

EPISODE 1161

“SZ: We have so much stuff about money and money can mean so many things to so many people. There's all this stuff about like, “I can't make more than X person in my life,” or there's all these hidden barriers, I think, that keep us from being open to the expansiveness of what is really available.”

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:51]

FT: Welcome to So Money, everybody. Monday, February 15th. It is my birthday. My wish from listeners, if you're so inclined to give me a gift, is to leave me a review, subscribe, share this podcast with a friend. We are six years strong on this podcast, and we'd love to make it another great year. Check out my Instagram, follow me on Instagram, where I've got a post related to some of the advice, I've got for myself and anyone else who cares to join in on making the 40s the best financial decade ever.

Along that theme, I have an incredible guest today, who is going to talk about how to give ourselves permission to choose. I don't know where you are in your life right now, but you've come to this podcast for a reason. You're at an intersection. Maybe you're about to make a big decision. Or you just want to learn more about money, so that you can make more informed, aligned decisions in your personal life. This conversation might give you the confidence and action steps to get closer to that goal.

Stef Ziev is a former TV executive, turned certified life and executive coach. You may have seen her on the NBC Today Show. She spent nearly two decades as an award-winning senior development executive in the entertainment industry. She worked for DreamWorks, Oxygen Network, she developed and oversaw original movies and series for TV, many of them won awards, including an Emmy. She pivoted to coaching. She's going to tell us why. Through this experience, has had the privilege of working with thousands of successful and driven executives, leaders and organizations.

Her goal with every client is to remind them that they have the choice to live and lead with more joy and freedom. It may not always feel that way, but we're going to talk about how to first, give yourself the permission to choose, and then how to identify those choices. Also, how to go back into your life and explain these choices, stand up for these choices. By the way, I am on Stef's podcast Permission to Choose and it is one of the best conversations I've ever had with a podcast host.

She asks me a lot of tough questions and gets me to talk a lot about my identity growing up as a kid, the challenges that came with being different growing up as me and how that worked out. Be sure to subscribe and listen to Permission to Choose. That episode is currently airing. Here we go, turning the tables with Stef Ziev.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:03:25]

FT: Stef Ziev, welcome to So Money. It is nice to have you on the show, after your generous invitation to be on your podcast. Welcome.

[00:03:35]

SZ: Thanks, my friend. It was a pleasure and honor. I look forward to many, many more segments with you.

[00:03:40]

FT: I was laughing before we were recording, because I said, I can't promise I'm going to be as stellar of an interviewer as you were for me. You spent some time exploring my name with me, which unleashed a lot of hilarious trauma, I think, from my upbringing. Anyway, just to tease that to listeners, so that you go and you check out Permission to Choose, which is Stef's podcast. Also, this incredible brand and empire that you have built. I want to really start with the name of this company, of this brand, of this existence, Permission to Choose. Is it the permission part,

the giving yourself permission part, or the realization that I have options that seems to trip people up the most?

I think it's going to be different for every person. For me, I would say it's the choice part. I've always felt like, I have ownership. I can grant myself permission to do things, but I sometimes don't see what my options are. You tell me what seems to be the biggest obstacle for people, the permission part, or the choosing part.

[00:04:41]

SZ: That's interesting to me that you went with the choosing part. I think a lot of people don't necessarily give themselves permission to make the choice. I think we live in this world, or especially this American society, where we have an abundance of choice. I mean, you just walk down the cereal aisle in a supermarket and it's overwhelming. The permission –

[00:05:06]

FT: Well, cereal I know, I have a lot of choices. Sometimes, if you're deciding on if you should quit your job or not, sometimes you feel you don't have the choice to quit, right? You feel stuck a lot. I think that's what I'm trying to get at. It's like, I have felt stuck in more than one occasion in life, where maybe I didn't recognize the choices that I actually had.

[00:05:26]

SZ: I think that people don't necessarily give themselves the permission to make the choice, because there's so much riding on it. It's like, what are you making the choice mean, versus I have a belief that whether whatever you choose, you're going to get what you need. What I mean by that is, there's always a lesson in life. It might be, I like to call it tuition. Sometimes I've paid lots of money for an item, or a program, or a coach, or fill in the blank, that has led me to either get the information that the coach program, whatever it was, was promising, and/or it provided a life lesson that was expensive. That wasn't necessarily what I thought, but it led me to my next choice.

I like to take the pressure off of what the choice is. At the same time, I like to bring the consciousness of choice and the permission to make the choice into the conversation, because I don't love the idea of, I didn't have a choice. I think that we always have a choice in some way, shape or form, whether it's the choice about how we're going to relate to something, the choice to make a move, the choice to not make a move.

I think that to stay in that place of I don't have a choice lingers us. It keeps us in that place of that victim mentality. I'm not saying that there aren't things that happen that we feel victimized by. I am saying that we all have a choice as to how we even relate to that moment of victimization.

I go back always to this very extreme example of Viktor Frankl, who wrote *Man's Search for Meaning*. He was a psychologist who was in the concentration camps, and was very mindful of the choices that he had, the freedom that he had in his mind, despite his very horrific circumstances. It's not like, he consciously chose to be in a concentration camp. Yet, he always was mindful of the choice he had, about how he was relating to that circumstance, and the choice to keep hope alive, which he attributes to part of what kept him alive.

[00:07:42]

FT: What do you say to people who go, "You know, Stef, I'm on board with this." For some people who feel marginalized, who have been marginalized, whether it's a person of color, an immigrant in this country, that permission and choice are privileges. How do you achieve those things if they're not accessible to, as much accessible as say, somebody who is more accepted in this country, a white man? Yeah.

[00:08:09]

SZ: Well, I am a white woman, so I acknowledge that I am not speaking from a place of having the actual experience. I'll answer this question as best I can. I say this with humility and I know that I am not the expert on this. Anyone who's lived through it can also certainly, I'm open to thoughts and feedback here. What I would suggest and the way I offer this idea of permission to choose is that, yes, we live in a certain system, right? We are thriving, some of us, and some of

us are oppressed. There's lots of different dynamics going on in the world that we live, and the society where we live. It's easy to linger in the land of the of the story. We can be single-storied, and that can keep us in many ways, imprisoned in some way. We can also expand our story.

I think that inside of that is a both and. It might be that, yes, there are certain people with privilege and there are certain people who don't have that privilege. We know that those privileges are intersectional. There's lots of different types of privilege. There's the privilege of maleness, there's the privilege of whiteness, there's the privilege of education, there's the privilege of finance. It's not just one thing.

I think inside of this, we really do get to ask ourselves, where do I have choice? What is my choice? If I were to even choose to relate to my story in a different way, if I were to choose a new story, because I think that sometimes, we unconsciously buy into a story that has been told to us, and that can contribute to keeping us small. That might be someone who feels marginalized to someone who has had trauma in their life, to someone who doesn't have the education that they feel elevates them to a certain status. We certainly have stories for all of those circumstances that have – where people have risen above and beyond their current reality.

Where did that come from? That's a choice too. It's like, we can choose to be limited by where we are currently. That is fine. You know what? This is not a judgement. This is just like, I say, if you're going to do it or don't do it, choose it. Even that's empowering, because I like to talk about it even from the very basic one of, if I choose not to work out, then I don't have anyone to rebel against.

[00:11:02]

FT: Stop being in my head. Well, I'd love for you to share, let's say, we were in one of your sessions and I come to you, and I'm like, "Stef, I don't feel like I have the permission to stop being a stay-at-home parent in this moment, especially of COVID and go back to work, because I'm stuck. My priority is to my family." I actually got this from somebody. "I'm a son of immigrants, Chinese immigrants, and I was allowed to be either a doctor, or a lawyer, or CEO. Now I want to

be a hairdresser. I feel like, I have to live their legacy out and not and live out their wishes, because they sacrificed so much to come here.”

I mean, that's a real immigrant child's narrative of feeling the pressure to follow in the wishes of their parents, because, yeah, they did sacrifice a lot, so don't screw it up. Two very different feelings of stuckness, or not having permission to do the thing that they want to do, coming from very different places. What is the exercise? What is the first step to giving yourself that permission to say, “I can actually do something else and here are my options”?

[00:12:15]

SZ: I like to talk about it as a story. If we think about it, like if you write down in one column, all of the reasons why I can't or I don't. Let's just call it the challenge, or the old story. Write it all out. What is it? What is that thought pattern? What are you telling yourself? What are the parents telling yourself in your head? We all have that. It's known as the shitty committee in the head, that we personify every day.

[00:12:51]

FT: Shitty committee. I love it. Oh, my God.

[00:12:53]

SZ: Consciously or unconsciously, that part of us, those voices are running our show. I encourage people to write that down in, let's say, if we make a T, on a piece of paper. In the left hand column, write it out, “I don't or I can't, because.” Think about it in terms of what do you really want. If it's, I can't get ahead, because I got laid off, because I don't have the skills, because all the things.” Then you use that to inform the right column, which is I now choose to. It's learning and writing and acknowledging what we don't want and our challenges is as important as acknowledging what we do.

This is where I think choice really gets accentuated, because we can be mindful then on the page. We can actually see, what is this inner talk? What's this dialogue that's going on in my

mind that's infiltrating and impacting the action I'm taking or not, which is creating the results that I have in my life? I think part of the reason we like to say, "I don't have a choice," is because it's much easier to not choose. It's much easier.

[00:14:09]

FT: That is a decision. Not choosing is a decision.

[00:14:13]

SZ: Correct. Not choosing is a decision. If we choose to not choose, then we have more agency. Suddenly, our power is back in our hands.

[00:14:22]

FT: I get this. I am on board. I think that there's another step maybe too, which I think prevents people from going to make the choice, which is the concern, the fear of reconciling their choice with their environment, their relationships, their external relationships. The example of my listener who's an immigrant of Chinese parents, making his mom still feel proud of him and accepting that. How do you then go back into – Okay, so you're like, "I'm making the choice. I give myself permission to do the thing that scared me, but I have to now deal with the – I have to go back into my life and then talk to my partner, talk to my family, talk to my boss as a maybe." How do you have those conversations? Do you have to realize that maybe some – there's a risk there maybe that you're not going to make them happy.

[00:15:10]

SZ: Well, first of all, I don't believe that we have the power to make anyone happy. I think that's up to the individual. I think if you take that pressure off of yourself, then you can start from there. What I also think about is, I have one of my foundational tools I use with all of my clients is this. If you think about a big table, a big dining room table, a big conference room table, whatever it is, and you think about all the different parts of yourself sitting around that table. What's there? Farnoosh, let's use you as an example. Let's just think about some part of you that are at the

table. We have mother, we have financial expert, we have wife. Let's have some basic ones too. We have love. We have fear. Happy, sad.

[00:16:01]

FT: Over-caffeinated. I don't know. Is that well representative?

[00:16:03]

SZ: Over-caffeinated. What else?

[00:16:09]

FT: Needs shower. Some feeling of – there's breadwinner, there's that. That comes with a lot of baggage, or not baggage, but a lot of feelings. There's the inner child in me, maybe, that had all the hopes and dreams. Should I go on, or is that –

[00:16:28]

SZ: Well, that's awesome. Then in the case of your listener, who is with immigrant parents and not wanting to disappoint, so you have the pleaser, maybe.

[00:16:36]

FT: Yup. I'm in there. Right.

[00:16:38]

SZ: Maybe there's some insecurity. Maybe there's doubt. Also, at the table, there might be confidence and there might be creativity. There might be an artist, or there might be the abundance and there might be lack. Again, we could go on and on. The question is always, what part of you is sitting at the head of the table? That part can change in any given conversation, in any given interview, in any given relationship.

When we bring a consciousness to what part of you is sitting at the head of the table, that becomes the narrator. That becomes the authority, i.e. the author of the story you're now telling yourself, and this is all choice. You get to choose, what part of me would be best served sitting at the head of the table, when I choose to have this conversation with my parents, when I choose to ask for a raise, when I choose to look for a new job? The job that I really want and deserve, not the one I think I will settle for.

[00:17:44]

FT: Who is going to be the main character in that discussion? The part of you that you're prioritizing and insofar as making – that you're prioritizing in making this decision.

[00:17:59]

SZ: Yeah. Because I believe that the more intent that we bring to the choices we make, the more power we have over the results we create. Because I really believe that it starts with who we are being, and then that energy gets infused into the action we take, which ignites and creates the results. If we're not really mindful about what that energy is, what that narrator is, what that leader of our discussions is, then we are just continuing to perpetuate these old stories and this old fear and this old lack and this old fill in the blank. That becomes where we – that's where we feel out of control and out of sorts, and that we don't have a choice. I would invite people to just try on the idea of starting things with I choose to, even if it's like, I don't have a to-do list. I have a to-choose list.

[00:18:58]

FT: I like that.

[00:19:01]

SZ: I think that's so much of this is mindset, even around money, right? It's like, are we choosing to be moving forward with an abundant mindset, or a lack mindset? Those two things have a real ripple effect in what we are giving and receiving, even financially, because I think that even

from a financial perspective, I believe that money is green energy, and we're just circulating it and that becomes a choice.

[00:19:30]

FT: Well, thank you for bringing this back to money. The second word of the name of the show. Sometimes I forget that we're talking about money. Yeah, let's talk about money and our relationship with money. I don't know how often this comes up in your client conversations. What are some Stef Zievisms around money? Do you have any big thoughts? Or, I mean, you just gave a bunch, like money is green energy. What are your biggest money philosophies that you see carrying into your practice when you're talking to people, because I'm sure money comes up a lot, abundance versus lack is probably a top theme? Then we can get into your own personal money experiences, but what are some of your overarching beliefs around money?

[00:20:17]

SZ: I'm pretty Zen about it. At this point in my life, I feel that I've really adopted a – I mean, I'm going to sound a little woo-woo, but I like to think of myself as grounded woo-woo. I do really believe in the mindset around money. I like money. I'm somebody who is a big fan of it. Also with my clients, I have people write out a 10-year vision for themselves and then all the way down to a three-month, three to five actual results that they want to create three months from now. When I'm having them write out 10-year vision, five-year vision, one year vision, and they give me a number on their financial desire that is small, I amp that up probably by easily 50% to a 100% every time.

I am someone who believes in the put it out there and then this is or something better. Then I also believe in an abundant mindset. I think that we have so much stuff about money and money can mean so many things to so many people. There's all this stuff about I can't make more than X person in my life, or there's all these hidden barriers, I think, that keep us from being open to the expansiveness of what is really available. I am somebody who very much believes in that expansiveness.

I believe that I like to give. I think that giving is an open palm that allows us to also then receive. I believe in that universal law of giving and receiving, if you will. I also believe in the idea that we get to give what we want to also receive. If you want money, give money. If you want love, give love. If you want friendship, give friendship. In my experience, that has happened. That sounds maybe a little super woo. Going back to my own personal experience, I have gone down to zero many times in my life. I think that the difference is that, it's when I focus on what I love and the choices that I'm making that are really in-line with my purpose – I am still hustling. I'm not somebody who's sit back and um it out and then it's just going to happen.

I do believe in action. I also really believe in intention. I also really believe in aligning that story. I also really believe in the choices to be in sync with my purpose and my values as I'm going out into the world to give what I want to give and do what I do, then the money comes in. I do encourage people to dream big, but also, clean out any of the cobwebs in the mind and fire some of the shitty committee that's not aligned with your true value and abundance.

[00:23:10]

FT: The shitty committee. I wrote that down, because I'm working on a book and part of it – a lot of it is about how to make good decisions. It's part memoir, part advice. Actually, one of my chapters is about being selective with your board of advisors and people asking everyone for their opinion, on all their personal matters. I have people come to me asking me for things and I'm like, “Do I know you?” I get it. I mean, maybe as a podcaster, I mean, that's what I'm here for. People in my life that overwhelm themselves with people's opinions on things that really only two people should be advising you on, or three people. Yeah, being selective with your shitty committee, making your shitty committee your – what's the opposite of a shitty committee?

[00:24:03]

SZ: That's a good question. I got to come up with that. I just think the opposite is you putting it –

[00:24:08]

FT: I'm quoting you in my book, though. That's great.

[00:24:11]

SZ: The opposite is just whatever your highest self is at the head of the table. Really, who's the leader of you.

[00:24:19]

FT: Yeah. How does someone who worked in talent management and had a really great big job for places like DreamWorks, Oxygen Network become you, become the person who's guiding people on these very important decisions in their lives? What gave you the permission to choose this direction in your life?

[00:24:39]

SZ: Yeah. When you started that question, I'm like, that sounds so familiar. Who else did that?

[00:24:44]

FT: I know that person.

[00:24:45]

SZ: Yes. I call this time of my life – I have a funny story about this, where I was going – I left Oxygen. I was a VP of development. I had a nice, cushy job with all the accoutrement that went with that, including elite status on airlines. A year after I left, I was going to a wedding in Austin, Texas with my friend, Cricket. We had coach seats and I said, “Cricket, don't worry. I'll go get us our – I have elite status. I'm going to get us bumped up.” She waits and I go up there and I said, “Yeah, Stefanie Ziev. Here's the information.” She's like, “Yes, Miss Ziev.” She's looking, looking looking. She's like, “I'm sorry. You're no longer elite status.” I was like, “I don't know if you understand.” I've argued with her for a few minutes, and then I realized I really was not.

I walked back with my tail between my legs to Cricket and I said, “Cricket. When I was an executive, I had a lead status and people waited for me at the airport with a sign that said my

name and they took me places. No longer.” I will say that I loved my job at Oxygen. I loved it. I loved my team. I loved it. What I didn't want was my boss's job. I just knew it. I just was like, I don't want to go beyond this very awesome level than I am, because I don't want to do what he does. I don't want to deal with budgets and I don't want to deal with people.

I became certified as a life coach during my time at Oxygen. Then it just so happened that I got certified and 12 days later, there was a big buyout of NBC. I took my severance and left. I will tell you that in the moment, it wasn't a conscious choice. I was faced with a with a meeting, where my COO called me in to say, “Stefanie, I want you to know that the CEO and I are going to do everything in our power to keep your job.” I found myself like, as if somebody was pushing me forward. I went, “Lisa, no.” I was like, “Are these words coming out of my mouth that I got [inaudible 00:27:00] this job? Am I an insane person?” Because it's not like, I had not mapped this out.

I ended up leaving with a severance. Let me tell you, I failed miserably, three years into my severance and into my very failed business. I was 40-years-old, moving home and living with my father and turning 41 on his sofa. It was not a good time. That was an example of, I was not mindful of putting myself out there and make – I was choosing to hide, and not go out into the world and show up in this way.

Then I ended up going back into the entertainment industry, which sounds like a dream for some, but not mine. It was a terrible situation for 18 months. Then I got fired. I still didn't have enough money to start my own business. That was it. I was like, we burned the boat.

[00:28:01]

FT: Don't you love getting laid off?

[00:28:03]

SZ: I do. I do.

[00:28:04]

FT: We were in the same club at one point.

[00:28:06]

SZ: Listen, I was crying in the bathroom the night before.

[00:28:09]

FT: Obviously. Yeah, it sucks.

[00:28:11]

SZ: Yeah. I think that that's one of the thing –

[00:28:12]

FT: I say that 10 years later, that getting laid off was great. Time heals.

[00:28:17]

SZ: This is what I would say about getting laid off. The night before I got laid off, I was literally in the ladies' room at my job crying hysterically on the floor, like a really good scene from a movie going, "God. I got to get out of here." I'm hysterical. This is the worst experience. This is terrible. I'm being abused. I don't have enough money to leave. The next day, I was let go and not with my whole contract. I had to even pay a lawyer to get – it was a mess.

Still, I just continued forward. I was really conscious at that point. I was like, I am going to make this coaching thing work. I will not be back on my father's sofa. I will not be back in the entertainment industry. I will not do it. I made the choice to really just go for it. Within two months after that, I was on the Today Show. Thank God, I'm also 10 years later, everything is good.

[00:29:20]

FT: Wow. Oh, my gosh. I love that. I say, the best decisions in life are sometimes the ones that are made for you.

[00:29:28]

SZ: Yeah. I would say one thing about that. I have a great story about a client who came to me miserable in her job. Tated the job. The whole point in hiring me was to create her exit strategy, get her out of the job and this was it. It was it was not what she wanted. The worst thing. Now, she didn't know exactly what she wanted, which is why she came to me also, but after my first session with her, then in the next session, she was a half an hour late for my 45-minute session. I'm calling her, calling her. She's not coming through.

Finally, she calls me and she goes, "I'm going to cancel the – Obviously, I'm late, but I'm going to cancel this, because I just got fired." I go, "Oh, no, no, no. We're not canceling this." I'm like, "First of all, congratulations. This is awesome." She's like, "Screw you," basically. Again, this woman years later would – she ended up going on a journey that took her to Costa Rica and Bali and now she's a coach. It's like, she just found her way. I always think like, where are my fingerprints on this decision that either feels it was made for me, or some part of me chose? That's the question I would ask your listeners. Where are your fingerprints on the circumstances that have led you to this moment? Now what do you want? Because that could just be inventory where you're like, that works or that doesn't. I'm going to make some more. I'm going to actually start to take some conscious choices here.

[00:30:57]

FT: Yeah. I really like the way that you shaped that. Where are your fingerprints? If you are someone listening, who is in an unhappy relationship, or you're not working, but you want to be working, or you are not happy with the business. I mean, I think it's obviously one thing to identify the stuff that has been happening to you. A lot of things happen to us. There's always there's always stuff that we played a role. That didn't just happen. Some just happen to us. I mean, sometimes like the pandemic, but we're talking everyday stuff.

[00:31:36]

SZ: You can say, things happen for us. Then that's another way into –

[00:31:42]

FT: I like that too.

[00:31:44]

SZ: What is this about? What am I here to learn? If we look at everything as a classroom and every trigger as our teacher, what are we here to learn? That's where I think, we can make some choices to even – even if the only choice is to ask that question and be curious. That's enough.

[00:32:04]

FT: Well, Stef. Thank you so much for sharing your time and energy with us and helping us work through some of the mind blocks, challenges around decision-making. I think 2021 is going to be a pivotal year for a lot of people. I think there are hopefully, going all to be good, strong, healthy pivots. After a year, we felt we just didn't have a lot of choices. Appreciate you and thank you so much.

[00:32:31]

SZ: Thank you so much. I'm really grateful.

[END]