
EPISODE: 9 See Jane Play Nice with Fran Hauser

Kelly: You're listening to the See Jane Invest Podcast Episode 9: See Jane Play Nice with Fran Hauser, author of the book, *The Myth of the Nice Girl*. Hi, I'm Kelly Keenan Trumphour. As an angel investor and film producer, there's one question I always ask myself and the women I mentor. What does it mean to invest in yourself and not simply wait around for someone to invest in you? If you want to play big in places that might not be familiar with your voice, your brand of leadership and your place in the world, the first person you should be expecting to back you is you. If you're craving a conversation that goes beyond fighting for a seat at the table and instead talks about how to take over the whole damn lunch room, you're in the right place. Welcome to the See Jane Invest Podcast.

Kelly: Would you ever call yourself nice, but thought maybe niceness worked against you? Is being nice a detriment if you're a woman with ambition? My next guest, Fran Hauser, doesn't think so. Her book, *The Myth of the Nice Girl*, is about achieving a career you love without becoming a person you hate. It was a wonderful conversation with her because I think there are a lot of women out there, myself included, who know they enjoy being nice. They are nice and they don't want to lose their edge. They don't want to go into bitch territory. They want to be someone who can still present their whole self, be grounded in what they do and not have to compromise their sense of what it means to be a compassionate person, someone with empathy, but does that work?

Kelly: Can you actually get ahead in the world? Can you actually keep an edge, do big, big, ambitious things if you are a nice person? Well, Fran and I have this conversation and we get into all sorts of scenarios that both she and I have encountered in our careers and what led her to write the book in the first place. I think you're going to really enjoy it. Here's a little bit more about her. Fran Hauser is a longtime media executive, startup investor and author of *The Myth of the Nice Girl*. She is best known for her role of buildingpeople.com, one of the biggest media brands online. Hauser made the leap to early stage investing in 2014, funding advising consumer-focused companies such as HelloGiggles, Mogul, The Wing and Gem & Bolt.

Kelly: Like me, Fran has a big interest in helping female founders. 18 of the 20 companies she's invested in are founded by women. That really talks about her broader commitment to increasing the representation of female founders and investors. The book, if you find it, it's getting all sorts of incredible attention. Amazon just named it one of the best books of the year in the business category, which is really well-deserved.



EPISODE: 9 See Jane Play Nice with Fran Hauser

You're just going to really enjoy this conversation if you have ever been a person who has struggled with how do you make your niceness stay exactly where it is, love it and appreciate it and use it in the world that may be your competitive, ambitious self? Let's dive in and enjoy the episode.

Kelly: Welcome to the show, Fran Hauser. She is the author of *The Myth of the Nice Girl*. Such an important book because if any of you out there have ever wondered how you can take your nice side and use it to your advantage instead of trying to hide it or run from it or not become the bitch. This book has it all. Fran, welcome to the program.

Fran Hauser: Hi, Kelly. Thanks for having me.

Kelly: You've got a great background. You worked in media before you became an angel investor, but I think both of those things are so interesting to our audience. Can you tell us a little bit about your back story and what got you into thinking about this book?

Fran Hauser: Sure. Yeah. I was in media for about 15 years. I was actually at Moviefone back in the late 90s.

Kelly: I remember Moviefone.

Fran Hauser: You remember Moviefone, which started out as 777-FILM. Then migrated to Moviefone.com. Moviefone was actually acquired by AOL. I ran Moviefone as a division of AOL. Then AOL Time Warner merged and I moved over to Time Inc., one of the Time Warner subsidiaries. I spent 10 years at Time Inc. I really loved my tenure there. One of the most fun things that I got to work on was people.com. We really took People Magazine's website and turned it from a marketing channel for the magazine to a fully-fledged, built out, standalone business, which was really great. It ended up being one of the most profitable businesses at Time Inc. It was a lot of fun to work on that.

Fran Hauser: By the time I left, I was President of Digital for the Style and Entertainment Group. I was running digital for brands like People and Style, Entertainment Weekly and others. I made the transition to angel investing basically because it was ... Meeting the startups was one of the things that I enjoyed the most about my job at Time. I loved



EPISODE: 9 See Jane Play Nice with Fran Hauser

meeting with founders. I was always trying to figure out ways that our brands could work with them. In that process, I found myself giving them so much advice about their business. I thought, "It'd be really fun to have some skin in the game and do some investing and advising."

Fran Hauser: I started doing that as a side hustle. Then five years ago, I decided to go all in on that. It's been a lot of fun, but with respect to the book, this topic is something that I've been thinking about for a long time. I started thinking about it back in 2009 when I was at People. I kept getting asked the same question from women that I was mentoring. The question was, "How can you be so nice and still be successful?" There was this thought that if you're too nice at work that it often gets equated with weakness and that you're not going to be able to get ahead. You're not going to get the corner office.

Fran Hauser: Obviously, I don't believe that. I spent a lot of time talking about this topic. Then really the tipping point for me in deciding to write the book was in January of 2016, I wrote a blog post for Forbes on the topic that ended up being one of the most popular posts in this mentoring series that they had. I started hearing from women all around the country, which for me really validated the fact that there was a pain point here. It's one thing to hear it ... I don't know if you've ever been in this situation, where I was hearing it from women in my network, but I really felt that it was important to hear it from women that I didn't know. I think once I got that validation, that's when I knew I had to write the book.

Kelly: Yeah. When I look at your book ... I was reading through it and I love the way you go through the chapters because I feel like as a self-proclaiming nice girl, one of the things that I've done in balancing the nice energy is there's this sense of both. Right? You get to hold two opposing aspects at once and your chapters just do that. It's like, "Be ambitious and likable. Speak up assertively and nicely." I imagine you've probably been on both coasts, but you're mostly in New York. Right?

Fran Hauser: Yes.

Kelly: Yeah. I also grew up in the northeast and was around the New York area a lot. My family was from Minnesota. Talk about stereotype of nice girls is Minnesota. We got transplanted to the northeast and you have that really ... What I actually love and adore about the East Coast now. I love how direct they are. A lot of people can read that as



EPISODE: 9 See Jane Play Nice with Fran Hauser

rude. I read it as efficient. I'm like, "Oh, god. That's so refreshing." I found for me in going through my career because I was always ambitious, but I also ... Like you with angel investing, I enjoyed the conversations where I got to talk to people and find out what was really happening with them, which gave that nice energy a place.

Kelly: I really use both. I wound up being nice and then if I got to a point where it's like, "Okay, let me be very clear and very direct and not put up with something I can't tolerate," that wound up playing out fine. I don't think that has been what a lot of women experience. What sparked the thing that made it easy for you to talk about it? You talk about it so well, but for many women, this conversation was, "I don't know how," or, "This is a hindrance. How do I get beyond it?"

Fran Hauser: For me, it was really about seeing how helpful being nice has been to me over the course of my career. If I think about some of my bigger milestones, even when I go back to before I was in media ... I was in my 20s and I was working at Coca-Cola. I got this really big promotion. I think I was like 28. I became the director of finance for Coca-Cola Enterprise's New York division, which was a billion dollar division. I was going to be overseeing 140 people. There were so many of my peers who were in their 40s. They had so much more experience. They were so much more qualified on paper than I was to take on that role.

Fran Hauser: I remember asking my boss, "Why me? Why did you choose me?" I was so surprised. He basically said that, "The reason I chose you is because you are great at developing relationships with people. You can influence people to get things done and you have a team that will follow you anywhere." When I thought about those things, all of that really came back to being nice and caring about people and being able to build connections with people. I think that was really for me the first moment where I was like, "This is actually an asset." My boss didn't talk at all about functional skills, technical skills. All of the things that he talked about ... Obviously I had those, right? I could do the job. I was a good operator and I was great at delivering and executing, but he was so focused on the softer stuff.

Fran Hauser: That was the moment where I was like, "Okay. This is really an asset. It is a superpower and it's something that can serve me well." I think also for me, when you're nice to people, they end up trusting you and you build relationships with them. At the end of the day, business is all about relationships. Being successful in business is all



EPISODE: 9 See Jane Play Nice with Fran Hauser

about relationships. It comes back to being nice. The thing that you have to be careful of is you don't want to veer into that pushover or people pleasing territory because that is I think what the stereotype of nice being a weakness ... It's when people are picturing somebody who's a pushover or who's a people pleaser and you can't go there. That's not going to serve you well.

Fran Hauser: One of the things I always say to women is, "It's one thing to be helpful. It's another thing to be subservient." Being helpful is awesome, especially if you're doing it from an authentic place. Being subservient, where you're catering to others at your own expense, that's actually not going to serve you well. Just being very aware of that and being aware of how you're showing up. Another good example is if you say yes all the time. If you say yes all the time, that could lead to people thinking, "Of course she's going to do it. She's such a brown noser. She's such a people pleaser. She always says yes." That's where the strength part comes in. It's so critical that you are both nice and strong. I love your example of being kind, but also just being really direct and firm when you're communicating.

Kelly: Yeah. You talk about it in the book. That has a lot to do with boundaries. When you hit that point of ... I wonder if you have something to comment about this, but for me, you get that kind of feeling in the pit of your stomach when you're like, "Something is rotten here and I don't like it, so I've got to put a barrier between me and it and make sure if it's another person or group that there's an understanding of I stay on this side and you are over there." I think that takes some time and awareness to even realize that that's not happening. I think women are taught how to do that in the dating world. Even there, maybe not enough. I don't know that they know how to do it in the career world as well. That really goes into you can be helpful in that space and you keep yourself from going into subservience.

Fran Hauser: That's right. Also, a part of that too is I get asked quite a bit about dealing with a bully at work or just dealing with somebody who just really makes your life difficult. One of the things that I talk about is if that's happening, if you have somebody who is ... Look, I have this example. I was speaking with this woman the other day. She would go into meetings and there was another woman who was always just really demeaning or dismissive of her. I suggested to her, I said, "What if you talked to her? What if you just tried to clear the air and say, 'Look, I can sense that there's something that's frustrating you. Can we talk about this?'"



EPISODE: 9 See Jane Play Nice with Fran Hauser

Fran Hauser: Sometimes what you'll find out is ... Like I did, actually. I had this very similar situation. This woman said to me that she was really upset about a comment that I had made six months before that truthfully, I didn't even remember that I had made this comment, but it was something that just really stayed with her and she was holding on to it. She was showing this really horrible behavior towards me. It gave me the opportunity to apologize for it, to clear the air and to get to a place where we were never going to be best friends, but we could at least be civil towards me.

Fran Hauser: I do think it's important to address it when you have a situation like that, but if the person doesn't want to engage in a healthy dialogue with you, even after you try to clear the air, that's where I think it's important to create the emotional boundaries and just say, "It's her. It's not me." Hopefully, you don't have to deal with this person. You're not having daily interactions with this person. If it's something where, "Oh, I know I'm going to have to deal with her once a month," you're going to have to deal with it. If it's somebody that you have to deal with every day, that's a whole different thing. Then you probably need to talk to your manager about it and do something about it. If you're feeling like, "This person is treating me really badly," why not try to have a conversation with them? If that doesn't go well, then it's time for the emotional boundaries.

Kelly: I may have been sensitive to even just fluctuations in things. I think there's a place for boundaries even before you get to the emotionally gritty places. I was someone who coming from a Midwestern family, where the general culture out there is helpful up to a point, but to not go into that subservient category. I had early jobs where all of a sudden, it was like the time I was expected to work was creeping into really late hours in the weekend and accommodating a different timezone on the West Coast. It was like, "You know what? I know I've been accommodating because that's part of my job, but now we've hit a point and I can't just be helpful." I have to say, "I've got a life. I've got to live it."

Kelly: Definitely with what you were saying with the emotional side when you have those ... Whether it's personality or just a situation where you have to be direct while also being kind. I actually think that's a place of power. I had a couple of hard conversations, where maybe my gut reaction was I just want to snarl and hiss and be like, "Well, you said this and you said that." When I have been able to take a minute, sit with it and come back and just go, "Does that serve anybody? Is there anything to be



EPISODE: 9 See Jane Play Nice with Fran Hauser

gained from having the conversation that way or can I just offer in a genuine way something real, factual or heartfelt and then walk away from it, even if I don't put an accusation out there or come at them and say, 'I don't like this.'"

Kelly: Sometimes to just be like, "That person is where they are. They're not going to be able to come to my side of seeing things because I just ask them to, but let me put this out there." That's actually been really powerful for me on several places, where it's like, "Sorry. This is just where I am."

Fran Hauser: Right. Doesn't it feel great after you do that, too?

Kelly: Yes.

Fran Hauser: You totally feel like, "Okay. I took the high road. I offered something genuine to this person," versus if you had gone to the snarly place. Look, that happens to the best of us, right? You feel like crap afterwards. Really?

Kelly: It's like a hangover. Yeah.

Fran Hauser: Totally. I do think that taking a minute ... Whenever I feel like I'm getting emotional. I think we all know what those triggers are. You can feel it. For me, I start getting the stomach flutters. My throat starts getting a little dry or whatever those triggers are for you. Just being aware of them and just taking a minute to take a breath or maybe even just saying, "Can we pick up this conversation later?" Just walking away and then coming back to it with a fresh perspective and unemotional.

Fran Hauser: I talk a lot in the book about when you're in a position that you have to give negative or constructive feedback to an employee. It's the same kind of thing. I feel like if you start the conversation in a really positive place and you say something like, "Look, I'm your biggest champion. I'm here to support you. I want to be helpful." If you start there, think about how you're making the person feel. You're actually creating a psychologically safe environment for them to have the conversation versus just diving into the specific feedback, which you do. You do have to be direct about the feedback. If you start it in a place where you show that you are genuinely there for them and you're their biggest fan and you're there to support them, it will make the conversation so much more productive.



EPISODE: 9 See Jane Play Nice with Fran Hauser

Kelly: Yeah. Okay, so let me ask you about a couple of scenarios that maybe some of the listeners have come across. What do you do when you're a ... Most of the time, you would describe yourself as someone who's nice. That's a genuine thing. You come across a person, male or female. Unfortunately, I think this is often experienced with another female, where they're using nice energy but it's fake. They see the benefit in looking like the team player, the person who cares, but it just reeks of a play, something that is going to get used as a manipulation. What do you do when you're the actual nice person in that situation?

Fran Hauser: Well, look. I think that-

Kelly: Do you know what I'm talking about? Was that too vague?

Fran Hauser: Yeah, I think I do. For me, it's all about bringing your whole self to work and being genuine and being authentic. In that situation, the person who's faking it with the nice energy ... I just think at the end of the day, people can see right through that. Also, I know that I'm the most comfortable and the most confident when I am being true to who I really am. If I'm trying to be somebody else, it always ends up backfiring. That is really the core of the book. It's like, "Bring your whole self to work." This book was written for women who are genuinely nice and compassionate and empathetic and collaborative and have an abundance mindset and are afraid that if they bring those things to work that it's not going to serve them well.

Fran Hauser: Really, the purpose of the book is to say, "No. Actually, those things will really serve you well." If it is who you genuinely are, then you're going to be able to thrive because you can be your best self. For me, it's all about doing that. It's funny. Somebody asked me, "Are you trying to make mean women nice?" I'm like, "That is really not the point of the book at all." When I was picturing the reader, I was picturing somebody who was just genuinely and authentically a kind and compassionate and empathetic person, but was struggling with how to bring that to work. I don't know. Does that answer your question, Kelly?

Kelly: Yeah. Earlier in my career, I remember for all of the time I spent on the East Coast and everything, I still had some moments where I was thrown off by just different personalities that would come into work spaces. I think one of the things that confused me but were incredible learning experiences, because talk about a whole fireworks show



EPISODE: 9 See Jane Play Nice with Fran Hauser

going on inside me, I remember there was a time in my career where especially when I was working in politics and then I got into the startup space, if I was working on something and it had momentum or I was just out doing a lot of things ...

Kelly: I network a lot. Kind of like what you're talking about. The relationships I was forming were authentic, genuine, mutually beneficial relationships. This is me talking in retrospect. I don't know that I would have even had this awareness at the time, but what was happening is that other people would see that and go, "Oh, I want in on whatever is happening in that whole networking arena." Not just what I was doing, but the people I was collaborating with or some of the stuff that was happening.

Kelly: For me, it happened with a couple of women. I have to say I have loved working with women. I have had overwhelmingly positive, incredible experiences working with women. These are the outliers. I in no way want to make this sound like this has been my experience. It was a little bit of that Queen B energy and it threw me because they came at me with almost this maternal, "I'm going to help you because you seem like you need help." I'm kind of going, "I don't think I do." Because I came from a Midwest background, I'm like, "Why would somebody ... Why are they offering to help me, but I don't think I need help?" Which I know sounds crazy naïve, but I was in my 20s.

Fran Hauser: Right.

Kelly: I remember having the visceral response to it. A friend at the time, she actually said ... When one person was approaching me that way, she's like, "Do you realize every time you talk about this person, you actually move away? You start hunching up your shoulders like you're creeped out." I'm like, "I don't know why." She's like, "Because she's coming at you with this, 'I want to be the person who you get to credit with helping you,' but you're already doing all the stuff she wants access to." That was just one outlier, but I do think there are some times where you want to still carry that nice energy.

Kelly: I remember I had a very hard time distancing myself from this woman because I think part of me wanted to believe she was well-intentioned. I wanted to believe, "This person isn't really trying to use me. She's trying to be decent," but my experience with her was just the most cringe-worthy ick. I just had to get away from it. Honestly, it might not have been the most artful thing, but that's what I did. I just got away from her. I just was like, "I don't know why, but I can't be around this person. This person is sending me



EPISODE: 9 See Jane Play Nice with Fran Hauser

all bad signals." I just exited from that relationship maybe not in the most graceful way, but it was definitely a learning experience of I don't want to be mingling with whatever that was.

Fran Hauser: Yeah. Well, the physical response was so interesting. Right? When you talk about how your friend was like, "You're hunching your shoulders." I often feel like we don't really pay attention to those physical manifestations, right? I'll give you my own little story about this, which was last year, I was considering taking a really big role at a big company. It was like a three-month process. Meeting with everybody and thinking about it. My ego was all in because I kept thinking about what my LinkedIn profile would look like and what my bio would look like.

Fran Hauser: Then once I really started to just visualize what my day-to-day would be like
...

Really visualize it from morning to evening. The way that it made me feel ... It brought me anxiety. I literally felt anxious. I didn't feel joy. I didn't feel excited. It's really important to listen to those things, right? The way that you're feeling about things physically, emotionally. Your intuition matters a great deal, especially as we get older, right? We've had so many experiences. I think your intuition as you get older gets even stronger. Yeah. I think it is really important to pay attention either to ... How do you feel when you visualize something or when you're with somebody?

Fran Hauser: In your case, you're with this person. How does she make you feel? Does she make you feel better about yourself? I love when I leave a conversation with someone and I feel better than I felt going into the conversation. There are times when I leave conversations and I feel completely depleted. Depleted. You have to listen to that. That person is probably not good for you.

Kelly: The body does not lie. My triggers are if I find that I wake up very easily in the middle of the night, if there is something buzzing in my brain right away when I wake up. All the feelings that you're describing. Yeah, as much as you want to convince yourself about something, your body is so good at being like, "Yeah, no. Here's the reality of that."

Fran Hauser: Yeah. You know what else? Somebody said this to me the other day and I thought it was such an interesting insight. She said, "When I'm thinking about an opportunity and I go into that, 'Oh, let me lay out the pros and cons,' it's probably not



EPISODE: 9 See Jane Play Nice with Fran Hauser

the right opportunity." If you have to go there where it's like, "Okay, let me just think about the pros and cons," it's probably not the right opportunity. If you're not feeling so excited that you just want to jump in with both feet, listen to that.

Kelly: Yeah. Before we wrap up, since we both work with startups, what advice do you have for the nice girls out there who are in startup world? Who are out raising money, working with investors. From my perspective, I've never seen ... It's tough out there. It's competitive. I do know investors can sometimes take a long time to make a deal or sometimes get aggressive in their negotiations. Given that the landscape favors ... There's still more men out there than women. What's the advice if it's different at all from your book as a whole? For the women who are in startup land.

Fran Hauser: Well, look. As an investor, one of the things that I really look for in founders is what's their mindset. How are they in terms of developing relationships? Is it something that comes really easy to them? Again, I so believe in the power of relationships. If you're going to build a successful business, it's all about relationships. I really pay close attention to the way that they're interacting with me. If they make a commitment to get me something by the end of the day and they don't, that's a little bit of a red flag. Kindness matters in terms of the way that you're dealing with people, including potential investors. It's also really important to be very direct and to be firm and to be strong and to have a lot of conviction when you're pitching your business because investors want to see that, too.

Fran Hauser: They want to see that they're talking to somebody who really believes in what they're building and that they're excited about it and that they have full conviction. I feel like the whole nice and strong thing, it actually applies to founders as well as to people that are working in the company environment.

Kelly: Yeah. Is there any advice that you have for the women when they're doing their pitches? I've seen some women that when they come up, it's not that they get rid of their niceness, but they sometimes feel like they have to have an energy that is kind of all in. Not exactly aggressive, but, "I've got what it takes." They don't want their niceness to be a detriment to the pitch that they're giving.

Fran Hauser: I really believe that you should be yourself when you're pitching.

Kelly: Yeah.

EPISODE: 9 See Jane Play Nice with Fran Hauser

Fran Hauser: That's really what it comes down to. You should be yourself. This is a long-term relationship that you're entering into, right? We were just talking about this. These companies, it takes five, six, seven, eight years for them to end it or to dissolve. You're entering into a long-term relationship. Be yourself because also when you're yourself, you are more comfortable and that will make you more confident. I think if you're trying to take on a different persona, it's just not going to be helpful.

Kelly: Yeah. Well Fran, thank you so much for joining us. You've got to go check out Fran's book, *The Myth of the Nice Girl*. It's on Amazon. Didn't it just get selected for some amazing Amazon award or designation? Tell us about that.

Fran Hauser: Thank you. Yes, Amazon just came out with their Best Books of the Year List. It's

Best Books of the Year So Far. It's midway through the year. *The Myth of the Nice Girl* was chosen in their Business and Leadership category.

Kelly: Well-deserved.

Fran Hauser: I'm really excited about that. Thank you.

Kelly: Yeah. Well, thank you for writing this book. I know all the nice girls out there are appreciating having it on their reference shelf. Fran, thank you. Where can people find out more about you and all the cool things you're doing?

Fran Hauser: Franhauser.com. Also, Instagram and Twitter. [Fran_hauser.](https://www.instagram.com/fra_n_hauser/)

Kelly: Okay. All right. Well Fran, thank you for being on the program.

Fran Hauser: Thanks, Kelly. Bye.

Kelly: Bye.

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EPISODE: 9 See Jane Play Nice with Fran Hauser

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