

EPISODE 354

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[INTRODUCTION]

[0:01:23]

FT: Welcome to So Money everyone. Welcome back, I'm your host, Farnoosh Torabi. Today's guest is an Emmy award-winning media producer and pioneer for female entrepreneurs. I met her back when I was super pregnant. She helped me promote *When She Makes More* and I'm so happy to now be able to give her the stage to share with the world all the good work that she's up to, Natalie MacNeil is here.

She's the author of two very successful books, most recently, *The Conquer Kit: A creative business planner for women entrepreneurs*. She's also the author of, *She Takes on the World: a guide to being your own boss, working happy and living on purpose*. I love that, "living on purpose" and her website, similar to the book, Shetakesontheworld.com, was recognized by Forbes as a top 10 website for entrepreneurial women and was also featured by Forbes Woman as one of the top 100 websites for women.

From Natalie, I learned where she invests her money, specific stocks and why. Taking her lemonade stand on the road as a kid and how she turned her little blog into a multimillion dollar business, what was the tipping point? Here we go, here's Natalie MacNeil.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:02:39]

FT: Natalie MacNeil, welcome to So Money. She takes on the world.

[0:02:44]

NM: Thank you so much for having me. I adore you, I love this show so much so it's an honor to be here.

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FT: We connected about 20 months ago. I was very pregnant and you host a wonderful show online and had me on talking about money. I was actually on your site now, She Takes on the World, and you have a section about money and I'm happy to say, and I'm proud to say that I've been featured on your site.

Tell listeners what it is that you do. I know what you do but I want to hear it from your own words because it's so multifaceted. I think the overarching thing is that you are all about entrepreneurship for women, then there's all these verticals.

[0:03:21]

NM: Yes, so with She Takes on the World, our focus is on women entrepreneurs and leaders. I believe that women starting businesses, women taking on leadership roles in various organizations can really make a huge impact on the world and that's something I am very, very excited about. So She Takes On the World is focused on women entrepreneurs.

Our flagship program is called The Conquer Club, which is a 12 month business incubator that connects women entrepreneurs to mentors and that's my main thing right now. That's what my team and I focus very heavily on and I write books. I also had a media and production company but I'm not running that anymore because I am full time doing She Takes On the World.

But in my former life and career, I am an Emmy award-winning media producer and have done interactive documentaries and online experimental films using all kind of technology like 360 degree technology that we were really building and using long before anyone else did. Now, it's starting to become more main stream and on YouTube then on Facebook, you can watch 360 videos but we were doing this years ago. That was my other life, my former life and now I'm very focused on She Takes On the World.

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FT: And your new book, *The Conquer Kit*, it's a creative business planner for women entrepreneurs is beautiful and the first of several books that you're doing in your book deal. Why make this the first?

[0:05:08]

NM: I wanted a business planner that felt very creative and fun to work on and very intuitive and I just wanted it to feel in alignment with me and my creative nature as an entrepreneur. So The Conquer Kit is really a canvass for your dreams and your goals and I invite readers to sketch and scribble and collage and write all over the pages while still actually developing a plan with those proven strategies for success that we've been able to implement in our businesses.

So *The Conquer Kit* has actually been my own planning process since around 2010. So I've used it for the last five-six years and I'm excited for myself to now have it in book form for creating my annual plan. It helps you create a full 12 month plan but it's not dated or anything so you could do it at any point. You can dive in and start your *Conquer Kit* at any point. It doesn't have to be at the beginning of a new year.

[0:06:13]

FT: So it's been road tested by you?

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NM: It has been road tested by me and the entire Conquer Club Community. They've got on board a few years ago so yes, it has been through many trials and tribulations over the last few years.

[0:06:27]

FT: Now, you were originally based in Canada. I want to hear your ability to breakthrough and most of your listeners and fans and followers are in the US, I think that's great. How did it work though being that you were in Canada that you were able to still have this global audience?

[0:06:50]

NM: I think that's just the power of online business today. I think we live in a very interconnected world and when I first started Shetakesontheworld.com, I was building my first business and traveling the world and documenting the experience on this little personal blog that I wrote called She Takes on the World.

That was back in 2008 and now, we reach a community of tens of thousands from all over the planet and I think when you're putting things out there online, you're creating content, you're being featured in the media, you never know who's watching or who is going to find you and it just so happened that we started building a very large base especially in New York, LA also in Dallas and Houston and some other parts of the US. That's where it really started to take hold and really just take root and it just grew from there.

So when you're putting things out there online, it is reachable by so many different people. It's not that we tried to focus exclusively on building a US base but that's just the way it turned out and now we reach readers in almost every country on the planet, which is why I love online

business. I love publishing online. You get to reach this whole world out there and that wasn't even possible 10, 15 even 20 years ago.

[0:08:28]

FT: And so tell us a little bit about what's on your plan for 2016 as you are mapping out your own business?

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NM: We are committed to doubling the business again. We've been doubling the business every year so this is another goal that we're setting for 2016 and it really comes down to having that solid team in place. I actually think I've held back on my growth the last couple of years to make sure we have the right foundation and the right systems in place.

To really build skyscrapers on top of and I'm ready to build those skyscrapers now so there will be another book. There will be a bigger better version of the Conquer Club because we made it bigger and better every year and we're also going to be launching a new company that I have invested in because I really believe in the power of meditation and mindset when bringing anything into the world.

I am a meditation and mudra teacher and that's going to become more and more part of my work as we move through this year as well. So that's a new company that I'll be investing in and I think it's great to invest in yourself. This was money that I actually pulled out of the stock market when just before it started to really dip.

I sold at that peak and I was like, "You know what? I think we're heading for a dip in the market so I'm going to pull that money out and invest it somewhere where I know I'm going to be able to generate returns over the next few years".

[0:10:06]

FT: For someone who's on the fence about meditation, me, I really want to skip the phase where you're getting acclimated to meditation. I just want to be able to meditate and have it be something that I can incorporate into my life and take advantage off but I think there is that barrier and there's that hurdle in the beginning of getting into that zone. What's your advice for some like me who's a beginner?

[0:10:35]

NM: I find that one of the biggest challenges people have is doing a longer meditation from the beginning. So when I first start meditating back 10 years ago with a small group of Buddhist monks in the middle of nowhere in China, I was invited to sit in meditation and it was never really forced on me.

So if I could only sit and quiet my mind for 20 seconds, they were very accepting of that, of doing it at your own pace and I feel like the biggest challenge is diving in and feeling like you have to sit for 20 minutes. And look, I work with a lot of busy moms and women who are managing their households and their business.

Sometimes finding 20 minutes is just not possible so what I'm doing with this new company is giving people meditations in as little as 10 seconds because the truth is, even if you are running at full pace through the day, I want people to be able to incorporate it into their day when they can. I have a red light meditation that you can do.

When you're sitting at a red light waiting and instead of looking around everywhere, looking at that strange person walking down the street, looking at that dog that's so cute across the street, you could just meditate for 30 seconds while the light is red. So I am trying to come up with more and more ways for people to just integrate it more into life instead of having it as this compartmentalized thing.

[0:12:18]

FT: Like six minute abs or whatever it is.

[0:12:21]

NM: Exactly.

[0:12:22]

FT: The seven minute workout, the 10 second meditation, I like it. Here's what I wanted to ask you earlier is that when you started out as a blogger and you described it as this little blog on the Internet, what was the tipping point? Every business has a tipping point at which point it suddenly has taken on a life of its own, and now you have to either tame it or set it free.

[0:12:46]

NM: Absolutely. It was a few years in when we started getting a lot of media attention and there was one feature that I did with Forbes and with that, we had thousands of new subscribers and followers overnight and it was after that happened and traffic was just booming that I knew I had to make a decision.

I was either going to dedicate a lot of time to it and make it a sustainable company. I knew that it had the potential to be something much bigger and that I could scale it probably way bigger than I would have been able to with the media and production company, that's how I felt at the time and it took me a few months of really contemplating that decision.

My business partner and I at the time, not my business partner for She Takes on the World, that I do by myself but with the media and production company, we had a long talk and decided that I would transition to do She Takes on the World full time and he was going to honor his art work, he's an artist and do that full time instead.

So it took about 12 months to actually transition into doing it full time but I just felt that deep calling that that is what I had to do and focus on and I just trusted that and listened to that. It was such a strong gut feeling I couldn't ignore it.

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FT: Yeah, one article sending you thousands of people.

[0:14:18]

NM: Yeah.

[0:14:18]

FT: That's telling.

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NM: Yeah and it was something that took time though so we put a 12 month plan in place. I wanted to make sure that I had money saved just in case we weren't able to hit revenue goals for the first year of She Takes On the World. So there were all these steps that I went through and I just made sure that I was very solid financially and in the business model for She Takes On the World before actually diving into it full time.

[0:14:49]

FT: I love that story. I'm glad I asked that question because I think some of my listeners are fascinated by the trajectory of bloggers who then become entrepreneurs through their blogs and I think that was a great, great case study. So let's transition Natalie to some money questions. You were asking me about money 20 months ago and now I want to ask you about money and ask you...

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NM: I love talking about money. It's my favorite subject.

[0:15:16]

FT: Oh good, really? Oh sweet.

[0:15:17]

NM: Yes, absolutely.

[0:15:18]

FT: Okay, well then we're in a good place. Tell me what's your money mantra, your financial philosophy?

[0:15:26]

NM: I believe in making money always work for me, but also make sure that I am having fun and living the life that I want to live. So for me, it's a very fine line between all the savings and then also still taking those big risk. I am a huge risk taker and that's something that I always have to be mindful of as well and something that my partner and I talk a lot about because he's not quite at the same level of risk taking as I am.

We go back and forth on that a lot, but it's just the balance. It's the balance between investing and saving for the future and also living the life that I want to be living now because we don't know what's going to happen in the future. We have no idea, we have to enjoy our money while we can.

[0:16:23]

FT: You mentioned earlier taking money out of the stock market to invest in the meditation business, do you have someone who watches your money or is the facilitator for your investments?

[0:16:35]

NM: I did have somebody do it. They had a portfolio and I have my own portfolio that I manage myself. My portfolio was out performing my manager's portfolio and because of that, I pulled my money out of there, put it into my own portfolio and I did all the management for both myself and my spouse for the last, about four years.

Now, like I've said, I have taken that out and I'm investing it in my own business because the returns that I am seeing right now and the growth I'm seeing in our company, I know that that money is better invested in my own company as big of a risk that may look to other people. I know that I'll be able to get a bigger return that I will in the market over the next few years.

[0:17:27]

FT: Well, I have to ask, when you do invest in the market, what's your strategy?

[0:17:32]

NM: I like to invest in companies that I know, like, and trust. I invest in a lot of companies that I use myself. For example, I got into Facebook the day that that hit the market not because that I thought that it was going to produce an immediate return. I was in it for the long run, but because Facebook had been so critical in me being actually able to grow my business.

Facebook has been a huge part of our growth and our revenue so it was a company that I believed in and had success with and I wanted to invest in it. Another company that I invested in based on their philosophies was Whole Foods because back in the day, when I was doing a lot of traveling, when I was first starting my business about 10 years ago, Whole Foods was my first stop when I would land in the US and I was traveling there.

Because I needed that healthy food, I wanted my daily smoothie and those were the things that kept me energized, especially when I was on the road and I just believed so strongly in what they were doing that I invested in that company and I've always had a lot of success investing in the companies that I really believe in and that I believe are doing good in the world. So I stay away from everything that I just don't feel in alignment with even if I think it would produce a big return.

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FT: So you do do individual stocks as well as maybe some funds?

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NM: That's right. I had a combination. I did do a lot of stocks because I'm young and I had that money that I could take the bigger risks on. So I would say I had about 75% of my investments in individual stocks and about 25% in mutual funds.

[0:19:40]

FT: All right Natalie, tell me a little bit about your childhood. I'm curious to learn how you made — like now, you are very intelligent with money and I'm wondering if your childhood influenced you in a positive way with money or maybe it was the opposite? What was your most memorable money moment as a kid?

[0:20:03]

NM: I have I think a negative and a positive here because when my parents had me, they were very, very young. My dad was still in school, they had a lot of student debt, they were in their early 20's and we lived in a trailer park for the first few years of my life. My mom was always talking about money when I was growing up.

I remember her always talking about whether or not there was going to be enough and it was something that I felt was put on me as a child and it was something that I would worry about from a very young age and I think because of that, I always wanted more money and I remember as a kid always wanting to make money.

I had that entrepreneurial spark. I was always the kid with the lemonade stand and I grew my lemonade stand way past lemonade and into baked goods and all kinds of different beverages and I would take my lemonade stand with me. I was like, "I'm not just going to wait on a corner

because X number of people are going to come by on the corner but if I go door to door, I'm in control of how many people I can reach today." So I had this cooler that I made with my dad on the back of a wagon and I would actually have my own little travelling lemonade beverage stand.

[0:21:36]

FT: You took it on road, is what you did.

[0:21:37]

NM: I did because and I made more money that way and as I made that money, I always wanted to save it and put it away. I was very responsible with it. I would take it to the bank. I liked to press my bills so I didn't like any bills scrunched up. I had a deep respect for my money so I would put them into books to flatten them before taking them to the bank because I wanted to be able to lay down these nice flat crisp bills when I got to the bank.

So I think a lot of that has come into play in my adult money life and it took me a long time to let go of that belief that there's never enough or that we might run out of money which is a fear that I had as a kid because my parents had to worry about money. They had debts to pay off, they weren't earning a lot at the time. It was a struggle for them when I was a child.

They're doing very well now and have been very successful but it was really hard when we were kids so I worried about money for a very long time and I always wanted to have a lot of it and for it to all be within my control so I would never have to worry about it. And now I feel like I finally got to that place and I do trust that I will never have to worry about money now.

[0:23:02]

FT: And what I'm hearing too from your story is that you are very much a self-starter, you want to be in control and honestly, at the end of the day, those are some awesome attributes to have when it comes to money because if you are on the other side of that continuum that you think that your money is going to take care of itself, that's just not going to work out for you.

I think that's a wonderful lesson to learn even if it was backed by some fear or some anxiety. You know what? Sometimes I say my mother put the fear of God in me when I was younger, I would make sure that I wouldn't get into debt and I thank her for that.

[0:23:41]

NM: Yeah, me too. My mom basically told us on a regular basis from our teenage years onward that debt was the devil and because of that, I never ever wanted to take on debt to the point where when I was in university, I worked full time at a car factory. I made very, very good money there and I ran my own business through university because I wanted to be able to pay for every semester as that bill came up and I refused to take on any kind of student loan.

And because of that, I finished school with no debt and actually with quite a bit of savings that was really helpful because I decided to start my own business instead of getting a "real job" and I've just always, like you said, had that fear of God in me from my mother from a very, very young age.

[0:24:41]

FT: Thank you to our moms. Talk about failure a little bit Natalie. What's your biggest money failure? I'm so curious now because it seems like you do nothing wrong with your money.

[0:24:51]

NM: I don't know about that. So biggest failure. Okay, so first of all, my first business that I ended up starting out of university was a big flop and it was after that that I started that production and media business which was a much bigger success and I felt like I couldn't do it on my own so I took on business partners that I probably should not — well not probably, I should not have been working with.

And whenever you're working with somebody else and I think this goes for relationships, any kind of relationship, you have to be on the same page when it comes to money and how you

want to invest it and how you want to spend it and I don't think we have those conversations enough. I know I didn't in that first business and that was a reason why it went totally sideways.

I was lucky that I trusted my gut feeling of "this isn't going to go well, we're not going to get this on track, back on track and I'm going to be better off doing this on my own because I don't think we are ever going to be on the same page about some of these big financial decisions that have to be made when you're starting a business".

So that was a really good lesson to learn just about how open you need to be about money in any relationship that you're entering into and it's not something that we talked about enough. The other thing was when I was 18 and I could get my brokerage account set up and start trading, it was — like I just wanted to jump in right away.

I didn't always do the proper amount of research on those investments and because of that, there were a couple losses. I was lucky because there were also a few really big successes that balanced out the whole portfolio but there were a couple big losses on one fund and one stock in particular that taught me a really great lesson on that research that has to go into it ahead of time.

Actually, I'll give you one more that was a really big lesson. When I did let somebody else manage my money and it was a fund that someone else was managing that I invested in, they totally messed that up and totally lost a lot of my money as well and it was a very good lesson in whether or not to trust other people with my money.

I'm glad that I experienced that at a young age because I've been all in with my own investing and just taking it all on by myself and making sure that I could do the research and I trust myself now to manage my money more than I would another person unless I really got to know them first and I'm grateful for that.

[0:27:54]

FT: That's so inspiring. I feel like there's no reason why more people can't have more of an eyeball, eyeballs on their money, their investments that I think I just had a guest on the show. I

don't know if he's aired yet. I interviewed him recently. He'll be coming on soon, we talk a lot about how the financial services industry, it's in their best interest to make it seem like this is a very difficult thing to understand.

They try to really mystify it because they want us to feel insecure in some ways about our money so we give them our money and then they can make money with our money but at the end of the day, it's not that complicated. It takes time though.

[0:28:37]

NM: Yeah and the first person I worked with, that was exactly the case and I took business in school. I understood how to read financial statements, I understood how to go through a company's annual report and skip over all the shiny nuggets that they try to include at the beginning and actually dig into the financials.

I knew how to do that but this guy made me feel so stupid and because of that I was like, "Okay, maybe I can't do this on my own. Maybe I really do need to invest this and let someone else do this because maybe it's a lot more complicated than I think it is," and he ended up losing a lot of my money and I was able to make a much bigger return on my own.

Again, I'm glad that was a lesson I learned when I was really young. I was 19 or 20 when that happened because I opened my first portfolio when I was 18. As soon as I turned 18, that was the thing that I did on my 18th birthday was went to the bank and opened up that portfolio because I wanted to get into investing.

I learned a lot in those first couple of years and now, I would be open to somebody else managing my money at this point but I would interview people first and I think it would be a long process of figuring out who that right person is that I really trust and probably getting referrals from other people as well who have had financial managers that they've worked with who have done a great job.

So I do think people need to do their research and really make sure they are working with the right person and still empowering yourself to know what's going on as well. I do think that's really important and you can't keep your head in the sand.

[0:30:25]

FT: Yes, true. Absolutely. Let's do some So Money fill-in-the-blanks shall we?

[0:30:30]

NM: Sounds good.

[0:30:31]

FT: Okay, if I won the lottery tomorrow, the first thing I would do is _____.

[0:30:37]

NM: Invest it all in my business with just a small amount for myself and for the Conquer Academy that we helped built in Tanzania a couple of years ago that I'm very involved in still.

[0:30:54]

FT: Do you travel there?

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NM: I did, yeah. I was just there, the last time was six months ago and it's just a magical experience to be connected to the teachers and the students and to know that there are things that I can continue to do and we have lots of big plans there and I like seeing that my money and my success is doing good for other people. It's very important to me.

[0:31:19]

FT: One thing I wish I had learned about money growing up is _____.

[0:31:25]

NM: That there is enough for all of us and that one person's success never takes away from another person's success. There is room for all of us to be wealthy and to have what we need.

[0:31:40]

FT: It's almost like one of my guest once told me her philosophy which is, "There's more where that came from".

[0:31:46]

NM: Exactly yeah.

[0:31:48]

FT: One thing that I spend on that makes my life easier or better is _____.

[0:31:53]

NM: First class air fare.

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FT: Have you tried Jet Blue Mint?

[0:31:58]

NM: No.

[0:32:00]

FT: It's awesome.

[0:32:01]

NM: What is Jet Blue Mint?

[0:32:01]

FT: It's their first class, they didn't ever have first class in Jet Blue.

[0:32:04]

NM: Oh I have never flown Jet Blue, that's awesome. I will definitely check it out. I usually take Air Canada flights because I'm Canadian so all my international flights, I love those sky pods and when you have to get off a plane and you have to work right away, not having slept the whole flight just makes a big difference. When you can lie flat and have that little sky pod, it's magical.

[0:32:28]

FT: It's heaven, it's a little bit of a 30,000 feet above the year heaven.

[0:32:32]

NM: Exactly. I'm willing to invest in those first class air tickets.

[0:32:37]

FT: When I donate, I like to give to _____ because _____.

[0:32:41]

NM: Organizations that care about an ROI because I think there are too many charities that mismanage money and it's very important that when you give, you are making sure that that organization is looking at the return and looking at investing that money, not just a return on investment but a return on impact as well.

How is that impact going to ripple out in the community? Whenever I am choosing causes to support and it's a huge part of what I do, a big percentage of our profits go to causes. *The Conquer Kit*, 50% of my royalties are committed to building the secondary school in the community that our Conquer Academy is in.

You just have to make sure that your money is being invested in the right way and that it's not being wasted or going toward overhead for some of these big charities that really mismanage money. I think it is really important that you are choosing causes that you can follow up with as well.

So for everything that I do, I have a cause that is aligned with that and a percentage of profit is always going toward a cause for everything that we're launching or everything that we're doing. So right now, we're very focused on the Conquer Academy and that community and the kind of impact we can make but I do want people to be very mindful when it comes to their charitable givings.

[0:34:07]

FT: And last but not the least, I am Natalie MacNeil, I'm So Money because _____.

[0:34:11]

NM: I make really big things happen from nothing and that is really empowering because I know that if everything was taken away from me tomorrow, I have everything that I need within me to be able to work and get it all back and then some.

[0:34:33]

FT: Well, I can just say in the last 40 minutes you have inspired me to be a little more involved in my financial planning and for those who've listened every day, may be you are already catching onto my train of thought these days which is that maybe I should move my money someplace else to get managed.

I have a financial planner, I love her but I'm just really concerned about fees and I also learned from you that you shouldn't ever wait for opportunities. You really need to go after them yourself, whether that's a financial opportunity or a career opportunity or a personal opportunity. So for all those reasons Natalie, thank you so much. Congratulations on your new book.

[0:35:14]

NM: Thank you so much, I really appreciate it.

[END]