Transcripts for No Guilt Mom Podcast Episode 180

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[00:00:00] **JoAnn Crohn:** Welcome to The No Guilt Mom podcast. I am your host, JoAnn Crohn. Joined here by my gleeful funny co-host, Brie Tucker.

Brie Tucker: Why? Hello? Hello, everybody! How are you?

I pieces before the intro. I know I have to start like coming up with ways to have it be interesting to see for people that are to checking us out on YouTube.

[00:00:21] **JoAnn Crohn:** Trying. Yeah. Gotta be seat. You. You could check out our nice attire today on YouTube where, uh, yes, we're dressed in our Arizona winter gear because we're recording this a little bit early. I know. It, it's, it's spring now. Spring now. And a little really close to our v i p retreat. Brie.

[00:00:37] Brie Tucker: I know.

[00:00:38] JoAnn Crohn: Like it just happens in the next few weeks from now.

[00:00:40] **Brie Tucker:** I can't believe it. Sun fun people. I mean, you can't lose,

[00:00:45] **JoAnn Crohn:** you can't lose no waterpark with a bar .Can't lose.

[00:00:49] **Brie Tucker:** I know, right? Every, every lazy river should have a bar.

[00:00:53] **JoAnn Crohn:** Exactly. And And don't have to bring your kids along that as well. Yes.

[00:00:56] Brie Tucker: Yes, exactly.

[00:00:58] **JoAnn Crohn:** Well, this, podcast guest actually came at the best time because it's funny, I came on this interview, we got on the studio about two minutes before, and I'm really stressed out with all of the things.

And you're like, do you wanna cancel? I'm like, No, I'm gonna do this. Um, but it was all of these working parent issues. That is what we talk about in this episode where my son came home sick yesterday. I found a doctor's appointment for him this morning and I was running directly from that doctor's appointment to here to log on and while being worried about my son and his health.

And it's just a lot when you're balancing work and you're balancing your roles as a parent.

[00:01:35] **Brie Tucker:** Yeah. And it, it seems like it, like is never ending. And we also talk about the fact that it feels like everybody's expecting more and more and more, and that our bodies, our brains default to more and more and more, even though that's not the best way to handle it.

[00:01:52] **JoAnn Crohn:** Yeah, this is a good one if you are feeling overwhelmed. So we are talking with Yael Schonbrun, who is a clinical psychologist specializing in treating relationships. She's a co-host for The Psychologist Off The Clock podcast, an assistant professor at Brown University and a parent of three sons. Her writing about working parenthood as appeared in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, greater Good Sciences Center among others and her new book, which is fantastic and you really need to get is Work Parent Thrive 12 Science Back Strategies to Ditch Guilt, manage Overwhelm, and Grow Connection When everything feels like too much, which I think. Everyone can agree with right now.

[00:02:39] **Brie Tucker:** I was gonna say, can we say that's an everyday problem?

[00:02:43] **JoAnn Crohn:** Everyday problem. So we hope you enjoy our interview with Yael.

You want Mom life to be easier. That's our goal too. Our mission is to raise more self-sufficient and independent kids, and we are going to have fun. We're gonna help you delegate and step back. Each episode will tackle strategies for positive discipline, making our kids more responsible and making our lives better in the process.

Welcome to the No Guilt Mom Podcast.

I loved your book, Yael. Working as a parent is extremely, extremely hard, and I think today is a really great interview day for this because I have had it dealt to

me this morning and last night with a kid's doctor's appointment this morning out of the blue, which luckily they're able to fit me in at eight 15.

And so it's coming from that to dealing with a sick child and it's just. Very difficult to be a working parent. So with your book, why did you feel this needed to be written?

[00:03:58] **Yael Schonbrun:** Well, because I'm a working parent too, and I feel so much of what you're saying that's like daily occurrence, right. So when I became a working parent, I, I am a clinical psychologist by training and I was on my postdoctoral fellowship sort of, you know, getting ready to become a assistant professor when I became a parent.

And it was really, really hard. And I think what. So hard is that I really didn't expect it to be quite, I, I knew that it would be hard, but I thought, I have a flexible job. I love my work. I had a healthy pregnancy. I'm really excited to be a parent. I have a supportive partner. This will be hard, but I got this.

I got this. And then when I became a working parent and found myself weeping on every commute to work and sitting at my desk working on grants and just feeling. So awful being apart from my child and then in the evening home with my child feeling so ashamed because all my colleagues were lapping me. I was kinda like, there, there's something wrong here.

So I, so I did what nerdy people do and I started reading everything that I could get my hands on from the bookstore in the library, and what I found there. Was true, right? It was mostly talking about how the systems fail us and also about time management. And those things didn't really get to the heart of what I was experiencing.

And I think part of that is that I'm a clinical psychologist, so I tend to look at the psychology of things, but I didn't see anything there that was talking about the human element of this. And sort of what we can do and what is the identity struggle and what are the tensions about? And the other part of it is that it was all pretty disheartening.

And I'm really a huge fan of the science of happiness, positive psychology. And so this book for me was, was what I wanted, right? Something that explored both, how do we make this work? Better and what is the inside part of the issue? Because for sure there is an outside reality that we need more supports and better policies and more equal marriages. But there's also this human part that I think is really important to talk about more. And what's cool is as I started diving into the academic science, I found a lot of really. Good nuggets that fit into what I was looking for. They just weren't written about in the popular press. Things like, uh, this concept of work family enrichment that hopefully we'll talk about because I think it's sort of the, the unknown sister of work family conflict, and it's the more appealing family member because it's really about how our roles can help each other out.

It's also about, How the tension between our rules actually is something that we can take advantage of it. It may not always feel good, but there are sort of embedded gifts in the way that our roles bump up against each other, and social science helps us to take better advantage of those gifts. And so that, that is what this book is about.

It's, it's the book that I probably could have used at the front end, but, but which now, I mean, I am still a parent. I have three kids and I find these are tools that I use every day in my, my working parent life.

[00:06:50] **JoAnn Crohn:** Yeah. And something that I love that you said is I too have seen in popular media how there is all these societal pressures on us as parents, and it kind of hasn't sat well with me because yes, there are societal pressures and we do need to address it, but it's also kind of taking the power away from us in that moment and saying like, oh, all these other things are wrong, and don't worry.

Like, you're doing fine, you're doing good. And to me, I'm like, I wanna improve something. I don't just wanna sit here and deal with all of this crap from other people. Like I wanna feel like I have some control in the matter too. And that's kind of what you're saying, that there are these tools that can give us back some of that control with how we're feeling and the stress we're feeling as a working parent.

[00:07:35] **Yael Schonbrun:** Right. A hundred percent. And I do think that the two go hand in hand because if we feel empowered to live our lives and conserve our resources where it doesn't make sense to spend them and expend them where it does make sense, then we can fight those battles in a more sustainable way. So I actually think that working with our psychology helps us implement system change even more effectively.

But also, More broad point. It feels really disempowering to read literature that basically says until policy changes, there's not much you can do. Because policy

changes really slowly and we have slow to live our lives. Right? And so it's a both and. Policy change would make this whole thing a lot easier.

Right? We need parental leave for all sorts of reasons, including for working parents, but like also for people taking care of elders and people who get sick and, and things like that. Yeah. So there's a making the system more humane element that needs to be considered, but also there are things that we can do in the meantime to make our daily lives a more tolerable, more enjoyable, more skillful, and that's where the social science can be really, really beneficial.

[00:08:41] **JoAnn Crohn:** Yeah, and that's empowering to me. And when I was reading your book and going through it, one chapter stuck out, which was this subtraction idea because when you mentioned time management, so many time management tips and strategies I've seen out there is like you just need to space apart your day better, and you need to chunk things and you need to take advantage of all these little moments to get everything done.

And I'm like, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. I, I am gonna be a stressed out monster if I am trying to get all of this little stuff done. So could you tell us a little bit about what this idea is of

[00:09:21] **Yael Schonbrun:** subtraction? Absolutely. And it is probably my favorite chapter of the book because I think it is so counterintuitive and it's this pocket of science that's not much talked about.

The other thing that is interesting about that chapter is I didn't actually, when I went under contract to write this book, that chapter was not in there. It happened because I interviewed one of the lead researchers, um, in the area of subtraction, whose name is Leidy Klotz, a terrific book called Subtract.

And as I was interviewing him, I was like, this needs to be an entire chapter. So the chapter features him, he's awesome and it features his science, which is really transformative. So the basic message of what his research reveals is that our brains are really good at adding and they're really bad at subtracting.

So when we encounter a life design problem, like how am I going to make this day work? Our mind automatically thinks, what? What more do I need to make this day work? And if you think about that from an evolutionary perspective, it kind of makes sense because in pre-modern times, if you encountered a life problem, it was most likely an issue of deficit.

Not enough calories, not enough connections, not enough shelter. And so our brains evolved to default to adding more calories, more connection, more shelter. And that made sense for pre-modern times where we were really exposed and we didn't have. Modern times are different, right? They're most have very full houses and very full calendar.

So more is not necessarily the right answer, but because culture evolves so much more rapidly than our neurology does, our brains haven't quite caught up. And so what is. So helpful to recognize is that the subtracting doesn't come effortlessly. What's more, the research shows that when we're overwhelmed, when we have higher, what they call cognitive load, we're even more likely to overlook subtraction as an option.

Now that is so you don't even think about it.

[00:11:19] **Brie Tucker:** Now, that makes me feel good, so that tells me it's not just Brie's brain that's broke and is constantly trying to add more stuff when I'm stressed. It's pre-wired that way and everybody is so yay. It's not just me. I'm not alone. No.

[00:11:34] Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, you're in very good company.

This is like a human thing. It's a human thing. I always think about it's, I think about it as like the target phenomenon. When I'm like rushing through Target and I only need two things and I'm in such a hurry, and I'm like, well, I'd have to come back later, so I'll just take this, this, and this, and I get home.

[00:11:50] Brie Tucker: It's so me!

[00:11:52] **Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah, it looks so good in the store, and then when I get home I'm like, shoot, what am I gonna do with all. Junk?

[00:11:58] **JoAnn Crohn:** I did that on Saturday. We went into target, me and my daughter, we had two things and we're like, we don't need a basket. We were like, at the end of the store, our arms are overloaded and we're like, oh look, they have baskets here.

And we grab one \$150 later. We're like, it's store

[00:12:14] **Yael Schonbrun:** wild. Okay. So I'm glad I'm in. Good target you guys. Yeah, it's really a problem, but what's helpful there? As, like Brie said, like your brain is not broken. It, it does what human brains do, which is it

defaults to adding and what that reveals to us is we need to sort of pause when we're making those kinds of decisions and recognize that even when it's not the better choice our impulses to add.

And so therefore, it's helpful to create some habits around subtracting, particularly when you're feeling overwhelmed and, hey, which working parent isn't overwhelmed. I'd like to meet you because I haven't met any. Most of us working parents are feeling pretty taxed and pulled in so many different directions.

And so recognizing that thinking about subtracting isn't gonna come naturally helps you to be more deliberate about it. And so I talk in the book about some of the practices that we can start to embed in our lives that can help us be more active in considering subtraction as, as you know, it's, that's not gonna be the only thing that we do, of course we have to add sometimes, but to be more deliberate about considering subtracting.

A choice as an option.

[00:13:22] JoAnn Crohn: Yeah.

And one of the stories you told is so relatable and I think would be such a hard decision for many women to make because we have all of these expectations put on us that we should provide certain things for our kids. And you had this incidence with you wanted your kids to have bar mitzvahs and you made a big decision there.

Can you tell us kind of that story and how you use subtraction?

[00:13:47] **Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah. I was writing this book during the pandemic and I was feeling very overwhelmed. There were so many things going on, and you know, among the many things going on is that I have three boys when, and my oldest is now 12, but at the beginning of the pandemic, he was nine, I guess 10.

He was. He was 10, he was turning 11. And so we had just started doing Hebrew school for him, and it was expensive. It was also a huge time suck. And it is important to me that they have certain features of spiritual community and heritage and tradition, and I want them to learn Hebrew because my parents are Israelis. So I was like, this is good and this is what I'd always planned. And I, I just, you know, this is what I'm gonna. I hadn't really thought about the alternative of not doing it was more how am I gonna do it? But it was miserable because it went online and it was super expensive and. There was so much going on and I was so stressed out with the book, and then I started thinking about subtraction and the light bulb went off.

I was like, wait, why am I doing this? Why am I sinking in all of these resources? My kid doesn't like it. It's kind of making me miserable. It's occupying so much of our time and it's making the financial resources not available to other things that are really of interest to the entire family. Do I wanna consider subtracting?

And I was like, no, but this is super important. And then I started doing the questions that I talk about in the book, which is to really clarify my values around what function is this serving? Like why is this so important to me? And I realized that it really was like the community and the tradition and the language part, and I was like, wait a sec, it's all online, so I'm not getting the community.

The traditions aren't really happening because it's like so brief and, and we're rushing through it. So we're not really getting the sense of spirituality and they're not actually learning much Hebrew because it's more like Bible study. So like I'm not getting any of what the why is, why I am contributing all these resources.

It probably doesn't make sense, and there might be other ways that I can bring those values to life that don't require so much investment. It was pretty hard to decide to drop out of that because it was, you know, it is something that I'd always thought that I would do. It helped to say, you know, I'm gonna try some other ways to fulfill these values for a year and see how that goes.

This is always a available to me if I wanna go back and, We haven't gone back. This is, we've decided that Bar Mitzvahs are not gonna happen in our family and we're gonna have a lot more disposable income for it. And we do other things, like my kids get tutoring in Hebrew and we go to services. We just don't do the Hebrew school classes.

So we find other ways, um, that are less time consuming and less expensive. But that allowed me to fulfill the why. So it's that question. First noticing the impulses to add, could I consider subtracting? Mm-hmm. Asking what, what the why is, like of the thing that you're debating, should I keep this or subtract it?

What, what's the function of it? What is your value there? And then if it. Is fulfilling the value perfectly. You know, you keep it, but if it's not, then can you consider subtracting it and if there's something important that gets lost, are there other ways that you can fulfill that value that are less expensive, quote unquote, you know, in terms of time and energy and other resources.

[00:17:10] **JoAnn Crohn:** I and I absolutely love that story cuz, I mean, Brie, I bet you could relate something that you feel like you have to do, like you have to do. Oh yeah. And you're like, push in and push in and push in and push in. We really don't think that, Hey, do we really need to do this at all? And is it even fulfilling the reasons we did it in the first place?

[00:17:27] **Brie Tucker:** I was just thinking like, do we not have this conversation work-wise at least once a week of like maybe like, no, we have to do it. And I was just thinking about that, like that is a really fantastic thing to be able to do. It takes a lot of practice, I would think. Because first of all, if you're doing it yourself, being able to recognize that, like you were just saying, this thought process that you had, that you have to do it.

Being able to question it is, is in some cases like questioning what you feel like are like core parts of you. So that's a little scary and hard to. And then also if you happen to have somebody else helping you with it, sometimes you dig in your hills even deeper because you're like, no, no, no, I have to defend it.

But yeah, once you come around being able to let go of it, it's so much weight off your shoulders.

[00:18:16] **Yael Schonbrun:** It is. And I, I think there's maybe some loss that goes along with it and so, you know, to recognize that that's a part of subtracting is like, Saying no, and there's gonna be loss there too, but it, that can free up time and resources in ways That's really valuable.

Related to what you're saying too, I think one of the reasons that we often get stuck in not. Considering subtraction is social pressure. Everybody else is doing it. Mm-hmm. And therefore I should too. This happens so much in the parenting domain also in work, but I think it's so dominant in parenting that everybody's doing sports and my kid's gonna get behind, or everybody's doing Russian math and oh my gosh, what's gonna happen if my kid doesn't, or everybody's hosting birthday parties, I'm gonna be a leper if I don't, or volunteering with a p t o and you know, I, I'm gonna be a bad person if I don't contribute.

What's helpful there is to unhook from the social pressure and recognize like we're social creatures. Like that is normal to worry about whether we're sort of fitting in and doing right by our peers. Yeah.

[00:19:17] Brie Tucker: How's it gonna look?

[00:19:18] **Yael Schonbrun:** But that kind of part. Yeah. How's it gonna look? Yeah. But then to ask, you know, what is it that I wanna stand for apart from what everybody else is standing for.

Consider for myself what is most important, even if what's important to me is not what's important to other people. So for me, downtime is really important. Mm-hmm. I have, mm-hmm. Most of my parent friends are go, go, go and have their kids in so many extracurriculars. And I, I have my kids in some extracurr curriculars, but I have a rule that each kid only gets one thing at a time.

I have three kids. So it's still a, that's, that's a good rule. Yeah. It's a good rule. Mm-hmm. But so many of my parent friends do way more, and so part of me is like, oh, am I not enriching my kids enough? But I really love my downtime and I love just hanging with my kids a. I really enjoy that, and I think other people get a little itchy when they sit still.

For me, I, I like sitting still with my kids, so it's a, it's what works for you in recognizing that it can be uncomfortable, there can be lost, but there can also be this fear of social comparison or social judgment that goes along with it. But when you're clear on your values, on your why and what's important to you, it can help you to transcend those kinds of discomforts and live in more in line with your.

[00:20:31] **JoAnn Crohn:** It's so funny because I, I've eventually worked up to that thinking my husband is very much, very strong for his downtime, does not like our weekends packed. While I am more social and always have been more social and wanna like be doing things. And we've been together now for 20 years and so his line of thinking has rubbed off on me a little so that now I'm like, no, I'm not gonna go there, or no, I'm not gonna do this.

And. It's really a process that once you start embracing it, you find you have so much control over your time and so much control over your energy too, and resentment from not having to do those things that you feel like you're socially obligated to do, but you're still know that you are in line with your values and you're really putting what's important to you out there.

So I love this values and I love the talk. Downtime. Can we talk a little bit about the benefits of just doing nothing?

[00:21:31] **Yael Schonbrun:** Yeah. There are so many benefits to doing nothing, and our culture does not really enforce it, but I actually think people are aware, right? There's this whole mindfulness movement. People know that.

Resting your body and your mind is important. People know that being able to be alone with your thoughts has value. Also for our kids, people know that being able to not be stimulated by our screens and engaged in, you know, mind numbing activities is really good for our emotion management. And yet we're kind of prompt, like you can know that, but we're prompted all the time to do, do.

It is so easy to just be entertained and to be engaged and even to kind of be half engaged. Right. You, you think about like standing in line at the grocery store, it's like, Five minutes, but what do you do? You pull out your phone, right? We all do it. I do it right. And I know this science, I do it really well.

Mm-hmm. And one other thing I'll just point out too, that when we're a little bit bored and quiet, that's when creativity happens. It's when self-knowledge happens, it's when you know restoration happens. So there's all these things that are so good about being and not doing and just kind of idling in a sense.

But it's so hard in our culture with all the temptations to be entertained. All the discomfort that we have about sitting still, like we have judgment. Oh, am I not doing anything? I'm not being productive.

[00:22:53] **JoAnn Crohn:** Yeah, the productive thing is huge, especially I think for moms because we're fed this line that like we could do it all and we could do all the things as well as long as we manage our time well.

And I think it's such a lie and such a disservice people because there's so many benefits in the rest and the doing of nothing.

[00:23:13] **Yael Schonbrun:** Totally. Yeah. We're like sold this false bill of goods that if you do, do, do, like that's, that's the good way to be. But actually that's like the recipe for burnout and resentment and yeah, lack of creativity and disengagement, honestly, like when we're do, do doing, how well do we connect with our kids?

Um, I think that's something that I notice when I. Don't stop. That is a recipe for me to be disengaged from my kids, even when I'm in the same space as them. And you think to

[00:23:38] **JoAnn Crohn:** yourself that if you just get like this much done or if you just finished this work for the day, and I have this issue too, and I have to tell myself, and this is another one of my husband's things, he's like the philosopher I guess, but, um, he's like, there are infinite amount of things that you could be doing at any time.

Yeah. Infinite. Like you're never gonna be done, ever. So there's no point in trying and you need to just rest and do nothing. Totally.

[00:24:03] **Yael Schonbrun:** There's this terrific book. The author is Oliver Berkman called Time Management. Uh, it's actually called, the main title is 4,000 Weeks and the Subheader is Time Management for Mortals.

And he has this anecdote where he talks about how his goal for a long time was to empty out his email inbox, right, to be the guy whose inbox is on empty, but. You know, if you respond to all the emails, you just get more, cause people do, like, I respond, I'll follow up with him.

So it does not work. Like if you try to get to, you know, the end some, some end goal, like it's just gonna fill back up because life is a process.

It's not a, it's not something you achieve and then you're done and you don't wanna be done with your life. So the answer isn't to sort of not have anything on your to-do list, but to be realistic about. Makes sense to get done and what makes sense not to get done today. Right now we're back to subtraction.

[00:24:54] **JoAnn Crohn:** Yeah. I love it. I love it. And there's so much to think about too. And I know I could get much better at subtraction, but to also give myself a little self-compassion with your, the research say that it's normal for human brains to add on more and it's okay. So Yael, what are you looking forward to right now?

[00:25:16] **Yael Schonbrun:** Lots of things. I mean, it's been, so this is my first book and it's been a total trip to be out there, sharing the content and talking to awesome people like you guys on this podcast. And, um, writing. I actually just had yesterday. It'll be a while back, but by the time this episode comes out, but a piece on subtracting that came out in a terrific outlet called the Behavioral Scientist.

And I'm also working on a new book project. Mm-hmm. And I podcast. So I feel like I have lots and lots of things that I'm excited about and my kids are at such fun age. So nothing, not like one huge thing, but just I feel like life is so full and interesting and. I still protect my downtime, so what I'm really looking forward to is my Saturday nap.

[00:26:01] **Brie Tucker:** Yay.

[00:26:02] JoAnn Crohn: Those are the best!

Well, thank you so much for joining us, Yael. It has been a pleasure and it has flown by and we so appreciate you and taking the time and sharing this with us.

[00:26:16] **Yael Schonbrun:** Thank you so much for having me. I so enjoyed chatting with you.

[00:26:20] **JoAnn Crohn:** So other fun story with Yael, like after we stopped the interview, we stayed on for a good five to 10 minutes afterwards, just chatting with her and she is so lovely and she's so, it was just like

[00:26:31] **Brie Tucker:** she, she's lovely. She's very down to earth. It was a very easy conversation and it was funny too, cause we were talking about. How we all have different abilities and what we can handle in terms of talking to the public.

[00:26:43] **JoAnn Crohn:** Oh yeah. Yeah. Like Brie and I found, I think we already knew this when we, but we could handle as complete opposites in mm-hmm.

Terms of public speaking, whereas I am like, Give me the stage, like, oh my gosh, that's a rent line. Actually, it's said by Maureen. She like pulls in on her motorcycle and she's like, point me to the stage, or which way to the stage, depending on who's performing it. But that's kind of how I feel like put me on a stage, put me in front of a lot of people and I am at home there.

But put me in a situation where I have to make one-on-one conversation with like 50 different people and I'm like, oh, it's depleted.

[00:27:18] **Brie Tucker:** Yeah. And I am, I am completely the opposite. I'm fine. Having, I think my max audience is 20. Anything over 20, I get overwhelmed, but, I could, yeah, I could make conversation with 50 people individually, no problem.

One-on-one, bread and butter, baby. I love that stuff. But at an auditorium full of people.

[00:27:41] JoAnn Crohn: It's like, yeah, it's funny.

One-on-one conversation. I'm like totally fine with, as long as we can't go deep in the conversation and we're in it for a while and each side is do saying interesting stuff and it's really like intriguing and goes from there.

I can't do small talk. I just can't do it. And I guess mind numb to me.

[00:28:01] **Brie Tucker:** Yeah. I don't like it when people start asking me personal questions. No,

[00:28:05] JoAnn Crohn: really?

If you don't go deep with me, I'm like, ba, but you do go deep with me. But like that's cause we're friends. We're friends. We've been friends for a while.

Yes.

[00:28:12] **Brie Tucker:** Yeah. For people that I'm, that I am friends with, I, and I mean like really good friends with, I can go deep and tell them all kinds and stuff, but for the most part, I'm a pretty. Pretty on the surface, superficial. I'd love to know about your dogs and your cats and how your day was, and any parenting issues you got going on or something you wanna complain about.

I'm all for that, but I'm going into the deep trauma and like, Nope, nope. What skeletons I got in my closet? No thank you.

[00:28:40] **JoAnn Crohn:** Well, you need to get Yael's book Work, parent Thrive. It is phenomenal. Go there for, and she has so many more strategies than the ones we talked about today.

And until next time, remember the Best Mom's a happy mom. Take care of you. We'll talk to you later.

[00:28:55] **Brie Tucker:** Thanks for stopping by.