, then you take some time off. Go. Traveling just never really happens. It just seems that you come to the end of the Gig, someone else's like, oh, we've got this thing starting in two weeks, and then you go to that Gig and then it happens again. And again. And this is the first time in like six years of doing this that I've actually said, right, I'm just not gonna work and I'm actively not gonna try and find work after my last contract ends. So that was quite a weird thing that's taken me a very long time to actually get to this point.
Carla Lindarte:	01:24	Yeah. It's weird though because as a contractor, that's what you would think people would do like just take more time off and manage their time and then actually you're not the only person I know who's contracting and never taken like time off. I was actually talking to a friend at work who was talking about her sister and she's a contractor and she was in hospital yesterday, but then she went back to work today because you know, she's a contractor and she's worried about, you know, not working another day, she gets paid by today and stuff like that. So I should have think a little contracts has put a lot of pressure on themselves, like trying to, you know, um, cause you never know what's gonna happen next kind of thing. Um, you know, tried to take advantage as much as possible and you know, when it's health related or when you, um, burnout, which is what we're going to talk about today. Um, it is important to take that time off.
Chris Mears:	02:17	Yeah. Not a mate, the whole episode about contracting the, that that is the trap, right? Because you get paid by the day, like

you say. So if you take a day's holiday, you're paying for the holiday, but then in your mind you are also like also by more so paying for the time that I'm not working. So it takes a lot of discipline I think to just cancel that second bit out and just saying, right, this is time off. I'm going to enjoy it. Don't think about the money I'm not earning at the moment.

Carla Lindarte:	02:44	Yeah. Is it a mentality, isn't it? Yeah.

Chris Mears:	02:46	Yeah. And yeah, that's kind of what we wanted to talk about today rather than just contractors is kind of, it's something I've seen lots on linkedin about I guess, cause the algorithm likes talking about it. But also there's lots of people just saying that, that burn out or that they've finally kind of recognized it and they're sorting out at the moment. I think it is a bit of a growing problem, not just among designers but just in the whole digital space because of the kind of pace that it works and modern life smartphones all this kind of stuff adding up, um, which is causing people's mental health to suffer.

Carla Lindarte:	03:27	Yeah, definitely. I mean, I think, I don't know why there's this pressure of always being connected and knowing what's going on. Um, and obviously the design space, um, there is a lot of pressure of being knowledgeable and reading the latest things and always being on top of things and, um, you know, going to the right events and the right conferences. And so you add all of that, you know, a cluster to your day to day, which is already really a high pressure. You know, you're in a design environment where you have to, like turn up with designs like very quickly or running lots of uses as saying, you know, um, and especially if you're in a consultancy where clients pay you for, um, a time frame at, you know, the particular time for me, you have to deliver something, the pressure is really high.

Carla Lindarte:	04:19	Um, so there are definitely, I remember when I was in the, in my days of consulting and agency life, um, there was a lot, a lot of people, and I can tell you like from my own experience who just couldn't come to work one day because they were too overwhelmed to do it. Um, so, you know, some people couldn't asleep. Like someone said to me like, I can't sleep but I haven't been able to sleep for a couple of weeks. Um, and I can function properly. Um, you know, suffering from anxiety, um, you know, feeling all the pressure of being in a high performance environment. Um, so it is something that companies more and more recognized I guess. And there is more, um, awareness of that and people can actually talk more about it. But, um, still as a problem that exists,

Chris Mears:		yeah, I think it's not just consultancies is agencies as well. So even though companies are generally getting better at that, there's still sort of a culture unwritten rules that the later you're seen to be at work in the early you get in, that's kind of a good thing or seen as a good thing and will lead you to promotion stuff like that. And nobody's actually saying that, but it's still very evident of who the people are staying after work, like time after time after time and you know, the motivation is properly just pressure that there may be inventing in their own minds to, you know, if the boss doesn't see me here, this late then going to get overlooked that promotion or they won't, they'll think I'm slacking off all that kind of stuff.
Carla Lindarte:		[inaudible] yeah, that's so true. I mean, and also as you said, there's not agencies, consultants like Google is also an environment where there's a lot of people who have burning out. Um, not necessarily, uh, for the life or balanced, but more from a pressure perspective, like peer pressure. Um, there's a lot of people who suffer from imposter syndrome and doing in Google, there's this perception of, you know, you very smart, you're lucky to be here because you've been chosen kind of thing. Right. And that pressure, um, at some, a lot of anxiety and I have to say, I, I experienced this and I still experience sometimes, um, you know, like that, you know, given pressure that you're here and you're lucky and you have to, you know, you have to be behave in certain way, um, that really can impact your, you know, your confidence and your self same and, and generate a lot of anxiety. So, you know, companies like this for example, or for like free therapy, um, you know, a free like, um, meditation classes and stuff like that because they realize it is a problem there.
Chris Mears:		Yeah. The interesting thing about it, they, I watched some dodgy Netflix movie awhile cause the circle, which is [inaudible]
Carla Lindarte:		yeah, that was shit. Yeah,
Chris Mears:		yeah. Some of it. Yeah. I did it on the basis of who was in it, which has never really the best way to choose a movie. But yeah. So anyway, it's kind of a parody of um, sort of silicon valley startups. Yeah. Google, Facebook, et Cetera, and kind of not just sort of the work environment, but all the social events and that kind of stuff that you're almost expected to go to. That can give a kind of pressure in itself because it's all in a way designed to make you more ingrained in the company and never sort of let you disconnect from it. You know, finish your day at work and then there's some drinks which isn't bad in

itself, but you're never kind of leaving the work environment really. Even your social time is tied to the work environment.

Carla Lindarte: 08:14   MMM. Even the gym is in hand, everything is in the same place. You know, your food is here, everything is in as like your whole life. Um, is less of an issue. I would say here in the UK, especially in the team I work on because the sales team is different to the product teams and um, I think a lot of this stuff is more relevant for people in actual like Silicon Valley and mountain view where, you know, they live around. Um, there's a lot of people like finish uni and all they have is, you know, going to one of these companies who provide anything they need and that's where their whole lives are, you know, in that space. But is less certainly relevant for, for the experience I've had so far. But yeah, definitely that's, I mean it is a good thing that you have all these perks, but it also means that you're always there, you know, always in the same space. Yeah. Which is not necessarily great, but how do you, how do you recognize, have you ever been burnt out or fell burnt out? Obviously I think this break that you've taken is kind of a sign of that. Okay.

Chris Mears: 09:20   Yeah, I think so. So I don't think I've ever got to the stage where completely like broken down, but there's definitely been kind of points where I've realized, okay, work shouldn't feel like this. I need to just take a step back and reset. So it's definitely been a few kind of patterns and stuff of when I'm really struggling to solve particular design issue, just don't know how to tackle it. Um, and usually that's a symptom of a couple of things. It's that kind of been in my own little boxed world and not sort of experimented with new ideas or sought out new ideas. So you kind of just become stuck in your own little mind hole essentially, which is a terrible phrase. Um, and it can also happen I think when you or the company is not doing enough user research because you find yourself very distanced from the people that you're designing for, which is of course essentially the whole reason why you x is a discipline exists and try and sort that out. But it can happen. Even when you've got established UX teams, you know, you get to a certain point and you're just getting the pressure on and you're trying to pump out features and you just forget the, there's actual people that you're going to be designing for at the end of it.

Carla Lindarte: 10:38   Yeah, that is a very common one I have to say. I think the, the lack of planning and you know, get in agencies and consultancies when you're selling like projects like UX projects, um, the kind of the stuff they do in research is sometimes underestimated that and content is always underestimated. Um, it's kind of like, yeah, you know, we get to add, we do these

techs in every day, but even if you go very, very lean, there is still work involved in testing. You know, there's, you need prototypes, they need to be functioning, you need, um, space, you need recordings and if not, you need to take notes. Do you need to, even if you just do very, very lean reporting, you still need to kind of gather your insights and so is work. And then if you didn't have enough people in the team, um, at all which this happened to me a lot, a when you didn't have people with the right skills, um, which is, is a big of a challenge because then I was in situations where I was managing a project, um, and I had very junior people or people would not experienced but so however I'm doing this kind of work, which means that it added more pressure, um, to you who are leading or whoever has got the experience because then you have to do your job and then help erm the rest of the team as well.

| Carla Lindarte: | 12:08 | Um, which is not ideal if you just have a short time frame and that's way as you said, that's when you start like forgetting all the prioritizing testing because you just need to turn like you just need to change and design quickly. |

| Chris Mears: | 12:23 | Yeah. And that's kind of the core problem I've seen with the agile approach in projects. You know it can work and it does worked pretty well for sort of feature delivery but you get sort of, so just in the sausage machine that you never have a chance to step back and you lose sight of the bigger picture. And I think that can be quite demotivating sometimes cause you just sort of forget what you are trying to accomplish in the first place. So it's quite important to have those periods of time where you can just step back, look at the kind of design, the journey as a whole reset back to what you originally trying to accomplish and just review it. And from that point of view rather than just constantly pushing out features, pushing out features, pushing out features. And I think the other trend is to just kind of put things out in the world that you're not really even sure if they are a good idea or not. |

| Chris Mears: | 13:16 | And I think whilst that does have its benefits, then you don't waste loads of time kind of building stuff that might not work. It's also, it's easy to fall into the trap of just being a bit lazy about it and putting no sort of thought to why you're doing something, which can be a bit depressing as well. Just saying, oh, what if I, fro this screen out there, see what happens. Like that's not really a very satisfying way to design. I think it's much better to kind of understands the problem, the user, and then designed something for that. Generally speaking, or at least I find that a bit more fulfilling. |

Carla Lindarte:	13:51	Yeah, and I do agree with what you were saying. I mean, there's a lot of theory on, you know, MVP, so minimum viable .. Valuable products and you know, putting something out there, et Cetera, et cetera. But if you put something out there that is not even good enough for a user to understand what the proposition is, right. I think that is, is even worse than doing nothing, to be honest. Because I seriously thing I prefer to delay the project and it's, when I was at my previous job, there was a lot of that thing happening. Like, oh, let's just put some, uh, you know, um, landing pages out there and then the quality of it wasn't great. So if you, if you want good feedback, um, you have to put something out there that is not perfect but at least communicates what are you trying to achieve and you have your hypothesis or what you're trying to learn, but not just like anything because as you said, not very satisfying and also from an outcome perspective and you're going to get where you, you're looking for if you do something that is not good enough.
Chris Mears:	15:03	Yeah. He would just end up even more confused, which is just even more depressing.
Carla Lindarte:	15:07	Yeah. I mean, I also think that, especially from my experience when I failed situations, when I found I was burning out, um, it was also the fact that I, I was put in way too much pressure on myself and also not managing expectations. Um, not necessarily just with other people but with myself as well. So I kind of like thought that because I was a woman and I wasn't from this country and I was just trying to demonstrate that I was good, right? I had to do more. So that that is a constant way you kind of think, okay, I have to do this and that and that. And if they asked me to do more stuff, you know, I have to show them that I can, um, because it's, I'm in disadvantage, you know, that's kind of the perception I have of myself.
Carla Lindarte:	16:00	Um, because obviously you and I, it still happens. You know, you, I work with people like English people come from Oxford University and I like super smart people, you know, and then you, you have the pressure of saying come from this, you know, country in Latin America and I don't even speak English as a first language and, and my woman as well. So there's a lot of pressure that you create for yourself. And I'm not saying it's just applicable for me or people like me, but sometimes you put a lot of pressure on yourself and then you realize that first of all, like your productive life is actually very, very long. If you think about it, I'm almost 40 and I still have another 20 years of like work. Um, so if you're doing something that is not giving you, um, uh, you know, it is not making you happy or you're doing something is burning you out is not the end of the world. If you

leave it. Or if you say no, um, you know, you have a president is in the future to grow and to be, to be happier with what you're doing. But there is a period of, there was a period of my life when I sold, I had to do it and that's what I found myself out because, you know, put a lot of pressure. So just managing those conversations with yourself and with others I think is super key.

Chris Mears:	17:18	Yeah. And, and one of the things we were talking about in our last episode about transitioning to UX is if your job's not super fulfilling, you know not every job is going to be changing the world or whatever. We spoke about that before. There's always the side hustle route which is to, you obviously don't want to spend your whole life working, but if there is something you can do on the side which deals with a cause or a problem that you care about, that can be quite a good, I suppose motivation booster that you are making some positive change in the world and even if it's not in your main job. So that's another route you can consider.
Carla Lindarte:	17:56	Yeah, definitely. And also this side hustles hour or things that also like put yourself your mind out of the problems that you're facing. So if you like doing yoga, if you're like exercising or like for example, I love doing this podcast, even if we have thousands or just hundreds of listeners, I just love doing it because it's a way of, you know, keeping myself connected with something I love, which is design. And you know, and it's fun and it's fun to do with you as well. So I think it's something that you can always do and if you help one person or two or you know, someone is listening to your message, it is good enough for me. And I think it doesn't have to be designed related, it doesn't have to be work related, but you can find something that you love doing. Um, and also that helps you disconnect yourself from the reality of your job and perhaps, you know, clear up your mind and then next day when you're doing your job again, you see it differently. Whereas if you just keep thinking about it, like obsessing about it, that's not going to help.
Chris Mears:	19:02	Yeah. I've always been quite good at that separation. I think like people, uh, I say a lot of people going to UX meetups after work and stuff like this, but for me, as soon as I'm out the office like, I don't care about UX at all until the next morning pretty much. Um, life for me, I can just flip that switch and put my mind to other things. Smash out some chains play on the Ukulele.
Carla Lindarte:	19:27	That's great. Like, I mean, I really envy people who can separate um, love. real life from work.

Chris Mears:	19:34	I think you can train yourself, right?
Carla Lindarte:	19:36	Yeah. You, you can and, and, and I'm, I'm trying to do it especially at the moment because it's just finding those things that make you happy outside of work. Um, which if, you know, you're so used to working really hard like I have been used to in the last, you know, 12 years. Um, you get to this place when you have more time for yourself and you don't know who you are, where you like doing, you know, you don't have any hobbies and cause if you put too much attention to work, then everything is around it. Um, and once you realize, oh my God, what do I actually like? But you're right, you can train yourself to do that. Um, and to enjoy it as well. Cause not everything is about work.
Chris Mears:	20:20	I think most people, even if they're not doing it currently, they'll have or will have had a thing in their life they can do where their minds just completely switches off and they're just focused on that one activity. So I think it's about understanding what that is. Practicing I suppose making time for it if you don't currently and just having that period in the day or the week or whatever where you can just do that thing that you enjoy just for the sake of doing it and then switch off from everything else that's going on at work.
Carla Lindarte:	20:53	Yeah, there's a no, there's something else that is related to that point that um, we used to do a lot at sapient, which was more, I'm going out for a, an exhibition for example as a team. Like we were going through this project, then we had a lot of things to do. But then like, let's just all together, lunchtime does just go to a design museum or something, you know, or you go to this place and have a look at this stuff, which is, you know, something that we enjoy doing as a team, but then also gives you like, you know, a little bit of like a head space as well. Or I think about something different. Um, and then when you, we came back to the problem, then you will be fresh as well. Um, that's something else that you could, if you're in a team or something you can suggest to your manager review or the manager you can actually do with your team because I think it is super useful. Um, and it doesn't have to be design or creative related. It could be just like can play football or you know, whatever. I list something different that um, you know, as a team you can go and do as to kind of disconnect your sound from, from the day to day of clients and deliverables and you know, user testing, et cetera.
Chris Mears:	22:05	Yeah, you definitely need those mental breaks. Like whatever form they take it's pretty well known. By this point, the people

can't concentrate the super long periods of time. As we've, as workshop facilitators, we've seen many, many times over say, yeah, it's important to just have those gaps in the day where you can not think about what you're doing for work for a few minutes. Just reorganize your thoughts. If that's meditation, cool if it's listening. So a few tunes. Yeah, all good. But yeah, just create that space for your mind to brief, I suppose mixing up various body parts there. But you know, I mean,

Carla Lindarte: 22:44   yeah, I mean there's a lot of tools right now. I mean, I have to say I was a bit of an, not necessarily not believer, but I was just like meditation. I tried it before and I was like, this is just not for me. I can't shut up my mind, you know, it's just too noisy in there. Um, and I started using an app called headspace, which is, um, you know, can you and get it for free or Google, but it's only like 70 pounds a year subscription. Um, and it just, it just really good because it's a bit like not pretentious cause you, you kind of like, well that's just me. I used to ask this shared meditation or Yoga with potentials, like good looking girls who are absolutely stunning and skinny. They can deal with these, um, you know, um, positions and stuff.

Carla Lindarte: 23:36   And, and then I, I used to go there and feel really like I'm overwhelmed by it cause I was, I know I'm not like them. I'm not like I cant be so like, you know, all this meditate, something like that. Yeah. and I'm pretty. And also just, you know, meditation. I was like, I'm not able to do it. But recently I started using headspace and I think is a very nice and kind of humble way of um, just maybe it's just they just really simplify it too. You just need to breathe and concentrate on your breathing and that just makes you disconnect your thoughts, like your brain from your thoughts and then you just kind of put attention to your body, which as well, yeah, that's kind of distracting. The mind isn't our, did you think of all these things, but you suddenly just concentrate or focus on your, the way your body is breathing, which is a constant thing that you can do anytime of the day.

Carla Lindarte: 24:32   You can just stop and just focus on how your breathing, how your body can goes up and down and stuff like that. And that just basically puts your mind off anything else. Um, so made it really like a bit more tangible for me and a be easier to, to understand. Of course I can, I still can do visualizations and you know, feel that I'm flying and stuff like that. It's a bit harder, it takes more practice. But I would really recommend people just it slow snow like this and also like you can also set it up for like 10 minute meditation or five minute meditation. You can do it in the morning game and then on the train sometimes and do it on the train as well. Um, which is, you know, is it's really nice

and it's in, it's not and there is with yourself, so you don't have to be in a group of people and feel a bit embarrassed because you making noses noises and stuff like that. What kind of noise is it? You make it, you know, and people, I have been to this younger class and people started making like we are noises and I felt really embarrassed.

Chris Mears:	25:34	You sure that was a yoga class? It sounds pretty dodgy. I don't know. Anyway. Um, yeah, it's whatever gets your brain to shut up essentially. Um, for me, I'm the same as you. Meditation always found it pretty difficult. Yoga was all right, but I'm just not into the kind of mysticism, energy, stuff like that. For me, just blasting drum and bass is my best way to relax. Like being relaxed stresses me out so I need to get like really hyped up to, to chill, which doesn't make much sense, but that's the way I'm built. And so yeah, when the music's on, my brain is not thinking about wireframes frames or anything like that, so, so whatever works, I think most people have got one or two things like that, which will just get their brain to focus on the activity rather than everything else that's going on in the world.
Carla Lindarte:	26:27	Exactly. That's all it is. Those what you know when they talk about meditation stuff, that's all they, want you to achieve at the end is just, be present, doing what you are doing at that moment rather than thinking of all the random stuff. That's it. Don't burn yourself out. Design is it is good, but it's not worth it, is it? We should just ends there. Life Is more important than a bloody wireframe. Right.
Chris Mears:	27:00	I think the point is you are not alone if you are feeling burnt out and there's plenty of stuff I think you can try and experiment with to un-burn yourself out, but if it's really just not a good environment to be working in, then yeah, strongly consider if it's worth your mentor and Physical Health to stay there. And if there's anything else you can do to ease the pain, like side hustle, stuff like that.
Carla Lindarte:	27:27	That's it, and if you don't like your job just go do something else. Okay, cool. See you next time, then. See you next time.
Outro:	27:37	Search and subscribe to design untangled using your favorite podcast app and leave us a review. Follow us on the web at designuntangled.co.uk. Or on Twitter @designuntangled. Become a better designer with online mentoring at uxmentor.me.