

## 090 Niching Down with Zim Flores



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Rachel Rodgers**

[Hello Seven](#) with Rachel Rodgers

## 090 Niching Down with Zim Flores

Building companies specifically for a niche, I prefer that better. It means that I'm clear on my mission. It means that I'm able to find and target those people specifically. I understand their problems better. I'm more focused. I don't need to worry about getting your dollar because this is the person that I need to serve, you know?

Welcome to the *Hello Seven Podcast*. I'm your host, Rachel Rodgers, wife, mother of four children, a lover of Beyoncé, coffee drinker, and afro-wearer, and I just happen to be the CEO of a seven-figure business. I am on a mission to help every woman I meet become a millionaire. If you want to make more money, you are in the right place. Let's get it going.

Have you ever felt frozen by fear when it comes to your business? Fear of trying something new, or fear of pivoting, fear of niching down too much, fear of investing? My guest today is exactly who you need to hear from, my friend.

Today I am talking to teacher, entrepreneur, investor, podcaster, and author Zim Flores. Named a leader using her voice and talent to elevate humanity by Oprah Winfrey, Zim Flores is the founder of Italicist, an online styling service that helps women discover modest clothing they love without the time commitment.

Previously, she was the CEO and founder of Travel Noire, a boutique travel company reaching millions of travelers each month, which she later sold. A serial entrepreneur, Zim is a Forbes 30 under 30 awardee who has been featured in The New York Times, Time Magazine, Elle, Glamour, The Nation, Essence, NPR among others.

She is proof that you can create thriving businesses in very specific niches, and that you can pivot with huge success. I'm so excited for you to learn from Zim today. Let's get started.

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Rachel: So, Zim, welcome to the Hello Seven podcast. I'm so delighted that you are here today.

Zim: It is an honor. I'm excited.

Rachel: Awesome. So your book, Dare To Bloom, was that this year that was released or was that the end of last year?

Zim: It was the end of last year, yeah.

Rachel: That's what I thought because I was like, yeah, I feel like it was a little while ago. It is the most beautiful book I have ever seen.

Zim: Oh my goodness. Thank you, girl.

Rachel: It is absolutely stunning. It is gorgeous. When I first saw it and I saw the web page and everything, like it's absolutely beautiful. Tell me about what that was like. Like how did that feel to release a book into the world?

Zim: Yeah, it was scary. You know, it's like it's one of those things where, you know, if you put out a video on YouTube, or if you make a post or something and you just don't like it or you don't resonate with those things anymore, you can just delete it. Well with a book you can never do that, right? It's like you put your words on a piece of paper and it literally is out in the world forever and ever and ever and ever, in libraries forever and ever and ever.

So it was, you know, it was definitely, definitely a little nerve wracking. But, you know, I felt like God was really with me in that particular season. Because I mean, as you know, launching a book is not for the faint of heart. It literally feels like you are doing thing after thing after thing after thing after

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thing. And so publishing it in December it was, you know, it was really interesting because I had gotten the pub date, I think, at the end of 2019.

So this is before the pandemic and all of the other things. And so when the pandemic happened there were authors whose books were coming out right in like March and April, who had to get pushed back, because like the printed books coming from China were like, really, really delayed. And I thought to myself, well, I don't know if this is the right time for me to release the book.

And I felt like it was just a lot of fear that was setting in because it was actually the perfect time to launch the book because the book is all about new beginnings and starting over. And it was based on the lessons that I felt like the Lord was giving me during the season that I really, really needed to divorce my identity from my work the most.

Rachel: Yes. And that is such an important thing to do, I think. And I have been on a similar journey of, you know, I think you build something and it becomes well known. And it's this big growing thing and it starts to grow beyond you, right?

Like you're not in control of it anymore. It just gets out into the world and then your identity is so closely associated with it. It's hard to, like you almost have to get reconnected to who you are outside of your work as CEO of XYZ company, you know?

Zim: Right. Yeah, I was, you know, it's funny, I send weekly emails out about God in business. And the last email that I sent out was about, I think the title of it was life's most dangerous question. And it was what do you do, right? So I think a lot of times in the US, specifically, we're so work oriented that what you do tends to become who you are, right?

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Rachel: Right.

Zim: Like, I am, you know, this or I am that. Whereas once you're not those things anymore, you're like well, I am an entrepreneur, I thought. Or I am a so and so I thought, and it becomes a lot harder to take those steps forward because you're always being a little bit hindered by who you were, who you thought you were, who others think you are. So yeah, it's one of the big, big lessons that I learned over the past couple of years and it's, you know, it's hard. It's really hard.

Rachel: Yeah. Yes, identity, I think, is an important topic that's constantly being discussed these days. And I think it is, it's true as a professional, you just, you know, like I had to shed my identity as an attorney at one point when I wanted to transition out of that and into being a CEO and not known as a lawyer. And that, you know, there was like a mourning in that, you know?

Zim: Yeah. Oh, absolutely.

Rachel: I think we don't talk about that enough. Like, even though you want new things for yourself, or maybe you're ready to move on to something else, there's sort of a mourning period of letting go of things that you used to be, you know, and that meant a lot to you at one point that you dreamed up, you know?

Zim: So when I sold Travel Noire I stayed on with the acquiring company for 18 months, and I felt like the entire time, at least it's what I felt like, I was grieving, right?

Rachel: Yeah.

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Zim: It was like oh, like, I felt like I sold it not at the right time. Or oh, I felt like I wasn't ready, or I should have done this better. I should have done this differently. And there was all of these, like, what ifs.

Rachel: Yes.

Zim: And it was really, it was a challenge. And I think especially given, you know, 2020, it allowed people to see. Like people were getting, you know, cut off left and right. Like there were all of these things happening and I felt like people had to deal with loss in a way that they might not have had to, you know, before.

Rachel: Yeah, for sure. It is, yeah, it is definitely part of the process. And this last year has been a real test.

Zim: Yeah.

Rachel: So let's go back and let's start at the beginning. What did you want to be when you were a kid?

Zim: So when I was a kid, so picture this, I grew up in Minnesota. There weren't very many Black people, Black kids around me. But I remember this was like maybe 96 or 95, whenever Mae Jemison went to the moon, I don't remember what that was. But I remember looking at her and being like, "Yo, that is so dope." Like, it gave me permission to dream like bigger.

So up until that point I had wanted to be an anesthesiologist. I was very specific about the desire to be an anesthesiologist. But at the same time, my mom was a single parent and she was a nurse. So if you are a nurse or you know a nurse, you know that they typically have, you know, long shifts 12-hour days.

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Rachel: Yes.

Zim: And so my mom took the seven to seven, 7am to 7pm, which meant that she got us ready for school before she went to work. She put on our clothes while we were still sleeping. We would wake ourselves up, prepare the breakfast that she had put in the fridge and then walk a block and a half to school. Then we'd come home after school and we'd explore like our little town with our motley crew of friends. So I had a very big imagination when I was younger.

And so even though I wanted to be an anesthesiologist, or just thought that being an astronaut and, you know, flying out to space was really cool. I just had a heart to explore. Like I felt like it was just who I was. And it makes so much sense now as I look to my life now, and even with starting Travel Noire, that thread of exploration and that thread of being really curious about, you know, the world around me.

And so I don't have a specific answer as to what I wanted to be, but I was definitely a curious little one back in my day.

Rachel: Yes, yes. It sounds like you had like big vision even as a child.

Zim: Oh yeah.

Rachel: Which I love that. And I saw that you, when you describe your childhood, you use the word uprooted. What do you mean when you say that? How did that uprooting affect you?

Zim: Yeah, so my mom was in an arranged marriage. So my family is Nigerian and back in the day they did arranged marriages. And so my mom came to the US. Now, mind you, she was from the eastern part of Nigeria.

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She moved from the eastern part of Nigeria to Minnesota in the middle of winter.

Rachel: Wow.

Zim: And as you can imagine it was probably, I mean she told me the first Christmas she was there, she like bawled her eyes out because she didn't know anybody and she was just kind of there by herself. And so my father ended up one day coming home with a gun. And my brother and I were really young, I think I was around one and a half. And my mom knew that kind of at that point, given the signs that she had seen of abuse and all of these different things, she decided to kind of make her own escape.

So when my when my father went back to Nigeria for a business trip she took us on a bus, on a Greyhound bus, it was my first cross country road trip. And so everything, even though I was very young at that time, everything that I had known up until that point was, you know, it had changed.

We got on a bus; we went to California. We had one family member in the United States, in the whole United States. And he happened to be in LA. So we stayed out in LA for a while until things kind of boiled over. And then my father had left to go back to Nigeria because he couldn't find us. You know, back in the 90s it wasn't like, "Oh, let me find my iPhone." Or, you know, whatever. It wasn't like that.

Rachel: Right.

Zim: So he ended up going back to Nigeria and we ended up back in Minnesota. And so we started kind of rebuilding there again.

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And so when I think about my childhood and my upbringing, it wasn't super duper transient, but it definitely had a lot of movement in it. When I was seven or eight my mom got a job at Duke in North Carolina and we moved from Minnesota to North Carolina.

And up until that point people had kind of seen me as like this girl with the cool name, right? Like My full name is [inaudible], which a lot of people could not pronounce so I shortened it to Zim. And so people were like, "Oh, Zim, yeah, yeah that's cool." And these are all like white kids, like, you know.

Then I moved to North Carolina and I'm like, "Yo, Black people." And they're like, "African booty scratcher. Like, go back to Africa, we don't want you here, why are you here?" And so, as a seven or eight year old, I'm like, "Wait a minute, I just left the place that I loved, that I considered so powerful and informative for my childhood to come here where I'm now being like ridiculed."

Like back in the day being African was not cool, right. Like now I think people are like, you know, like, I feel like it's cool now, it's hip, it's like the thing, whatever. But back in the day that was like the height of the Africa, like the not commercials, but the infomercials where you see the kids with the flies in their eyes and stuff.

Rachel: Yes.

Zim: And so, you know, I grew up around that time. And so that's what people thought Africa was. That's what I thought Africa was, I had never been there before. And so when I think about uprooting, there are so many instances in my life where I felt like I was being torn away from what I knew and I was being torn away from the familiar things. And that was one of them.

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Rachel: Wow. Wow, I can relate to that as a bi-racial person. You know, not feeling like you 100% belong anywhere, you know?

Zim: Yeah.

Rachel: And also feeling like, "Well, I can't claim my identity on this side. And I can't claim my identity on that side." That's a lot of what I thought when I was younger and, you know, kids are the worst. Like we love them and they're the worst.

Zim: Let me tell you, sometimes I feel like I have PTSD. If I walk in the middle of like, teenagers or high schoolers, or middle schoolers, I get nervous, still.

Rachel: Oh my gosh, wow.

Zim: It's crazy. Like I was so picked on when I was like in elementary and middle school. Middle school things started to turn around a little bit. But yeah, there was a turning point for me. And that was when my mom put me into an art school.

I was this like, you know, weird kid and I started getting into bad things hanging out with other kids because I wanted to be cool. I started stealing from my parents. I mean, I was just doing all the things. And my mom was like, "Actually, not today." And so she put me into a lottery at, I don't know if you've heard of Durham School of the Arts, DSA in Durham?

Rachel: No, I haven't.

Zim: Yeah, so she put me in that magnet school. And here I saw all these kids who are like, "Oh, I'm coding." And they're like, 12. Or, "Oh, I got to go and put my artwork in the kiln." Or "I'm about to like play for this recital."

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Like there was just all of this stuff and I was like, “Yo, I actually feel like I belong.” So a part of that like transformation for me was being placed around the right people at the right time.

Rachel: Yes. I love that and just surrounded by creativity. That is beautiful.

Zim: Yeah.

Rachel: And Durham is such a cool city. I mean, I don't know what it was like back then. I live in the Greensboro area so I go to Durham all the time now and it's a beautiful place.

Zim: You know, it's funny because when people grow up there, like people tell me they'll go to Durham to vacation. And I'm like, “Why? I don't get it.”

Rachel: Isn't that how it always is?

Zim: It is. It's because I grew up there and I'm like, “There's nothing special. Like yeah, there's the university and the gardens.” But like it's just Durham. It's just Durham, that's it.

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, there's some cool stuff happening with entrepreneurship there.

Zim: Yeah.

Rachel: And just I'm in a really small city, and I'm in like a little rural pocket.

Zim: Right, yeah.

Rachel: So it's kind of like, you know, sometimes we'll go out there to, you know, go out for the night or whatever. Go out to restaurants or whatever.

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So it's kind of our escape. I'm from New York where there is like so much, it is an explosion of entertainment. Yeah. And you get hungry for like a specific type of food at 3am and you can have it delivered.

Zim: Right.

Rachel: And that is not the case down here.

Zim: Yes.

Rachel: So I read that when you were 19 you cloned a gene.

Zim: Yes.

Rachel: And that you also became the youngest precinct judge for the state of North Carolina. Please tell us more about this.

Zim: Oh, my gosh. So as you all know, y'all know the beginning, I was a very curious kid. So I got to college, ended up I got denied from all the universities I applied for. And so, you know, my mom wanted me to go to community college and then go to Carolina. And I was like, I'd rather be a big fish in a small pond than a small fish in a big pond.

I wanted to make an impact. And at Carolina or some of these Ivy League schools I was like, I would just be like one of, like everybody's trying to hustle for all of the scholarships and all of the things. But let me go to this smaller school and make a bigger splash there.

So I went there and my freshman year I was walking up and down the halls of the biology building. And I saw this like paper of this guy who was doing research, and he looked really cool. His name was Dr. LaJeunesse, and so I walk in and I'm like, "Hey, what do you do? What are you doing?" And he

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told me that he did research with fruit flies. So if y'all have ever had bananas or y'all know what fruit flies are.

So essentially, there is a part of the fruit flies' body that is similar to heart muscles in humans. And so we were studying those particular parts. So we would be crunching up these little fruit flies, doing all of our like, listen, don't nobody like them anyway. But we were crunching up these little fruit flies and we were, you know, doing our research and cloning and doing all that stuff.

And so I was 19 when that happened, and it was a big deal. I didn't know it at the time, like I was just like, "Oh, you know, just cloned a gene with my mentor, Dr. LaJeunesse." And it just, it blew up. So I started traveling the country and talking to - Yeah, it was my research, we did all of the things.

And so that was that was like my freshman year, I think, going into sophomore. And then I was very active with the precinct, the Guilford County precinct. And so there came a point where I could be appointed to be a judge. And it's not like a judge gavel and, you know, sit in a chair. But you do have the opportunity if you've been working in the district for a while to be appointed into that role.

And so, at the time, I was the youngest one. I don't know if there are younger ones now. But, you know, people thought it was a really big deal, right? So I would work at the polls and I had essentially larger and larger responsibilities. But, you know, it was just an interesting time to be like a teenager.

This was like right around when President Obama got elected, and it was just an energetic time to be in Greensboro, especially with all that was happening. The Civil Rights Museum that was there at Woolworth's, downtown was opening up, I started an organization to help that open up.

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And so around that time 2008, 2009, 2010 there was a lot that was happening there.

But it all started with, you know, me cloning a gene and then doing the work that I did with the Board of Elections there in Guilford County.

Rachel: That is amazing. I love this. I love this so much. Okay, and so is that where your love of travel came, from when you were traveling around the country and?

Zim: No, so my best friend started an anti-tobacco organization called Forget Tobacco and we traveled around the US. So, for my research I went to a couple of different like bio conferences, but it wasn't anything crazy. For Forget Tobacco we were like, we were in Maine, we were in Nebraska, we were doing all of these things.

I would have to tell my professors, "Hey, I can't be in class, I know we got a test. Can I take the test early? Or can I take it when I get back?" And they'd always look at me and be like, in my mind I'm thinking like they would say, "Who do you think you are? Like, you've been gone twice this month to go like talk to 500 teenagers, somewhere in the middle of nowhere."

But it started there, right? Like I was able to go around and see different communities of folks and talk to them and train them about big tobacco. So then I applied for this program that would pay for me to go anywhere in Asia, any country that I chose, would pay me a salary, would pay for me to learn the language.

And I chose India. It was one of the places that I felt like had a heavy influence on the region in general. I'd never been to India before, I had never even tried Indian food, but I stayed there. I worked there, I learned

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Hindi. To this day I still speak, read, and write it. And it was it was an experience that changed my life, right.

Like, I spent time living on a train. I lived at the base of the Himalayan mountain range. I traveled throughout Asia and I was traveling for so cheap, right? Like I would go from Bangalore, which is in southern India to Kuala Lumpur, which is in Malaysia for \$8. They were running these \$8 flights and I would fly.

It was crazy, it was literally crazy. I would tell all my friends back home and they were like, "So did this plane have seats? I just want to know for \$8 what you got. Did you have to sit with an animal in your lap? Like what's going on?"

Rachel: Right, like can you bring anything?

Zim: Right, exactly, exactly. And so, you know, I was literally I would like spend one day in India and then the next day by breakfast I'd be in Cambodia, or like I just had these crazy, amazing experiences. And I wasn't, I didn't have to break the bank to have those experiences.

And so the salary that I had, I ended up spending all of it traveling. And I ended up back home with my mom in Southern California. And, you know, true to mom form. She was telling me to go to medical school to go, you know, get a nursing degree. To go do a post doc. I'm like, "Ma, how can I do a postdoc? I don't even have a doctorate."

But anyway, so then I ended up saying, "Mom, I love you. I have a friend who has a place for me to stay in San Francisco. I'm going to go there, see what's up, apply for some internships. Maybe find a job, I don't know. But just trust me."

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And so I took this Greyhound bus up to San Francisco. And if you or anybody who's listening has been to San Francisco, you know there's a little island between San Francisco and Oakland called Treasure Island. It's like about halfway between the Bay Bridge.

That's where I lived. And so I was on a couch, on my friend's couch. I think I was there for maybe four to six months. And so I stayed there, was working a bunch of different jobs. And Travel Noire started when I had moved into the city during that time. So it was the love of travel for me started when I moved to India and was able to travel around for pretty cheaply.

Rachel: Yeah, that is amazing. And I had similar experiences. When I was young, I went on missions trips to Barbados, Nigeria, I went to Lagos.

Zim: Oh, wow.

Rachel: It was amazing.

Zim: That's awesome.

Rachel: I mean, it's so funny, I had such culture shock when I first got there the first couple of days. And then I was sobbing on the day that I left.

Zim: Oh my gosh.

Rachel: I was devastated when I left. I was there for a month and it was life changing. I had the best host family.

Zim: that's amazing.

Rachel: I felt at home. You know what I mean?

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Zim: Yeah.

Rachel: And it's, yeah, it's an experience that I hope every Black American gets to experience at some point.

Zim: Yeah.

Rachel: I just felt so connected to the people in the culture, you know?

Zim: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

Rachel: And I mean that's one of the gifts that travel gives us, right? But I can definitely relate to traveling for cheap as a young person.

Zim: Yeah.

Rachel: Having I mean, there were times where I had no money overseas.

Zim: Right, yeah. We've all been there.

Rachel: Calling my home like, "Could you wire transfer \$30?" Or whatever it was?

Zim: Listen, we've all been there, don't want to go back.

Rachel: But you're on an adventure. You're having this life changing experience and like I would not trade it. I would not trade it.

Zim: Oh, absolutely not. No way.

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Rachel: So, you found a lot of success at a young age, you've been on Forbes 30 under 30 list, a ton of media features. What do you wish people knew about being successful when you're young?

Zim: You know, there's this like, I heard it like years ago and I don't know if I internalized it or I just kind of had like an aha moment. But it was this, it's almost like being popular in high school. Right? Like, there are some people, like the phrase is like you peaked in high school, right? It's like, when you're successful when you're young sometimes people feel like it can't get better than this, right? Like or this is the best that it can get.

And so, you know, success at a young age or “success” at a young age, it really depends on how you define success, right? So for me, other people will call me successful before I would call myself successful. And so for me it was always about being rooted and grounded in what I found to be success. And this is something that I learned later on. But as a young person, sometimes people feel invincible, right? Like I was, I don't even know how though I was when I got Forbes 30 under 30. But there were -

My stepdad, so side note, my stepdad, and my mom got married, I think in 2010. And so he knew me, but he didn't really know me that well. And so he came around when I was getting all these awards, that's when he kind of came into the picture. And so he was always worried that I would like get a really big head. Because literally there was a season in my life where it was award after award after award after award. And he felt like my head was just going to get like, really, really, really big.

Rachel: First of all, I'm into this. I want your head to be really, really big. I feel like this is a good thing.

Zim: So he, you know, he thought that my head was going to be really, really big. And was surprised when it wasn't, when I just came home and I

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was just like, I actually just want folks to treat me like I'm regular. Like I don't want any attention.

And that's just me. There's some folks that, you know, they prefer it another way. But I think a part of what I had learned in India, which was really interesting was that you become the spectacle. And I did not want that, right?

So nowadays, so right now I'm in Mexico. And we went to this like really touristy local spot. And it's one thing to be at a touristy spot when it's people from other countries. And it's another thing to be at a touristy spot and it's all local people who've never seen a Black person before. And you get these stares, and that's what it felt like when I was in India. I became this like spectacle, and I just never liked that. It just wasn't for me.

And so I felt like in the success that I had at a young age people were doing that to me, right? There would be people who would be coming up to me crying, and I'm like, "I don't know what to do with this. Like I don't know how to handle this scenario. I just want to melt into the ground." Right?

Rachel: Yes, and people coming up to you like they know you, they know your whole life story. And you're like, "Wow, you probably do know my story, and I don't know you at all. And that's really awkward."

Zim: Yeah, it's a lot. It's a lot. So you know, it was a lot of lessons like that, especially with, you know, with Travel Noire, when people found out that I ran Travel Noire, that I owned Travel Noire, they would treat me a little bit differently. And that obviously changed when I sold Travel Noire and didn't have it anymore, you know.

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So there are like a lot of little things that you learn, and you learn about yourself, and about people when, you know, when you're "successful" early on.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah. And it sounds like, I think it's just important to be really connected to who you are, what your identity is, what you actually want for yourself, what success looks like for you, as you were saying. Because, you know, the whole world can say you're amazing, but like, are you content?

You know, I think these are important questions to ask. And, you know, I teach people how to make lots of money and money is important. However, like my happiest moments are literally like, sitting on the couch.

Zim: Not connected to it at all.

Rachel: Exactly, like sitting on the couch with my kids. And, you know, and I love too that I like could have the super successful launch or like, make a lot of money or get lots of accolades, and then I come home and my kids are like, "Are you going to do my hair? Are you going to play Candy Land with me?"

Zim: Yeah.

Rachel: You know? And it's just like they don't give a crap about whatever. They're like, "Yay Mom, that's great. Let's go play video games."

Zim: Right, exactly.

Rachel: And so I love having that grounding, you know, like having these little people in my life who ground me and who are like, "Yeah, we don't care who you are out there, right now you're mom."

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Zim: Absolutely.

Rachel: And that's the best, right? Because at the end of the day it's like we can have all of these professional accomplishments that are meaningful, and they do matter. But at the end of the day, we just want to be known, right? Like just being with people we love who truly know us in a really deep way is so powerful and meaningful, and probably, you know, one of the best experiences of being alive. You know?

Zim: Yeah, absolutely.

Rachel: So, okay, so you founded Travel Noire, tell us, I mean, you talked about your love of travel when you went to India. Tell us what was the purpose of Travel Noire? Why did you decide to begin this company?

Zim: So it started because I noticed that when I was traveling I never saw any other Black folks. Like never. And so in my mind, when I combined never having seen other Black travelers with the reactions that I got when I would tell my friends that, "Hey, I flew to this place for like \$8." Or like, "I went here."

It's very hard to talk about like the transformation of travel or travel as like a tool to people who've never traveled. Like it's really, really hard to like put that into words. And so I thought to myself, well, what if there was a community of people that wasn't centered around me, right? Like I didn't want to be the face of whatever this thing was that I was going to build. I wanted it to kind of have its own legs and run on its own.

Rachel: Yes, I'm a huge fan of that, by the way. From an IP perspective, and also from the perspective of like you talked about earlier, your identity being so caught up in what the company is. It's like I am Rachel and this is

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Hello Seven, we are not the same thing. You know, I think that's important. I love that you did that.

Zim: Yeah. And so when I got back to the US I moved to San Francisco and started Travel Noire in 2013. And it was a place for people to not only share their experience as a Black person, but also talk about how you could get your boss to allow you to work remotely, or how you could, you know, fly to Brazil for \$60. Or how you could, you know, do all of these different things. And at that time there weren't very many organizations or businesses or whatever, that were having these kinds of conversations.

Every travel magazine that I looked at never had somebody like me who was actually doing the exploring. We were the ones being explored, right? And so I was like, "Well, there has to be a different conversation that we can have around Black travel."

Because every time I go to Bali or wherever y'all stay playing somebody from the culture. Like y'all stay playing some songs that I know, like some Whitney Houston or whatever. Y'all stay playing that kind of music. But when it comes to thinking about what a traveler looks like to you, it's still the same. It's like a blonde woman, petite blonde woman who has money, you know. And so that's kind of where Travel Noire got its start.

I really wanted to challenge people's perception around what it means to travel deeper, right? You don't have to rent a yacht every time you like go. Otherwise, I mean, if you don't have a lot of money, you're going to be vacationing like what, once every 10 years or whatever?

I want you to vacation five times a year, or seven times a year, whatever that means to you. It could be a weekend getaway. It could be, you know, an extended weekend. Whatever that means, I want you to have more because you don't necessarily need to break the bank. Right?

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You can go to Argentina or to wherever you want to go and not spend, you know, a ton of money. At the same time I was somebody who would travel anywhere that wasn't war torn. And that was important because the conversations that we were having at TN were around like defying what people thought. Like people would just go to the Caribbean and go to Mexico and that was, or travel to see family and that was the extent of it.

But I wanted people, I wanted you to go to South Korea. I wanted you to go to Indonesia and not Bali. I wanted you to go to Papua New Guinea. Like I wanted you to go to Iran when it was, you know, when it was chiller.

You know, like I wanted people to go to these far-off places where they're, I mean, the Diaspora is there, right? You have black Iranians, if you Google a photo of them, you can see them and they're beautiful. And I wanted people to actually experience that beyond what their comfort zone told them, like, "Oh, I'm going to go to, you know, Jamaica or Cancun." And nothing wrong with those destinations but I wanted people to dig a little bit deeper.

Rachel: I love that so much. And it obviously was so needed and that's why it was so incredibly successful. Because you were you filling a gap in the marketplace, you know?

Zim: Yeah.

Rachel: And really showing Black people that we're everywhere and we can go everywhere. And here's what that looks like, here's what that feels like, here's some different experiences.

So Travel Noire was incredibly successful, did that surprise you? Like how it blew up?

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Zim: You know, when I started it, it was very hard to find photos of Black travelers. It was very, very challenging. And now you can literally go and find them. So when I started back in 2013 it was a little bit of a drag, or it felt like a little bit of a drag until it didn't anymore.

So what we were doing was we -

Rachel: It felt like a drag until it wasn't.

Rachel: Yes, I can relate to that.

Zim: We were doing like a lot of master classes. And then we launched one of our signature products, which was called Travel Noire Experiences. And we centered all of the experiences around this concept of tension.

So tension when you travel looks like you lose your luggage, you have a really challenging conversation, you do something physically challenging. That's tension. Those are the moments that you have when you travel where you tend to grow the most.

And so I thought to myself, how can I codify tension in a travel experience at scale? And so we ran -

Rachel: What a fascinating question to start with. I'm obsessed with that. Brilliant, absolutely brilliant.

Zim: And so what we did was we ran 60 trips a year across five continents. And every single trip we had about 12 folks and a private photographer, because we wanted people to focus on in the moment. And tension looked like a lot of different things. Right? It looked like something that was physically challenging. It looked like something that was

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conversationally challenging. It looked like something that challenged an existing like mindset.

Like if you were in Italy, for example, we would take our travelers, first of all we would place them in one place for the whole experience. We wanted them to fall in love with a particular destination, not hop around to different towns, although we would go and do different things in the region. We wouldn't spend, you know, two days here and then go five hours and spend two days there. We really wanted to root people in a place.

And instead of taking them to see monuments and things, we took them to meet people. And so it was kind of like this way, it was like it was really interesting. We relied a lot on our own connections, but we would take people for a cooking class. You could take somebody to a regular cooking class in a building with like, you know, long aluminum tables and you could set up stations.

We decided to go in the town that we were in, it's kind of like an "if you know, you know" type of town with a beautiful like vista of the coast of Italy. And we put them in a home of a grandmother whose house had been there and whose farm had been there for 200 years. And so she was, I think, in her 90s and her daughter was younger.

And they would teach everybody who came on an experience the correct way to like make pasta and sauce and all these different things. And then they would sit around a long rectangle table with a view of the coast. It was literally just the, it looked like a picture. And people would go down there, we would spend the day.

We'd start I think at nine and end at four, and so it was a full day of eating. People would be stuffed by the time that they left. And they would oftentimes cry while they were there because they realize that like

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something like this actually exists. And something like this is actually possible, right? Like if I wanted to get that little tiny house that I see on the coast that has like a mud track or like it's not even paved to get to the house that has a beautiful overlook of the ocean, I can do that, right? This thing is possible.

Conversely, in South Africa, we would have conversations about why there are no black people who own land out in like Stellenbosch or Parle or, you know, some of these places. And so there were ways that we could introduce tension into the experience that meant that at the end of every trip, one of our metrics of success was how many people actually cried. That was a real metric of success.

Rachel: I love that.

Zim: Yeah.

Rachel: I'm going to add that to my program. How many people did we make cry like in the last few months?

Zim: Yeah, I mean people were literally like, "The way that I travel has changed forever." And so yeah, so that was our signature product. And so some people have been like, "How did TN make money? We thought that you were in X, Y, and Z." And you know, yada, yada, yada, not realizing how many trips we actually ran and how much of an operational feat it was.

Rachel: Yeah, I bet. I bet.

Zim: Yeah.

Rachel: So then you decided to, like, you know, maybe it felt like it was at the height. I know, you had like a following of 2 million people. I don't know

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the other stats around the business at that time, But then you decided to sell it. What brought you to that decision?

Zim: Yeah. So I was at a conference. And I talk about this a little bit in the book, or actually a lot of it. But I was at a conference, it was a church conference. And I remember there was a preacher who was preaching and one of the things that he said would stick with me forever. And it was, he was basically talking about being consecrated to basketball. That's all he did, it's all he thought about. It was like literally who he was, it was his identity.

And then he talked about success as what people measure it. Which is like how much money you have, how many cars you have, like how many houses you have, all that good stuff. But the way that success was measured in the Bible was by sacrifice. If you think about Abraham, if you think about basically anybody, there was a level of sacrifice that they had to contend with.

And so I thought about my time with TN and I knew that there were more things that God wanted me to do, but I felt like I was just the travel girl, right? Anybody who would hit me up would always hit me up about traveling. Not saying that there was anything wrong with that, but I knew that there had to be something more.

And that something more, it was like, there's a term that I describe that summer, it was the summer of 2017. It was like where everything went wrong and right at the same time. And so there was a period of time where I had to come to a decision whether or not I wanted to launch a new product. Whether or not I wanted to raise capital. Or whether or not I was going to sell.

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And there was a point in time where I was like, “You know what God, if this is what you want me to give up, I'm happy to do it.” And at that point, it was my entire identity. Like you have to understand, like TN, the reason that it existed was because I didn't see other black people who were traveling, right? So like the ethos of the business is very much tied into who I was, my work was in my work completely.

And so when it came time to sell there were two folks that wanted to buy the company. We ended up going with Blavity. And I was not expecting, I knew that some things would change, but I wasn't expecting like everything to change.

And so the 18 months after selling TN were really challenging because this thing that I had built, it was almost like an extension of who I was. So every time something changed it felt like a finger was getting cut off. Or like, you know, it felt like something was changing.

Rachel: Yes.

Zim: So now that I look now that I look back on it, and I think about how much of my identity was intertwined with something that was a created thing. I'm like, “Huh, now I know never to do that again.” Because it's rough.

Like there are people that will tell you, there was a tweet that I saw, like I don't know how many months ago and it was like somebody was basically saying like if your life is not your business, then you're doing something wrong, or like something along those lines.

Rachel: Oh my God.

Zim: I was like, “What are you talking about?”

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Rachel: Completely wrong.

Zim: What are you talking about? And so, you know, people will try and shame you into making what you do your entire life. When in actuality it is a part, it is literally a thing that you do with your hand.

Rachel: And for a time, right?

Zim: And for a time.

Rachel: I think there's that thing, like there's this like five-to-seven-year itch, you know what I mean?

Zim: Yeah.

Rachel: That you kind of do something for a little while, you get really good at it, and then you start to get bored. Which is normal because it's not new and fresh and as interesting anymore. And there's reasons to stick with it, and there's reasons to part ways at times.

Zim: Right.

Rachel: And I think your career is constantly, I think for most of us, it is usually shifting in various ways and to tie your whole identity to it is just, that's bananas.

Zim: Yeah, it's crazy, girl.

Rachel: People are wrong.

Zim: I was like, "What are you talking about?" Yeah, what are you doing over there?

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Rachel: Exactly. I also think that like, I can't imagine Hello Seven with someone else running it, right, and I'm still there.

Zim: Yeah.

Rachel: I know that, like I know why that's so important when you sell a business because the new owner, there's some level of continuity that you kind of need someone to help you bridge that shift.

Zim: Of course, yeah.

Rachel: But it is hard to look at your creation, see someone - It's like, you know, like I just bought this property, the ranch where I live and it's got a beautiful house on it that someone put all this love into it, but it's not my taste. So I like ripped things apart.

Zim: So you changed it.

Rachel: Exactly, paint this, get rid of that. And I'm sure she would stand there in horror if she was still there watching me do it.

Zim: In horror, yes. Crying, bawling her eyes out, it would be a wrap. You would have to pick her up off the floor. I mean, and that's how I was with TN. It was like the trips, they cut the trips off. And this was like, you know, we poured our heart and soul into building these trips around this like central theme of tension.

And then it was a true labor of love but, you know, they decided that it didn't serve, you know, the greater mission of the business and so they cut it off. So then people are, you know, people are asking me what happened to the trips? And I'm like, "I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know." Meanwhile, I'm like, you know, bawling inside.

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And so by the time that I left, in fact when I found out that they were letting me go, the same day that I found out they were letting me go, I had purchased my husband and I had purchased our first business in South Korea. And it was like such a bad moment because it was literally to the day.

I found out that I was going to have this call. I didn't even know what it was about at all, only to find out that they were letting me go at the end of the month. And it was almost like a Steve Jobs type of moment, you know?

Rachel: Yes.

Zim: So it was, again, it was really interesting. It was very, very interesting. I had received a warning about eight months prior from somebody I didn't even know. And it was just it was like a crazy, crazy time.

Rachel: Eight months, dear God, that's a long time.

Zim: It was a long time. Somebody I didn't know called me and said, "Yo, you're on the chopping block." Another God moment. And for me it was like, "Okay, it's time to get all of my ducks in a row, it's time to get everything ordered."

Rachel: Right.

Zim: And by the time I left, it was you know, I felt good. You know, I felt like I was exactly where God needed me to be at that moment. And I was able to -

Somebody told me this on an interview months and months ago, they said that you gave up a business and God gave you an empire. And so I look now today where my husband and I, we have six different businesses that

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we run. And a lot of them are like in the background businesses, right? They don't require me to be in the forefront, but they still, you know, earn us enough money.

And so it's just been a really crazy journey that I don't know, had I not sacrificed TN, had I not have been willing to let it go, if I would be here at this moment right now.

Rachel: Yes, yes, exactly. It's the belief that like what's meant for you and the best things for you are ahead of you. You know?

Zim: Yeah.

Rachel: Like sometimes we think, "Oh, that was the best that I could ever do." No, that wasn't.

Zim: Yeah, there is a quote that I used to, maybe I posted on my Facebook years ago, I don't know. But it was something that I lived by for a while and it was something to the tune of your life is like a crescendo, your greatest moments and contributions will always be ahead of you.

And if you're musical at all, you know that a crescendo, when you see a crescendo on the score, it means that you have to play louder, right? And so when you see a crescendo when you're playing the piano and, you know, you're hitting the keys a little bit harder, you're growing louder. It's essentially, if you kind of tie it back to what I had said earlier, it's that everything that you do from here on out is going to be bigger and better than what it was previously.

Rachel: Right. I love that. So your current business, Italicist is an online, well one of your current businesses I should say to be clear, is Italicist, which is online styling service that helps women discover modest closing

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they love without the time commitment. How did you decide this was the niche you wanted to serve?

Zim: Yeah, you know, it's funny because I realized that I like niche businesses, right? Like Travel Noire was very niche, right? It was Black travelers. It's niche enough that when I searched for Black travel when I first started TN it was like a black luggage. I was like, "This is not exactly what I meant by Black travel, not a black suitcase."

Rachel: Right.

Zim: And so this particular one, it was a community. It's a community that I'm a part of, right? Like I dress modestly, it's how I prefer to dress. And it's just very challenging, right? Like the challenges that women who dress modestly face is that they, you know, they don't want to look like farm girls, right? Like who wants to be out here looking like so and so on the prairie, right? Like there's a way that you can still be, you know, super duper stylish. But the challenge is that you have to search, right?

Like, I'll go into a store, and I'll be like, "Yo, this dress is fire." And I'll turn it around and the back is out, it's missing. And I'm like, "Okay, if I buy this dress I can wear a blazer with it. But then I have to buy two pieces of clothing." I'm like, do I really want to do that? And so what solutions exist, where I can look and find things out of the box without spending a whole Saturday,

Like I don't know if you were younger if your mom would like take you out on errands over the weekend, and it'd be like Saturday, you'd be like, "All right, mom, it's three o'clock, let me go home." But you can't really say that because it's your mom, you just got to, you know, roll with it. That's what it feels like when you're shopping for modest clothing. It's like a never ending thing.

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And so I wanted to build a tech solution that served that particular community. And that business is like, it's a labor of love because I'm not a tech person at all. I am a marketing person. I tell stories, that's what I do. And so this has been, you know, a really interesting challenge for me.

Rachel: Yeah, I love that. I've experienced that with my daughter in particular. First of all, I think that's something that a lot of plus size women have experienced, like having a really hard time. So I would compare it to that, like if you're not a size 10 or smaller you have a really hard time finding clothing that fits. And I feel like there has been this explosion of solutions that have happened over the last decade, you know?

Zim: Oh yeah, absolutely.

Rachel: So I love that this is another niche where, you know, women are struggling to find clothing that really suits them and makes them feel good. And I experienced this with my daughter, like all the shorts are just so tiny. And I'm like, why does my nine-year-old need to be in little booty shorts? You know what I mean? Like, um, no.

Zim: Gogo shorts.

Rachel: what did you say?

Zim: The Gogo shorts.

Rachel: Exactly. I'm like, "No, y'all don't need to look at her butt, stop that."

Zim: Oh my gosh, yes.

Rachel: Actually, I have to shop at the very top of the summer to find, because it's almost like you can get that crossover kind of spring short, that

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goes a little bit longer. And you have to stock up because they will be out of sizes and you'll never see them again until next spring.

Zim: Wow.

Rachel: So that's what I do because otherwise, she got real long legs and I mean, I just don't want to have to hurt nobody. You know what I mean?

Zim: Yes, yes, I hear you.

Rachel: And I mean, when she's older if she wants to wear booty shorts, like more power to you, sis, like do you girl. But right now I'm your mother and yeah, nobody needs to be looking at your cheeks.

Zim: Oh man, that is a challenge.

Rachel: It is a challenge. And you know, a lot of our listeners and the members of the club, which is my community, they are so scared to niche down. They think that if they have a niche that like they're not going to have enough customers. Or that they're losing sales if they don't serve everyone. What would you tell them?

Zim: Honey, honey, go ahead and niche down. You missing out.

Rachel: Exactly.

Zim: It's an opportunity to serve somebody specifically. Right? Like and it's such a beautiful opportunity to serve somebody specifically, it means that you're able to get clearer, faster. And you're able to say this is for you, but this is not for you. Like this is for you, and this is not for this other person.

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And that's completely fine. In fact, it's better that way. I think in the case where brands get it wrong, like some of these larger brands, is they start off very niche. And in their quest to scale to hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars in revenue, they start widening their funnel. But then they lose that original appeal, right?

So they started off kind of indie, right, "indie" but then in the quest to grow and scale they widen their funnel so much that it ends up changing the company in general. And so when I think about niches and building companies specifically for a niche, I prefer that better. It means that I'm clear on my mission, it means that I'm able to find and target those people specifically, I understand their problems better. I'm more focused. I don't need to worry about getting your dollar because this is the person that I need to serve, you know?

Rachel: Yes, yes. I love it. And I mean, I totally agree. I like people to feel really served and like, "Oh, this is absolutely the solution for me. And there is no other." You know?

Zim: Right. Exactly. Yep.

Rachel: And I think that's the benefit of having a niche. So you also work with your husband to acquire, grow, and sell small online businesses. Like tell me more about that. What kind of businesses catch your eye? You know, what do you look for and how can you tell if something thing has potential?

Zim: So I tend to look at businesses that have really solid operational processes, right? Like they are already -

Rachel: Yes, I love that, I'm already laughing because so many don't. Like their operation processes are all in their brain, you know?

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Zim: Listen, so here's the thing, I know that my skill set is in marketing and storytelling and in branding. And so if I find something that is operationally sound but that isn't really strong on marketing or branding, that presents an opportunity.

Because at the end of the day, if you look at all of the water in the water aisle at the grocery store, they all have different stories. They all have different stories they want to tell. If you look at like just water versus San Pellegrino versus Topo Chico, or whatever, they're all water, right?

Rachel: Right.

Zim: But they all have their own branding story. And whoever tells the story the best to their niche audience that they're trying to serve, wins. And so I look for operationally sound businesses. I look for, I'm pretty industry agnostic, so it doesn't really matter what industry you're in. I could tell a story about anything, girl, you give me a pen, you give me a light bulb, I'll tell you a story about it.

And so those are the types of businesses that we that we look for. We look for niche businesses. So we tend to focus on businesses that serve a very particular market, very particular. So I mean, it's not like hyper niche in the way that it's like, "Oh, we want 18- to 21-year-old, international students who have studied at Harvard. I mean, that pool gets really small really quickly, but it's niche enough that we have a, you know, a particular target of people that we're after.

Rachel: I love that. Awesome. And so you find one and you make them an offer or invest in them. Do you partner with the people who are already there or do you buy it from them and take it to the next level?

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Zim: Yeah. So we tend to buy it from them outright. So these are oftentimes like owners that are distressed. Like either distressed in the sense that they're like, "I've been doing this for eight years, and like I'm ready to move on. Please take this from me." Or distressed in the sense of like, "Yeah, I'm like working on too many things where I just don't have the time for this anymore. It's just like, you know, not a thing."

I had a friend who bought a company where the owner was literally a week away from pulling it off all the marketplaces and shutting it down. He ended up selling it to her for 3k. And now I think the business is, I think it's like the low five figures. But I mean, she's going to build it up to a million-dollar business.

But if you're looking, and you can find the right business that has all of the like bells and whistles. The first business that we bought, I maybe work two hours a week on it. I don't even know; I don't work that much on it at all. But it's a steady income generator, steady. Our team is in South Korea, they operate everything, they operate everything for us. And so it's really a matter of figuring out which business fits with where you want to be. And also, which one has their kind of operational wheels together.

Rachel: Yes, I think once you have built a successful business it's amazing, you have this keen eye to be able to find other opportunities and see where like, and I agree with you, like you've got, a great operation. But you have also opportunities where you can bring a solid brand, maybe some fresh marketing, a new website, whatever. All of these different things that you can build into it, that can help it grow.

And then someone gets to exit when they're done with a project because not every time, like when you're an entrepreneur and you start things sometimes you don't want to finish them. And that's okay, right? We don't have to do this for the rest of our lives.

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Zim: Yeah, yeah, seriously.

Rachel: Okay, so I have one final question for you, fill in the blank before I die I will ...

Zim: Before I die... Oh, that's a good question. Why so deep? Okay, hold on let me think.

Rachel: Also, it's challenging, right? Because especially for somebody like you, like you're going out there doing the things. You've traveled, and you've built businesses and sold them, and you're having these experiences that you want to have every day.

So, you know, it's like we're doing so much of what we wanted to do. So there's not, I feel like sometimes there's not a whole long list of things that we're like, "Oh, I need to pursue this. But there's probably something in there.

Zim: I mean, at the end of the day like for me personally, everything that I do is a part of a bigger mission. And so before I die, I will, I essentially - I'm going to go back a little bit, there was an exercise that my husband and I did in Cape Town about our eulogies.

And I looked at his eulogy at the end of this exercise, and I loved it so much. It's stuck with me to this day. And on his tombstone, it will say, "It was all for God." And so when I think about before I die I will, I will use every single gift, every single thing that he's given me to the benefit of the kingdom. Whatever that it is, I will do it.

Rachel: Yes. I love that so much; it reminds me of Todd Henry's book called Die Empty. And it's about this idea that like use all of your God given

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talents and gifts while you're here, you know? Have an impact, help people, do things that matter to you, create things and die empty, you know?

Zim: Exactly.

Rachel: Yes, so good. So powerful. Thank you Zim for coming and telling stories.

Zim: Yes.

Rachel: And sharing your journey. I think it's so inspiring for people, and especially just all the things that you're doing are not typical, right? And so I think it's important for people to hear your story and see it. And I know so many will be inspired by it.

Zim: Thank you for having me on, girl. I appreciate it.

Thanks for listening. Now, before you go, it's an incredibly exciting time here at Hello Seven. That's because my new book, *We Should All Be Millionaires: A Woman's Guide to Earning More, Building Wealth, and Gaining Economic Power* is on bookshelves now. You can pick it up from Amazon, Target, Barnes and Noble or your favorite Black owned independent bookstore.

When you buy, you'll be getting my playbook on how to make million-dollar decisions. How to increase your income right now, no matter what your current profession, and no matter what's going on in the economy. And why earning more money as a woman is not selfish or greedy, but in fact, a revolutionary act that brings the economy into balance and creates a better world for all. Go to [helloseven.co/book](https://helloseven.co/book) for more information and links. Go get the book now.

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