**Dr. Brandy Baxter:**

00:11

Welcome back, Rachael. Another great episode. How are you doing today?

**Rachael DeLeon:**

00:16

I'm doing great. Um, you know, this guest today is someone who I would describe as a ray of sunshine. Like she walks in the room and my head turns, and I'm excited to speak with her. And so I think our guests today are really gonna love, love this conversation. Excellent. Why don't you tell us who we have today? Today's guest is Simi Mandelbaum, a certified financial therapist, accredited financial counselor, and certified financial behavior specialist. She is the founder and CEO of Prosper Financial Wellness, where she helps individuals, couples, and business owners transform not only their finances, but their relationship with money. SEMI is known for combining the science of behavioral finance with the emotional insights of therapy, helping people understand why they make the financial decisions that they do and how to create lasting change. She has particular expertise in working with neurodivergent individuals, including those with ADHD and other executive functioning challenges, helping them develop practical financial systems that work with their brains rather than against them. Simi also serves on the board of the Women's Employment Initiative, a nonprofit dedicated to helping women achieve their employment and career goals. And she's the author of The Road to Prosperity, a popular financial wellness series published in the Voice of Lakewood. Whether she's coaching clients, training professionals, or speaking to audiences around the country, Semi's mission is to help people reduce financial stress, improve their financial confidence, and create lives of greater purpose and peace. Please join me in welcoming Simi Mandelbaum.

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

02:10

Hello, hello, everyone. This is so exciting to see you, not in person as we usually do, but still good.

**Dr. Brandy Baxter:**

02:25

Absolutely. Yeah. So, Simi, during your intro, Rachel mentioned that you have experience in financial counseling, behavioral finance, financial therapy. How do you find that all of these different modalities, if you will, bring an integrated approach to the way you serve clients in financial wellness?

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

02:46

That is so fabulously asked, Brandy. And I compare it to like obviously, I like to eat. So I compare things to food sometimes. I compare it to like stew, where you take all these delicious ingredients, you combine all your information to really give you a wholesome, holistic approach to really serving individuals and couples. And some of that is the counseling, the counseling, understanding the emotion plus the opportunities that exist for people if they need programs or different abilities that they need. The therapeutic model, where it has the ability to understand what traumas might be behind there, how to work the modalities. There's so much experiential that I bring to the table that most people probably have never done, or maybe they have done, but they're you very unique.

**Rachael DeLeon:**

03:35

I love that. You know, we talk about toolboxes, but I kind of like the financial stew. I'm with you. I'm a foodie. So semi-a significant part of your work focuses on supporting neurodivergent individuals. How can these types of conditions influence a person's ability to manage their money? And why would you say it's important for our listeners, other financial professionals, to recognize these challenges?

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

04:02

Neurodivergency or anything that's a different in the neurotypical brain reacts differently. There's less of a connection to personal finance. There's more opportunity for them not to have jobs. There's a sometimes a disconnection between them and understanding time management. So there's a lot of stress when it comes to themselves, but in addition to that, when it comes to money, paying bills on time, understanding what savings are, really not having that impulsivity to do what feels right in the moment, but seeing a bigger picture really is a differential for them.

**Dr. Brandy Baxter:**

04:44

Simi, that's got me thinking, as a financial professional, what are some ways I can support clients who present neurodivergent? And what should I even look for to know that this client may need additional support?

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

04:57

You know, so many people don't even know they're neurodivergent. So this is not about actually labeling them or saying, oh, there's something wrong or, you know, what's going on for you? It's the insight that I had was I thought I built this fabulous way of assisting people. I combined numbers, I combined therapeutic tools, behavioral change. I was like feeling a little maybe too proud of myself. And then I remember one uh, you know, one of our methods that we work hard on is doing something I call 30-day money, which is, and it could take people years where they try to get their money a month in advance. So either they'll wait for a bonus, a tax return, or they'll put a little bit away. And what we do is we find that it really alleviates the pressure of paycheck to paycheck stress. And so you have it in advance, and it just is such a it's the first thing I see that really reduces stress tremendously when you're living so tight. Like, can I buy the groceries today? The check is coming tomorrow. What does it have to clear? Where am I up to? That whole stress is relieved. And I remember one particular couple, they worked really hard and they spent almost a year getting their full months in the account. And they come in like the fifth of the month and they look at me and they're like, didn't work. I'm like, what do you mean? It's the fifth. How did you use all that money in five days? And uh the husband looks at me and he says, Well, I paid off all my debt. I'm great. What do you do you not remember? We did this a week ago. Like, I could, I was like, I am missing something. I am missing something. And I went back and I realized that there is a pattern of this disconnect between what we discussed a day ago or a minute ago, no, and um occurring. The behaviors just didn't work, that that memory, the fun, the executive function. And so what we had to do was really first established, and it was important to me to understand what is the strength of someone with neurodivergency so that I can give them real skills and strength. And part of that I noticed was they are fabulous visionaries, they are fabulous entrepreneurs. They are typically really invested in relationships in a meaningful way because they forget about everything they actually have to do. And so they can really give you good attention. You know, learning these skills and really understanding them assisted me. Looking to long term didn't work. So with these clients, it's very important to work experientially with their fingers, their vision, depending on what learning skills. So very often I'll have so many things around my office that will be uh replacing whether it's in category, like, okay, here's your food, and we have like a snack that we put there, and here's your this, and then it will be monopoly money or something that we're putting on there so they start feeling and seeing this experience. And again, we do have a virtual office as well. So a lot of the times I'll be always come to session with a pen and paper and scissors because you don't know what we're gonna do. And we're always playing with things so that it really has a different impact to them.

**Rachael DeLeon:**

08:03

Simi, what's really interesting to me, what you said, is you know, a lot of times people, you know, ADHD is one form of neurodivergence, not the only, but sometimes people aren't diagnosed, but but have tendencies or or feel or even self-identify those tendencies. How do you determine when working with a client when to pull in some of these more tactile mechanisms?

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

08:29

First of all, anything that's helpful for neurodivergent is doubly as helpful for neurotypical. So who cares? Bring it in. But the minute you start seeing that maybe you have that like gloss over in the eye, or um, I vaguely remember that I felt really good about putting dollar bills and then having the client like put it on these different categories. And the client kept on looking at me and I'm like, I'm missing something. I said, What's going on? He says, I have this calcula, I can't see these numbers. I'm like, oh my gosh. Like it didn't even occur to me. I'm like, okay, so you know, go back to the drawing board. Okay, every red bill is five dollars and we we have to switch them over, right? So it really doesn't make a difference if we know a diagnosis or not. It will only be beneficial. And honestly, Rachel, the way we have and change takes place is in our middle brain. Our middle brain doesn't speak the language of numbers, it doesn't speak the language of letters, it speaks the language of feelings and pictures, uh so experiences and pictures is the language that takes place and the brain that most affects change. And so anything we're doing, if we can bring it more to fruition, and you know, we'll have different things at the end where we have some good stuff that we'll put into that below here, those links to help bring money to fruition. Like you really get it in a gamified, fun way.

**Dr. Brandy Baxter:**

09:58

Yeah, you know, Simi, what I'm hearing is you're just really telling our audience that they need to start thinking off the box and look for effective ways to help themselves process the way that they're communicating about money to their clients and really just being sensitive that people are processing information differently. So, as you're as you're sharing all of these tips with us, I'm curious what prompted you to really lean into this particular aspect of working with your clients, focusing on the neurodivergency.

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

10:30

So, here again, I'm patting myself on the back, doing really well. So that's one person. And then I'm saying, you know what? No, it's not one person. There's a lot more people, and even Brandy, the way you mentioned, processing differently. So, what does that mean? Someone could be neurotypical but process it differently. They don't process it visually, they don't process it auditorially. So learning styles are different as well. The easiest way I say to do this is take a second grader. If you can explain what you want to to a second grader, you got it that better. And so what I realized is that the more I did this, the more everyone bought into whatever they planned for. The the turnover rate are because I started testing it. So e whether it was real or meaning whether they were diagnosed or I just felt that there was resistance to what we were saying, it was a different experience. It's almost like they detached from themselves for a moment. It's not about their money, it's about this fun activity, and then we can bring it back to you. And so what really made me lean into it is like honestly, I'm not such a great person with numbers. I don't really shouldn't say this out loud when I work with numbers, but I actually love money and I can deal with money. So if I, you know, I gotta figure it out. I've got it, that's really what allowed me to lean in to see there are so many people that struggle because the people that are coming here, if they know how to do it right, they can go on YouTube and figure it out. They're coming here because it's not working.

**Rachael DeLeon:**

12:09

I think it's funny that you say, you know, I don't love numbers, but I love money. And I think it's because money is a means to something. You know, I think I remember taking a statistics class in college and like the math statistics versus the business statistics, it's so different because you're actually applying it to something that's meaningful and that is working for you. And I think that is helping people who are like, I'm not good at numbers. You can still be good with your money. You know, I think there are bridges we can help people get to. So I love that. And I think it's okay to be vulnerable and say that.

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

12:44

Thank you. And by the way, AFD was really my first introduction to the fact that I did have an uncomfortable feeling about numbers. And I was like, can I actually do this? I don't know. Like, let's try it. I think there's such an important need, but can I do it? So it was really so helpful to see that I can learn it. Uh I'm not learning deficient. I'm just wasn't my thing.

**Rachael DeLeon:**

13:08

Yeah. And it's just applying it in a way that resonates with you. And I think that's so much of what counseling is, is list like listening to the people that were serving and offering shifting strategies and to meet their needs, not just one size fits all. Some me, financial behaviors are often driven by more than knowledge alone. How do emotions, behavioral patterns, and past experiences shape financial decision making? And what role has your what role do you as a financial therapist and a financial counselor uh play in helping clients create change in their lives? Let's hit the first one first. I asked you too many. I do that.

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

13:50

I know. Like, can I can I try to remember everything? How do emotions and your past experience impact your spending? Hello? Probably 90%. Probably, if not more. But the idea of the world is like this is just a math game. If you make $2 and you spend $2, you have none left. That's the way it works. No, that's not the way it works. And the easiest way I can explain this, and I just like actually was talking about this the other day. I was talking about needs and wants. Like, how do you know what's a need and how do you know what's a want? So if I give you categories and I say entertainment, oh yeah, that's probably a want. If I give you a category that says food, you you probably would say that's a need. But let's talk about that for a minute. So when you go to the grocery, how you buy chicken could be a want or a need. It could be frozen, so it's less expensive. It could be fresh or it could be prepared, even more expensive. All of those things may not be a need to one person, but it may be a need to another person. So from a need, you could see it right then and there that it's driven by our experiences, what we want, our values about what's important to us. Is convenience important? You'll see that. Is is getting the best deal important? You'll see that too. So I tell clients, you show me your numbers, I tell you your story.

**Rachael DeLeon:**

15:12

Oh, I like that.

**Dr. Brandy Baxter:**

15:15

I like that. Semi, so thinking about those that might be listening, what are some practical or best practices that you would recommend for financial counselors or coaches to create more of this inclusivity in their practices? Because what I'm taking away from you is like really inspiring to just think differently about how we are connecting with our clients. So, what would you say to a financial professional some things they can maybe start doing today to make their practice more inclusive?

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

15:46

Well, first of all, thanks, Brandy. Don't jump on it. Just because I said it doesn't mean you have to do it. But this is true. I think that so often we're so excited with a new tool that we neglect the most important thing, which is to understand the client. So here I am, the client walks in and I already have my toolbox, can't wait to use it. I didn't even hear what he said. I already took everything out. Wrong, wrong. The first key is really making sure you build the rapport that you get the client. And when you get the client, you know how you know that's true? It's you understand them in a way that their life makes a hundred percent sense. You're not even in your own head. Like when they say, Oh, so you agree that I don't need to save because I just told you why, what's important now. And for that, in that moment, it makes a hundred percent sense. So it the minute they feel that you got them, the ability for whatever you're about to do is gonna shift uh a hundred by uh 70, I think more than 70% is a study. So really that's the first goal is really to learn that art of learning how to summarize, how to capture that essence to move on. Once that's there, something that you may be able to use as a toolbox, and it could be anything, whether it's savings or um or creating a cash flow budget or creating an awareness about yourself, is if it was a cash flow, right? Maybe have some things on your desk or around you. Or if a client is ritual, I'll tell them to cut out the boxes that they feel is important to spend money on, right? This is an easy example. They'll cut out their paper and they'll I'll say write down. And after they write down, I'll listen out for what didn't exist down there. So they'll be like, oh, it's really important to give medical uh education, um, classes for my whatever it is. And I'll be like, oh, I see that gifts never made it there. Why? Because I know that gifts is on their sheet, or I know that gifts is something they're spending a lot on, but it never made it to what they believe is the important categories. So it's all of a sudden, uh, that's weird. I don't know why I didn't put it on. Or and then I'll I'll ask them and we'll start playing with things like you could actually just take pen and paper and play with this. Have them draw, draw what would it look like if it was all working for you? Or what, you know, one of the things, so so it's there are so many different activities. And again, you'll have some on the bottom, whether it's savings that you have a thermometer that you can put on your refrigerator that has like that you could actually color and have done this. We write how much you're saving for and for what it is, and then start putting pictures. And every time you hit a target, like, okay, now we could afford food, let's put a pizza on there. Okay, now we could afford the trip and let's put an ear plane on there, and now we could afford more than the beach, and we start putting pictures, it becomes engaging. And this is fabulous for neurodivergent or neurotypical.

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

18:40

You know, one of the things when I got married, I'm a second marriage, and I remember someone told me, the days you get mad at your husband, you have to remember why you married him. So they told me, write down on a paper every night, like one thing that you're proud of, and put it somewhere that you remember. And I put it in the back of the wall of my closet, the back of the door of my closet. And um, anytime I'd be mad, I'd shut the door closed, but nobody understood that. I was looking at the back of it to remind myself, oh, I shouldn't be angry.

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

19:06

And once my husband's like, what is in that closet of your case? I'm like, none of your business, because I wouldn't want to tell him that I'm actually thinking nicely of him for that moment. Uh and then he like climbed in and he's like, Wow, this is really what you think of me as don't get so excited, honey. Okay, this is just the times I'm mad that I have to remember. No, but the idea is that like having something in front of you and having that part of your brain muscle memory has big impact.

**Rachael DeLeon:**

19:33

Simi on the wall behind you, you have a sign and it says, Goodbye, overwhelm, hello, confidence. And I love that tagline. And I think that's at the core of your mission and the work that you do. Tell us, you know, what is it with the word confidence that is so highly connected to financial well-being? And how do you move clients to that confidence?

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

19:54

That's a great question, Rachael. Something I never even thought of. And I think that confidence comes from feeling good about myself. I feel good, so I feel confident. When I look and I see negative zero in my bank account, I don't feel good. I feel like a failure. When I don't understand that it's important for me to get my nails done, and so that I don't get my nails done, I don't feel good either. Because I feel like uh I'm not feeding myself. So when you get that understanding of who you are and how the money could work with your personality, how we can make that work, or what yes are we saying to today that is a no for tomorrow, or what no are we seeing for today that's a yes for tomorrow. Success breeds success. And that's that confidence. So once we have that, I feel better. I'm okay. I'm taking care of me and I'm taking care of these things called numbers that that works in line with me. And that really is why it's hello confidence.

**Dr. Brandy Baxter:**

21:01

Sammy, you're obviously very passionate about the work that you're doing, and that's exciting, right? I'm sure our audience is like, yes, I can get behind this. So thinking about the work that you're doing, what opportunities do you see for the financial services industry as a whole to better support people with learning different learning styles or even different uh executive functioning needs?

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

21:25

One of the things I think is important is almost like a behavioral, a behavioral audit so that you know the person that you're dealing with. So before you do anything, understanding who they are at their core, whether you play a money habitus game or you do the money scripts, or you do something that gives you insights to the person in front of you. Obviously, they could have worked on themselves or they could be different at different times of their life, but it will give you some insights to be curious so that they can start questioning themselves to create a better outcome. So if I see Someone that's really high and spontaneous and really high and carefree and low in planning and security. I know the last thing they want to hear is about my plan. They're sitting here because someone intellectually told them it's the right thing to do.

**Rachael DeLeon:**

22:12

You've given us so much to think about. And you mentioned earlier you're gonna uh give some resources and links that we can put into the show notes too. But I just I love all the tangible activities and things that you've shared today that I think are really can get our audience thinking and think how how do they apply these in in the work with their own clients? But we always ask at the end of every episode, um, what is your two cents? So we're collecting this bank of knowledge because we're so fortunate to talk to people like yourself. What is one thing you'd want to leave with our listeners today?

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

22:46

So thank you for offering that two cents. And by the way, I have to go back after that because I have a really good idea for the financial people. So I'm gonna go back. But my two cents, I'm not gonna give you two. I'm gonna give you three, okay? My first sense is Amazon is my biggest nightmare. And I think a lot of our biggest nightmares, it doesn't fit onto our spreadsheet. We don't know what it is. It's a gift today and food tomorrow, clothing the next day. We don't know what it is. So having a delayed response for Amazon, we do it once a week. You could put whatever you want in the car, and this is fabulous for neurodivergency. Put it in the car, and then once a week, decide what night it is. Usually it's the after the paycheck night, which is the most dangerous night because I think I have money. I forgot that everything else is coming out the next day. But once a week I look at it and do, is this still important to me? So you'll also be able to see, does the feeling still remain? Then I know it's a need and it's important. Nah, not so much. Maybe I want to put it safe for later. Maybe I do. I can make that decision, not in the place of emotion as emotional because there's been space between when I put it in. So that's number one. Try to have one Amazon shopping day a week. I should say a month, but no, it's a week. Okay. The other one, the other one I want to say to you is uh I want to say that every yes is a no. And we don't give that time enough to understand. Like anytime I say to myself, yes, it's okay for me to get a donut today, then I get mad when I get on the scale. It's like, yeah, well, every yes is a no. Like, what was I thinking? Well, I thought maybe since it was such a hard day, it wouldn't count. You know, it's it doesn't work that way, right? Uh the same way it's every no is a yes to something else. Every time I tell I tell I tell my husband, no, I don't want to spend time with him, I I'm saying yes to something else that may not be in my best interest. So, what is it is my yes today and no tomorrow? What is it? And and I say that because neurodivergency typically they walk around with shame and guilt because uh they've been late, they've been accused of things, and there's shame about how they manage life. And so I want you to know yes, it's okay. Everyone does this. We say yes today for something that's no tomorrow, and we don't realize the no for tomorrow. We're just so focused on the yes today. So start exploring yeses and no's. And my third thing, because it's three cents, obviously. Be compassionate to yourself. Like be compassionate to yourself. There is something so uh exciting and invigorating because I'm trying to learn that skill and I see the benefit and I see how important it is when we can be compassionate to our clients and they can be compassionate to themselves. Because they typically are coming in and they don't feel so good. They're not coming in because they want you to tell them what a cheerleader you are for them. They're coming in because they're not feeling great about what they're doing. So getting to be compassionate is my third sense, but it's more than everything sense.

**Rachael DeLeon:**

25:39

So good. So good.

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

25:40

I'm going back now. I'm going back now. All right, go back. Where are we going? First of all, um, the Allied Bank has accounts that you can actually name and put a picture on there. And so what this is very helpful for is a lot of times I like when the clients have separate accounts and they're not so because they don't remember of what is my fixed bills, what is my savings, what else is there going on. So what we do is we divide the money into these different accounts. And if the person has, let's say, a savings account for like rainy day or fun money or future, and we put a picture, studies show us it is a lot harder to draw it out. It really reminds us what it is that we're saving for. It's a lot easier when it's a bunch of numbers and we just transfer from account to account. So by the way, in any account, in any bank, you can name your accounts. And it is helpful to have a little division. I'm not going to go into how many accounts and how many not accounts, and is it confusing? I'm not gonna do that. But you can name your accounts. I find that super helpful and I find it helpful as we age and as we struggle with different things to have just our mental accounting, how I say mental gymnastics. It's like, which account? What is it? What it's so much simpler. Sometimes I'll even put into the name of the account my goal in that account. So if I know if I always want to put $5,000 in there and my or your hundred dollars in there, like where am I at today? It gives me that in a snapshot. I don't have to use my brain. Um, and so using that, there's a fabulous software. I I don't even, I think there still exists, it's called Cubes. And that actually you put your money in and you could divide it. It's an actual bank account, so you could transfer from place to place, but you can play with it in a way that you see it. And that's super, super helpful for financial professionals to know that they could support in a place that they don't feel like they can support their clients to set things up in a system that works. And again, when you're working with neurodivergency, you want to remember uh what I say the saver model, which is it's simplistic, it's easy, it's accessible. I can have it on my phone or near me or have access to it. It's realistic. It's something I could actually like S-A-V, actually V visual, I can see it instead of just read it. It's a visual experience. E, it's engaging. So talk about those pictures, talk about um things that I want to do with my kids, put things around my room to remind me of what I'm doing, make it engaging, and then are realistic on my worst day, on the bad day, can I stick to this? Or is it so much manual labor that I gotta write it down and tedious and how can I stick to something simply? And that's really the best thing I can give you guys.

**Rachael DeLeon:**

28:32

Oh, I love that. I love the fact that there are organizations out there that are working with different types of learners and focused on things, you know, using the research that exists to develop smarter technology that we can use to better serve our clients. Um, and I think it's amazing that, you know, knowing your clients and knowing their needs, and you're right, it's not one size fits all. So one piece of one technology may work fantastic for one person and finding something that works for another client's it's so key. So I love those. And we'll make sure we put uh some of those links in the show notes too. Uh SEMI is full of resources. Um, Simi, uh, for those who are listening today and are feeling as jazzed up as we are and want to connect with you, where can they reach you?

**Simi Mandelbaum:**

29:22

You can reach me almost anywhere in the grocery store on the path to go. I'm hiking or anywhere. No, I'm kidding. Um, well, I'm on LinkedIn. We are we have a website, my email, Simi at prosper. So it's S-I-M-I. Well, I want to say C me, but it's S-I-M-I at Prosper, which is P-R-O-S, as you see, P R. There's no E for no excuses. That like fitness, like we want to be fit muscles, so financially fit to prosper that fit. You can reach me there on our website, www.prosper.fit, and anywhere else you see me. Please, if you see me, say hello. Oh, fantastic.

**Rachael DeLeon:**

29:58

Thank you so much for joining us, Summy. Thank you for this opportunity.

**Dr. Brandy Baxter:**

30:04

Oh, we Rachael. I mean, I know we say it, but today I'm sure our audience can definitely connect with what an exciting episode this has been. If I could have paid attention to the interview and taken notes at the same time and typed in my task list, I would have done all the things, but I was just locked and loaded because Sammy gave such amazing resources and great, great insights. I know a lot of our listeners are financial professionals and we're always looking for ways to better serve our clients. Make no mistake, this is the episode you want to bookmark, save it and refer to it again. Because I agree with what she said. If you're focused on making sure that your products and your programs are accessible to all learners, then you really will make sure that neurodivergent clients get what they need, which in turn will benefit neurotypical clients. And so it's just a win-win for our clients, which I believe is really the heart of us for uh, which I really believe is the heart of financial professionals. We want to be the best service to our clients that we can be. And so this is a great episode.

**Rachael DeLeon:**

31:19

Brandy, I couldn't have said it better. I listen to podcasts when I'm walking or doing the dishes, but for I did feel like this should be a disclaimer at the front of this show. Like, sit down, grab a notepad, right? You know, this is me on my morning walk, like opening my notes up as I'm listening. So these are the kind of episodes I enjoy so much. It's such a reminder of the work that we do and why it's so important and just how much we can learn by connecting with others in this community. And so, you know, it's really the reason we bring real money, real experts to our listeners is because when we get to listen to different perspectives and different people in the work that we're doing, it only widens our minds to all of the things that we can learn.

**Dr. Brandy Baxter:**

32:03

Yeah. And so if you're like Rachel and you listen to the podcast while you're out and about walking, jogging, or driving, and you can't take notes, we want to encourage you to like and subscribe. That's the easiest way to stay connected and you can always keep up to date on the latest content. And like I said, bookmark an episode like today so you can always refer back to it. Thank you for listening, and we'll see you again next time.

**Rachael DeLeon:**

32:29

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