

EPISODE 750

[INTRODUCTION]

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FT: How would you describe your relationship with money? Is it anything less than harmonious? If yes, then our guest wants to help. Welcome to So Money, everyone. Welcome back. I'm your host, Farnoosh Torabi. Our guest today is Ashley Feinstein Gerstley, the founder of The Fiscal Femme. She's a life coach, money coach, keynote speaker who has made it her entire life mission to help women cultivate what she calls harmonious relationships with money and achieve their financial goals.

Ashley is a former investment banker and now she spends her days as an entrepreneur working with women in particular across the country, helping them advance in their financial life, and the keys, she says, is to develop a positive mindset when it comes to your worth. She's going to tell us how.

Here we go. Here's Ashley Feinstein Gerstley.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:01:28.8]

FT: Ashley Feinstein Gerstley, welcome to So Money, a.k.a. the Fiscal Femme. Welcome to So Money.

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AFG: Thank you so much for having me. I am a huge fan of your work and a long time follower of the podcast. So I'm very excited to be on.

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FT: I'm always excited to meet and support fellow female financial nerds.

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AFG: I'm definitely a financial nerd and a female.

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FT: Yeah. So you check off those boxes. What I find really interesting about your journey is that you have a financial background yet you wanted to turn this around a little bit, this career for yourself, and really become more of like an educator as supposed to working in an industry.

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AFG: Yes. So it was actually pretty shameful to be a finance major and then financial professional for many years and to know nothing about my own money.

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FT: How does that happen? How does that happen?

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AFG: I've come to find that just no one knows about money, but there's an extra shave around the financial professionals who don't know and I realized that –

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FT: It's like the psychiatrists whose life is a mess.

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AFG: Right. Definitely. I worked corporate finance is an investment banker. So I was dealing with companies' money, but even as a finance major, I do nothing about my own money and made a million mistakes and bled through all my cash when I switched jobs. So I really started The Fiscal Femme because I needed it myself.

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FT: You've been quoted as saying that money is a feminist issue and yet women are still reluctant to talk about it. So why is it a feminist issue and why are women reluctant?

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AFG: Great question. The reason I believe it's a feminist issue and a big part of our mission at the Fiscal Femme is equality, and I believe that finance and financial freedom is a really important often overlooked part of the quality, because we we're thinking about equal pay, and I talk about that a lot, but when we are really dependent on the next paycheck, we can't negotiate as strongly as we want or we have to stay in jobs where we don't want. So I think in order to take risk in our careers, in order to invest in other women-owned businesses and negotiate or financial stability and financial freedom is really important.

[0:03:49.3]

FT: I can't agree more. I mean, lately too, I'm sure you've been addressing this in your work as a coach and speaker is the Me Too Movement and how there is a connection to your financial security and your security. Just your general overall personal sense of security, that I think it's no coincidence that a lot of reasons why women stay in unhealthy and scary and dangerous jobs is because they don't feel like they are financially empowered to leave. They stay in a particular industry. They stay working for a terrible person because, well, they're worried. If they leave, what is on the other side? Will they be able to afford the transition? Will they be able to support themselves? Will this person blacklist them from the industry and therefore not be able to find work? So I'm curious how that's been coming up in your conversations and what you're discovering from that perspective.

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AFG: From specifically the Me Too Movement?

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FT: Yeah, and how that is changing the way, hopefully, that women think about approaching their financial lives.

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AFG: Definitely. So I think something that I've experienced too is the wanting, I think, to get educated. I would say if someone is looking to leave a job or to speak up about something that's happening and if their financial well-being is getting in the way, I think there's definitely a push for educating and not depending on other people for our financial well-being. It's a very much an independent push that I'm seeing.

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FT: Hopefully we're waking up more and more to the fact that you can't just transfer the money and responsibilities off to your partner or put your head in the sand. There's a lot of individuals and relationships, men and women sometimes, but I think mostly women, because I was just talking to Danielle Town who is the author of a new investing book and her father is a very well-known investor and teacher of investing and she kind of grew up like not caring about investing and she does believe that there's like sort of a female thing to that that we just don't either feel like we can or that we can rise to the occasion. We're not interested. Do you think that it is in our makeup to not care or not want to be as involved in our finances as men or is there something else going on?

[0:06:15.4]

AFG: Definitely not. I think they're a bunch of studies that show that actually women are better investors than men when we do invest.

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FT: When we do, but we don't.

[0:06:23.6]

AFG: Yes.

[0:06:23.9]

FT: When we do. That's the good news. The bad news is that we're not doing it as much as we should.

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AFG: Yes. One of my heroes is Sallie Krawcheck and she talks a lot about the masculinity and the patriarchal system of investing and how even the wording is very masculine, bull market. When I talk to my clients about risk, there's often an association of risk being very scary and this idea. I just think there's a lack of education around investing, and when you work really hard for money and you're finally saving something, this idea that, "Oh, I can lose some," is scary and to not want to make a mistake.

What I've found, even one of my big financial mistakes, was taking investment advice from a coworker, and I think men are often willing to do it even though they have no idea what they're doing and it's so much more important to do it than to do it perfectly. So they might not have any more idea. They're just going to get started and we learn by doing. So my biggest piece of advice is to get started, but I would say that it's definitely not part of our DNA and it's something that I think it's been a boys club and hopefully more and more platforms and conversations like this have it feel more accessible so that women get investing.

[0:07:41.6]

FT: Speaking of accessibility, you have this thing called The 30-day Money Cleanse. You also book coming out soon. That's kind of an offshoot of this 30-day transformational experience. Tell us a little bit about it and how it differentiates from other kinds of programs on the market. Why should we do the 30-day money cleanse as supposed to the 45-day money makeover? You know what I mean? Not to cast any doubt on the success of your program, but I'm going to give you the platform. I'll give you the stage to talk about why yours is better.

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AFG: I love it. Thank you for that.

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FT: Yeah.

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AFG: So the 30-day money cleanse actually was born from trends that I saw in my one-on-one clients. So often my one on ones are like the research for programs and I saw no matter how little or how much we were making, we were all struggling with very similar things around money. So my work and the program combined the numbers, which I think most financial platforms and education is around the numbers. But I actually became a coach because, yes, there's missing education and the numbers are important, but it's actually the emotional behavioral side of money that has us create those lasting results.

So the course is very much about money mindset and my money philosophy. It's judgment free, it's values-based. It'd definitely not one-size-fits-all personal finance, and it helps people take control of their finances, manage their spending and de-stress their money for good. Because it's around the money mindset piece, that it actually feels easy and it's fun and the program itself is gamified. There's raffles for cash and participation is rewarded. The results have been amazing, which is why I'm so excited to bring it to a larger audience with the book. The average participant saves 950 during the 30 days, or 20% of their pretax income, which is amazing.

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FT: And how are they saving mostly? Are they just taking stuff out of their day to day spending? Are they automatically saving? What's going on?

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AFG: Yeah, it's a great question. So I am very much – I am a proponent of living really well while saving. So people might not want to take money cleanse because they're afraid I'm going to make them stay home and eat ramen alone in order to save money. But I would say most money cleansers are poor, that they're actually living better even though they're saving, and it's because we do a lot of things mindlessly. We're in the habit of doing them. We haven't really evaluated trade-offs or we treat ourselves and don't realize, "Oh! That's actually not a treat. It's at the expense of what we want most."

So thinking about getting back on our own team versus combating ourselves when it comes to our money so that we can make choices and maximize the dollars we spend and the way that's going to make us the happiest, and there's definitely – Oh, go ahead.

[0:10:37.2]

FT: No. I just wanted to add to that and say that I find it really liberating when you can get clear on what's important to you and then suddenly you can say no with conviction. I don't want to buy that, because it's not important to me as it turns out. What made me previously felt like a deprivation, because you weren't getting yourself that fill in the blank now feels like liberation, because that's money that you can now put towards something even more spectacular.

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AFG: Definitely. Yes. Right.

[0:11:06.0]

FT: Yes! So you talked about the importance of mindset work in your 30-day challenge. So we know a lot of our mindset is shaped from our children, our childhoods and how we experienced and relate it to money as kids. So ChaseSlate, our sponsor, actually did a survey and found that over half of parents have talked to their kids about money at some point. So I wanted to ask you the question of what was your biggest sort of money memory as a kid growing up? What did your parents teach you that was really impactful?

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AFG: I grew up with an allowance, and it was a system that we split up our money into three buckets. One was spend now, one was save and one was give. Something that really impacted my money mindset, and it's actually negative, and I remember it really vividly, is I was saving up and I searched and searched but I can't find the name of this doll, but it was a doll in the 90s that I had and I wanted to buy her a riding outfit, and it was \$28 and I had the magazine and I checked off the riding outfit and I put \$28 cash in an envelope. Mostly probably in ones, given my allowance, and I shipped it off and I never got my outfit.

I don't know. Maybe it got stolen in the mail. Maybe I didn't break – I was six-years-old. I don't know if my.

[0:12:33.4]

FT: Did you tell a parent you were doing this?

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AFG: No, I did not.

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FT: Oh, boy!

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AFG: I was no independent. Had my allowance money. I was so excited. So some takeaways that I think I took from this that were pretty negative was money is not fair. It's not straightforward. I should really leave this to the grown-ups. What's the point? I'm not good at this. When you think about the rest of my life and money until I was around 25, I was kind of driven by those beliefs as I wasn't facing my numbers at all.

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FT: Wow! That's a lot of money for a six-year-old.

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AFG: I know. I had a great – The amount of allowance was your age and then you divided it by those three. It was a very good allowance.

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FT: What's your take on allowances now? Parents often ask me, "What's the best way to teach kids money management or good money behavior?" So curious to know what your thoughts are on that.

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FT: It's a great question. So along the lines of my philosophy, I definitely don't think there's a one right way to do an allowance. But I do find with the parents I work with that there's this fear that you have to look perfect and you don't want to share any of your mistakes with your children. I think when we make a mistake, even if it's the present or the past, it's such a great way to have a conversation about something and maybe prevent our children from not having to experience the same thing.

Then I think there is a balance. I know a lot of people say, "It's the only time you don't have to worry about money. So I want to let them enjoy that." But I've heard of parents doing time of

day, or a day that kids can ask what anything costs. So I think as long as you're facilitating a conversation and it's not dogmatic. It's sharing an open and they can ask questions. I think that's great to start the conversation early.

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FT: Yeah. Not to underestimate their ability to really understand seemingly abstract concepts. They have more potential than you think, and I have heard that starting as young as five and six years old to talk about what money means and what is money and currency is not too early to start that at that age, because when they go to school and they see other kids bringing different things to school, whether it's like the – One kid bringing in a fancy lunch or a lunch box or talking about a vacation that they took. They start to see the different economies at play. It's important at home you're having, like you said, an open dialogue about what things cost and how to earn things.

We digress. Let's talk your biggest money failure. You talked about – You hinted the fact that when you were transitioning to – I guess, when you were leaving your corporate job and found Wall Street, you kind of like blew your paycheck, or your savings rather.

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AFG: Definitely. It was just withering away, because when I was in investment banking I had no free time. So whenever I did anything, I could really do whatever it wanted, because it was once a month and I had a great paycheck. Then when I left every day around five or six in the sunlight, there are so many things I wanted to do and could do and had a lot more time to spend my money.

So I think definitely there was 100% issue with spending and budgeting, but I'd say the biggest loss that I had was when I took that coworker's investing advice. He sounded just so confident. He's doing a speculative investment and I just assumed that he knew what he was talking about.

Again, it kind of fed this idea that I realized most people have no idea and they bragged about their wins and are very quiet about their losses, and I learned that in there that I want to know exactly what's happening with my money.

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FT: Yeah. Now you're married I saw your beautiful wedding photos online and I wonder what's your biggest advice for women in relationships when it comes to money management.

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AFG: Yeah. One thing I've noticed in the opposites attract, they tend to attract on the financial side of our relationship too. So there's typically a saver and a spender and we typically polarize each other. So the spender becomes more spending and the saver becomes more savey. But one thing that I do that I recommend all my couples and I do with my husband is have money parties.

So something you mentioned too is putting your head in the sand and handing over whether it's all of your finances or just the investments to your partner, so staying in those conversations. I found – There're so many things to say. But I found that if, for example, as a couple you have a financial adviser, and often some of my clients will feel uncomfortable in those situations or made to feel stupid or feel like they are not comfortable asking questions, to just stay in those conversations, ask questions, do the research and then have biweekly or monthly money parties where you check in on how your goals are, what you're spending and make it fun, make it a judgment free zone and just to stay in that conversation together on a regular.

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FT: I love that it's a party and not just a meeting or a gathering. How do you make it a party?

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AFG: Everyone has to make it a party a little differently, and if you try something that you think will make it fun and it doesn't, just try something else. We typically do it over dinner and some wine. So you can either make the party fun itself by having music or getting comfy or having your favorite beverage, or you can also do a reward after the party. So before date night or with your girlfriends, have your money parties and then everybody goes out. So we work really well with rewards. So rewarding yourself for keeping your promise to yourself to do your money party.

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FT: So back to your book that's coming out early 2019, share with us some of the kind of unique insights and takeaways. What was your favorite part of writing the book as far as what you felt was like a really important message you were bringing into the world?

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AFG: It's a great question. So the book is going to be a workbook, and it actually is taking the money cleanse course and turning it into a book. So it's beautifully designed colored workbook, and I wrote it – Actually, I gave myself a deadline to write it before my son was born, because I didn't know what new motherhood would be like and if I would have any time to write. One of my favorite – My favorite parts of the book are mindset reframes. So looking at things in a different way that make it easy to stick to them, and one that I love is thinking about each expense in terms of the opportunity cost.

So sometimes it's helpful to just see the annual number of something that you spend on. So if you say, "I get lunch out every day and this is how much it costs. That's \$3,600 a year." To some people they'll think, "Oh my God! That's way too much and I'm going to now bring my lunch a few times a week." For others, that's just a number and it's not really clear if that's valuable to them, if they want to be doing that.

So to look at 3,600 in terms of something that would make you really happy that you're currently doing that you could do more of or something you're not doing, that you could actually do. So if you want to go on a vacation, what would a \$3,600 towards your vacation look like?

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FT: A lot.

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AFG: Yes. How many dinners with friends could you have for that same amount? So instead of just saying this is the number that your spending. What does that look like in terms of the trade-off?

[0:20:26.8]

FT: Yeah. What's it worth to you? I like that. Or what if you invested that, and what would that be in 20 years? We used to do this thing at thestreet.com when I was a reporter there. We would write about kind of like the trade-off of not buying the iPhone, because we love to cover Apple there, and we would put the cost of the iPhone, let's say, it was like \$400 into a retirement calculator and we were like, "If you took this iPhone, instead maybe every three years you put \$400 into a retirement portfolio," because let's say every three years there's a new model, so you have to buy a new one. It would be like tens of thousands of dollars in retirement. So it was just kind of an interesting way to look at opportunity costs. Now that everything is an opportunity cost, but I'll love those games.

[0:21:21.6]

AFG: I love those games too.

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FT: All right. So what's your number one money habit currently that helps you stay on top of your finances to avoid the old Ashley where she would blow her paychecks and kind of was spend happy?

[0:21:43.3]

AFG: I guess the one way I love to look at each expense is if it's – Because I think it's interesting, the treat yourself campaign. I definitely think we deserve to be treated and I deserve to treat myself. But is something really truly a treat? It's kind of in the same minds of the opportunity cost, but is it mindless? Is it marketing that's making me think this thing is a treat to myself? What is the real treat for me and will this make me actually happy more than 15 seconds?

Then something else that I've been doing through this work, and this I guess just passed my four years of running the Fiscal Femme fulltime, I've gotten really good at being fabulously frugal, and not living fabulously while saving for your goals and not spending as much. Something that I'm working on now is the earning piece. So how to build wealth, increase your income? So I've been doing a morning meditation around earning and attracting wealth each morning.

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FT: Take me into that meditation. What are you thinking? How are you manifesting?

[0:22:52.2]

AFG: So I've done it a few different ways. Sometimes I'm just imagining money coming at me, and it's crazy, but this has really been working. Then another thing through my wealth work that I've been doing, it's like what does it actually mean to you? Because we have a lot of baggage around wealth and being rich and there's a lot of judgment around how people use their money. I call it rich shaming. But viewing, "Okay. What would you do with that?" So actually visualizing the part that gets you most excited about attracting this wealth so that it's much more tangible.

[0:23:26.4]

FT: And has it worked?

[0:23:28.5]

AFG: It's been a couple of weeks, and it's really been working. So I'll have to get back to you to tell you if I hit my goals.

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FT: How do you know it's working?

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AFG: A lot of new opportunities have been coming in, which I'm excited about. The goal is to quadruple the income this year. So we'll see –

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FT: To triple or quadruple? What did you say?

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AFG: Quadruple.

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FT: Quadruple. You go girl! Go Fiscal Femme! Lead by example. I love it. All right, Ashley, let's do some So Money fill in the blanks, and this is where I start a sentence, you finish it. First thing that jumps into your head. If I won the lottery tomorrow, the first thing I would do is ____.

[0:24:13.2]

AFG: I would start a rescue and a vineyard.

[0:24:18.3]

FT: Oh! Do you have pets?

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AFG: I have a dog, and I'm not even a cat person, but I spend a lot of time this morning. One of the feral cats in our backyard, he wanders around and was injured, and I spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to get him medical care.

[0:24:36.9]

FT: That's a huge problem, right? Is pet owners and keeping their pets healthy and alive, when they get injured, it can be really expensive. I don't know a lot of people who get pet insurance, although it exists. But it's kind of a tossup to whether it is going to pay off.

[0:24:53.8]

AFG: It's almost like when you have a home, you should have kind of an emergency fund for the home, or pets, either pet insurance or an emergency fund for their vet bills [inaudible 0:25:02.9].

[0:25:04.3]

FT: It's really sweet. Okay, the one thing I spend on that makes my life easier or better is _____.

[0:25:12.4]

AFG: Number one right now is childcare.

[0:25:14.8]

FT: Oh! You're a mommy.

[0:25:16.9]

AFG: I'm a mommy. Yes!

[0:25:18.3]

FT: I didn't know that. Well, congrats. How long have you been a parent?

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AFG: Eli is 10 months old yesterday.

[0:25:25.4]

FT: Oh! Eli. Is he walking yet?

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AFG: No.

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FT: That's early.

[0:25:32.0]

AFG: He's pretty chubby, so he's not doing a whole lot other than rolling.

[0:25:36.6]

FT: That's fine. That's fair. My kids didn't start walking until like 14-months. That's fine. Because after that, it's a whole different ballgame.

[0:25:47.6]

AFG: I can imagine.

[0:25:48.9]

FT: Yeah. Then it's climbing, and then it's running. Someone said to me the other day that as parents we're always like super insistent on getting our kids to walk and talk and then once they hit like 10, all we want them to do is be quit and sit down. I mean, that was like maybe an old generation. Nowadays we're all about getting out there and being true to you.

[0:26:13.3]

AFG: Yes.

[0:26:14.2]

FT: All right. When I donate, I like to give to ____ because ____.

[0:26:19.5]

AFG: I have three. I should probably just pick one. So right now I'm donating a lot to cleft organizations, because Eli has – He had a cleft lip, but now he still has a cleft pallet. So it's a cause near and dear to our heart.

[0:26:36.4]

FT: That's cool. That's how it would always usually works, right? You need like a personal drop. One thing I wish I had learned about money growing up is ____.

[0:26:48.0]

AFG: That saving is a gift to myself, not about deprivation.

[0:26:53.0]

FT: Yeah, and don't send money in the mail. Don't send cash in the mail to a P.O Box or whatever.

[0:26:59.3]

AFG: I know. I need to figure what that company was.

[0:27:04.4]

FT: Yeah, I know. Let's investigate. Last but not least, I'm Ashley Feinstein Grestley, the Fiscal Femme, I'm So Money because _____.

[0:27:13.3]

AFG: Because I'm changing the conversation around money to work for us as individuals and women.

[0:27:20.7]

FT: As a whole. Thank you so much, Ashley for the work that you do. We'll put all of your links on our site and we're wishing all the best as you continue this important journey to help women, help everybody master their money, and enjoy that little baby of yours. Talk to you soon.

[0:27:39.4]

AFG: Thank you so much.

[END]