

Kindled podcast is brought to you by the generous support of our donors. If you want to join them in making this show possible, visit kindledpodcast.com/give. Hello and you are listening to Episode 41 of Kindled, a podcast where women share stories of motherhood, work and the grace we need for both. Today, I am talking with Toi Sweeney, an award-winning stylist, brand image strategist and successful entrepreneur who puts professionals on the pathway to a more confident, coordinated appearance. Toi has more than 20 years of hands-on experience in the fashion industry and today we're talking about how our appearance and our brand impacts our perceived value. Now, even if you're not an entrepreneur or own your own business, this episode is still going to have huge value and impact for you in your own personal life. Before we get started today, I also wanted to let you guys know that I have decided to take a break from publishing episodes for the season of Advent. Advent is the four weeks leading up to Christmas, it runs from Sunday, December 2nd to Monday, December 24th. I decided to do this just to take some time for myself and my family, to not have that weekly 'feed the podcast stream' beast and be able to feed my own soul. I also still will be recording and I have some really exciting interviews lined up for the month of December, so that I can just kind of come back in January refreshed and prepared with content and maybe get a little bit ahead of this whole publishing game, which has always alluded me. We're also getting super close to the one-year anniversary of Kindled, so I have some ideas at my sleeve and if you want to be involved in what those ideas are, you're going to need to go follow me on Instagram to stay plugged in, where I will still be posting and active even while I'm not publishing episodes in December. So yeah, just make sure you're following me at [haleywilliams.kindled](https://www.instagram.com/haleywilliams.kindled) to stay in the loop, as I'll be making some announcements on there over the break. Okay, now onto my interview with Toi.

So today on Kindled, we have Toi Sweeney here to talk with us. Thank you so much for being with us today, Toi.

Thank you for having me, I'm so honored.

Well, I am honored that you are taking time out of your day. I actually heard you on Story Brand podcast.

When was that like? In the last year, right?

You know what, somebody else said that to me last night and I think that it was actually 2015. 16? 2016.

Seriously?

I know.

Wow.

Because I was episode 10.

Oh my gosh. Okay, so I apparently have been listening since the beginning, but I did hear you on there, but your name didn't come up again until my friend Stephanie was like, "Oh my gosh, I know this awesome lady, you would love her, you should have her on the show." And then I was like, "Wait, I recognize that name, I have heard her before." So that's -- small world.

She's like, yeah [inaudible 03:09] I met Stephanie, actually, because we attended the Story Brand workshop together.

Yeah.

And then, after the workshop, you know, it's great to go because you get an opportunity in those days, not now, because the company has grown so large, but it really was about timing. And so anyway, at that time, Donald was running the workshops himself and so we all got to meet him, which was great. And then afterwards, he asked me to be on this podcast and so I was like, "Man, this is a crazy opportunity."

Yeah, that's so cool. I love it, that's really cool. It is pretty insane how much it's grown. I mean, in just a few years it has gone from small business to [inaudible 04:02] brand basically.

So yeah, I was excited to be a part of that. So it's nice to meet you officially.

Yes, you too. So Toi, can you tell us about your family and your people?

Yes, so let's see. So I am married and I am -- Sorry I got distracted. Squirrel! So I'm married, I've been married for the last 18 years, we have a little eight-year-old boy and as you and I were saying that, we met through your friend Stephanie and Stephanie and I were bonding over our infertility challenges at that time. So, I'm lucky enough to get to be Tucker's mom, but my sister-in-law, at 53, carried my son for me because 10 years ago, this September actually, I suffered a uterine rupture and so my first child passed away. And so because of the horror, obviously, that was around that, I can't have children. And

so we get to just kind of swim in the river of God's grace and we get to be parents to Tucker, via my sister in law. I mean, he's completely our DNA but she just carried him for us, so...

Wow, that is amazing.

Yeah, so that's kind of like my family story. And so I left my corporate job two years ago. So I was a style Director at QVC, the number one home shopping network, where I had the opportunity to address all the program hosts, all [inaudible 05:36] of them, so I got to shop with them, we managed their closets and we managed their on-air personalities. Not their personalities, but just kind of their image rather. So yeah, it was a lot of fun. And then I just decided to try to branch out on my own and open up the Well Dressed Brand and so now I get to run and be the founder of the Well Dressed Brand.

That's so cool.

Yeah, so it's fun.

How did you -- I have some of the questions, so I'm trying to decide which direction I want go first.

Before we get into your work...

Yes.

So, how -- Back to your son.

Yes.

When you realized that you weren't going to be able to have children biologically from your own body, how did that come about that you were -- that your sister-in-law, I mean, did she offer? Like how did that even come up?

I don't think that that's something, in my opinion, that you ask someone, you know? I would never ask. And so, we were very lucky that we had a couple of people offer, but not everybody -- You know, it's just like with life, you have to really pray for wisdom and [inaudible 06:45] know the why. Like, Why are people offering to do it? And so the first person that had offered, her -- You know, when we really dug a little deeper, her intention behind it was for her to get the accolades. You know, when you strip back all the layers. She wanted to receive all the attaboys and I was very upfront about that with her. So I said, "I don't think that you are in this for the right reasons." And so we had a couple of other family members offer and were less like, "No." And so, when my sister-in-law offered, I actually laughed because I was like, "You're old, you cannot..." You know, and so we went to go visit a doctor who he did our fertility and was able to get us pregnant through IVF and he was just checking on us. He's so amazing, Dr. Michael Glass, in the Philadelphia area, and he was, you know, obviously broken and concerned and cared about us and so we were just visiting with him after Miles' funeral and all that stuff. And I mentioned to him, jokily, I was like, "So my sister-in-law is 53 or 56 or whatever -- she was -- and she wants to carry my child for me, hahaha." And he said, "Well actually, you know, your uterus doesn't age like the rest of you. And so if she has a history of good pregnancies then she may actually be a good candidate." And I was like, "What?" So, the rest was kind of history, so I mentioned it to her, she flew down and yeah, and then that was kind of it and she lives, you know, in St. Louis and so I still got to have an opportunity to grieve the loss of Miles and still know that she was kind of growing Tucker, so I had something to look forward to, which made it a little bit easier.

Wow, and so Miles was your first son.

Yeah, so he would have been 10 and Tucker is eight, so that's kind of like -- I had that, you're pregnant for about a year and so he had been gone a couple of like eight months or something like that and so, yeah. So we just got to kind of really grieve together and hold on to each other and just pray through really, as much as we possibly could during that time and she would just send me pictures in the mail, give me updates and everything and then we flew out to St. Louis for his birth and then brought him home.

Wow, that's awesome. That's great. And then, how far along were you with Miles when -- You had a uterine rupture, you said?

I was about -- some of the memories, because of that the time was so traumatic -- I get lost in them a little bit. And it was 10 years ago, but I think I was about six months.

Okay.

So we still had to have a funeral and all that stuff, like...

Yeah.

Like I had to, you know, go through the whole thing and I had an opportunity to hold him and I wasn't processing, as you can imagine, I wasn't processing any of it at all, you know? And I just -- it's funny

how God works, because I remember about three years prior, I had read this book that might be out of print or it's on Amazon for like \$2, but it's by the gospel singer Yolanda Adams and it's called Points of Power. And I remember reading in this book about her going through a divorce and losing, I think, her parents or something and she was talking about being able to reframe your mind that when something traumatic happens to you, if you can kind of get yourself to a place where you think and understand, you know, really kind of like Jeremiah 11, right, like "I know that plans I have for you, plans to prosper you" and you don't think that when you try for three years to get pregnant and then only end up having your uterus explode and then 'Oh, by the way, now you can't have children, right?' You don't think that that -- there's no way you're going to think, "This is going to prosper me." But I remember that it was around Christmas time and I remember being at church and I remember it was like -- we were doing like a holiday cantata and unfortunately for the people at my church, they had microphones hanging from the ceiling and so -- for the choir -- but I went up to the altar to pray and all you could hear echo into the church. I'm not embarrassed, but it's really... It was awful, but all you could hear is me wailing at the altar. And I remember just really saying -- It sounded terrible, but I was actually thanking God for taking Miles and I just -- Because I remember saying, listening to the words of Yolanda Adams, that whatever is coming must be so fantastic because this is so awful, you know? And I just kept saying over and over and over again, "Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, I trust you, I trust you, thank you, thank you." And this was before my sister-in-law, you know, had offered to carry Miles for us, because when you were looking at women, surrogates, there we go -- What you're looking at surrogates, you know, it was like upwards of like \$200,000. Oh my God, I don't have that kind of money, you know, yeah, to do that and God bless the people that do and it can be kind of unattached, but it worked out better for us. And so I just remember that lesson and just learning that and being able to apply it in my moment of need and it worked out for us, which ended up, obviously, being fantastic because if you go on to my Facebook and you look through all the -- I don't have any on there now -- all the stories of Tucker and his lively personality, he is so beautiful and he's so hilarious and he just makes me full belly laugh every day and -- We just get to really enjoy it. We really enjoy him and being parents and we know we have all the stuff that comes along with it where you just want to, you know, like, "Are you kidding me?" You have days, but, you know, he wishes there was 10 more kids in the house, but, you know, but it's a good time, it's a good time.

That is incredible. Wow, what a... What a sacrifice too. I mean, it sounds like your sister-in-law was excited and happy to be able to help, but just that sacrificial carrying, literally carrying one another's [inaudible 12:47] of your child, that's pretty awesome. I mean...

Yeah, and she was married at the time and it was like weird because her husband would be like -- You know, they're in their 50s and they're like -- He's like, "Well, Karen's pregnant and it's not my baby." Like that was his joke. He would say that all the time. He'd say like, "Well, my wife's expecting and it's not my child." You know? And everyone like, "What?" You know, and she's a nurse and she didn't tell her staff until she was probably eight months pregnant and so they couldn't tell because they get to wear scrubs all the time. And so it was really sweet because once they found out, oh my word, they just kept taking her blood pressure, they'd want to do ultrasounds every day. So, now whenever he goes to visit her, he's seen all these people that have known him since he was like in the belly and so they get really excited. It's like a celebrity when he goes to St. Louis.

That is awesome. I am distracted by the fact that nobody could tell she was pregnant until she was eight months.

No, I don't even think then. I think it's just because -- You know, I don't know how tall you are, but I think that it depends on your body shape and how you carry, but my husband...

I'm not that tall. Yeah, I'm not.

Me either. And so it's like, I'm right out there. And so because -- like, my husband is 5'6 and so all of his sisters are like 5'9, 5'10 and they're curvy and so I think that because she's so tall, she probably was like at 14 around that, size 14 around that time and she just really -- she carried so well, honestly, she just didn't look pregnant.

Tucker was literally standing up inside of her.

Yeah, probably.

He wasn't [inaudible 14:34] he was just standing there.

Like, "I'm here." And she just didn't -- She would still play with her other grandkids and there's pictures of her wearing overalls and I know she's clearly like eight months pregnant, but I think that people looked at her and then thought, "There's no way this woman who's well into her 50s, there's no way she's pregnant." So she clearly is just fat. They just thought that she had put on extra weight, but they didn't know.

It's like your brain tells you, "That's impossible. Like, they wouldn't -- No, that person wouldn't be pregnant."

Exactly, and so I think it was that and then also, you know, you're wearing these huge scrubs and so people are just like, "Oh, she's putting on a little weight I guess." But they didn't know and I just think it's funny too. Like, how could you not know? She was...

Right, I know, because I'm picturing myself back at even four or five months pregnant. I'm like, you could absolutely tell. I mean, there's just no... When I was seven months pregnant, I was getting comments. My mom got remarried when I was about seven months pregnant with my first daughter and wearing the dress, as a bridesmaid, it was like an empire waist, so it hung off my stomach so it really just made me look bigger because it didn't like fit the actual shape and I was getting comments like, "Are you sure it's not twins? Oh my gosh, are you due tomorrow?" Like, "Oh, you have two months left?" I was like, "Somebody's going to lose a tooth because I'm going to punch you in the mouth if you say one more thing"

People don't realize, it's just like, come on. If you can just keep those words in your mouth and if you can't say kind things -- And they don't even realize it, you know?

Yeah.

And so, you know, you think it because we're human, but I think that I've gotten... If I see someone and I'm like, "Are you ready? How are you feeling?" And then I always look them in the face and say, "You look beautiful." Exactly.

I always do that because you don't know how they're feeling, you know?

They're very rarely feeling beautiful.

Right.

I mean, even if you are, like you're not feeling it, you know?

Right.

Oh man, that's awesome. Well, thanks for sharing that, that's really cool. So then how did it come about that you decided to leave QVC and start your own business and you obviously have the skill and this talent for dressing people and understanding brand and how that relates to perceived value of individuals and companies and all that. It's just really interesting. How did you get into all of this?

So while I was at QVC, I was really frustrated in my career and I think I lay the story out -- excuse me -- in my book "Secrets of a Well Dressed Brand," which is only on iTunes, but I kind of lay the whole thing out in there too, but it was really -- I was really frustrated and stuck in my career, because I had -- I just wasn't moving forward and the way that the infrastructure was at that time was that there was nowhere for me really to be promoted to and so I was just clicking on hours or years on my resume. So any time I was gaining any extra knowledge or whatever, it had to be up to me and so thank God I'm a life learner and I love to read books and articles and I kind of stay up on everything as much as I possibly can. You know, because I just like to learn and so I had come across -- I was really looking for a way to kind of level up at work and I was taking notice of what my co-workers were good at, where I was on short and things like that and I stumbled across Dory Clark's first book about brand. I don't... maybe she was the second brand book I read, but anyway, it was like a cluster of like all these branding books when the phrase "personal branding" was just starting to really hit the market, so I was reading every book that I could possibly read and I remember Dory Clarke was like the first or the second book that I read. And so every time I consume something like that, Haley, my question is, "How does that relate to fashion? How does that relate to people? How does that relate to what I'm doing?" And so I started out -- At this point, I was a full-time fashion stylist QVC so I was only dressing the models back stage with the live show, which is a huge deal. It's a lot of, you know, it's a lot of work and a lot of stress and not stress in a bad way, that's not the right word. It's a very high pace, there it is and so because it's live and so -- Like now I can do it with my eyes closed because, if I've done it so long and you learn to respect time completely different at QVC until I worked in there, three minutes was not a lot of time to me and everything becomes minutes. I know how long it takes me to eat a bowl of cereal, I know how long it takes me ---

So you just have it... Anyway, you just have a different perspective on time. But anyway, so I started to lay some groundwork for personal branding, so I said, "What would happen if I start to dress models according to their real life personalities?" And I didn't tell anybody I was doing this and so there was one who was very -- in her outside life of QVC, was very upscale. She had this brand that was very elegant and she was not [inaudible 19:12] about drama and she drove her Mercedes and she was just really like this kind of boss girl. And then you had one who was beautiful, but she was kind of a tom boy and she, you know, she was very down to earth and she was very... You know, she's the girl next door that everybody wants to be, because she just... She's a mom of a boy and her husband's a detective and she just had this cool kind of life, so... And then we had one that used to be a ballet dancer who was very tall and very elegant and lalalala. So every show, I would kind of merge the brand of QVC their personal brand and then whatever item that we were presenting into one and I just tried it out and then I could see that they started to like it. So, the one girl wouldn't -- She never really wore jeans and so I would always put her and dresses. Like, if I had a dress [inaudible 20:09] all those types of things. And so they start saying things like, "I would actually wear this outfit" and "Wow." And then the host started to comment on it [inaudible 20:19] I'm like, "Man, I might be on to something." And so I saw an opportunity to get promoted to senior stylist. I call the same title Styles Director because I perform the functions of a style director. So once I kind of tested the waters with them, I tested it with the program hosts, so they were split up into half. So I had 15 and then my other co-worker had 15 that we styled and so I started to do it with them. Said, "Okay, what if we dress all of them?" I got my boss on board, you know, from their personalities, they all look very different on air. Well, then it started to happen on the threads where the customers were saying, "I don't know what's going on with you guys, but you all look like yourselves and you look really different and you all look cool." And it was... And we really started to use the color of psychology, and so I was like, "Man, you've got to be kidding me." And so, also when I took on the role as Style Director, it's all about questions and so then I said, "Well, what happened if I use it on myself, because now that I'm in this role that has a ton of visibility in the company and I'm implementing these strategies, how does that -- Like, can you change your perceived value and the way that someone sees you by the way you dress?" So what I started to do, I said, "Okay I'm going to test it out." So for a year straight, I wore only what I consider to be a very elegant color palate, so I would only wear gray, ivory, black navy to work. I rarely wore bright colors at all, and so I found this gold necklace that in big letters just said 'chic' on it and so I did that and then I would wear... So, Fridays were was dressed down days, so then I would wear like let's say jeans, a graphic T that said 'chic' and then I wear a blazer that said that, like a black player and just killer shoes every meeting, everyday, I was always just kind of like, "How do I want to be seen? So I want to be seen as the authority, I want to be considered very chic' and dadada." So, I never said these words to anyone. Again, I just kind of put that out there and that's what I mean by when I'm saying "Dress your message." So dress in the way that you want to be perceived. And so that was the way that I wanted to be perceived. So this is where I tested the water. So I was -- probably about a year had gone by, I had stopped wearing the chic necklace and so, I mean, I just... Whatever. So I was in the bathroom one day and I ran into the president of our company and we walk out of -- you know, she comes out of her stall, I come out of mine. We were at the sink washing our hands and she [inaudible 22:47] her hands for the paper towels, she turns to me and she says -- She looks me up and down and she said, "You know, you always look so chic" And I thought, "You have got to be kidding me.

Oh my gosh.

I was like, "This stuff works." I was like, "Man, okay."

And you weren't wearing the necklace?

No, I was not, and I thought that it was funny, because I was like, "Oh my goodness, it worked" and it was just staying within a certain color palate and really doing what I considered to be chic and to see if other people could pick up on it. And then, on the flip side, as far as just to learning and just really trying to be so very good that I couldn't be ignored, I had also built a personal brand in the building that one of my co-workers stopped me one day and she said, "I'm so very proud of you." And I said, "Why?" Then she said, "Because, you know, I was in a meeting today and someone -- everyone's rolling out their projects and someone's giving a presentation and at the end of the presentation, someone raised her hand and said, 'Did we run any of this by Toi?'" And I was like, "Wow." You know, she's like, "You built such a brand for yourself that what you say matters in this company and how things are put out there,

from the image perspective." And I thought, "Oh man, you know, I really kind of made it." So I decided to leave because I had really done everything that I had come to do there and I really believe that these things work. I thought that I could help other women and teach them how to do it, the position was going in a different direction that was going kind of backwards and so -- And I really wanted to continue on the path that I was and so I just decided to leave and I tell you, it was amazing. So the first year, I wrote my book, *Secrets of a Well-Dressed Brand*, I had a feature in *forbes.com*, I was featured on *bbcnews.com* and I was featured on like 12 different podcasts that year as well. And so that was just year one. And so I was like, "Man, what is year two going to look like?" And then this year, for year two, I had an opportunity to be on Rachel Hollis's podcast, I have an opportunity to be on your podcast.

Yes.

You know, and I spoke at the RISE conference and I got to go to different conferences and so -- You know, it's not bad, so I'm very happy and I'm getting to work with all these amazing women and moms and things, just sharing what I know to help them to be able to level up and get to wherever it is that they want to be.

I love that. So, what a cool story, and just evidence that when you are doing what you were created to do, you know, it's not as a striving, it is -- I mean, there is hard work involved, obviously.

Of course.

I'm not saying, "Oh, just fell into your lap." You still had to work, but it was like -- When you took that thought of like, "What if I follow this thing that makes sense to me, and -- You know, it's like everything started, you started really building a brand, you started -- people started noticing, it started doing the work for you in some ways, because you were just showing up and kind of doing what you knew was within you, which is really cool.

Yeah.

Inspiring for a lot of women who are, you know, trying to figure out what that is for them.

Thank you, yeah.

I'm sorry to interrupt this episode, but I have to ask you a favor. It's not to buy my product or someone else's, but it's to spread hope. I want take a quick second to invite you to share Kindled with a friend. Kindled, after all, does mean to light, ignite, set fire to, arouse or awaken. My prayer and hope is that every episode of this show ignites in you hope and fans into flame the gifts and skills that God has given you, that the very stories and women you hear from what ignited you a fervor for God in His glory and a desire to live more fully into what He's calling you to. One simple and real way you can do that is by sharing this episode with a friend right now. Screen shot it and add to your stories on Facebook or Instagram, or maybe text it to a friend. Maybe this is a neighbor, a mom from pre-school or your kids' elementary school, a fellow entrepreneur, a stay-home mom or maybe your sister-in-law. Your words mean so much more than you know. Your recommendation is your stamp of approval and people trust you. So, if you love this show and it has encouraged you, please share it with just one mom who could use the hope and encouragement today, which isn't that really all of us? And last, if you want to go a step further to support Kindled and keep it around, you can give a one-time or a regular gift by going to kindledpodcast.com/give.

Your website, you say, "I help you dress your message and increase your perceived value." That's kind of like your story brand, right?

Right.

So, what does it mean to dress your message? Like, you described for you -- How does someone like me -- I mean, and this is actually timely because after our interview I'm going to a meeting with a client and for my marketing job, like my "day job" so I have a web design and marketing business and this is a client that -- and they're like, they email me and they're like, "So, we want to meet with you to see how we can increase our marketing spend this year," which basically just means like, "How else can you help us? Is there more we could be doing with you? We're ready." And so for me, this is really timely. I'm like, "Okay, what should I wear? What should I wear to increase my perceived value here? Like, tell me. I wish you were here. You can just come to my closet and tell me what to wear."

Well, that's fine.

But what does that mean?

We'll FaceTime.

Yeah, yeah. What does that mean to dress your message?

So it really comes down to what I said before, in the sense of you -- The first thing you want to... So I'm going to tell you how to do it and through that, I think you'll get what it means. Hopefully, I'll answer the question right. So what I would... So the first thing you want to ask yourself is, "How do you want to be seen?" Right? Because your personal brand is going to enter to the door before you do and so, as you are walking into the meeting place or you're sitting or whatever, a person and everyone in that room is taking you in, so they're looking at your hair, your handbags, your shoes. In the first nine seconds they're deciding if they can trust you, if they want to do business with you, if they think you're attractive, if they're going to hire you. You have nine seconds, because with our smartphones, we've learned how the multi-task in a sense, or at least jump from task to task to task to task. And so it no longer takes us the 12 seconds that I did years ago to kind of come up, to give a [inaudible 29:25] of someone. So it's been down to nine seconds. So you can't build a relationship in nine seconds and so you have to have a personal brand. So the first thing you want to do is decide, "When I'm meeting with this client or I'm meeting with this teacher or I'm on this job interview or running snacks at school, whatever it is, what do I want people to think, feel or know about me?" And then once you decide what that is -- And so, the way I help my clients do that is I have a style crept test that I created that tells you exactly what your style is, and it'll go through if you're creative, if you're, you know, if you like just separates, all the things. You come to know what your style recipe is, so you know like what pieces you should wear. Like, "Oh, I actually don't love pants, so I'm going to wear a dress." Or, "I'm really not a dress person, I'd rather wear jeans." Okay, so now that we know you're wearing jeans to this, you know, because that's what you're going to be more comfortable and then feel more powerful in, we kind of go through in each of the seven style buckets on the test explains to you who you are, from a stylist perspective. So on my test, I test as -- What am I? I am dramatic and polished. And so that goes back to being pull together and very chic and so I'm always going to be wearing something that adds a little drama to the outfit, right? So that's what it means and so -- You know, you really, again, you want to put your message out there because it comes in the door before you do. So in my book, I tell -- I cite this test that was done, I believe it was Stanford University, and it was the person who's running not their culinary department, but he specializes basically, in restaurants and food. So I took a theory in the perceived value from that idea. So the cake theory in my book is -- So they bake this chocolate cake, right? And so they do a series of tests where they give one group of people -- So think of get about your image the whole time, right? So they give one group of people the cake on a napkin and then they give another group of 10 people or whatever it was the same cake on a paper plate and then they give this another group of people the same cake on Wedgwood China And so the difference was, the people who had the cake on a paper plate or napkin was like, "This cake is good." And then the people who had it on a paper plate said, "Oh, this cake was really, really good." And then the people who had it on the Wedgewood China thought that the cake was remarkable and they were willing to pay three times more.

Wow.

Let that sink in for a second. So if you're showing up places in your pajamas and your sweat pants and your hair is half done and you didn't bother to put on at least like a tinted moisturizer or BB or CC cream or something and I lip gloss -- whatever, whatever it is your thing that makes you feel the best -- It's obvious, you know? And people, unfortunately it's such a... People are still judging and it's such an exceptional time, Haley, to be a woman where we're accepting more of each other and we're [inaudible 32:52] each other on and your size doesn't matter and none of those things matter, but your brand still does matter. And so whether you're dressed in a 2 or 22, you still have to show up. And so that's really what it's about, it's about how you're the icing on the cake, so to speak, you know? Is that you are the brand, so you have to dress the message, you are the walking billboard for whatever it is that you are doing in life and so that's what it means. It's like... So that's what it means to dress your message and then that's what the perceived value is. And so like, how are you taking your personality, your image, your mission, you know, your vision and your packaging it up because you are a product. You are the product, right? And so what do we all do? What's your favorite thing that you just bought on Amazon? You know, when you got it in the mail, you noticed how it was packaged. When you give a gift,

right? You take time to wrap it or choose the right bag or choose to... It all is the same in reference to your image as well. And I hope I answered your question, but yeah.

Yeah.

That's like... that's what... That's what it is, you know?

Yeah, absolutely, that makes a lot of sense and I think, as someone who's a creative entrepreneur, I personally have struggled in the past with -- I see, I really see the tie between perceived value and how you put yourself out there because although -- My skills have increased over the years, so yes, like my prices can increase. A lot of it has had to do with how I perceived myself and my own perception of what I was worth, not as a human but as someone to work with. How much can I help you as a business? How much value can I add to you by solving your problems? A lot of it has just been in line with my mindset, so it's like my skills have not exponentially increased in web design from three years ago to today. Now, yes, I'm better, but it's not like...

Of course.

You know, it's not like I'm worlds apart, like I was [inaudible 34:14] kind of was created the same thing, it just... it got better, it looked sleeker or it was a little more optimized, or whatever. But most of it has had to do with my own perception of myself. And so I guess what I'm getting at is I think that this whole concept of personal brand has almost as much to do with ourselves like thinking and recognize our own dignity as individuals and women and unique created -- You know, we all have some different things we bring to the table. Like you said, your test, like what's your version? And I think it has a lot to do for people with how they think about themselves and...

It's everything.

Feeling good about yourself. And so, I'm thinking about -- the mom listening, who's like, "Well, I don't have a business. I don't have a company, maybe I don't have a product that I'm trying to sell or service I'm selling so this doesn't apply to me."

Yeah, but it does.

Why does it apply to her? And can you explain why this whole concept? Or isn't a waste or doesn't need to fall in deaf ears?

No, so I think that... Well, it does apply to you because you're still building a legacy, especially if you have a family. And if you don't have a family or you're single, you know, you still want, you're still building a legacy and a brand of who you are and what you leave behind, right? It's kind of like your personal blueprint and that's what we're talking about. And so, what you feel and who you are in the inside, it will eventually come out, good, better, indifferent and so that's why I always talk to my child about, the importance of... it's inside and out. And that's why my book is laid out that way because I'm saying, "Listen, you have got to understand that number one, your fear [inaudible 36:11] Number two, your mind and being mentally strong is so important and so even though it's a branding in style, but I talk about the importance of having a spiritual life and then I also talk about why what you wear matters. This is what we're talking about today. And so, it really comes down to legacy. So even if you are a stay-at-home mom, that is not a small task. You are running a business, because your family... You know what I mean? It's like you are the marketing department, you are at the travel department, in most cases. You know, you're running a cleaning business you're...

You're a personal chef.

Right, you are a personal chef, you're like, you're like snack Mom 2000, you know? You're doing all the things, right? And so... And then if you're a working mom, you have to multiply supply that by three. And so, you're doing all the things and so the question then becomes, "What legacy do I want to leave behind?" You know, do you want be known as a type of mom that's going to build your kids up or tear them down? Do you want to be the type of mom that man, when she pulls up here, she always has it together, you know what I mean? And so, none of us really have it together, but do you at least look like you have it together, you know?

And I'm not hearing you say like, "You have to wear stiletto heels and jeans every day when you get your kid [inaudible 37:29] for school."

Who does that? No, no, no.

Like, no. I don't think... it sounds like, as I was picturing like, "Well, what would that look like for me on the days where I'm not going to be seen by clients and I'm not having meetings." I think, you know, I wear leggings. Everyday when I get up, I put on some version leggings.

Oh, yeah.

And so -- But for me, I think, and I'm speaking of [inaudible 37:51] because I'm putting words in your mouth, but I'm just interpreting like -- So do that well, don't just like slob around, because I don't feel good when I am that way. Obviously, some days I don't wear make-up or some days I don't shower or do my hair, but to some degree, I try and I want to feel good about myself, so if that's what I feel good on that day, do it and that's okay, but if I don't feel good, that's what's the problem, right?

Oh, absolutely and that's exactly what I'm saying, is that it's not about... Because we just don't -- we're busy, we don't really have time to wear those shoes that only look good for dinner if somebody's going to pull around the car and pick you up. I don't know at what point I kind of start wearing jeans and leggings became my jam, but now that I work from home, I'm with you because we're doing the same thing; we're getting up, we're getting our kids to school, we're coming back and sometimes we're meeting with clients or whatever. But my version of it is that I think I have seven pair of just black leggings from Nordstrom Rack or Target or whatever fits me or that I love and so...

Leggings for every occasion.

Right, and then I have -- You know, and if I'm meeting with a client, then I have some that are leather or I have like whatever, but I need to be comfortable, number one. And I then I have this cashmere tunic that I wear over it, so I actually have a meeting in New York coming in up that's really big and I was thinking last night like, "What am I going to wear to this meeting?" And then I was like, "Oh, don't over think it." I have this really beautiful Tahari sweater and I have also the tunic length like cashmere sweater that's black and I usually wear that with my leggings and then I will do designer boots. So I encourage everyone, if you can, to spend your money on your accessories, because no one cares if your jeans are from Target, you can't even tell if they are or not, because denim has come such a long way, you know? And so, you know, wear it was a cute little top that you picked up from Target but get a great blazer, if that's your thing, or a beautiful sweater to wear over it, if that's your thing, or whatever and then you... If you're sitting in a chair, Haley, let's say, you're sitting in Starbucks and you're meeting your clients or the moms out there, you're meeting another mom for coffee or whatever it is, you can have on your yoga pants, have your hair up in a cute little top knot, throw on a nice lip stain, some bronzer on your cheeks, your cute little puffer coat or sweater or wherever sweat shirt, depending on where you live and you have this beautiful leather handbag hanging off the chair, no one's going to question. Like, you just look expensive automatically. I mean, you do. Like, we've all seen them. You know, you see the girl in her Gucci sunglasses and her Gucci bag and then she can be wearing like, I don't know, only God knows what, just T-shirt and jeans. You don't know if that's a \$300 T-shirt or the Target version, you have no idea, but in your mind, you've already told yourself a story about her. So yeah, it really is about just thinking about leveling up, regardless of where you are, because -- Science supports this theory that it enhances your performance, you guys, it really does, and you can change the way a person thinks about it. It's so powerful that I'm really shocked that I'm not... that more people aren't talking about it, you know? Because it really like -- We are so much more powerful than we even imagine, you know?

Yeah. Well, one reason maybe, I think there's a perception that we can't talk about image because, you know, we shouldn't care about how we look or we shouldn't care. We should be so like, as believers or as Christians, caring about beauty or caring about fashion is, I don't know. what's the word?

Yeah.

It's simple.

Or is it you just want to be like, it's like "Oh, what you want... Is that falling under the umbrella of being in the world but not of the world?" But you look at Esther, when you read the Book of Esther, she spent -- what was it -- a year before she went before the king getting beauty treatments. So I mean, it literally says and they go through all the things that she did because she couldn't just pop up in front of him the way that she was. It was not acceptable and so I look at it that way as it's the same thing that it is fine. It's fine if you want to go out that way and you want to do that thing, but I'm telling you, psychologically, it's going to change the way that you think and it's going to change the way that you feel and so when people -- You know, they have these studies out there -- I actually have it in front of me -- it's this article that you can Google, I'm sure, says, "Dress for success, how clothes influence our performance." And they're talking, they're citing a study that was in a paper and from August 2015 in social psychology and personal science where they as subjects, some of them to dress formal and some of them to dress casual and they found that the ones that dressed up were more creative, they were more strategic, they

felt more powerful and then I cite some other studies in my book, as well. And so it has a psychological effect on us all, where we stand a little taller, like I was telling you about some things that I had gone on in my family yesterday. And so, when I was up from 3 in the morning yesterday until I went to bed at like 11:30 last night, so as you can imagine, I was exhausted and so after I got my son out the door, I went back to bed, which I don't typically do, but I was so tired. I set my alarm to make sure that I was here for you this morning and I looked out and I was like, "Oh my goodness, I need to take my own advice." And so, I changed my shirt and I brushed my teeth and I put on my tinted moisturizer and some blush, and I was like, "I know we're not using video, but it's not about that, I need to be able to feel good, because everything -- Like Rome is burning all around me, you know? You know, and I'm like, "Okay, but I can still show up and it makes me feel different." And then we're going to hang up from this and I'm going to go run and grab my kid from school and then I'm off and running for the remainder of the day and so... Right. There's just some... And I think you're talking about, like it's dressing for the job that you have and I've heard that saying like dress for the job you want, not that have, but I think what I mean is, if you're a mom and you've got a little kids, well, for you to wear jeans and a blazer and high heels would be the ridiculous.

Of course.

Like, that would not be, it's not be, it would not serve you or your family or children, but wearing comfortable leggings and cute tennis shoes and, like you said, looking at yourself for five seconds in the mirror and being like, "I am going to feel good about myself today and know that that's flowing from the inside out." And starting with your spirit and your mindset and then working its way on to your face or your hair. It's not about, you know, "Oh, I've got to try make myself believe that I'm something that I'm not."

No.

If it doesn't start inside, it doesn't last.

No, it doesn't count.

I know a 100% that like when I am at least semi-prepared for the day, like today, this is second day hair, but I did, do my tinted moisturizer, my mascara and my blush and like chap stick, like all that it's enough for me to be like, "I'm a person" and just even give myself the dignity of the time to get ready for my day. You know, I get my kids ready, I [inaudible 45:11] my husband to go to work dressed appropriately and with gel in his hair and deodorant on, and yet, what am I just going...? Oh, well, I don't matter, you know? I'm I don't have time for that, like that's silly. And I don't know if I'm the only one who's sort of sometimes has this old really outdated voice in my head saying that I shouldn't care, but I do, I mean, I do care. And I... do you know what I mean? I don't know if other women probably struggle with some sort of version of, "You don't need to care." But I do and I'm okay with caring, I love, caring, do you know what I mean?

No, and I think that -- You know, like we said, you have to do it and if you choose not to, then that's fine, but I tell you what, what I've learned in all of this is that none of us have time. Okay, we don't, you know? And you've got a little preview into my life today and you were so sweet, you know? You're like, "Do you want reschedule?" I'm like, "No" Because we don't have time, but we have to make time. So if that means that you get up -- I get up at 5 AM every day because it's important for me to have that time because I know for me, that if I am not taking 30 minutes every morning and spending time in my Bible or to just read a devotion or just to have that time and just be quiet, I'm going to be a little bit lesser of a mom when I need to wake up my son, at 6. And so it's important for you to kind of take that time. And then, if me choosing to put water in my body, which as opposed to something else, all those things that contribute to me feeling good. We know what we all need to do, we just don't do it. So you're deciding. Every choice that we make is either getting us closer to our goals or further away, every choice that we make is either getting us closer to God or further away. And so you get to choose, and so that really is what we're trying to say. So why do we do not choose to spend that time with God or to spend that time with your kids? And you're setting examples, especially if you have daughters, you are teaching them so much about what you do. They don't care about what you say, they're only watching what you do and so if you're telling her that it doesn't matter how you show up and again, going back to dressing your message, if you don't want to be perceived as someone who is promiscuous or -- I don't even know, whatever, insert whatever word it is that you kind of see is taboo in your mind, all of that is a choice, right? But if you don't want to be seen as X, Y and Z, they don't dress like X, Y, and Z. You know, don't

show up to school with the booty shorts and the UGGs on. You know, but if that's the message that you want to put out there, then by all means girl, knock it out, but you have to decide and that's what I'm saying, that you can't... We can't tell our girls, "Be strong, stand up for yourself, do all these things and then send them out into the world, dressed like prostitutes." Like, you just can't. I just, I don't get it. And then obviously men should take us seriously, regardless of what we have on, but the reality of it again is that they don't and so it does -- That transfer into us being adult women too, you know? And then you're wondering why people aren't taking you serious as an entrepreneur?

Yeah, well, I was going to say. We could have an entire podcast episode on what girls are wearing on college campuses today. I don't know when the last time you were on a college campus was. I mean, there's like seven schools around Philly, right?

Yeah, I'm sure it hasn't been too long, but...

Oh my gosh, wow, I'm so glad I went to college when I did, because when I recently -- I don't remember why I was on KU's campus, and I looked around and was like, "What are you guys...? I think you forgot to get dressed. I think you just hopped out of the shower in your little see through shirt" and, like you were saying, it's like, "Oh my gosh, the the booty shorts, the leggings and the UGGs and... I mean... And it's funny.

I wore my fair share of leggings and UGGs, but at least had a shirt on, you know?

And some of the leggings are footless tights, so actually not pants, so you can see through them, so [inaudible 49:20]

I think that's the point.

Right, it's like cash and prizes for everyone. Like, put those away, you know?

What qualifies as a shirt today is just... it blows my mind. I'm like, "That is a shirt? That's... in my day, that was a bra, but that is a shirt, yet that is a shirt." Okay, I'm so...

Are you sure?

I am, yeah.

Like, are you sure it's a shirt?

It's wow.

Well, it's funny, I was reading an interesting study the other day that's talking about -- Is the Gen Z, right under the millennials. So it's swinging back around because they care a lot about their image, a lot, which I think is very interesting because I do think that millennials get such a bad break about them not caring about not much of anything, but... And I don't think that that's true of all of them to be quite fair, but I think it's very interesting that the kids before them, under them, they really care a lot about what they look like.

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So what would you say to do someone who is struggling to understand what sets them apart? Or what is my version of... How do I do that for my own life, for my own self? My first thought is they should take your test and they should see what you say on there. Is that something they can do on the web site?

No, you have to contact me for that, because it's like a style consultation fee. I charge like \$197 for it. So I'll walk you through the way that I take on clients and so what I'll do is I don't typically offer discounts, but I will offer -- I'll do half price for anybody on your podcast that wants to do it. So the process is that -- So I use... I am a certified fascination advantage coach, so I typically will send you the link to a fascination advantage test. That's the [inaudible 51:15] yes you can go online and I think the test is like \$50, but the benefit of doing it through me is that I just [inaudible 51:21] do the test and then we -- and you're paying a little bit more to have me go through it with you, but it's very, very brand-specific, whereas if you're taking it, you end up with a 16-page report that's telling you all this awesome stuff about yourself, but you don't often know how it applies to you. And so you get this test and it breaks you down into an archetype and it tells you how the world sees you, as opposed to you. Like it works really well in addition to the Miles Briggs or any of the other assessment tests that some of us have taken it, like different jobs and stuff. The reason I love this one is because, Haley, it's the only one that I know of in the world that tells you how the world sees you. So you know what people are thinking about you before you meet with anybody. It's things that you're putting out there to your family, your friends, your boss, whatever, so you get a little snippet of it and then all the rest of the reports I help you to break down, if you want to put it on your Facebook or your Instagram or your LinkedIn, we can pull from that so that you have these adjectives to describe and put out there to the world and help you to understand

yourself better as well. So that's the first thing we do. So now that... Now we know who you are and how you're already being perceived, we have your brand right there in front of us. And then, the second thing then is the style consultation. And so then we go through that. So, like I said, you end up with this formula of like, "Oh, here's why I'm dressing the way that I am and here are some tips that I can give you to help you with that." So, typically, for both of those tests together, I usually do \$495, so if you choose to do one or the other, I'll do them for under \$100, you know, like \$99 or something for your listeners. Awesome.

So you guys can just go to my website and then just email me or whatever. There's a call button on there too, so just -- if I don't pick up, you can leave a message if you don't want to type.

Okay.

But yeah, so then we can do that.

I'll link that in the show notes for people.

Yeah, they can just kind of get it together, so I want did I... So typically, it's \$197 for each and I'll do each of them for like \$97, so that way they can pick like, "Well, maybe I'll just do the style test" or "Maybe I'll just do one or the other," but I would encourage you to do both, so that you can start going into the new year laying some foundation and the fascination advantage has also -- gives you some great ideas if you're like, "Well, I'm home, but maybe in another year the kids will be off and I may want to start doing some something else." And it gives you some great things like, well, maybe you should be a writer or maybe you should do -- It tells you, you know, some things that might be a great career for you as well. Yeah.

And we can talk through all of that. So that's kind of what we do. And then for my upper [inaudible 53:59] clients, I do, you know -- So after that, then I do a co-branding book for them that takes the two tests and I merge it together and also, well, in my book, I also give the style test, but I think it's easier to take if I email it to you because it's so detailed that to get it in a digital form was nearly impossible, so I still have the old school, but I can get what I need from it. But anyway, then I build out a whole branding deck specifically for my clients and then I do a lot of career coaching as far as like interviews and stuff like that based on your fascination advantage and your image too, so... So yeah, it's that good, yeah.

Okay, well, I'm going to be doing at least one, probably both of them. I want to -- I'm like, "You need to help me."

I have some idea of my strengths, but I think -- What's interesting it's like what other people perceive because we're often so aware of our own weaknesses, our own challenges, but we don't really see what other people see and they don't always notice the same things we notice about ourselves.

And it's such a game changer, like it literally takes eight minutes to take the test, you know? And so you're just like five or eight minutes away from just knowing. So when I didn't mine -- I'm trying to find my... I don't have it in reach -- But when I did mine, it says that I am the kind of sewer, for example. And so it says that I noticed things that made a difference. So I know exactly. You can line up 10 people, 10 rows of fabric, 10 glasses of whatever and you can just line up stuff and inherently, I just know the right things to pick, which makes me great in my drop, so that when I'm shopping from you, I know just the right things to pick. You know, it tells me that, it tells me that I come across very warm-hearted, so those are the -- these are the things that you're doing without trying that I come across as an expert and that I come across very knowledgeable. So you would have to tell me that you think that that's true, because we're meeting for the first time.

It is true, it's true.

And so, then that's my brand, like that's what I'm putting out into the world. And so then the question becomes, "How do you package that and filter it through everything that you're posting, filter it through...? You know, when you're interacting with your family." And so, I use it now. My husband is the [inaudible 56:16] he's very hard [inaudible 56:16], he is very detail-oriented and he likes to achieve -- everything is like, "Go, go, go, go, go." So when we're talking, he's always drilling with questions and I hate it, but I know that he's is a [inaudible 56:29] like he's result-oriented and so now I had to learn to speak his fascinating language, and so when I talk to him about something that's going on in my business, I'll have to say -- I have to speak in numbers and talk about the outcome, as opposed to me, I want know how you feel about it, but he wants to know what the outcome is. And so, if he was a client and I had that information, you know, I know how to best serve him. So it's very powerful.

Yeah, that's really cool. I've heard of Sally Hogshead said in that test -- I think I heard about her originally through Terri Gentilly who's a business coach and anyway, I used to follow her stuff a lot, but that's really interesting and really cool. So yeah, people grab that, jump on that that's a really... that could be super valuable... And I can see that also, like even for someone who doesn't have a business yet, even understanding like what is... What do I not want to go by? Because this is not going to be a good fit for me, whether it's just style-wise or color-wise or just free yourself from feeling like you have to keep up with everybody else and go buy x, y, z that you may be wasting money on and then being like, "Well, I feel terrible when I wear this, so why...?" You know?

Yeah, and I think the biggest thing -- I think the biggest value... Not the biggest value, but one of them, is that we all have these items in our closet that we are not wearing. And you're like, "Oh I love that, sure." And when I saw it on my friend and you're just like, "But I don't go to that portion of my closet" or "I'm not wearing it" and it might be because you were very classic in your style and maybe this shirt is very feminine. Like last year, everything was a floral dress. Florals, florals, florals. And so, but maybe you really aren't like super feminine, and so... but you were trying to jump on the trend bandwagon and I'm just, I'm not... Even though I'm in fashion, this shocks people, I'm not super trendy, you know? So I was at a meeting yesterday and I was presenting some items to these clients and she said, "I'm really surprised that all these items on the rack, they're all approachable and very wearable." And I said, "I know that it's surprising, but I'm actually not a very trendy person. I have an exceptional sense of style." So it's the way that I put it together, it's not so much about the thing and that's what we're talking about today that it's not so much about the outside things and I want your listeners to get that, that you are the brand, you are the light, you are everything that you need to be the best; mom, wife, entrepreneur, whatever it is, and that what I'm trying to help you do is say, "How can we make that better by the way that you think, the way that you dress, the way that you choose to run your family, parent, the way that you choose to be the wife, the people that you surround yourself with, putting the right things inside of your body. Again, not about size, so just about anything that's going to help you to be the best version of yourself so that you leave this legacy behind." Of, man -- You know, when your kids are standing there and talking about you, we're all going to come to a point, right, where we're no longer here -- and it's fresh in my mind because I lost my mom last September -- but to have 600 people showing up to her funeral and talk about the legacy that she left behind and it had nothing to do about the fact that she was beautiful, because she was, it had nothing to do with the fact that she had an exceptional sense of style, because she did, it was about how she made them feel. So I'm saying, package that up, put it out into the world and make magic happen.

I love it. Okay, we have to just end there because we can't talk [inaudible 59:27] that's the best, make magic happen. Toi is going to help you make magic happen, so get in touch with this lady however you can. Okay, so how can people find you online and what's the next step for people that are like "Okay, I need more."?

So I am Toi Sweeney seeing everywhere. T, as in Tom, O-I, except for on Twitter, I'm Sweeney Toi. Don't ask, it's weird. My website is toisweeney.com. I'm just switching everything over to the Well Dressed Brand at some point, but. But yeah, for now, I'm toisweeney.com. I am also back up guest for a fashion brand on QVC so I do post on Facebook when I'm on and also on Instagram, when I'm on. So if you're interested in seeing me present some items there, we can do that. Also, if you guys don't mind, check out my television show, which is on Facebook, which is the Well Dressed Brand TV show. Type that right into the space bar and I just did an interview with -- I just interviewed Christy Wright, and we talked a lot about legacy, which we talked about today. So, if you want some additional information, I'm talking to a lot of industry leaders. So like the page, follow it, all of those great things, so I look forward to that.

That's exciting, I saw that. I can't wait to watch it. I love Christy Wright.

Oh my goodness, she's just -- It was amazing, it really was amazing.

Yeah, that's so cool. How fun that you have a TV show, you're just... you're like going -- And you're only like two years out on your own now.

I know, it's crazy.

I feel like you have 10 years under your belt, from... Well, I mean, you do have more experience, but just being an entrepreneur and... Way to go! You're rocking it.

And then we all are entrepreneurs, right? And so, it's just a matter of getting a product that you want to present out into the world, but everybody, all of us, are entrepreneurs. And so, the sooner we start thinking like entrepreneurs, the better off we'll be.

Okay, well, mike drop, that's the best. That's perfect. Yeah, that's perfect. Thank you! Thanks for sharing your wisdom and your style. Now I feel like compelled to go ravage through my closet. I will link everything in the show notes so people can get in touch with you and take advantage of those generous offers that you made and you'll be hearing from me soon.

Awesome. I'll talk to you later.

Thank you so much!

That girl is so fun. I love Toi, I'm so excited to work with her on the style questionnaire quiz thing that she mentioned on this episode. And if you want to take advantage of that as well, make sure and head to kindledpodcast.com and when you scroll down, you will see the episode with Toi's photo and the title of this episode, you can click on that and that's where you'll find the show notes and you'll get a link there to the actual quiz and you can sign up to work with her in whatever capacity you want to, whether it's just doing this questionnaire and then have her kind of help you work through what your own personal brand could or should look like, or in some other capacity. kindledpodcast.com for all the details there. Thank you guys for listening and I will talk to you next week.