

EPISODE 768

[INTRODUCTION]

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FT: It can be hard to find quality career advice these days. The word landscape is always changing. We want much freedom and flexibility. Women in particular I feel as we are arising through our careers unsure about whether to be tough, or nice, or somewhere in the middle. That's why I've invited today's guest on the show.

Welcome back to So Money everyone. I'm Farnoosh Torabi. Our guest today is Lauren McGoodwin. She's an expert in career development for women. A few years ago, she founded the popular website Career Contessa, After realizing there weren't many career resources, specifically those for women; together with her team, Lauren provides a lot of advice, a lot of insight and guidance for women who want to pursue their career goals.

We'll chat about the beginnings of her business, her financial failures and I love this, the importance of having not just a career but really a life that you love.

Here's Lauren McGoodwin.

[INTERVIEW]

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FT: Lauren McGoodwin, welcome to So Money Miss Career Contessa. How are you?

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LM: I am good. Thank you so much for having me.

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FT: Career Contessa is fast becoming the destination for women who want to excel in their careers, whether it's because they want to learn how to get the promotion, get the raise, transition, move up. You started this, because you felt as a recruiter and also as a woman in your career, trying to move up the ladder that there was a void in the marketplace. How does Career Contessa fill those gaps?

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LM: Yeah. Taking a step back, I actually wrote my master's thesis on millennial women and career resources. This was something I was experiencing myself, which was I have gone through college, I was raised being told I can do anything I want to do. I'm just as good as the boys, etc., etc. Graduated from college and quickly fell flat on my face. The expectation of what I thought life was going to be like, versus what it was, etc. Landed a job, but it was not glamorous, or fun by any means, and not that jobs have to be fun, but I was literally feeding paper through a printer, working as an admin assistant for a college.

Basically was on the search for what I wanted to do, and so I ultimately figured out that recruiting I thought would be a really great career choice. Did a bunch of informational interviews and landed a job at recruiting at Hulu. When I was at Hulu, probably within six months into my job, I was also I enrolled in a master's program. I've gotten to the point where it was time to write my thesis.

I decided I was going to write my thesis on millennial women and career resources, because I have had just this dramatic shift of what being fulfilled in my career with the impact it had on every other part of my life, and I thought this is really fascinating. I wonder if this is – is this a millennial thing, is this like the jobs are changing thing, and now I was on the other side of the hiring table.

I started Career Contessa, because I thought there was a void, but also I had done all this research to realize that the millennial generation has definitely shaped, or is changing the way work gets done, and the future, work is it's definitely changing. What I also felt as a woman, and we are the minority in the boardroom. We are more likely to face unconscious bias and see a gender pay gap. We are more likely to take a career break.

Also at my research was proving to me with that and my own life experience was that women had just as many opportunities as men and we were working just hard, but that wasn't the whole story. I agree, we've made huge advances, but we're still facing some unique challenges that men just simply dump in the workplace.

I just found that there wasn't really a resource I could go to that “spoke woman.” It was tailored to maybe what I was thinking, or had as a lot of the career sites out there really boring and dull. My people would ask me like, what's your hobby? It's my career. I was really invested and I still am really invested in my career and building something on my own terms. It was a lot of things, and certainly having done the research was I think the nudge for me to realize like, this isn't just in my head, or my own personal experience. There's a reason why this is happening.

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FT: How has it evolved and what have you learned as you've been building this, as you've been keeping your ear to the ground, connecting now with women like, is that what you thought it would be, or has it turned to something different?

[0:05:15.8]

LM: It's little bit of both. I mean, when we first started, the only thing we had on our site were interviews. I think when I started, I was definitely thinking this will be a blog, and will give great advice. Again, having been a recruiter, I realized that job search advice was certainly something that people really needed, because as we all know, applying for a job, it's like the Wild West out there, who knows what the rules are?

We started with just advice and then we moved on to – or, sorry interviews, and then we moved on to including more career advice. I personally thought this would be a blog, something I would do on the side, but it's really turned into a very comprehensive resource, and I know resource is sometimes too big of a word for people to be specifically understanding what we do, but I think we've turned almost more into a learning tool. We teach people how to do things that help them advance their career.

That's been really fascinating to watch us evolve from here's some advice, do what you want with that to let us teach you how to advance your career, whether that is skills, leadership tips, you name it, and that's really how we've evolved. Of course, being an entrepreneur, I think every day is you're just constantly adapting and trying to build not just a company, but also a brand. I've learned so much just from the journey of entrepreneurship that, and I always joke ignorance is bliss, had I known how much work this was going to be and how challenging it was going to be.

I might not have left the comforts of a full-time job. I'm happy I did, but of course, I got to go into it blindly. Yeah, we certainly have evolved a lot in the last since I left my job full-time in 2014 to do this.

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FT: You mentioned that your career was your hobby. I completely relate to that. I think a lot of us chuckled when we heard that, but there is also something to be said about not being so obsessed with your career. Be more obsessed with your life, right? Your career is an aspect of that. I think for women, that's really important, because we want more than just to be running our careers. I think a lot of us, and men too, we want family, we want relationships, we want real hobbies. To that extent, how does Career Contessa go about guiding women through that, if at all? Because I'm sure, well there's all this focus on your career, how do how do we teach women to be able to create a career that plugs into the bigger life that they want for themselves.

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LM: Yeah. I think, that's actually a 100% what we do at Career Contessa. One of our tag lines is we help you build a successful career on your terms. However, you are defining success, we're not defining it for you. We're saying, define success whatever that looks like for you. Some people, that is the corner office and a really high salary in this non-yada, yada, right? Other people it's like, I want to have balance. Personally in my life, I want to be able to go to work, feel good about that. When I'm done, I want to be fully dedicated to my kids and my family, and I

also want to be able to have time for joining the PTA, or becoming a yoga instructor, or going on hiking trips every month.

However you define success, we want to help you build that successful career on your terms, because for many people, especially women, I think having a career is going to be very important, because it's power, right? It's the power of if you have the skill set, you can go out and financially support yourself, which will give you the ability to make choices. I really feel like no matter what, however you define success, like a career is probably going to be a piece of that. I know for a lot of women, their careers also bring them a lot of fulfillment.

I think, I could totally understand someone who heard that being like, your career shouldn't be your hobby. You should actually go get a real hobby. I've probably been told once or twice before like, "Get a life. I think you need to stop thinking so much about career stuff." What I learned for me is that is one of the things that I define success by, is being able to feel fulfilled in what I'm building, or what I'm doing.

We're trying to provide the tools and services, or access to – so we have a career coaching service on there. If you're not fulfilled in your job and you're spending eight hours a day doing something you hate, that is just as much of a waste of your time is not being able to set boundaries, where you need to leave at 5:00, so that you can go spend time with your friends and your family and things like that.

[0:10:02.5]

FT: You mentioned how a career is a source of choice and power for women, everybody. It's also a revenue stream. It's a way to make money, which also leads to power and choices. I wanted to now shift gears to your financial frame and mindset. What is your money mantra, Lauren?

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LM: My money mantra is same. Same, same, same. I mean, I'm definitely one of those people where I haven't quite embraced the whole like, it will come. Whenever I get a dollar, I save it and

I try to make it stretch as far as possible. Stretch the dollar as far as you can go with it. That's my money mantra.

[0:10:47.3]

FT: Is that something that you learned growing up, or something that you've inherited as a result of being an entrepreneur? I know that comes with a lot of uncertainty, so the – you be gravitate towards realizing we need to save more than ever. I am curious about your childhood and how that impacted your financial frame and mindset, our sponsor Chase Slate did a survey recently and found that over 50% of parents have had a conversation about money with their kids. Do you remember a money talk like that when you were growing up?

[0:11:19.5]

LM: No. What's interesting is my family, we don't talk about money at all. I mean, it's like to the point where I'd be bringing it up, my mom will be like, "That is so no. You just don't talk about money." My mom actually came from a pretty well-to-do background, and so part of why they never talked about money is they never needed to. Then she was very against talking about money. I don't remember us talking about money as a family.

If somebody bought a new house, you would never hear my parents ask how much did they pay for it. I didn't really grow up having a lot of information about money, but I do remember my dad was an entrepreneur, what I specifically remember around middle school is really waves of tough moments, tough financial moments. I can remember asking my mom, like we're telling her, like I'm going to so and so's birthday party, can you give me 20 bucks to put in their birthday card? My mom being \$20 is like – and looking at my dad – not that they – Basically, there was a very tough five to seven years financially for our family, and that was the first time I remember thinking like, "Wow, I don't know if mom and dad have enough money. I don't know if they can afford this, or wondering how are they affording this and stuff like that."

I think my money mindset, like save the dollar was this feeling of I had seen my dad go from things were going well, to things were going not very well pretty quickly. It wasn't developed via conversations. I think it was definitely developed via watching their behavior. Going to college, I

always assume they would be paid for college and that was a wide opening. It was very much a wake-up call for me to be like, "Oh, no. This is not how it's going to happen." I think I definitely live through, and I'm sure there's a lot of people, especially people my age who have looked through the recession who watched their parents go through really tough moments and stuff like that. Yeah, my money mantra is definitely based off more behaviors than conversations.

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FT: Yeah, we learn a lot. I tell parents all the time. I was wondering like, "How do I take to teach my kid about money?" I'm like, you don't have to tell her anything. Just be the role model that you want to be. Also keep in mind that they watch every move you make. My son this morning, we had this credit card lying around the house that was not one that's we're actively using. It was just sitting on our desk. My daughter wanted to play with it, and then my son wanted it, and they were like – he's like, "What's a credit card?" I was like, "I'm not ready for this conversation. You're four."

The point is that they have a curiosity, they see you, he knew what it was, because he had seen me using something like it a lot, probably in the grocery store. I don't want to make that the teachable moment, but it's going to happen.

[0:14:30.7]

LM: Well, it's funny, because when I was a kid my mom was writing checks at the grocery store, so I only learned how to write a check because I would watch her at the grocery store, and I remember when she got a debit card I was like, "That's so cool. Someone else pays for it." She's like, "That's not how this works."

[0:14:46.0]

FT: Right, right. Yeah, I had the similar experience. My mom when she was writing a check at the department store to pay off a credit card and I'm like, "What are we doing here? Why aren't we shopping? Why aren't we getting anything in exchange for you buying, clearly giving them

money?” She’s like, “Because we bought stuff in the past and now I’m paying for it.” That blew my mind. I was like, “Wait. You can do that?”

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LM: Yeah. You're like, “Whoa, this is amazing.”

[0:15:11.2]

FT: Mind blown. Let me go pick up a few more things while we’re at it. Awesome. Tell me about your so money moment. This is a period in maybe your career, or finance – I’d love to hear financial so money moment. I made this much money once and it was more than I ever thought, or something along the lines of really feeling you’d triumphed in your financial life. What happened? Where were you? Take us there.

[0:15:36.7]

LM: Yeah. I mean, certainly with Career Contessa, I can remember when we got our first six-figure deal, sponsorship deal. I mean, I was on cloud nine. I mean, it was a pinch me moment. I almost didn't know how to react and I think hitting a six-figure deal for a sponsor that reached out to me, we hadn't been doing – I think we were probably three years into Career Contessa. The reason why it was such a big deal to me is we had been talking to this brand for a while, and they basically – I was like, “That's not enough for us compared to what the work we're going to have to do, but let's stay in touch.”

Then three months – maybe, it was more than that. Maybe it was six months later, they came back to me and they were like, “We really, really want to work with you guys. We're happy to meet your terms,” and part of the terms was a certain investment amount, which was over 60 years, which was the largest deal we had ever done by a huge amount. I just remember having this moment of like one, I truly believe that everything happens for a reason. I had this moment of like, had I not pushed back and had boundaries and – my hindsight is so great, because now you can look back and be like, it was all worth it.

In the moment, I remember crying and being like, “What did I do?” I just lost a deal, and any deal would have been better than no deals and being really, really fearful about how it's going to keep the company alive without deals. Then when they came in, it was one, not only did it save the day, because we needed a couple more content deals, but also it just felt really great to be like, “Yeah, I said we were worth this, and now you're coming back,” and they felt really good about it. That was definitely a money moment that I will never forget.

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FT: I don't like to say it a lot, but I do think that in retrospect, things happen for a reason. In the moment, you don't feel that way.

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LM: Oh, no. At the moment, it felt terrible. I felt like – I mean, I honestly, I went home that night and I started working – Career Contessa is completely self-funded, so I went home that night and I started working on a pitch tech. I was like, “I'm going to have to get investors. I can't believe I tried –” it just felt like one of those things where I had pushed, and maybe I pushed them too far. Then you start to have regret like, “Oh, my gosh. I pushed too far. I was trying to be –”

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FT: I was too needy.

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LM: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. I think for a lot of entrepreneurs, or freelancers, anyone who's basically saying, “My skill set is valued at this amount. If you value it, you'll pay for it.” That's always a really tough one, because you could push too far and then just say like, sorry that was way more than I thought, and now I never want to talk to you again. It's hard not to take that stuff personal. It's hard not to – be tough on yourself if you lose it. When you get it, then you're like, “Okay, this now justifies everything going forward.”

That was definitely one of those wins that even today, sometimes I think back on it when I push on something, where I'm like, "No, you have to trust your gut. You have to do what you know is right," which I mean, I'm making it sound so much simpler than it really is.

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FT: Oh, I can only imagine in the moment. You're just sort of, like the walls are caving in, the sky is falling. I know, your heart is racing, right? You're trying to put this – you can't put this PowerPoint deck together fast enough.

[0:19:11.2]

LM: Totally. Then you're like, "No." I mean, you're just so negative. I mean, someone could have told me I want a million dollars then. I probably would've been like, "You're lying. A million dollars wouldn't even help me right now." You know what I mean? You're just so negative that nothing can help you.

[0:19:26.5]

FT: Okay. Well, not to get sad or anything, but I love talking about failure, because it's so – I mean, especially when you're talking about it, and as something in the past, you can be a little bit more optimistic about it. What's a financial failure that you experienced that was really – was really a lesson learned? A hard lesson, but a good lesson.

[0:19:48.7]

LM: Man. Certainly falling for the quick fixes, so hiring a consultant who's going to come in and fix this thing and ultimately make you a bunch of money. I remember, I was at this place where I really wanted – everybody was talking about how they had sales consultants and that's how they were able to make these big deals, and they would negotiate. I was like, "I need one of those." I remember I hired one. It was a complete waste of time. I spent a lot of money on this person and literally did not get a single sale after hiring a sales consultant.

That has just been, and I've done this a couple times. I've probably experienced this three different times, where I've hired consultants who were going to fix all my problems and I paid them thousands of dollars and I'm no better off. I can totally do it myself. Part of that is believing that someone else can do it, because you can't, or just not having belief in yourself, but also it's just that content reminder of there are no quick fixes.

Entrepreneurship is all about testing it, throwing it against the wall, and if sticks, great. It's not going to stick forever, so you have to constantly be iterating and adapting and evolving with your company, whatever your strategies are for marketing, or sales, or your product line, anything like that. Those have been some really, really painful moments, because my two biggest pet peeves in life are wasting time and wasting money. That falls into both those buckets.

I think for me, I also have learned that I have to give myself more credit. I always think that they're the expert, they're going to fix my problem, or they can do it and I can't. Really that comes down to more belief in yourself than anything else.

[0:21:37.7]

FT: I know it's tempting when someone – when you need help in your business, someone is there to say I can do this and it's going to be quick. It's tempting. I've been there. Been there.

[0:21:50.9]

LM: Yeah, just don't fall for it. I mean, also you're – I think what's interesting is for example, people who spend a lot of money with Facebook Ads managers, luckily that was one route I didn't go, because I heard too many horror stories about this. I get why you do it, because it's going to be really time-consuming to become an expert on this thing, but I guarantee it's much more empowering for you to be able to be in charge of that piece of your business, if it makes that big of a difference to your business too.

[0:22:18.5]

FT: All right, what's a money habit that you practice to support your goals to save more and everything else that you want to accomplish? Is there something that you do, like a check-in every day, or an app that you love?

[0:22:30.5]

LM: Yeah. I mean, I've tried on a lot of different apps, but really what works best for me is I have two debit cards, and each debit card also has a savings account attached to it. Essentially, I have two checking accounts and two savings accounts and they all are for different things. The minute I get paid, which I also started doing this year, I started paying myself a salary. It's not a lot, but I found that having that consistency is actually really good. A lot of female entrepreneurs, especially don't pay themselves, so that was the first thing was just getting on a schedule.

Now what I do, the minute I get that money, I put a certain percentage on one checking account, and that is for food and miscellaneous things like gas and food, or whatever for the month. I have one that is I set aside for rent and all the stuff that is life stuff that's not going away. Then I have one that I put for savings, whether that's putting money into my IRA at the end of the year, or it's just investing somewhere else, but that is my savings.

Then I have one that is my fund money. I can spend it on whatever I want, and that one usually has the smallest amount. It means when there's a sale at Nordstrom for the anniversary sale and you really want a pair of jeans, like if there's money in that big account, you can use that. I have found that for me, I actually have to put everything in its right compartment, and I switch debit card. I mean, I'm very regimented about it, and that has seemed to work for me, and that is something – I probably look in on my accounts. I used to do it a lot more. Now, I can mentally keep track, so I probably check in on my accounts a few times a month, versus every week.

I knew one friend who was doing it every day and I was like, “Oh, I could probably do that. That sounds fun.” Then I realized, if you didn't spend any money that day, you really don't need to do that. That's something I've been doing that has worked really well for me, and I've tried a lot of different apps. I think at the end of the day for my life right now, I want it simple. I didn't want any more tech. I just want it to be like, “I can do what the app is doing. I just need to be more routine with it.”

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FT: It sounds you have a modernized envelope system going for yourself.

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LM: Yeah, kind of. I think I would have done really well back in the days where you were writing checks and you would itemize each one and say what it was for. I probably would have thrived in that environment. Yeah, I do essentially.

[0:25:05.0]

FT: Lauren McGoodwin, thank you so much. The site is Career Contessa. Congratulations on the evolution of Career Contessa. Thank you for the work that you do. We know you have a podcast as well, where you asked me to come on. I'm so excited to air that with you when it's ready. Yeah, thanks so much. Have a great rest of your summer.

[0:25:24.5]

LM: Yeah, you too. Thank you so much for having me.

[END]