

EPISODE 1300

CD: *And we're all walking around super exhausted, thinking that there's something wrong with us, as opposed to understanding that we are just in a very unhealthy and dysfunctional dynamic with rest."*

[INTRO]

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FT: Happy New Year, everybody. Welcome to So Money, a fresh year, a fresh start, 2022. Who's tired? Who's exhausted? Raise your hand. Well, I have a timely guest for us all to kind of get us out of our exhaustion and give us some motivation for the year ahead. Caroline Dooner is the author of *Tired as F*ck*, which offers a frank and funny critique of the cultural forces that are driving us mad. In her book, Caroline takes a good hard look at the dark side of self-help and explains how she eventually personally use a radical period of rest to push back against cultural expectations and reclaim some peace.

For a while now, I've been saying how I'm a little over the expression hustle, hustle for life. I think it started out as a genuine proclamation of working hard, getting the money, building your life unapologetically. But now, I think it's morphed into just feeling guilty for not working hard enough and this idea that you're running up against the clock. It's not healthy. It's no way to start your year. It's no way to live your life. With Caroline, we unpack this to understand the root of hustle culture, where it is today, and how to actually get the rest that we all need to move forward successfully. Here's Caroline Dooner.

[INTERVIEW]

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FT: Caroline Dooner, welcome to So Money. Excited to have you here, and Happy New Year. You're one of our first shows of the year.

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CD: Oh, my gosh. Thank you for having me. I'm so excited.

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FT: Your newest book is called *Tired as F*ck*, although it's actually the four-letter word we all know and love. But I'm cautious to say it because sometimes I get slapped on the wrist over in the Apple world. But *Tired as F*ck: Burnout at the Hands of Diet, Self-help, and Hustle Culture*. Some might be listening and thinking how is this a financial topic. Well, we're going to get to it. We're going to talk about how a lot of this also feeds into our financial mindset, our career culture. It's all intertwined. Tell us – This is such a personal story. This is not a self-help book. It's a cautionary tale that stems from a lot of your own personal life experience. So tell us how this book began, Caroline.

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CD: Yeah. It's helpful maybe to start with the fact that about 10 years ago, I found myself in a sort of crisis state. I hit a sort of rock bottom with my relationship with food and my relationship with my body. I realized that I had had this really, really toxic relationship with dieting and with weight for the 10 years before that, but I never – Like we live in this culture that sort of applauded my obsession with food and weight loss and this obsession with my body. So I didn't understand how dysfunctional it was and I didn't understand how unhealthy it was, honestly, on so many different levels; physically and mentally, emotionally.

It really took me hitting a rock bottom after my 50th diet that I tried that I always ended up bingeing and thought I was a food addict and kept going back for more. I decided to radically try and heal my relationship with food and unlearn all of the things that I had learned about food and weight and health and worth. It was the sort of intuitive thing that I was going to try and do. I didn't really have any proof at that point that this was a good idea, but I set out to sort of research and see if I could find inspiration along the way. So it was this kind of like crazy, dramatic journey that I set out on.

Pretty quickly, I actually did find all of these books that corroborated this intuitive hunch that I had. It was by this weight scientist who had vowed to never take any money from pharmaceutical companies and from big business, so it wouldn't taint her findings essentially. She had found along the way. She actually went into weight science to try and figure out how to lose weight and keep it off forever. What she actually found when she wasn't being paid off by a diet company or a weight loss product company was that it didn't work long term. It just didn't.

We have this homeostasis. Our body fights back. Sorry, my dog is like going crazy right next to me. Our body fights back. We have these weights that ranges that are very genetic. When we try to go below them, that's actually – Even if we think that going below them is what's healthy, and that's kind of the thing that we're led astray on. If we're below where our body genetically feels safest, we're going to have a really, really difficult time. It's going to affect our health negatively. We're going to feel really, really, really addicted to food.

It was mind blowing. It like corroborated all this, so I went on this journey. I healed my relationship with food. I started writing about it. All of that became *The F*ck It Diet* book. Oh, sorry. I just – You can bleep that out if you want.

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FT: Go for it.

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CD: We said we weren't going to curse, so you could –

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FT: We have an allowance.

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CD: Stay on Apple's good side. It changed my life. It's what became my first book, all about our relationship with food. But about five years into that, so about five years ago, I had this other epiphany that I still had all of these beliefs about what I should be doing and what I should be like and what my life should be like. All of these things that I had worked through with my relationship with food, and it was pretty big. Like that was a pretty big, kind of counterculture journey to go on and to start writing about all these things that we don't necessarily know and even that the medical community is a little bit behind on still. Some are catching up and some still are super, super weight-centric, which I really don't think it's helpful for people's health or relationship with food.

But I realized that I was still doing this to myself with everything else, with my career, especially with my career, with my personal life, with dating, with all of my anxiety that I – It was very odd that when I finally went through my healing with food, I realized, oh, my god, I have had so much anxiety my whole life that I channeled into extreme dieting. It was like I didn't even realize that I had it because I was in this odd dysfunction thinking, “If I can just be so perfect with my diet, then I'll look like this, and then everything will fall into place.” It was this like really, really extreme outlet for my anxiety. So I didn't realize how much anxiety I had until I let go of that vise almost, like that –

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FT: Now, you're looking for somewhere else to channel it.

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CD: Exactly, and I channel it into my career, because I was like, “Oh, my god.” People want to hear what I have to say. This writing thing is going well, but how can I make this perfect? How can I make the most money that I can possibly make? How can I – I got so burnt out, like so unbelievably burnt out physically, emotionally, spiritually, that I had to move – I lived in New York at the time. I moved out of New York because I couldn't afford to be tired in New York, if you know what I mean. I had to move somewhere where I could live a little bit slower for life and still be able to afford rent.

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FT: You mean New York doesn't let you sleep. I don't know about that. But to be clear, your book is not about how to eradicate yourself of anxiety or even to ignore your fears, but rather how to sort of have a healthier mindset around what it is happening in your body and your mind.

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CD: To understand, yeah. To understand yourself better and to – I think that there's this parallel between people who think that they have this horrible, horrible dysfunction with food. One of the things that I talk about a lot in the first book, my first book, is how so many of us are convinced that we are food addicts, but it's actually a huge response to the diets that we put ourselves on and the sort of crisis that our body goes into. Then our culture at large that constantly is telling us in so many ways that we should feel guilty over what we're eating. That actually affects our relationship with food. It can make us feel super fixated on food. It can cause bingeing.

So a lot of us think that our hunger is this huge problem that has to be fixed with a diet, and we think that this way that we're kind of going about eating is just normal, and we just have to deal with it. I realized that we also have that with rest and exhaustion. I think so many of us are truly on the verge of burnout, especially after these two years. But even before that, I mean, we're all sort of just operating under this, “I have to be constantly productive. I have to be responsible. I have to –”

It's happening for so many reasons. One, we learned that that's the way that we should be. Two, we also use it as a way to kind of mitigate our anxiety and not have to process stuff. We're all walking around super exhausted, thinking that there's something wrong with us, as opposed to understanding that we are just in a very unhealthy and dysfunctional dynamic with rest and with allowing ourselves to be tired. When so many of us are tired, we don't always go to, “Oh, I should rest. I should take the weekend off. I should cancel some plans.” We go to, “What's wrong with me? Why can't I push through? What supplements do I have to be on? Should I be exercising more?”

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FT: Not prioritizing my needs. I have to wake up earlier. Yeah, I go through the same.

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CD: Exactly.

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FT: A voice that's in your head, yeah.

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CD: It's not that those things don't have a place. But when we're talking about burnout, which a lot of us don't understand, so a lot of us don't understand disordered eating and how it manifests. Then the parallel that I've noticed is a lot of us don't understand burnout and how it manifests and what causes it too. For me, I was like, "I don't deserve to be burnt out." I'm like, "Compared to other people, my life is so easy. I don't have kids. I'm doing – I'm living this life where I get to follow my passions. How could I possibly be burnt out? I don't deserve it. I just have to figure it out and push through." I did that until I literally, I mean, really like on the edge of physical burnout, just thinking that I didn't deserve to be tired.

You do not need to work an 80-hour workweek to get burnt out. People get burnout on a 40-hour workweek all of the time. There are even studies that show that the 40-hour workweek is way too long for some people, and we like totally check out at three to four hours a day. Everyone's different, of course, but we're all sort of plugging ourselves into, "Well, I should be able to handle this and I should be able to have energy to work eight hours a day and then go out at night and do things all weekend." A lot of people just can't, especially if they've been kind of pushing themselves too far for too long.

But then we also don't understand the way that it manifests. Burnout can manifest as kind of like depression and anxiety symptoms. It can manifest as like a listlessness, brain fog, not feeling excited by –

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FT: Your scalp itches. That's what happened to me when I was super stressed. My body will start screaming.

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CD: Your body starts to break down. I mean, it's literally under – So it has to essentially operate on adrenaline and other stress hormones, and that will just run you down. So physical symptoms, it can manifest as so many physical symptoms, immune system issues, hormonal issues. Like our body is trying to communicate with us. Yet, because of our beliefs, essentially about what we should be able to handle –

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FT: I'd love to explore this culture that is a result of beliefs, things that are handed down to us, things that we think we should believe in. I mean, I've said on this show multiple times now in recent months that I'm kind of anti-hustle culture now. I used to think hustle was sort of like a cool term for somebody who was ambitious, who's trying to reach their goals. I hustled in my 20s. I had multiple jobs. Even now in my career, like I've prided myself on having these different revenue streams and always working on something new.

But there's a line that you cross sometimes, which is this like sort of healthy hustle and then this out of control hustle. So tell us about, first, what sometimes we buy into that we shouldn't and then also, on the other side of it, how to stop it. So you talk about in your book how this isn't just about getting more sleep, like you have to actually change your life. First, tell us about the root of this, and what are some of the telltale signs of buying into a culture that is not healthy, the hustle culture specifically?

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CD: Yeah. Well, just like you said, because there's always nuance, right? I never want someone's takeaway from this book in particular to be like, "Oh, so I'm not supposed to do anything. I'm not supposed to have goals. I'm not supposed to work hard." That's not it at all. That can be like some of the most life affirming stuff to feel productive, to have projects, to have goals. All those things are good. In the very least, they're neutral. Just like you said, it's where is that line between what we have the capacity for, what we have the energy for that and the time for, what we enjoy doing. We don't always get to do everything we enjoy doing.

But in general, we want what we're spending hours and hours of our life to be something that we don't absolutely despise because that will definitely burn you out too. Where's that line between actually something that's life affirming and something that is now draining you and based on beliefs about what you should be doing or how much you should be working or any of those things? What I realized is that most of my anxiety and most of my sort of dysfunction, specifically with the way that I was operating in my business that I was running, all of a sudden, I was like this small business owner, online business owner, was this belief that I wasn't allowed to slow down, and it was not conscious. It was not a conscious belief at all. I had to really, really take time to understand why I was so anxious and why I never let myself stop.

It was this thing that I picked up probably like in middle school so, so long ago that I needed to constantly be doing things, constantly seeking out new work, constantly doing things to remain impressive, to impress other people, to be responsible. For me, it stemmed a lot from I actually went to school for musical theater. There was always, always, always, always, always at least four auditions a day in New York that you could and should be going to. That became this thing. Every single day, I woke up and I was like, "Oh, my god. Oh, my god. There's so much that I should be doing. I'm not doing enough." I never felt like I was doing enough ever. Even if I was doing plenty, it was never enough ever.

So it was this like subconscious. I describe it as almost like a computer program that was like running in the back of my brain, my computer brain. It was draining all of my energy, infusing me with guilt all day long, and it was completely learned and completely arbitrary. The marker of when I was allowed to feel like proud of what I done, just it like didn't exist. I never ever was like, "Ah, great job, Caroline."

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FT: Yeah. Who invents these awful sayings? In my world, it's like you're only as good as your last book. You're only as good as your last podcast, right? It's like, "I'm sorry. Don't have any room here to mess up or try new things or take things in a new direction? Why does my measure of success have to be like only the last thing I did, as opposed to the body of work?"

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CD: It's very unforgiving. Then the sad thing is, is that most of us are perpetuating it on ourselves. We heard someone say it, we heard many people say it, and then we just kind of accept it as a truth and without realizing how it's affecting us or being aware of it and then asking ourselves, "Okay. Well, is this true for me? Or is this something that I want to rule my life and how I feel every day of my life?"

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FT: I want to suggest something. Maybe I'm going to hypothesize here, and maybe we can talk about this. Okay, we live in a patriarchy. A lot of this culture is brought upon by what we now call maybe like the bro culture, which, generally speaking, have different responsibilities and needs than the female culture.

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CD: Yeah. I mean totally.

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FT: You might be able to go to four auditions a day because you're not a single mom taking care of two kids, right? Let's think about that.

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CD: Totally, completely. Then also like, I mean, the other truth is when I realized how many people in my life had to be medicated on uppers just to get through what we're expected to get through, I was like –

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FT: Everyone's incentivized for your exhaustion.

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CD: That would be nice.

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FT: Yeah. Oh, my gosh.

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CD: Not to knock it, but like if we zoom out, it's like, okay, so we have to almost like do that to keep this competitive edge in this world, where like we're expected to just be able to go nonstop all the time. I mean, also like looking, even thinking back to like the anxiety that I had over auditions. Then I learned that every actress friend of mine was like on all of these drugs to like take away their – These beta blockers like block your adrenaline and this and that. I was like, “Okay. Well, okay.”

But it does speak to the expectations that are put on us that we then take on without realizing it because we want to be happy. We want to be responsible. We want to be successful, of course. Again, that's not a bad thing. But it's how are we going about it and why are we making ourselves do it and are we happy? Is it actually – Because I can look back to the hustling that I did with *The F*ck It Diet* in the beginning, and I can say I'm so glad that I worked that hard because I did get to a place where I was able to publish a book and now publish a second book.

Doing that kind of work helped me. But at a certain point, it was not helping me anymore. Without checking in with ourselves and asking ourselves why we're doing what we're doing, why we believe what we believe and is it serving us. Are we are we happy? Are we actually happy? Are we going to be happy if we keep going like this for the next five years? I think that that is like a pretty simple takeaway of like can we just check in with ourselves and ask ourselves why we're doing what we're doing and if it's working out or if we need to shift something.

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FT: Yeah. Well, you – I mean, the pandemic was and still is such a transforming time for people. We're seeing, for example, a lot of Americans leaving their jobs. I think a lot of them have arrived at this same realization that there's more to life than just working a crap job just because it pays the bills. We should expect more from how we spend our hours. I wonder, when you wrote the book, did the pandemic – Was it even a thing?

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CD: It was so bizarre, yes. So I wrote the beginning of the book pre-pandemic. I had the concept for the book. I knew generally what I wanted it to be. I got my second book deal literally the day before New York shut down, the day. We knew it was shutting down. We were like, “Okay.”

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FT: How do I sign this contract?

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CD: Yes, exactly. We better take this because I don't know if we're going to be able to shop it around. So I had the task, basically, for the first – So that was March. Then I had to turn in the first full draft that fall. So that whole summer, it was like a blessing and a curse because it was an amazing focus to have during – It was like, “Okay, I'm going to have money for the next year and a half. I have this focus and I'm lucky I can stay home and I can write this.”

But the world was so upside down that I was like, “I don’t –” I was talking about rest, right? We were all sort of like forced into this like sort of fake rest, where like, no one was really feeling restful because they were stressed out of their minds, and they were having to deal – I mean, all the people who had to work from home and homeschool their kids at the same time, and people who were like, “Oh, yay, a two-week vacation.” Then they were like, “Oh, my god. I’m losing my mind.” So I don’t consider that rest because I don’t consider that mentally and emotionally restful.

That’s one of the things that I talk about in the book. Just like sitting on your couch, I don’t consider rest, unless you are making sure that you are so allowed to be doing it. Because what so many of us do is we feel guilty about it, and that is not rest. That is stress. That’s actually defeating the purpose. But that is where a lot of us find ourselves. I think that that’s – When people think, “Oh, well. The pandemic, I got to stay home all the time.” Well, that’s not necessarily rest, unless you deliberately are making a rest. Most people weren’t or most people couldn’t at that time.

My god, it was crazy. I had so much more in the book about the pandemic. Then I took it out because I thought it was ending. Then I turned in the book, and now it’s still going on. So it’s like it was so hard to account for that, but I do still think that we’re all kind of operating under this belief that we shouldn’t be tired. We are so allowed to be tired because there’s so many things going on, and we don’t know how to handle it.

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FT: Something that you said about giving yourself permission to feel, “I can take this rest,” I think gratitude is a really important practice. But sometimes, that just reminds you of like how good you have it, and so you should just suck it up and deal and stop complaining. So how do you – What’s your advice for someone who might feel like that?

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CD: That is the dark, so to speak of gratitude, and it's actually something that I do talk about in the book because the book does talk about so many of my attempts at self-help to try and self-help myself out of being anxious and tired. All of the things that I sort of dove headfirst into and sort of made this sort of black and white thing where it's like, "I have to only have good thoughts. I have to just – Every bad thought I have is like creating my –" It was all about law of attraction stuff.

I really genuinely think that true gratitude, like true gratitude, not bullshit like spiritual bypassing toxic positivity gratitude, but like true gratitude where you can just slow down a little bit and hold the good with the bad to be able to feel your emotions and be honest about your pain or fear or anxiety I think is so important. I think that that can coexist healthily, right alongside gratitude. I'm experiencing this stress and this pain, and this is a hard time. But I can also be thankful for these things, and it doesn't mean that I can't feel stressed, and it can't have a bad day, week, month.

Because I do think that that's one of the issues with this toxic positivity is that we believe that we can sort of just like hack our life and our brain and our emotions. If we just think positive thoughts, we can just sort of like overrule all the negative thoughts and all of the pain. No. But I believe that thoughts happening in our minds are different than actual emotions. What often happens there is we are suppressing and denying our emotions, which doesn't work. That just leads to – Honestly, it like leads to what people are these days calling trauma, where it's like you have this unprocessed stuff in you, and then you think you can sort of –

I think that this is like a good example of what we're doing with our exhaustion and with the way that we're treating ourselves. We think, "Well, what's wrong with me?" You just need to think positive thoughts, and everything's going to be great, and we're not like being honest about our grief and our pain and our sadness and all this stuff that we don't necessarily – In our culture, unless you have a really good therapist and have been at it for a long time, we don't necessarily think that it's responsible or healthy to feel.

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FT: You mentioned earlier that you yourself in your own journey realized that you had been implementing this hustle mentality in your ambitions as an actress and also like how you are earning and all of that. Before we go, is there any advice, even if it's just experiences that you had, for somebody who is trying to find peace in their financial life? I think like social media has infiltrated so much of our consciousness and including like our financial mindset because there's so many people to follow. Someone even just recently wrote into me. They're like, "I'm a –" He's getting a degree in finance and he still feels like he doesn't know where to begin because there's so many different types of advice, different kinds of influencers. So any thoughts on how to find balance and do you when it comes to your finances?

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CD: That's such a great question, and it's a really hard to answer because, of course, it's going to be really different for everybody. Everyone's going to be in a different because the truth is I had hustled enough for a couple years, where I said, "Okay, you know what? This isn't working anymore. This energy isn't working anymore. The way that I'm going about this is not sustainable, right?" It was great. It led to some good things, but I can't keep going at this rate. That was the checking in like, "Is this still working for me?"

But I had made enough money to say, "Okay, you know what? I can take the next year or two later and I can take that time." I have to keep working. It wasn't like I was able to like just quit my life. I'm going to keep working but I'm going to be more discerning with the things that I take on. I'm going to be more discerning with my energy. Not just with career and job stuff but also with my social life because if I can – Any energy that I can conserve and that's when I was burnt out. That was like when I was like, "Something is wrong. I have to reassess."

I think what's important for people to know is you can take it one step at a time. There's no way to know everything you need to do, but these tiny little reassessments of, okay, well, is that particular job? Because just like you, I had all of these different – I was almost like a freelance and I would do these workshops with people who followed me and I would write and I had a podcast and I was doing all this different stuff. I was saying yes to everything, which was amazing for the first few years. It was great. But at a certain point, it wasn't great anymore, and I was like, "I can't say yes to everything. I have to be more discerning in what I take on, and I

have to be okay making less money for the next two years and just hope that it's going to be okay." I'm not going to go try to be extremely irresponsible but I need to kind of shift my priorities a little bit from making money to conserving my physical and mental health essentially.

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FT: Yeah. Remember, you say yes to a lot of things so that later you can definitively say no to things because you have tried them and now you know.

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CD: Exactly.

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FT: I think what I'm learning from you is that we need to give ourselves permission to recognize the changes that are happening in our lives and go with that flow, as opposed to trying to hold on to a formula that may have worked for us in the past, even if it's a formula that seems so popular. That your financial life is a reflection of your personal life.

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CD: Yeah. It is not one size fits all and it never needs to be and it never should be and it doesn't even need to be one size fits you for your entire life.

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FT: Because God knows I still try – Try fitting into those jeans all your life, one pair of jeans. I'm sorry, but no. Once I have like those elastic bands like my son's pants from the Gap.

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CD: Yeah, exactly.

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FT: Button elastics on the inside. I need those.

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CD: Exactly.

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FT: We all do. We all do. Caroline Dooner, thank you so much. Your book is called *Tired as F*ck: Burnout at the Hands of Diet, Self-help, and Hustle Culture*. You also have so many other offerings. Tell us. Your podcast is still active.

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CD: Yes, my podcast is still active. I went on a hiatus for a while but I am back. It is called the F*ck It – Wait, what is it called? I just changed the name. It's called The F*ck It Podcast, and that's the full word spelled out with the asterisk. So you can find me there. You can find me on Instagram @thefuckitdiet, and that is the full word spelled out. I'm considering changing that to my name because I think I'm getting punished for that. But if I do, I'm still going to have that, and then it'll lead to my name.

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FT: We'll find you.

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CD: You can definitely find me there. I spend way too much time on Instagram, so I will be there.

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FT: Me too. Let's – I'll follow you right now. I don't know why I wasn't following you earlier. Thank you again and Happy New Year.

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CD: Oh, my gosh. Thank you so much for having me.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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FT: Thanks so much to Caroline for joining us. Her book is out February 8th, so you can preorder it now everywhere books are sold; Bookshop, Books-A-Million, IndieBound. On Wednesday, we're going to talk with one of my favorite authors and digital entrepreneurs, Grace Bonney. She is the author of *In the Company of Women*, one of my favorite coffee table books, and now a new book called *Collective Wisdom: Lessons, Inspiration, and Advice From Women Over 50*. You don't want to miss that episode.

In the meantime, I hope your day is So Money.

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