

**EPISODE 987**

*“MH: Being on the road and meeting so many women especially women of color, they told me that there are just many of them aren’t even asking, right? They are waiting for their boss or their manager to come in like tap them on the shoulder and say, “It’s your time for raise,” and I realize in my experience, it never happened when I waited, right? It is very rare.”*

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:51.1]

**FT:** Welcome to So Money, everybody. You know, it is not secret that women make less than men. The gender pay gap is alive and well, women make 80 cents to every dollar that a man makes for doing equivalent work but lesser known is that women of color have an even larger pay gap. It is kind of a chasm. Black women are in 61 cents for every dollar earned by their white male coworkers and my guest today is here to help close that gap and also, create more equality at the workplace for women of color.

Welcome to So Money everybody, I am your host, Farnoosh Torabi. Minda Harts knows how challenging it is for women of color to advance in the workplace and she wants to change that through her career development platform, The Memo LLC and her book, *The Memo*, she provides a roadmap for women to not only navigate but change the system that they are working within and she makes it clear that yes, the discrimination you are feeling, those micro aggressions, they are real — and we need to acknowledge them so we can change our reality.

Minda and I talked about the impedes for her book, the ugly truths that keep women of color from getting a seat at the table in corporate America and how everybody can work together, people of color, white people to create a more inclusive work environment.

Here is Minda Harts.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:02:12.2]

**FT:** Minda Harts, welcome to So Money.

[0:02:14.4]

**MH:** So happy to be here thank you.

[0:02:15.8]

**FT:** Thank you for writing your book, it is so important that we feel included in the conversation as women when we're talking about work and while there is so many books out there that are written for women, you really wanted to address women of color because you felt like this wasn't really a conversation that we were having for real like with real honesty and real strategy. So tell us about what inspired you to write your book and it has been now about six months, so what has been the outcome, since you've released it?

[0:02:50.7]

**MH:** Yeah, it's really been crazy. I literally just this past weekend came off a 28 city book tour and I wasn't sure what the outcome would be. You know the book came out at the end of August and it is the first book about women of color and our experiences in the workplace by a major publisher. And so, putting I spent 15 years in corporate America and I was always one of the only ones, one of the only black women or women of color.

And so you tend to feel isolated when you are the only one. Yes as women, we do experience levels of oppression at times but it really is different when you're a woman of color. For example, I talk about changing my name just so that I would get the interviews. You know sometimes, other women don't experience that. My hair, I talked to other women who had been told, "Why don't you wear your pretty hair today?"

You know all of those certain micro aggressions and biases that we don't address or that hasn't been addressed and I think in order to create an equitable workplace, we have to talk about the experiences of all women.

[0:03:58.3]

**FT:** Indeed and you know just to go back to *Lean In*, for a second, one of the criticisms I think that was the fall out of the book although there were many things that I liked about *Lean In*, one of the sort of annoyances was that here we go again telling women how they need to behave and act to sort of fit into a model that is otherwise rigid and patriarchal — and so when you are writing *The Memo*, what considerations did you make as far as there is obviously advice that you can give your readers.

But there is also systemic problems that individuals can't really solve for. So how did you reconcile that?

[0:04:37.5]

**MH:** Yeah that is a great question and you know, yes *Lean In*. It definitely really puts in fire underneath to tell my career story in those women of color because I don't think that the workplace is created equal and granted there was some really great advice that *Lean In* had, I think sometimes it is different when you don't have a certain pedigree as a women in the workplace to build your network.

And if you are not in the room already then it is really hard to *Lean In* and so I think for at least in my social circles with other women of color, professional woman of color that I was with we talk about *Lean In* just in many other career books that we just didn't see ourselves in and so I wanted to write a book in which, you know, black and brown women, women of color saw themselves a little differently and that others who weren't women of color could read about some of the things that we deal with.

And so for the first part of the book, I take you on a journey in terms of some of the I guess compromises, sacrifices that I made in my career and what I didn't realize at the time was that I

was making these concessions for some people in my environment that wouldn't even learn how to pronounce my full government, right? And so sometimes when you make all of these concessions, you realize, "Wow, this is really a detriment to my overall career health."

And so I wanted to write a book in which, you know, going into this next decade that women of color would be able to be a little free-er and hopefully our allies inside the workplace, those managing diverse talent would understand some of the unique challenges that some of their talent maybe facing that they hadn't even considered and so that is part of why we need to tell various narratives of career stories because again, all women don't experience the workplace the same.

[0:06:21.6]

**FT:** You know you have been on this book tour, so when I am emailing you I have been getting an auto-reply in some cases and it describes how to get in touch with you if it is urgent and one of the things is, "If you are interested in having me speak and interview me, here is who you can call or connect with P.S. I have a speaking fee." That is explicitly in the email, which I think is so bold and spot on, but I think some people would be afraid to put that out there.

Because they would be worried that it would immediately exclude them from opportunities. You made a conscious decision to put that in that email and I wonder going back through your history of work, what inspired you to do that and was this something that has been successful for you?

[0:07:06.2]

**MH:** You know, I am glad you brought that up because I always would.

[0:07:10.2]

**FT:** Yeah, I notice that. I was like, "Good for her."

[0:07:13.6]

**MH:** Well, it is funny because, you know, women will email me and they'll say the one thing that they comment on is, "I can't believe you'd be so bold to put that you have a speaking fee inside your email," and for me, I have to tell you, Farnoosh, that for me, finding my voice inside the workplace was like a metamorphosis, right? If you were to ask the Minda 10 years ago, which you have drafted an auto response in which I was so clear about my expectations in former relationship, I would have said, "Oh no," right?

But what I realized was if I am not my best advocate, if I don't put some respect on my own check, in my own talent then I leave it in the hands of someone else and I think as women and as a speaker and you probably know this, there is so many people who reach out and say, "Can you speak for free?" And it's like well, this is how I make my living, you know? You wouldn't go to McDonalds and ask them to make you hamburgers for free.

And so, I figured that one of the things I would do and I just started doing that at the second half of 2019 was be very clear and so if you want me to come, I want to come too, but let's establish that there is a fee and then we can work from there and so it is really been great because people still who really want to talk about this in our serious about equity for all women, they continue to reach out and we talk about and negotiate what that fee is.

And then those who don't obviously they self-select but I think those are the environments I want to be in and I get to create that environment for myself.

[0:08:46.6]

**FT:** That is so smart and I love that you've had a positive experience with that because I think the guess is that, "Oh this is going to necessary diminish my opportunities," and perhaps yeah, there will be some people that will see that and go, "Well, we don't have a budget," but at least you're right. It kind of takes an elephant out of the room right away because I think we always dance around the money bit for too long.

[0:09:14.2]

**MH:** Oh, definitely, and I am sure that people are like, “Who is this woman think she is? Is she like Melinda Palmer or something?” Which is fine but I realize that we all start somewhere, right? And you want to build relationships with people who respect what you bring to the table and it has really been helpful and it’s been challenging me. So even in my own like I had to lean into my courage and say, “Okay, if this is what I offer then, you know, let’s have that conversation there” and then people will fall for that.

I can only control the part of the equation that I can and that is letting people know that I do have that fee.

[0:09:50.4]

**FT:** It is so hard to gain that power to feel like you are in control and one of the things, one of the themes in your book is about reclaiming yourself for the power in walking away. I was just interviewing a celebrity, Busy Phillips about how she negotiates for herself in Hollywood and she professed and said, “Look I am going to give you advice but two things, I have a very specific industry that doesn’t necessarily track with others. I don’t work in corporate and two, I am a privilege white woman. So I just want to say that.”

And I really appreciated that because it is important to say these things, right? Because, it is not going to necessarily track for all people. She said to me, “I am a privilege white woman and so that is important to keep in mind when I tell you things like there have been opportunities that I have been presented with that were below my pay rate and I walked away. Would I have been able to walk away if I wasn’t as well-known, if I was not a privileged white woman? I don’t know.”

And so I want to ask you that question. There is a danger sometimes in walking away because you’re ability to ultimately claim power and a fee and seniority in your role and in your work, you have to build that momentum and maybe you do start off with — at zero and then you leverage that to ultimately get where you want to go. So how do you know when it is okay to walk away?

[0:11:16.6]

**MH:** Yeah, I am glad that you put that into context and I think it is important to have that discussion. When I started my company, The Memo in 2015, I was taking speaking gigs for free, right? Because I wanted to hone in on my skills and in my bravery and those sorts of things. So it took some time for me to get to that place where I felt comfortable enough to be able to say, “You know this is my fee.”

And there are still times where I do things because they resonate with my mission, right? And so I work with folks — but it took a couple of years before I was able to say, “You know, this is what my fees are,” and I think that regardless of what industry you are in, obviously once you have a certain level of expertise, then you should get paid for your time and your talent and I think only you can decide what that is but, it took over probably a 100 unpaid or very minimally paid speaking engagements. It took TED X talks, it took a lot before I was able to say, “Hey, I am pretty good at this and then obviously there is a want for what I have to talk about and so even in my mind, I still waver because I really am an introvert and so I am like, “Oh my God am I really doing this?”

But I have to tell you Farnoosh, one woman said to me, “Minda if you wrote this book and people want you at the moment you are in demand to talk about The Memo. If you are not expecting a certain fee, what do you think that means for the ones behind you and coming up behind you?” And so when she said that, I realize that I had a responsibility to make sure that I stay here because I don’t want them to take anything less than what they are worth.

[0:13:00.9]

**FT:** Yes, it is not just about you sometimes.

[0:13:03.2]

**MH:** It is bigger than me.

[0:13:04.1]

**FT:** And it is much bigger than you, which I think is so empowering. It is a reminder of just how powerful you are and just to put out there, black women earn 61 cents for every dollar earned by their white male coworkers. You know they say it is going to take who knows when, for the average women to reach pay parity. What is the outlook you think for women of color?

[0:13:27.9]

**MH:** Yeah and you know, those stats don't lie. I mean those are the facts at the moment and I think for us and I talk about this, I have a whole chapter in the book about my negotiations and things I have been in and part of that is really asking because being on the road and meeting so many women, and especially women of color, they told me that just many of them aren't even asking, right?

They are waiting for their boss or their manager to come in and tap them on the shoulder and say, "It is your time for a raise," and I realize in my experience, it never happened when I waited, right? It is very rare — and so making sure that I have all of my statistics, I have my notes, I have my case for support I really have to put it out there and we have to be our biggest advocates and so I did that when I was in a traditional workforce.

And now as an entrepreneur, I realize that I have to do that even more because the paychecks look a little bit different when you are out on your own. So I have to advocate for myself. So we can control the ask, right?

[0:14:27.6]

**FT:** Yes — so much of this is psychological and I read that you're right, I think about this in your book that there were earlier days when you had to really kind of give yourself a pep talk. You had to change the story in your head and each morning before leaving your car, you'd give yourself a pep talk where you would be able to then go into the workplace and fight against whatever the micro aggression of the day was going to be or even some cases, direct racism. What was a pep talk like, how did it go?

[0:15:00.6]



**MH:** Well, it was mixed with some tears and like some Beyoncé lyric if I am being honest with that.

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**FT:** Perfect cocktail. Perfect.

[0:15:08.8]

**MH:** Yeah but I realized that I still had to remind myself of my worth even if it was wavering at times in the environment I was working in but reminding myself that I worked really hard to get here. I belong to any room that I walk into. Now that may not be the one that I need to stay in, right? But I had to remind myself that we have worked too hard to lean out now and I think it is really important to tell ourselves a new story every day.

Because, you know, the life we live, the world we live in it can be sometimes a lot to take in and sometimes we have to rewrite that new story every morning to remind us about the reasons why we are doing what we're doing.

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**FT:** How do you fight racism at work? Is there a path to success there because it seems like you talk about what was it, the double bind, you know? Like if you are experiencing gender discrimination at work that is one challenge, and then you are experiencing perhaps layered onto that, racial discrimination. Do you feel like there is safety in talking about that at work and going into the powers that be and talking about, "Hey, my manager is racists," have you heard of stories about that being successful?

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**MH:** I probably heard more stories of where it hasn't been successful right? Part of that is when you are one of the only ones and the majority is not experiencing what you are experiencing,

then they try to tell you sometimes that what you are experiencing isn't what it is, right? And so it is diminishing how you feel about the situation and so I think for many of us, we just don't even say anything because we know we are going to be met with, "Well no, so and so didn't mean any harm," when you know that that harm eventually means something to you.

And so I think that, what is going to change the way we dismantle racism in the workplace is when our colleagues, our allies realize that, "Oh I just can't stay silent on this, maybe I should step in or talk to somebody or acknowledge it," because you can't fight it alone, right? Success is not a solo sport and so those times when I was in the workplace and something racist was said in the office and I was the only one there and my colleagues would just look the other way.

It is like I was hoping that they would step up for me but some of them, many of them never did because they didn't want to get involved and I think it is going to take all hands on deck and we can no longer just turn a cheek to racism — unless that is the environment that we want to create, right? But if we say we want equity for all then it is going to take some people leaning into their courage as well.

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**FT:** That is a great transition to my next question, which was that you have in your book advice for white readers who want to create inclusive work environments. So what can we do? What can I do, to make sure that there is the change that I want to see in the world, happening at work?

[0:17:59.7]

**MH:** Well I appreciate you just having this conversation on your podcast because I think sometimes, the privilege that many of us have regardless of what intersection we sit at, is that sometimes we're not thinking about how others experience things and so the book like *The Memo*, if you are not a woman of color it is important that you read about what it's like because I am sure you sit next to one, right?

Or you manage a diverse talent so you would be a better manager knowing what some of those issues are but I think the other part is understanding our language and in that chapter, I really talk about some of the things that historically are said to people of color, that I know we are well-intentioned but they make us feel bad, right? So, I am color blind like I literally was in a Lyft ride for about 40 minutes and the Lyft driver just kept saying, “I am color blind, I am color blind.”

And I am like, “Okay guy,” you know what I mean? But I’m like — I want you to see me and I think that is the issue. We have been so afraid of race and we don’t have to be. I am a black woman, that is who I am. I want you to see that and so I would love to redefine ally-ship into success partners where at the end of day it is really bridging the empathy gap.

[0:19:13.6]

**FT:** And do we start with our kids at home? It’s funny, like my son who is five and a half, he is starting to pick up on people’s different skin color and skin tones. I don’t think — I mean we don’t really talk about — we don’t go into depth about race yet because it is like this delicate balance, right? How much attention do we give it to the point that he is thinking like, “Oh this is a thing,” like you know and that maybe that the differences.

He can then start to internalize that as like these differences constitute conversations, which may mean to him, in his little brain that like it is more serious than it should be you know?

[0:19:49.6]

**MH:** Yeah, no I agree. I know that it can be hard. I think we can all do small steps, right? Small acts of courage and meaning like if you currently don’t have anyone not you per say but if those don’t have any people of color or underserved communities in their network, you know finding ways to expose our children to others, right? So it is not like this weird thing that you just see somebody.

[0:20:16.6]

**FT:** It is not a teachable moment, right? If you just see multi culturalism and diversity and that is part of why we live where we do and I grew up with that. I grew up going to school with a lot of different kids from different races and different religions and different household dynamics, single moms, two dads and so I think that for me it was such a strong foundation because I just accepted, at a very early age, that the world is vast.

And that I am just one person on this planet that the world doesn't revolve around me that no one is more dominant than the other person and I think that that's crucial — that yes, conversation is important but you really start to believe what you believe when you see it.

[0:21:03.7]

**MH:** Exactly. I mean, literally when I was I guess you could say in my formative years up until I was about 12 years old I have lived in Southern California and it was very diverse atmosphere and I never thought much about I was never the only one of anything but then once I was a teenager, my parents moved to a small rural town in Illinois and I was the only one and it was the first time that I felt out of place, right?

It was the first time that some of my Caucasian friends had seen a black person and I felt all of the things that were coming out of them from not being exposed to this and I think it does us harm when we don't expose even just each of us, even as adults. If we have been normalized in one situation that it is really important as we go into the next decade, how are we going to change the way even we show up in the world for others.

[0:21:55.4]

**FT:** Let us shift gears a little bit Minda, to talking more about money and yeah, I mean you have already shared a bit about your upbringing. How was money introduced to you as a child in terms of like when you think about your childhood and money, what is a story that comes to mind that really captures it?

[0:22:17.0]

**MH:** In my home, I actually have to say I grew up in a very low income family so money was very scarce but one thing that I saw was my grandmother like she was really, really good about her money and she would always tell me, you know, “Get a saving account, you deposit your money in the bank,” and so I really watched my grandmother as I get older and I saw how she was – how she made her money stretch, right?

And she lived below her means and so that was something that was really been etched in my brain as I grew up and entered corporate America to really make my money stretch so that I have a savings account and so I am really happy that my grandmother instilled some of those money principles to really respect your money in a way and have a good relationship with it.

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**FT:** And why do you think she was so good with money?

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**MH:** Yeah, my grandmother, she was a single mother of five girls and so she didn't have a high school diploma and so she really went out and realized that every dollar counted and so I am so happy for her because she was able to buy her first home and help some of her daughters buy their first homes and this is a woman who probably made an equivalent to maybe \$10 an hour and she was able to make that money stretch.

And so seeing her do that I realized that you don't have to be rich to have a good way of living, right? And so for me it was just really good to see her as a good money role model.

[0:23:48.2]

**FT:** It is so important, and when you really think about the New Year or the beginning of a new decade, a New Year, 2020 so exciting. What do you hope for your finances this year? Is there a financial goal you have in mind? We ask this question in partnership with our sponsor, Chase, we are really curious to learn about guests financial resolutions.

[0:24:12.0]

**MH:** Yes, so continuing to add to my savings account but the other thing that I hope to do in 2020 is help invest in women owned business because I think it is really a catalyst for closing the wealth gap and so I want to be able to do more angel investing and so I am making sure that I am living below my means so I can help others and invest in their business as well.

[0:24:35.3]

**FT:** And book number two? I mean I got to ask a new author who has done very well with her first, I am sure there is talk about the next book.

[0:24:43.3]

**MH:** Well, yeah there is. There is a talk of it and I will share with you that we are actually talking about a younger version of *The Memo* because to your point earlier, some of these things that we learn, we learn as young adults, young children and so what would it look like if we had some of these conversations early on and so we're playing around with that right now.

[0:25:04.2]

**FT:** And so if you had to give advice to a younger Minda or a younger reader of *The Memo* who is looking ahead and optimistic about getting her job and working her way through her career, what is some strategic advice you would give her that would necessarily shield her from any of the still lingering racism or inequalities at the workplace?

[0:25:31.0]

**MH:** Yeah that is a great question. I think I would tell the younger Minda and I would tell any women really is make sure that you interview your future employer as well. I think when I entered the workplace and every job I had, I was pretty much just happy to get the role, right? This is great money, it is a title change and I was just grateful to be at the table and in the room but I didn't ask, always, the right questions of them.

You know maybe I had asked certain questions, I would have found out what type of environment I would have been exposed to. So I think remembering to interview your employer too because it is very – we give the power away sometimes and I could have asked those questions about culture and environment and predecessors and I think I would have gotten down to a lot of that. I would have avoided some of those bad environments, those toxic environments so remember that you have the power as well.

[0:26:20.4]

**FT:** And just to add onto that maybe not so much for someone who's getting her first job because you don't really have any money yet but I think your ability to walk away from a situation that reads bad to you is having money, right? When you feel financially empowered that is agency to become more choosy, right? Because sometimes we are just happy to be there because it is paying the bills, frankly.

I wish for a day where everybody especially women have the financial security where they can say no more for whatever reason. It doesn't feel safe, it doesn't align, they want to wait for something better that is a change that I would love to see and it is so great that you are sharing this message with all generations now. It is so important and I hope 2020 will be a year of progress, I think it will be.

[0:27:10.6]

**MH:** I think so too.

[0:27:11.3]

**FT:** And as long as you are out there, I think we'll be definitely moving the needle. Thank you so much Minda Hart.

[0:27:17.2]

**MH:** Thank you.

[END]