

EPISODE 1393

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FT: So Money is brought to you by CNET, the site that shows how to navigate change all around us. So Money episode 1393, how to overcome overwhelm and bring your book to life, with Richelle Fredson.

***RF:** The key to really coming up – You're laughing because you know, yeah. The key to coming up with your book idea is to really say, 'How do I bring my own fresh and unique spin to something that's tried and true? How do I not freak a publisher out with a brand new idea,' which you don't need."*

[INTRO]

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FT: Welcome to So Money, everybody. I'm Farnoosh Torabi. Are you overwhelmed by all the moving pieces that are required when writing, editing, and publishing a book? You've got a great idea. You just don't know how to bring it to life. Well, you've turned to the right episode. Our guest today is Richelle Fredson. You've probably heard me talk about her. She's been on the podcast before. She is my personal book proposal writing coach. She helped me finish my book proposal, and now the book is coming to life. It's going to be out next year. It's called *A Healthy State of Panic*.

I wanted to bring Richelle back on the show to talk a little bit about what she's noticed in the publishing landscape over the last year since she's been on the show. What books are selling? What's the new advice that she has for authors? She has an exciting new digital program. If this is the time for you to get that book out in the world, and you just need that nudge and that expert guidance, Richelle has launched a brand new course called the Book Proposal Blueprint. It's the literal blueprint for your book, how to write it, how to sell it, how to bring it to life. Here's Richelle Fredson.

[INTERVIEW]

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FT: Richelle Fredson, welcome back to So Money. I am so stoked for this conversation. We are going to talk about all the things I really love and you love, which is book writing and entrepreneurship and online courses. Although I'm not someone who probably should ever do an online course. I tried it, and it's just not me, and I actually wrote about it in my book because I had online course FOMO. I was like, "I have to do a course. Everyone's doing a course." But some are better positioned to do this like you, and we're going to talk about what you have in store for our audience.

But first, let's just recap and reintroduce you to the So Money community. You've been on the show before. Why? Because I am not just a friend but a client, and you helped me really, Richelle. I mean, I can't say this enough. You really helped me get out of the weeds of this, I think, where a lot of people who attempt to write books begin, which is, "What am I doing? Can I even do this? How do I get this done?" Trying to get a proposal out the door in the heat of the pandemic is – I mean, I'm just saying that out loud. It sounds impossible. But you helped me get to the finish line, and the book is called *A Healthy State of Panic*. It's coming out next fall. I'm getting goose bumps. Huge thank you to you for getting me there.

I only bring the best people on the show, people who are like they walk the walk, they talk the talk, and they've helped me to get further along in my life. That's Richelle. So first, tell us a bit about your business and what your passion is and how you help your clients write their books.

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RF: First of all, thanks for having me back. I love being here. I love being with your audience. I think that when I started my business, I had already spent 15 years in house with a big publisher. What I really wanted to do in my next phase was help all the people that didn't have the roadmap to get published, right? Because my job was looking at book proposals and helping to decide what we would invest in and what we would launch and then navigating those launches with the authors.

There were so many great book ideas that would come across my desk that we just couldn't take on because there was an element that was missing. Maybe the person didn't think about who their reader was, or the idea wasn't baked enough, or something was missing. I thought I want to get to these people. I want to help the people that are on a mission to get their book out into the world and create an impact but don't have the roadmap to do it.

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FT: That's precisely why I wanted to work with you because you had that insider baseball knowledge of what publishers are looking for, and what a pity that you write this proposal. You put it out there, and it's missing a few ingredients, and that can be your make or break. It's like I just applied for a passport for my daughter, and I put the wrong Social Security number on her application. I put her brother's Social Security number on there. So now, I'm in the midst of like correcting that. I've lost weeks, thankfully not trips. But anyway, I digress.

The point is little errors like that can make or break and tell us about who you're helping out these days. Who are your clients that are desiring to write books? Later, we'll talk about how the industry is also changing. Last time you were on, we're talking about how publishers were becoming more inclusive, and editors were becoming more diverse. It used to be a very whitewashed industry, and that's changing, which is good. But first, tell us who do you work with? Who are these folks besides me?

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RF: Yeah. To your point about the passport, I mean, when it comes to book proposals and getting your idea in front of the right people, it's that old adage, right? You only get that first chance, that one chance to make that –

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FT: That was my point?

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RF: Yeah, yeah. So like let's please do it right the first time. I want to set you up for success. My clients are – A huge chunk of them are entrepreneurs, a lot of people that have built their own business. They have coaching practices or consulting businesses. Some of them are in corporate, have climbed the ladder, are ready to write a book to get on more stages and get more interviews and be in media, right? A lot of my folks are change makers and thought leaders because they know that writing a book is a tool to grow your business. So for them, there's a lot of opportunity that goes beyond what's held in the pages of the book. It helps to bring people into focus for their programs and other things that they're doing.

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FT: Not everyone to write a book, though, right? You mentioned about being a tool. There are many tools that entrepreneurs can leverage to grow their audience. I just had a guest on the show who's leveraging TikTok. Now, she's a comedian. Not necessarily like – I don't think she'd described herself as a change maker or a thought leader, although you should really go back and listen to Leah Rudick because she's making me think. Her comedy is so spectacular.

But I guess what I want to hear from you is if you're listening to this episode, how do you know if you've got it? Because listen, it's not easy writing a book. Not everyone is up for it or really should do it. There's other ways to get out there.

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RF: You're right. I kind of look at it in two lanes. The first lane is perhaps the person who has a certain framework or something that they do when they build their business that has repetition to it. They've done it enough times that they have feedback. They know what the readers will want from them. It's not just something they're putting down on the page for the first time and figuring it out as they go. Somebody who has done the practice of figuring it out, what they want to teach people.

Then there's the folks who are writing really for creative pursuit, right? The folks that maybe want to write their memoir or short personal essays or things like your beautiful upcoming book will be as a showcase for who they are in the world and as a creative passion to do so. It doesn't matter which lane you're in. If you want to traditionally or hybrid publish, you need the book proposal. So you have to do that foundational work.

What I find is that when people go through that foundational work, they get really clear on who they want to be not only in the world, if I can sound like cliché. But really understand what their purpose is, but show up more fully in their business and show up with such clarity in their book. So there's this element of discovery that happens. So people don't have to be 100% certain when they sit down to begin their book proposal process. You need to be really certain by the time you submit that proposal, though.

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FT: I personally love the self-help books that integrate science with a counterintuitive thesis. I'm tired of the you go get it girl finance books and how to like be happier. There was a period of my life where I was open to those books, and I feel like I got what I needed. I would love to hear like what are the titles and the topics that are really winning over editors and readers right now.

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RF: Yeah. I mean, especially because we're coming out of a pandemic, there was a lot of talk about discovery, a lot of learning that we did in that time. So we're starting to see an influx of books that are rooted in trauma, both through the psychological lens, therapists, practitioners, things like that, but also from people's personal lens, right? Because lived and learned experience are equally valuable when it comes to a book.

We're seeing topics like loneliness. We're seeing topics like substance abuse. It's rising for women more than ever before, right? Women carried a huge load during the pandemic, especially parents and working moms and things like that. So a lot of trauma, a lot of advocacy, right? So creating that more inclusive environment in the publishing space, which we touched on last time I was here, I love to see that that's still thriving. So things like indigenous wisdom

and anti-racism through the way we look at our bodies and the way we look at food and the way that we look at parenting.

There's all these cool topics that are on the rise. But the truth is publishers are incredibly afraid of risk. So the key to really coming up – You're laughing because you know, yeah. The key to coming up with your book idea is to really say, “How do I bring my own fresh and unique spin to something that's tried and true? How do I not freak a publisher out with a brand new idea,” which you don't need.”

The idea of loneliness and isolation is not a new topic, but there's a lot of new knowledge that comes to the table coming out of a pandemic. So how do you bring your spin to something that's already proven in the market?

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FT: That's where you come in, in many cases. What I found, and I experienced this, you have a lot of different ideas. Before I discovered or before I landed on *A Healthy State of Panic*, which is my offering to my audience on how I make decisions and how actually fear is for me a catalyst for growth and can be for you too. But to get there, oh, my God, it took years because I went from like, “Oh, I want to write another book, and I'm kind of tired about writing about money exclusively, and I kind of have like this weird upbringing, and my family's kind of kooky. I wonder if there's a way to bridge it.”

I mean, literally, the plant was seeded, I want to say, in 2017. Okay. It's coming out in 2023, so six years. So this is why I'm saying like if you have no patience, if you're not in it for the long haul and for the big finish line at the end, maybe you try something else but –

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RF: Do the course. Do something digitally.

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FT: Do something digital, right? You can self-publish. What are the ingredients that publishers are looking for, besides, like you talked about, this idea that is not too risky but also irreverent and new and fresh? What are they looking for in the author?

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RF: Personality, first and foremost. I think that's the most common thing that people leave out when they're developing their book idea, and especially in their book proposal, right? Just for anyone listening that doesn't know, the book proposal is like the key to entry, right? It's your document that pitches the book vision and you, and it's the only thing that agents and publishers will read. So the book proposal is –

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FT: They might Google you, though, too.

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RF: Yeah, totally. The book proposal is the shot, and what happens is people often come to that very mechanically. So the proposal and anything that you're writing from this point forward should really hold your personality. Write in hash tags. Write in whatever slang you use. Whatever it is, like let it be you.

The other thing is some track record, some proof, right? So if you're writing something that you're saying changes lives, or if you're writing something that says, “I have a plan for,” they're going to want the proof for that. So they're going to say, “How long have you been running your program, right? What have the results been?” They're going to look at your social media and your website to see how you're showing up as a teacher and a leader or a business person, whatever it is. So make sure you're out in the world doing the thing before you write about it, and that is if you're writing a nonfiction prescriptive book.

If you're writing a memoir or short stories or something like that, they're looking for a strong storyline, right? Good memoir should read like fiction. So they're looking for something that feels

like they can drop into the moment and be there with you. That often comes down to the quality of the writing.

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FT: Reads like fiction. That's what I want for my book, even though it's not exclusively memoir. But it's like a big idea memoir, as my editor, Michelle says. The word memoir is like, "Okay, I'm not Taylor Swift. So let's relax."

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RF: Well, the beauty of a style like yours, and Jen Winston did it with her book, *Greedy*, is it gives you permission to not have to tell everything in a linear fashion. It's like what are the moments from my life that I want to share that have a point to them? Because the truth is, and this can be triggering for people, your book isn't about you, right? Your book is about the reader. Your book contains you, and it holds you, and it has your vision and your voice. But it's all about connecting with the reader and the reader having their own reflections and the reader taking action in their own way.

I love the way that your book is organized, and I think that's actually a really topical style of book. I think it's a growing genre.

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FT: You're so right about the importance of reminding yourself that your book is about the reader. I get caught in that loop because in conversation with my editor recently, I was like, "Did you feel like Farnoosh went on an arc in this book?" She's like, "Yeah." But I mostly felt like the reader went on an arc, and that's, I think, more important. No offense.

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RF: We love you, but it's not about you. Yeah.

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FT: Relax. You and I work together intimately over the course of 8, 9, 10 weeks. I had you at the ready helping me, and that's one way that you work with your clients. But you're also expanding and making yourself more accessible through an online program. Tell me how you're capturing and bottling up the essence that is you in a digital program, in a digital format?

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RF: Yeah. Well, I mean, I'm a lot of personality, so the whole thing. The whole goal was to not lose that when you're staring down the barrel of a camera, teaching modules. But the whole point was to create a model that was really accessible for people. Obviously, to work with me privately comes at a certain price point, and I love to do it. It's a little bit more intensive.

But also, there are people out there that can't show up to regular meetings. Or they're parents and they have the time to do it at like 10:00 PM or 2:00 AM or whenever it works for them. For most people, they've been putting their book idea on the back burner for years. They've got multiple Google Docs, piles of Post-its, journal entries that hold all these ideas, but they haven't taken action.

So my goal was to create a program that use the same framework that's proven and has led to millions of dollars in book deals, to bring that in a digital format, where people can really access all that wisdom and do it self-guided. But we have five virtual office hour sessions, where people can connect with me and get feedback and work through challenges because it was really important to me to have my fingers in everybody's business because that's just who I am. But to know that they weren't alone, right?

Because any creative project is going to bring up vulnerability, comparison, concerns about our content. Am I doing this right? So I wanted to make sure that there were elements of touch points for me to connect with people.

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FT: What do you want your clients to bring to the table? Like the disposition that they should have or like how to get through some of these writing blocks or even just idea blocks because maybe they have a lot of ideas, and they're feeling stuck. But like you can help them walk through that and filter through that. But to some extent, they have to also bring some – What is that? I'm searching for the word. What is that thing that they have to find?

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RF: It's accountability. They've got to have accountability. If I think of all the people in the world that say I want to write a book someday and never actually do it, that's the majority. So you have to be in the mindset and be ready to do the work, quite frankly. But you don't have to have it all figured out when you start this program.

We spent a great deal of time in the first two modules helping people land on their right book idea because there is a strategy to choosing that first book out of the gate. So I wanted to walk them through my method to get there. So even if they're feeling like, "I've got a few books in me. I'm not sure which one comes first," they'll know once they go through the program.

Then we dive into the deeper work of the book proposal and tackle all those emotional components we talked about, right? Overwhelm, vulnerability, comparison, writer's block. I made sure to tackle all the things that happen in our brains in our hearts and could lead to someone derailing. We made sure that wasn't going to happen.

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FT: Tell us how we can learn more. Then I have a lot of other questions about like the state of the industry. I think you're writing a book, too. Isn't Richelle working on a book?

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RF: Well, Richelle turned her focus to this digital program. I know and I will be going back to –

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FT: You should take your own course, again.

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RF: I know. I know. I'm 75% done with my own book proposal. For people who want to learn about the book proposal blueprint, again, it's a 10-week program. You have lifetime access to the module, so you don't have to complete in 10 weeks. It's richellefredson.com/blueprint. We are open until the 12th for enrollment. So if they're thinking about it, now's the time to act, and I hope to see them in there.

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FT: Awesome. Awesome. Well, we will put that link in our show notes. Again, I cannot endorse you and your ideas and your process enough because, clearly, it led to my book deal and others I know. I've referred you to folks, and I've heard also great feedback from others. So listeners, like this is – Richelle is not giving me any like money. We are not like – She's not giving me any side whatever. Like there's no deal here. I'm just a big fan.

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RF: Thank you.

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FT: All right. How would you characterize the state of publishing today, as so far as their interest in publishing books that are by authors of color? Because we saw a bit of that right around George Floyd's murder and, obviously, Black Lives Matter movement helped to set our heads straight and get us to really realize the importance of inclusivity in many ways. So is that enduring or have we gone back a little bit?

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RF: No. It's still enduring, and I think there's a lot of space for growth still. But we're seeing a lot of titles acquired that are really rooted in like Latina culture. I've got a couple of books coming out that are wonderful around finance for Latinas, around climbing the corporate ladder for Latinas, right? It's a lot of fun to help amplify the voices that need to be heard, and I think publishers have really woken up to that. I think, like I said, there's a lot of space for growth still, but we're seeing some really cool titles getting acquired and starting to hit the market. It's been a lot of fun to watch.

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FT: Great. Okay. What's your book about, and why aren't you writing it? What's going on? What's that 25% going to take?

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RF: It's going to take time. My book is going to be very similar to the framework that I teach in my course. So this is a really great lesson for people who think that if they teach something one way, they can't teach it in any other capacity, right? If we look at social media, we know when we post, not everyone is seeing it. Not everyone is responding to it. So if you have a program, you can have a course. You can have a book. They can all be married and rooted in the same teachings, and you'll still reach new people.

My book will be about the process I take people through the tackles the journey of authorship and how to execute it successfully.

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FT: Count me down for at least 5 to 10 signed copies. We should give them away at So Money.

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RF: Let's hope my agent isn't listening to this and calls me and says, "Give me that proposal tomorrow."

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FT: Well, you brought up the agent. So you mentioned that the traditional publishing landscape is very traditional and has its process, scenes. How do you even go about getting the agent?

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RF: Great question. An agent is your most important advocate in the publishing process, right? Because they're going to put you in front of the right editors and the right publishers. They're going to negotiate your deal. They're going to tackle any problems that come up in your process. So it's really, really valuable.

The way to attract the right agent for you is to create a great book proposal. Not to always bring it back to the book proposal, but that's really how it's done. So the more that you show up as yourself in your book proposal, the more you tick all the boxes of what they're looking for, which is precisely what the program does, the more likely you are to get the right agent that sees the vision and you, and is ready to walk into the room and sell you because you're not always in the room, right? They're going to go and do their half of the job and get you the meetings. Then you get to shine.

But they're carrying a great weight at the beginning by pitching you out to publishers that are going to be in alignment for you. So you have to have a strong book proposal that sells that vision, so the agent can do their job. One of the tricky ways to do it is look into books that you love. Look at their acknowledgments. They always think they're agents, right?

Then there's services like QueryTracker or Publishers Marketplace. What I would not do is just email one of those folks and say, "I have a book idea." That is the fastest way to go into like the junk folder forever. I would just go through the book proposal process, come out with that shining document, and put your best foot forward.

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FT: How important is your social media following? I asked this because, well, yeah, maybe the answer is just you got to have a lot of followers, and that works to your advantage. But we know now that that doesn't always equate to book buys, and I think publishers are catching on to this. So when you're trying to make your case for why you're going to be not a risky bet and like you're going to sell books, what should you highlight? If you don't have a positive or a big social media following, does it really hurt you?

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RF: Publishers love thriving platforms. But I think where everyone gets caught up in thinking that social media is the only part of the platform that counts. You're right. Publishers are starting to notice that the correlation between followers and book buyers is getting smaller with each passing year. So what they're really looking for is they're looking to say, "What other elements? What other buckets of the platform are you filling and are you focusing on?" So are you contributing articles? Are you on podcast? Do you have your own podcast? Are you blogging? Are you taking stages and like doing speaking events? Like what else are you doing?

If you're writing a book that is to enhance your business, then they're going to look under the hood of your business and say, "What programs are you running that are going to help sell this book long term? Do you have a group program, a membership? Are you hosting retreats? Do you have a course?" So they're going to start to look at all the ways once they take their foot off the gas that you're going to be able to keep selling it for the next two to five years.

I think it's looking beyond social media. Social media is important. Certainly, email list is very important. But lots and lots of books get bought every year by clients of mine who have very moderate social media presences but have great businesses or have great corporate contacts. So we have to look at all the different buckets that a platform can be.

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FT: Tell us about your podcast too, Richelle, and the fact that you have even just built this incredible like ecosystem, helping your audience with this entire process, from your course to the podcast, to the coaching. Your website's an incredible resource. It just shows you how much

demand there is for this, and you really cornered this market. But tell us about the podcast. It's so super.

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RF: Thank you. Well, you know I'm going to –

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FT: Bound and Determined.

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RF: Bound and determined. You were one of my lovely guests. Thank you so much. That podcast was born out of the fact that there is a lack of transparency in the publishing industry. Part of my mission is to just crack that open, so people know what they're getting into, right? A lot of people don't know that the second you sign your book deal, it takes 18 to 24 months for your book to come out, right. So the things that no one's talking about.

I love to have authors on, industry experts, agents, all of that, so that people can hear from the mounds of experience, what to expect, and really sometimes how to fast track that process. So I love it. It drops every Monday. It's a labor of love. It's so fun for me to do.

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FT: Have you done an episode yet on how to feel empowered throughout the publishing experience as an author? Because sometimes, especially new authors, you're just so excited and grateful to have a publisher. I remember when I was a first time author and feeling like I had to do everything the publisher wanted me to do. The cover, I didn't have any vote on that. However they wanted to edit the book then. You know what? They're the professionals.

But it took some time and some coaching from my agent and other experienced authors to know that, no, these are all just recommendations. The publisher wants the best for you, and they have a lot of experience. But you don't have to lose your voice in the process either.

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RF: Yeah. I often – There are many episodes that talk about this, and I call it a marriage, right? Because that's really what it is. It's your ideas meets their expertise, and you come to a middle ground. So there's a lot of back and forth and advocating for what your vision is, and there's also surrendering to the expertise of the other people in the room. So there's a lot of back and forth.

We also cover the three points of resistance that every writer hits, right? There's a lot in the feels, as I say, where people need that type of support to know that they're not alone in the way that they're feeling because just nobody is immune from these feelings that come up. No one's immune from the overwhelm. But learning how to advocate for yourself in the process is really a powerful lesson, and we do spend a lot of time talking about that.

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FT: All right. I want everyone to go check out richellefredson.com/blueprint. If you want to make 2024 the year that you maybe don't get published but get a publishing deal, because you're right, it does – There is a timeline.

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RF: There's a timeline.

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FT: Richelle, always an advocate and friend. Thank you so much, and I hope you book up fast.

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RF: Thank you.

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FT: We're booking up fast. How much longer is this open?

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RF: It closes on the 12th.

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FT: Okay, good to know.

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RF: Yeah. Thank you for having me.

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FT: Anytime.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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FT: To learn more about Richelle's Book Proposal Blueprint, go to richellefredson.com/blueprint. I'll put that link in the show notes. I'll see you back here on Wednesday, when our guest is Berkeley economist, Jesse Rothstein, on the state of the job market. Thanks for tuning in, and I hope your day is So Money.

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