

**EPISODE 1009**

***BA:** I remember taking the SAT and trying to come to the US. A friend of my dad told my dad and said, “Oh! Are you going to send a girl to America to go study? What happened to all your sons?” That was literally the kind of conversations that were happening back then. My dad looked at him and was like, “No. My daughter is very equally smart, and she deserves the same opportunities that everybody, boy or girl, deserves.”*

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:01:03]

**FT:** That is our guest today, Blessing Adesiyan describing her background. Born and raised in Nigeria, facing patriarchal standards. Arriving in the United States ambitious, eager to learn, eager to achieve, Blessing went on to earn degrees in chemical engineering, energy management, and also an MBA. She is now a mother of three, married to her secret weapon husband for over 10 years, and is a founder of an exciting platform for women called Mother Honestly.

But she says the patriarchy is still holding women back when it comes to mastering motherhood and work, and she is fast building a community to bring women together through online content, workshops, events, and everything in-between to elevate mothers to live bigger, better, and deeper lives.

Welcome to So Money, everybody. I’m your host, Farnoosh Torabi. I first learned about Blessing just through the grapevine. We connected as two moms who are actively working to help other women thrive in motherhood, in their careers. I’ll be speaking at her event, Mother Honestly, later this fall in October in New York. But I hadn’t really gotten a chance to learn more about the woman behind the mission. Who is Blessing? What were the financial lessons she learned growing up? What are the challenges that she still sees present for women and then who want to parent and have careers at the same time? What are some solutions? Blessing Adesiyan.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:02:29]

**FT:** Blessing Adesiyan, welcome to So Money.

[00:02:31]

**BA:** Thank you. Thank you so much for having me, Farnoosh.

[00:02:34]

**FT:** We've been in touch for some time now through your work. You do many – You wear many hats, but specifically we connected over Mother Honestly, which is your platform that you started sort of as a passion project. But that has really taken on an incredible life of its own. We'll talk more about Mother Honestly in a moment. But you yourself as a woman, as a mother, as a professional, you have so much going on. I mean, just reading your bio, you obviously are ambitious. You're well-educated. But yet there was an aspect of your life that you felt was not solvable as far as –

This complexity of being a working mother for you was a bit of a conundrum. I mean, you call it sort of like a cultural gap that you experienced here. You are originally I believe from Nigeria?

[00:03:24]

**BA:** Correct.

[00:03:25]

**FT:** Right. Maybe we could start there a little bit with – Given that you have all this professional and educational experience, and you have three children, you felt like this was an area that for you and I think for a lot of women, working moms, almost felt like there wasn't a roadmap. Take us back to that moment where you realized, "I need help."

[00:03:48]

**BA:** Yeah, absolutely. This was after my son was born. I have an 11-year-old girl and I took about nine years to focus on my career, build up my career, as well as save a lot of money. Nine years later, I had my son, and that was when it hit me that there was a gap in how society cannot relates to women at work and in life.

When I had my son, I was home. I had the pleasure of having four months of maternity leave through my employer, and I was very, very grateful for that. When I took that maternity leave, I realize that there was just so much information out there for breast-feeding, homeschooling, which was great, because I needed those things. How often should my son be sleeping? Is he getting enough milk?

After that phase of kind of learning how to change a diaper again, how to – What's the best car seats and all those different things, I realized that there was nobody speaking to me personally as a mom, as an ambitious woman that just had a baby. Of course, I'm now thinking about going back to work. How do I do that with confidence and resilience? How do I really continue to nurture my goals and my ambition and mother hood?

There was nobody speaking about that. So that caught me unawares, because I thought for sure this is America. There should be some sort of solution for working mothers.

[00:05:23]

**FT:** What was modeled for you growing up, because you're not from this country? So you came with an expectation that America was going to necessarily have all the answers, regardless of what journey or whatever path you wanted to pursue. Did you – What was life like growing up? What was modeled for you?

[00:05:39]

**BA:** Yes. I grew up in a much more patriarchal society than America, obviously. I was the –

[00:05:47]

**FT:** Although we're still in a patriarchy. Let's be honest.

[00:05:49]

**BA:** Yeah, we still are. But like when we look at other – Especially places in Africa, for example, it was more mature. It was more – The man was the head of the household, and the wife stayed home and took care of the kids. My mom had six kids. We had about nine kids totally in my house. I was one of the four girls.

I remember taking the SAT and trying to come to the US. A friend of my dad told my dad and said, "Oh! Are you going to send a girl to America to go study? What happened to all you sons?" That was literally the kind of conversations that were happening back then. My dad looked at him and was like, "No. My daughter is very equally smart, and she deserves the same opportunities that everybody, boy or girl, deserves."

That was the kind of environment that I grew up in. I also saw my mom. She was a very smart, ambitious woman, and she wanted to really live out our dreams and ambition. She wasn't able to do that because of the kind of society that she grew up in and also because back then for her, my dad was the breadwinner. She felt like her role was support him in whichever way she can, right? That means making sure that there is dinner on the table, breakfast, lunch. She's supporting every single career moves that he was making.

That was always modeled for me, and I remember just looking at her and was like, "No, that will not be me. I will not actually be having kids and I will not be doing all of this." When I came to the US, obviously I changed my mind in terms of kids. But what I really wanted – What I really expected in the society was that we would be much more further along. As you attested to, we're not. It's still very much a patriarchal society where men are – I kind of look at it as two different spheres. You have the home and you have the work. Men have dominated work, and women have traditionally dominated the home.

Now, we have a situation where women are migrating from that home sphere to work, right? Now, we have 65% of women are breadwinners or corporate winners. What does that mean? It means that we need to support women as they transition from home to work, and that does exist as it is today.

[00:08:13]

**FT:** A lot of people would pinpoint the corporate structure as being what is ultimately or one of the ultimate challenges to working parents to be able to find balance. Some companies have very limited family leave policies for when you have children. Then, of course, the demands of work doesn't really jive with the demands at home. There's – You sometimes feel like you have to sacrifice so much in one or both departments to just kind of get through the day, get through the years.

Companies still I think have the model and the mindset that the men at work are the ones who are necessarily the chief breadwinners, and they don't necessarily see women in that role.

When it comes to things like raises and promotions, it's unconscious bias sometimes, but they more likely promote the men because they see them as the providers.

[00:09:04]

**BA:** Absolutely.

[00:09:05]

**FT:** I've heard this from women who – I've heard this from a lawyer friend of mine who was up for a partner at her law firm. Her husband also a lawyer who did a little bit better than her was more further along in his career. Her boss told her, "Do you really need this promotion?" As in –

[00:09:23]

**BA:** Whoa!

[00:09:23]

**FT:** Yeah. Like, "You're okay because you're married to this rich guy." This is what we're facing, right? How much pressure should we put on corporate versus all other factors? Like how – Because I feel like the patriarchy is what is so present still in the workplace. You having pursued things like chemical engineering and energy management and your MBA, very male-dominated career tracks. I'm curious to see from your perspective how much is the responsibility of our employers.

[00:09:54]

**BA:** I think our employers are very much responsible for a lot of this disparity that we have, especially when it comes to the wage gap and women advancing in the workplace. As a chemical engineer, I experienced that a lot in my career. I think one of the things that we can start to demand of as women is accountability and transparency, because nobody's going to do that for you. You've kind of need to step up and ask.

Another thing that we talk a lot about at Mother Honestly is the role of female leaders. Women like me and others that have the reason they've climbed to the corporate ladder, you're in there in leadership and you can speak up. You can speak up for other women and say, "Hey! No, she

deserves a promotion,” or, “She deserves X, Y, and Z number of parental leave because she's been here for either 10 years or 5 years or 2 years.” It doesn't even matter. You can speak up for women and really get them the benefits that they need.

I've done that. I've done that in my various roles in corporate America where I have fought for parental leave. I have fought for a return to work policy that really helps women ease back into the workplace after having a baby. I think that a lot of employers, a lot of them are just not educated. That's one of the things that I found, especially as we talk to thousands and thousands of women within our network and within our platform. We find that employers just don't know.

So we kind of need to start educating them, whether that's through conferences, which Mother Honestly is doing, or whether that's also through various platforms. Individuals like us that are in corporate America can speak up and say, “Hey! Have you looked at this return to work policy by –” Whether it's ExxonMobil or Procter & Gamble or JPMorgan Chase. Show people what's working. Show them the best practices from other organizations and other companies and really lead them to that point where they feel confident enough to support their working parents.

[00:11:53]

**FT:** You call your platform Mother Honestly, and this is conferences. It's online resources. It's really your community building. It's a platform that's here to help mostly modern, ambitious women learn how to thrive in and beyond motherhood. You call it specifically Mother Honestly, so it begs the question. Did you feel like there was some dishonesty in how we were going about mothering and talking about motherhood?

[00:12:19]

**BA:** No. I think – The name Mother Honestly actually came about when I was thinking about – I was home at the time when I came up with Mother Honesty. Like I said, I had my son and I was on maternity leave. I started thinking about the stay-at-home mom and I started thinking about, “Oh, my god! This is how much work it takes to be a mother and decides to stay home.”

Obviously I was only home for four months, so that doesn't do it any justice. But I could feel – I got a little taste of what it took to be a stay-at-home mom. My husband would come and be like, “Oh! Is dinner ready?” I'm like, “Oh, wait a minute. No, dinner is not ready, because I have been sitting here, pumping all day. No, you need to like go make us dinner. It's what you need to do.”

I started talking to a lot of stay-at-home moms, as a result. I had friends that they had an MBA, and they decided to stay home. I spoke to moms that were working part-time and moms that were working full-time. I started realizing that it doesn't matter how you want to – How you get to that decision of being a stay-at-home mom or a part-time mom or a working mom inside or outside of the home. What matters is that you are doing motherhood honestly. You're doing it honestly. You're making decisions that allows you to live your best life; a healthy, productive, and fulfilled life in motherhood.

So whether it's staying home and nurturing your ambition in one way or the other or it's working inside or outside of the home, what really matters is that you are aligned in your purpose as a mother and as a human being and that you are living your best life. That was where the name came from. I wanted to give everybody the opportunity to be part of that community and I wanted to do it in a way where we're not saying, "Oh! Because you're a stay-at-home mom, you can't be part of this community," Or, "Because you only work part-time inside of the home, you can be part of this community." I wanted to open it up to every mom that has a goal, has an ambition, and they really just want to live a fulfilled life.

Maybe they have made the decision to stay home for two to three years while their kids grow up and go to preschool. As long as you're doing it honestly, you don't need to feel like you're missing out or you're not part of this whole community of being a working mother. That's where Mother Honestly came about.

[00:14:36]

**FT:** Do you have a philosophy, a belief system around how to mother honestly and financially solvent and independent? How do you do that at the same time?

[00:14:49]

**BA:** Absolutely. I think that for me and we recently had this discussion within our Mother Honestly community around how to mother honestly and how to make sure that you have some kind of financial backbone, right? Because I think a lot of women, they make a decision to stay home without really understanding the implications of that, the skills that they lose, the benefits that they lose. The \$1 million I think is the calculation through research that shows that when women take a break out of the workforce, they lose about \$1 million in their lifetime.

Women are not making this decision holistically and honestly. They're basically looking at the numbers, and so we started having discussions around what does it mean to be a mother what does it mean for your financial stability and your financial outcomes.

So looking at the short-time and the long-term and really understanding that when we make decisions as mothers, we cannot only make those decision from a back of the envelope calculation, which I think a lot of women are doing. We started having conversations around, first of all, staying home to raise your kid. You're actually working. It's just society has made it – They've kind of defined the only work that is payable to be the work outside of the home, where you clock in and you clock out.

But when you're actually with your own kids, that's actually working. That work is very, very – It's gruesome sometimes. We don't talk about that enough, and it can be lonely. Study shows that actually affects a woman's mental health as well when all they do is centered around their kids. We're basically having conversations around what it means to be a mother and also look at your financial spectrum basically, not just at the moment, looking at it from 0 to 18 years. A kid is with you for 18 years. So saying, "If I take a break now, what does that mean for me financially for the next 18 years?"

I ask people. The true litmus test is if you and your husband are having a conversation about you staying home, you need to be asking him, "Can you stay home?"

[00:17:08]

**FT:** Right.

[00:17:09]

**BA:** If he is not willing to stay home, then maybe you shouldn't be so willing to stay home too.

[00:17:14]

**FT:** I sometimes wonder why we collect stay-at-home mom. It should be called like work-at-home. There are so many things that you're – Staying-at-home moms sounds like you're just sitting at home.

[00:17:24]



**BA:** It almost sounds bashing, right?

[00:17:26]

**FT:** Yeah.

[00:17:26]

**BA:** Like, “No. You, stay home.”

[00:17:27]

**FT:** It should be called like –

[00:17:28]

**BA:** You’re not allowed to leave. Just stay right there.

[00:17:31]

**FT:** It should be called super womaning from home or like working around the clock like a slave from home. There isn’t – Your work is never done when you’re at home.

[00:17:41]

**BA:** Never.

[00:17:43]

**FT:** You’re right. There is a aspect of isolation and stuff, man. I am so grateful for Mondays because I get to go back to work and feel like I can exercise a new part of me that has been lost all the weekend.

[00:18:00]

**BA:** I look forward to my Mondays. I'm like, "Finally, the kids get to go to preschool or school, and I can have my mental alignment back." Because when they're around, I feel like I'm always anxious like, "Okay. Who else is going to break their leg and who else is going to –" I'm just a nervous wreck. Once they're out, I'm like, "Awesome. It's somebody else's job."

[00:18:20]

**FT:** Yes. It's someone else's job.

[00:18:23]

**BA:** Somebody that is trained like, "They are trained. They can do this." I'm out there just doing my best work and looking forward to seeing them later on in the afternoon.

[00:18:32]

**FT:** I would love to learn more of your behind-the-scenes of how you're mothering honestly in terms of how you're structuring your home life so that you can be present both at home and at work, and the roles that you have between you and your husband, and just a little bit of like how you're "making it work."

[00:18:52]

**BA:** Absolutely. I love getting that question because I always tell people it takes a village and I have the rest of people that actually help me. I think I told you this already. I work full-time as a chemical engineer. I manage a very, very – I work in a very large organization. I also have – I work in Mother Honestly as well as a side hustle at night when I get home, when the kids are in bed. I also am working on a startup as well, so I'm –

[00:19:23]

**FT:** No way.

[00:19:24]

**BA:** I know.

[00:19:25]

**FT:** Why not? Just throwing a startup.

[00:19:26]

**BA:** Just throwing a startup, yeah. Talking to VCs and investors is so cool.

[00:19:29]

**FT:** Oh, my gosh!

[00:19:32]

**BA:** I wear many hats and I'm also a mother of three. I have a newborn who is – She's a five-month-old. I'm going to just be honest. I have a nanny. I have a full-time live-in nanny, and that's the only way I can get through what I do. I know it's a financial – I mean, literally almost a financial suicide to hire somebody full-time that lives in with you or through the work week to basically get things done for us. She watches our daughter and makes sure that my son is ready for school. She handles their breakfast, lunch, and dinner. She's literally the engine in this house.

I also have my sister as standby. I have my sister who works full-time as well. She also doubles as my executive assistant in the evening. She does a lot of like errands for me. My husband also does a lot. He's literally my secret weapon, because everything else that I can't do I just put it on his to-do list. It's probably helpful that he doesn't have side hustles like I do, so I'm basically his side hustle. He does a lot of work around the house to make sure that the kids are – He picks the kids up, drop them off so that I can go to work early.

We kind of just partner. Sometimes, for example, Monday, Tuesdays, my default for me to go into work very early and come back very late. So I try to put those two days 100% into my work and I probably get 20 hours of work done Monday, Tuesday. Then Wednesday, Friday, I kind of put maybe six, seven hours. That's how I make up my 40 hours at work. My husband, we flip. So Wednesday and Thursday, that's his own days to going very early and come back late. Friday, both of us work from home. We do a lot of team – It's a true partnership, and I'm very grateful for that.

I think – This is something that we talk a lot about at Mother Honestly as well is you really need to be on the same page with your partner. If you guys are not on the same page, there is – It's just not going to work out for you. The career advancements that you seek, the financial stability and the financial opportunities you seek, they will not come quickly if you and your spouse are not on the same page.

So, you really need to have that communication up front. It took a lot of work. There were some tears. There were some difficult conversations. There were lots of sometimes even yelling. I have to be honest. But at some point, we made a decision to really tackle this as a team, and it's been really helpful for us.

That's how I mother honestly is I have a team of people that help me behind the scenes. I have no shame in asking for help. I know as moms, we want to do it all. We want to be the ones to feed our kids. We want to be the one to go get the groceries. Well, here is – I'm giving everybody the permission to go out and ask for help if you can afford it. If you cannot afford it, ask your sister. Ask your neighbor. We have – I have a neighbor that drops off my son whenever I can't. So really just get a village together and make it work.

[00:22:40]

**FT:** Yes. I say get your tribe, treat them well, keep them close.

[00:22:44]

**BA:** Yes.

[00:22:45]

**FT:** Because they are your life line.

[00:22:47]

**BA:** When I go grocery shopping, I get flowers and I have my daughter drop it off for our neighbors. That is my way of saying thank you very much for picking up my son twice this week while I was stuck in traffic.

[00:22:59]

**FT:** That's awesome. Well, Blessing, tell us how we can tap more into your community and any upcoming events that you have with Mother Honestly. Yeah, tell us how we can all get involved.

[00:23:11]

**BA:** Yes. Mother Honestly is growing like rapid wildfire. We started in 2018. Our conference, which is really the flagship event for us, started about 250 women in 2018. In 2019, that number doubled to 500. 2020, we are going to the Brooklyn EXPO Center on October 1 and 2, so first and second. Really, this conference is for ambitious women, and that's what I call it. It's for ambitious women that are seeking to thrive in and be in motherhood. This is a conference for us to discuss how to approach our lives, how to approach our family, motherhood, work, life, because motherhood matters, ambition matters, support matters.

We've taken a very holistic approach in bringing together thought leaders, professionals, experts, career leaders and ask them how you're approaching your life. What are you doing differently? What are the things that – What are some of the actionable insights and advice that we can walk away with and take back to our homes, take back to our employer, take back to our careers, and really live our best lives?

One of the things that we love about what we're doing is that we're also getting employers involved. Last year, we had about 20 employers send their working mothers to the conference. These women went back and they had a lot to share when it comes to negotiating for their salary, asking for a raise. How do you do that effectively? How do you return to work in a way that doesn't leave you anxious and stressed out or overwhelmed?

These are the kind of topics that we discuss, and I'm super excited for what's to come. We're coming to you in New York as well, so we're hoping that you can also join us, and some of your listeners can join us as well.

[00:24:56]

**FT:** Yes. I'm excited. I hopefully can make it. So happy to hear and not surprised that the organization is growing. This is a much needed resource, and thank you for putting this out in the world.

Blessing, thank you so much. It's been wonderful to connect finally. We've been emailing a lot these past several months in the year.

[00:25:13]

**BA:** Yes, we have.

[00:25:14]

**FT:** But nice to finally get voice to voice and learn more about what you're passionate about and how you're helping so many people. Thank you.

[00:25:22]

**BA:** Thank you so much. Have a wonderful weekend.

[END]