

EPISODE 1098

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[INTRODUCTION]

FT: Welcome to So Money, everybody. I’m your host, Farnoosh Torabi. It is Monday, September 21st, 2020. What a Monday. Heading over to live with Kelly and Ryan today to share some advice on how to save at the grocery store. Yes, the very exciting grocery store, where I’m spending way too much time these days. It’s the only place I go, besides my house. Catch me there. If you don’t, I’ll be posting it on Instagram later.

As promised, we have a national treasure on the show today. If you, like me, were obsessed with Three’s Company, well this is a gift to you. We have the one and only Suzanne Somers here, who is not just a renowned actress and performer, but she is a multi-multi-best-selling New York Times best-selling author. She is an entrepreneur, who has many, many, many incredible stories to share, stories filled with life lessons and you just heard her talk about the behind the scenes of that hit 1980s show, Three’s Company.

You may have noticed, Suzanne was no longer on the show after a few seasons. She’s here on the show telling her side of the story, why she got fired over her negotiations. Her latest book is called *New Way to Age*. It is now in paperback and it presents a revolutionary philosophy for a longer and better-quality life with easy to understand lessons and doctor interviews. Suzanne is 73 years young. In the current chapter of her life, she is a leading voice on anti-aging. I took a lot of notes and I think you will too. Here’s Suzanne Somers.

[INTERVIEW]

FT: Suzanne Somers, welcome to So Money. It's so wonderful to have you on the show.

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SZ: Well, thank you very much. Interesting name for your show. How'd you choose that?

[00:02:57]

FT: Well, it's a pop culture reference in that classic movie *Swingers*. There's a line where the guy goes, "You're so money, you don't even know it." It became this cultural reference, this catchphrase. Being so money is saying, you're with it, you're cool. It's optimistic. It's a positive and I wanted to make money positive.

Here we are with one of the most positive people on the planet, speaking of positive, Suzanne Somers. *A New Way to Age* is your latest book. It's now in paperback. Congrats. I got to ask you Suzanne, first question is given the world that we live in today, I'm curious if this has changed your mind, or in some ways, reinforced some of the things that you attributed to living a quality, healthy life.

[00:03:47]

SZ: Well, I've written 27 books. I never planned a book. That's what's been so interesting about this new chapter of my life, even though I started writing books because I was on the road doing nightclubs, nightclub performer. Loved it. I mean, I absolutely loved it. I mean, imagine getting dressed up every night in eight or nine beautiful concoctions and having my own band and going out on stage to an audience that loves me, because they weren't forced. They went out and bought a ticket and came and got dressed up and showed up. That was just such a wonderful thing that I've already said to my husband. One night walking, I had my own showroom at the west gate in Vegas, a couple of – I guess, it's been a couple years that we shut that room down.

I'm walking down the hall one night after the show, just these great shows, and I said, "I want to be doing this when I'm 80." Then I thought, I saw myself at 80-years-old and I know from what I'm watching is that I'm aging in a way that I never imagined. Well, why is that? I'm aging in a way that I never imagined, because of the choices I made in this chapter of my life.

We determine our outcome, good and bad. We determine everything by the choices we make. I take my food choices very seriously. When it comes to meat, I got to know what that cow, lamb was eating, because what they're eating now is what I'm eating. That's one of the choices that I've made for my body. This chapter for me is about getting on stage at 80 with the full vigor and my ability to do my dumb dances that I do on stage that are not choreographed. They come from my soul, from my spirit.

[00:05:57]

FT: I'm just so fascinated by all of this. I'm 40 and I want to feel like you now. Was there a moment in your adult life when you – I mean, you've always appeared to be a healthy woman to me. Someone that I watched on television. Was there a moment when you realized, "I really want to supercharge my health. I want to take things more seriously." What was that moment?

[00:06:21]

SZ: Getting cancer. Cancer was my veiled gift. I always say, the negatives in life are opportunities. When you hear those three words, "You have cancer," it's like getting cold cocked. I remember the first time I heard it. Hear what I just said, the first time I heard it. I thought, what have I done in my diet and lifestyle that has allowed me to allow this to invade my body and it wants to take my life? It's not life-affirming.

I went over in my mind, "What have I done?" I thought I was eating healthy. I thought I was making the right choices, but I wasn't. I was like – like all of us are before you have an awakening. I was eating food that I wasn't taking organic seriously at all. I wasn't eating tons of sugar and cakes and cookies and pies and things like that. That wasn't what it was. I figured, because I wasn't sculpting down those foods that I was on the right track, but I wasn't eating life-affirming foods. I was eating foods that were right, but not right, not in today's world.

I stepped back 10-feet and I looked at my choices. We make choices all day long, good or bad, all day long. We don't even realize it. I was eating food that was sprayed with poison, like I was talking about. That oh, it's okay to eat food that's not organic. It's fine. Fine isn't fine anymore. Fine was fine when I was a little girl. Fine was fine when my mother would bring home food from the butchers. We didn't have organic food when I was a kid, because no one ever thought it was a good idea to spray poison on our food at that time.

[00:08:24]

FT: Right. Nothing was engineered like it is today. Fake food.

[00:08:27]

SZ: When the talk of the times now is eating quality food, why would we want to eat food that's genetically modified, that has been messed with, that's been played with, that's been fiddled with? I decided to change my life. I decided not to take chemotherapy. I took radiation, which is a choice I wouldn't make today, because chemotherapy, well, I don't know. There are a lot of people listening who have survived chemotherapy, but not most people. Most people do okay and then eventually it gets them in another way.

I was interviewing a doctor, a renowned neuroscientist, Dr. Russell Blaylock. Incredible person. He said, chemotherapy gets into the DNA of every cell in your body. I said, explain what you mean. He said, when your cells have been altered and what you and I are are about 40 to 60 trillion cells, that's all we are. All cells communicate with one another. Then you start messing with your cell health. That was interesting, because that came up in almost every interview I did for this book, *A New Way to Age*. It takes a long time for this information to roll up to be relevant.

[00:09:49]

FT: You talk about making your own choices and how nothing is accidental, so much as we think. Shifting gears then from health to your career, one could look at your career and say, "Suzanne, brilliant choices." Whether you're looking at your show that you just discussed in Vegas, to things like the ThighMaster, even your career as an author. As this is a financial show,

the audience and I, we're really curious about what determines success. What are those choices?

I was reading in an article, when you were presented with the idea, the concept of ThighMaster, it ended up becoming something totally different. You signed on, but ended up leading the marketing, the branding. You even changed the name. It was initially called the V-Toner. What was it about that particular product that made you think it would become so successful? I mean, even to this day, millions and millions in sales.

[00:10:50]

SZ: Well, here we go again. I got fired from Three's Company. Not many people know that, but I got fired, because when I signed on for that show, I just signed on the dotted line. I was so happy to get a gig and I had never had an opportunity to be, what turned out to be the number one show in America. I didn't know when I signed on the dotted line that I would have the highest awareness in terms of my demographics as a female, that I was able to garner what they were paying them in.

I looked around and the men were all being paid 10 to 15 times more than me, including my co-star. It wasn't right. Now my contract's up and I'm not being greedy like they portrayed me to be. It was just you have a contract, they expire, and so here was my time to renegotiate. I went in and said, "I want to be paid what you're paying the men." What people did understand was that Laverne and Shirley, which was a colossal hit like Three's Company, but not as colossal, as Three's Company, they had their ex contracts expired and they had recently gone in and gave ABC, as I call it a colonic.

I thought, okay, they paid Laverne and Shirley, so Joyce Dewitt and John Ritter had already renegotiated, because they had been on the show contractually before me. We all went on at the same time, because it didn't work with the two females that played Chrissy Snow before me and they only played it in a pilot and they didn't test well. At the last minute, they had to go find a new Chrissy Snow. Guess who it was? It was me.

There I was thinking, “Oh, wow. Dumb blonde. Everybody hates dumb blondes. They're so irritating.” How do I make a dumb blonde lovable, likable? What would make you tune in to want to see a character that is so hard to pull off? I did. I gave her a heart and a soul and a moral code and what she would and wouldn't do, to the point where the audience would laugh before my character would do it, because they knew her so well and they'd think, “Oh Chrissy Snow would never do that.”

That was the first negative that turned into a positive. That's what brought the public thinking to the fact that they really liked this character. There's something about her. They didn't know why. I was starting to figure out why. I go in to renegotiate. When my husband walks in as my emissary, I'm waiting at home. There are no cellphones at the time, remember? There was a time when cellphones did not run the world, which they really do run the world now. I'm waiting at home and waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting. Three hours just seemed like an eternity.

I lived at that time in a multi-level beach house and I sheared the front door open. There's a way the front door opens when it's good news and there's a way it opens when it's bad news. It was clearly bad news, because that door opened real slow and then closed real slow. Then I hear him paddling up the stairs. Again, there's a way that walking up the stairs is good news and when you're listening to it when you know it's bad news.

I met him at the second level and he looks at me. I see his face is just devastated and he said, “You're out.” “What do you mean I'm out?” “They said you're out. You're out. You're fired.” I said, “Fired? It was a negotiation.” He said, “You were fired before I even walked into the lawyer's office. They had planned it.” We had heard it the night before from the CFO's office at ABC. A friend of a friend called my husband and said, “You didn't hear this from me, but we're going to hang in them in the marketplace. That's going to be Suzanne.” That's what they did.

Then in order to get paid for the rest of the season, they – the Good Old Boys Club, they had to humiliate me. I had to in order to get paid, show up every week, but they would have a guard meet me at the back gate of the studio, walk me into a new dressing room, which was nothing like it had been. I didn't have a pretty set. I didn't have good lights. I just had a wing chair, a pole lamp and what else? That was about it.

I'd be on the phone and this was my script every week. "No, she's still sick. Yeah, I miss you too. Well, I hope. Okay, I love you too. Bye." That was what I did every week. I would leave crying. It was so unfair. That's when I learned that lesson. Life's unfair, okay. How can I make this work for me? My husband had said that when he said, "You're out," he grabbed me by the shoulders, grabbed gently, took me by the shoulders and he said, "We're going to make this work for you."

In making this work for me, I sat in that same living room where I didn't have a cellphone, on that gray overcast ocean day and I heard a voice. The voice said, why are you looking at what you don't have? Why don't you focus on what you do have? I kept saying, what do I have? One day, the voice said, you have an enormous visibility. Everybody in America and in most parts of the world knows your name.

I sat there and I thought, "Yeah. What can I do with that? How can I make that work for me? Everybody knows my name." That's when I realized, "Wow, that's valuable." I said to my husband, I'd like to do a Vegas act. He said, "Can you sing?" He was joking. I had used the Three's Company years to oh, gosh. What fun I had. I was the last person – John Wayne, you probably don't even know who that is, but John Wayne was the biggest movie star in the world. He had a walk that everybody recognized.

I worked with Sammy Davis Junior. I worked with Frank Sinatra. These are all people of that era, but I worked with all of them. I worked with Don Rickles. We would go to Sinatra's dressing room on Sunday nights when his show would close. It was like, when his show would close, the lights went off in Vegas. He would invite all the headliners from up and down the strip to come to his dressing room. I would sit there with Rodney Dangerfield and show they were playing.

[00:17:43]

FT: This is so good. I mean, I could hear you talk for hours. What I think you're really telling me in a nutshell is that you leveraged your star power. You think about women in Hollywood in your era, you were able to parlay their celebrity into entrepreneurship. You think of Jane Fonda. You were a trailblazer, Suzanne. If you may indulge me just a little bit, I'd love a story about those auditioning years in Hollywood as a woman in the 60s, the 70s. Was having your husband, Al,

as your business partner, a shield for you, a protection for you in some ways? Because I can't even imagine the way that women were taken advantage of then and still today, but especially then. What was your experience? Was it mostly positive?

[00:18:32]

SZ: Well, nothing more potent, or powerful than an incredible team. We realized, working for other people, ABC, Three's Company, not owning a piece of the show. They didn't want me to brand Chrissy Snow. I went to them years before I was off the show and I said, her clothes are so popular, we could make a fortune together from clip-on ponytails, from hot pants, to suspenders, to a makeup line. She had a definitive makeup that I made up, which was dark eyes, the black eyes and the long black eyelashes and big pink cheeks and pink lips. It was a look.

On Friday nights when we would tape, the show would go out there, third of the show would have been little girls dressed up like Chrissy Snow. I would say this to the producers. I remember one day, one producer screaming. He said, "This is not a show about fashion. This is about the show." I'm thinking, it's called show business. I was working with a team that I think they – this is crazy. Were jealous of the fact that I was usurping John Ritter in popularity and they had already decided that John Ritter was the star of the show. If we've decided that John Ritter is the star of the show, then you can't be star of the show.

That's when Alan and I realized from here on in, we will never work for anyone ever again. We will work together with each other, for each other. That was the best decision we ever made. We get along amazingly. I don't remember the last time we had any arguments, or crosswords, or harsh tones, or anything. I am supposed to be married to Alan Hamel. I knew it the day I met him. I've been with him now 50 years. It's true love.

[00:20:40]

FT: I wanted to ask you about this partnership. A harmonious partnership, in love, in business. It's rare. What was it that when you saw him you knew? I mean, you could you teach us all something here?

[00:20:53]

SZ: I knew. I don't know if everyone knows. He was my second husband. I was married at 17. Good catholic girl. When I grew up, nobody ever got a divorce. I didn't know anybody who had been divorced. I couldn't stay married to him. I was pregnant. When you're 17, you have to get married. That's what they used to say. She had to get married. That was the big whispered awfulness.

I had this darling little baby boy. I remember the first words I said to him when they pulled him from my body, unbeknownst to me, the words that came out of my mouth were, "I promise. I'm going to make a good life for you," and I did. I somehow figured out how to feed us and clothe us. I did not get any child support, or alimony or any of those things. I don't even know what they are.

That was unfair too. Again, life is not fair. Anybody listening to this that feels they've got a raw deal in life, no you haven't. You've gotten the greatest opportunities. All the negatives in life are your opportunities and every time I get cold cocked with another one of these things, I think to myself, what am I supposed to learn this time?

Getting fired was this incredible opportunity, because now I'm working as a headliner in Vegas and wow, what a success. We were selling out two big showrooms every night at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. That at that time was the biggest room in Vegas. They came and they lined up and they loved it. I realized, the other thing that's really important, really important in life and in business is tell the truth. Tell the truth.

I go out on stage, I didn't have a writer. I didn't hire any comedy writers. I didn't hire anybody, other than musical directors, because you need some help sometimes. I just told stories that emanated from my thoughts while I might call somebody up from the audience and we'd have a repartee. I'd ask him. It was usually a him, questions that seem pertinent to how that person looked, or acted, or felt, or nervous, or whatever. "Are you nervous? Why are you nervous? Am I scary? I'm not going to bite you." Then the audience would laugh.

You follow that flow. That worked for me positively. Then one day, we get a call about this V-Toner thing. I was in really good shape, because I'm dancing. I did two years at the MGM Grand and then I got so skinny that I had to stop doing a show that was so strenuous, but this V-Toner person, lady shows up at our house and calls it a V-Toner. What does it do? Well, it's for the inner thighs and it's for the upper body and it's for your arms and your shoulders and your pectorals and all that.

My husband and I had our pseudo-argument of we both knew right away. V-Toner is not a good name. She was really pushing for the upper body, for the upper arms, for the biceps, for the pectorals. I'm going, "What about the inner thighs?" She goes, "Well, yeah. It's great for the inner thighs, but women are more interested in their arms." I go, "Nah, they're not. No they're not."

It was my husband and I who named it the ThighMaster. Here's how the ThighMaster commercial works, sort of a negative, but turned into a positive. There's a theme. As I'm talking to, I realize I'm revealing a theme that I didn't plan. I bought a pair of Manolo Blahnik, perfectly plain nude shoes. They had the perfect pointy toes, they had the perfect amount of toe cleavage, they had the right arch, because Manolo Blahnik was an engineer and they had, I think it was a four-and-a-half-inch heel, maybe a five-inch heel. They were \$565.

I'm standing in my dressing room in my bra and bikini underpants and I'm looking in the mirror and I thought, "Ohm my husband's going to think I'm so stupid for buying a pair of perfectly plain nude shoes that are almost \$600. Oh, my God." I walk out in my bra and underpants and the Manolo Blahnik shoes. I said to my husband, "How do you like my new shoes?" He said, "Great legs." I went, "Oh, my God! That's the commercial." He goes, "What?" I said, "You sit in a chair just like you are."

I walk out in not my bra and underpants, but something pretty sexy, underwear looking-like-ish and you say, Great legs." Well, that became the commercial. Although, he chose not to be in it. He was just the voice off-camera. I walk out in my blue leotard, not so sexy, not by today's standard at all. I had no jewelry at all, but I had on those shoes. I showed by sitting down, how you could use the ThighMaster. The main trust of the commercial was you wear these shoes, your legs are going to look so great that everybody is going to want legs like this.

The commercial, if you remember, was that voice over off-camera, I'm standing there in those shoes, those exact shoes, \$565, and Alan's voice off-camera, the blue leotard is cut real high on the thigh, which at that time they weren't doing. Now it's no big deal, but at that time they weren't doing it. You hear off camera Alan Hamel going, "Great legs," with that sexy voice. He was one of the leading television personalities in Canada and also radio. He had the radio voice. We sold at last count, 10 million ThighMasters.

[00:27:21]

FT: Make that 10 million and one. I'm desperate for some ThighMastering in this pandemic. Can I ask one question, Suzanne? Then I promise, I'll let you go after this, because you've been so generous with your time. You mentioned the importance of telling the truth and I completely agree. It's a simple piece of advice, but we often feel afraid, or unsure about telling the truth. Back to when you were let go from Three's Company, you had shared – I'd read that you shared that the network had perhaps been not clear about why you parted ways. They hadn't been clear to the cast about why you parted ways and that caused hostility and you never told your story then. You never revealed your truth, at least not publicly back then about what happened. I wonder, do you regret that?

[00:28:07]

SZ: I didn't realize. The public didn't realize it and I was embarrassed. They're saying I'm greedy and I'm going, "No, I'm not. No, I'm not greedy. I'm just asking for what I deserved." Clearly, I had more work to do on my self-esteem to be able to publicly say, my talent on this show is worth every bit as much as any man on television. It wasn't even a feminist thing. I'd love to say I was so far ahead of the game that it was about feminism.

I'm actually not a feminist. It was about, how many tickets did I sell? I sold as many or more tickets than any of the men on television, so why are they making 10 to 15 times more than me? That, because not one woman backed me up. Now maybe they were afraid that if they went out and said, "I think it's terrible what they've done to Suzanne Somers." Not one woman in television at that time came to my defense. I lost out because of that.

I was embarrassed that I took a shot and lost. Today, that would not have happened. Today, I think the outcome would've been very different. The question is do I regret it? No. No. I don't regret it, because it forced me to reinvent again. It forced me to look at life in a different way. The way I look at life now is we are a series of chapters. The chapter I'm in right now is the choices that I make, and that every choice counts. Don't try to not pay attention to that.

I'm 73. I've decided to make 73 the age that women who are 40, as you are, want to be. Why not? Why would you want to be? I want to be on stage when I'm 80. I've learned how to work from home, because I write books. When I finished my 27th book last year, I've known that feeling when you put the pen down and you sit back in your chair and you go did it again. Okay.

I said to my husband that day. I came down for dinner and I said, "Now they're best-seller." He goes, "Yeah?" I go, "Yeah, absolutely." Then the way I always do with all my books is I read them to him and to see if he has the same reaction. I remember when I finished this book, he went, "Fantastic."

[00:30:56]

FT: Well, I see you guys having a lot of fun on Instagram with your happy hours. I enjoy living vicariously through you and Alan.

[00:31:05]

SZ: We are major in love.

[00:31:06]

FT: I believe it.

[00:31:06]

SZ: I think I told you at the beginning of the interview. Oh, my God. I love.

[00:31:12]

FT: I mean, you can't fake 50 years.

[00:31:15]

SZ: Yes. Yeah. It's for real. It's not BS. I'm not faking it. Also, we have a drink every night. We have a tequila every night. I say that, you can probably hear some pride in my voice, because why not? What? Am I going to be an alcoholic at this age? I've only started drinking about five years ago. We don't drink anymore after the show. We don't sit and – I have a one tequila, maybe two tequilas a night, but usually one. If you've seen my Baccarat glass.

[00:31:48]

FT: Yes. Yes. It's a sight, everybody. I will tell you, everybody follow Suzanne on Instagram. You won't be disappointed. Thank you, Suzanne, so much. Thank you for coming. Your new book is called *A New Way to Age: The Most Cutting-Edge Advances in Anti-Aging*. I really appreciate your honesty on the show, Suzanne, and really just diving into the stories with us, being so transparent. Going behind the scenes, it's why we love you.

I first came across your work in 1986 in Worcester, Massachusetts. My mom and I would sit in our living room, I was six-years-old and watch reruns of Three's Company. I was definitely too young to be watching the show, but I was not young enough to recognize that Chrissy was the best on the show. She was our favorite. I'm so happy for you all these years later.

[00:32:38]

SZ: Thank you. Thank you. Every choice along the way has worked in my favor, because I made it work in my favor. You're in charge of your outcome. You're in charge of the life you are living. Envision yourself, the grand vision of the greatest version of you and see that and never stop until you've achieved it. I've achieved it. I am the grandest version of the greatest vision of myself. It's not an ego thing. It's I am who I am, because that's who I want to be. That's what I need. We can choose our lives. Don't look at the negatives, in your life as negatives. They are your opportunities. Make every negative work for you and enjoy the life that you've chosen.

[END]