

**BECAUSE
I SAY SO**

BECAUSE I SAY SO

Live Your Life With
Clarity and Courage

Kristen M. Bowers, M.S.Ed.



© 2019 by Kristen M. Bowers, M.S.Ed.
Published by Secondary Solutions LLC DBA Simply Novel, PO
Box 3042 Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91729

All rights reserved under the Pan-American and International
Copyright Conventions

*This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part, in any
form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including
photocopying, recording, translating, or otherwise transmitted
or stored by any information storage or retrieval system,
without prior written permission from the publisher.*

Published and printed in the United States by Simply Novel, an
imprint of Secondary Solutions LLC. Books published by Simply
Novel are available at special discount when purchased in bulk
by United States corporations, institutions, and other
organizations. Please contact Simply Novel Publishing Sales PO
Box 3042 Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91729 or email
customerservice@simplynovel.com.

ISBN: 978-1-938913-45-7
E-Book ISBN: 978-1-938913-43-3

www.KristenMBowers.com

Simply Novel Publishing
www.SimplyNovel.com

*Owning our story and loving ourselves through that process
is the bravest thing we'll ever do.*

— Brené Brown

I dedicate this book to my daughter. May you always be your authentic, passionate, extraordinary self, live the life of your dreams, and know that I love you so very much.

Contents

Preface	10
Introduction	25
How to Use this Book	33
Part One: Owning It	41
Chapter 1: The End of Living by Default	42
Chapter 2: Seeing the Big Picture	50
Chapter 3: Acknowledging What is So	57
Chapter 4: Being Grateful for it All	69
Chapter 5: Declaring Your Vision	74
Chapter 6: Because I Say So	82
Chapter 7: Discovering Your Why	91
Part Two: Busting Your Asphalt	97
Chapter 8: The Myth of Fearlessness	98
Chapter 9: No Shame (or Guilt) in Your Game	106
Chapter 10: The Thief of Joy	110
Chapter 11: The Tag-Team of Stress and Conflict	119
Chapter 12: Letting Go of the Albatross	125
Chapter 13: Check Your Attitude	132
Chapter 14: Confidence Doesn't Give You Answers	139
Chapter 15: The Invisible Thread of Connection	147
Chapter 16: Living Your Purpose	156

Chapter 17: Being “All In”	165
Chapter 18: Identifying Your Kryptonite	174
Part Three: Living Your Vision	187
Chapter 19: Revisiting Your Vision	188
Chapter 20: The Decluttering Process	191
Chapter 21: The Power of Choice	196
Epilogue	201
Acknowledgements	205
Further Study/Resources	208

Preface

Halfway through writing this book, I came very close to dragging the entire file straight into the trash can at the bottom of my laptop screen. The urge hit me when I was writing about a particularly difficult distinction—comparison—and very quickly, I found myself descending like a shot down a rabbit-hole of self-doubt. I began to ask myself, sincerely, “Who do you think you are?” Here I was, writing a book about becoming your authentic self, living your best life—in my apartment, alone, where I had been holed up for months. I closed my laptop and the symphony of doubt, fear, beat-up, and frustration commenced.

What the hell do I know about anything? Why should anyone listen to me? Why would anyone care to hear from someone who isn’t rich, famous, or powerful? I am not a millionaire, I don’t own a Fortune 500 company, I haven’t coached celebrities, I don’t hobnob with A-listers, I am not Oprah, I am not 25 years old, and don’t have a rocking hot

PREFACE

body... yet. Why would anyone care about what I have to say? It all made such perfect twisted sense at the time. There was no reason for anyone to listen to me. Especially not if they could listen to all “those” people out there who have/are these things! It wasn’t until days later, as I secretly and defiantly refused to write another word, when I was kicked in my big, arrogant ass.

Yes, here I am, a regular person, telling people that they can and should embrace who they are. Telling people that they can live life authentically and powerfully, and can and should share their gifts with the world. Declaring that people get that they matter and are important, and that they have a responsibility and the power of choice to live a life of no regrets, or remain unhappy and unfulfilled. Here I am, a regular gal, who has been through the ringer and fought my way back. I have been on the brink, and come back with more confidence, passion, power, purpose, and hope than ever before. I am just a regular person, learning and growing. I am a woman with a vision. A woman who refuses to live life with any regrets. A woman who asserts that I get to be a role model of tenacity, courage, strength, and authenticity for my daughter. I am here, being my passionate, crazy-ass, drama-queen self: being my vision for myself.

This happens now, *because I say so*, and I invite you to listen in on my story and what I have to say because you choose to. I invite you to learn what living with clarity and

BECAUSE I SAY SO

courage means. I invite you to learn what it feels like to live according to the idea of *because I say so*. There is enough for all of us to win, for ALL of us to step into our greatest. To own the life we are meant to live. To define who we are and the life we want. And if you get nothing else from the words I share on the pages of this book, get that you have a responsibility to contribute your unique gifts, and your authentic self with this world. Because you get to be that big version of yourself you have been waiting for. You get to live your life how you want, in all your glory and power and confidence, loving yourself and being your authentic self along the way... and you get to do that *because YOU say so*.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? ... And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

— Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love*

Three years ago, I began an intense journey of self-exploration, although I didn't actually know it at the time. At

PREFACE

that time I was unhappy, restless, and unfulfilled, and had been for a while. For years, I had avoided these feelings through a regular practice of numbing myself out with large doses of pretending not to know, very long hours of work, and an embarrassing amount of alcohol.

In 2015, I had a very successful publishing company, a husband, and a daughter. On the outside, my life looked like it was pretty great, but on the inside, I was wracked with guilt, shame, and debilitating feelings of unhappiness and unworthiness.

In 2004, I had married one of my best friends, and by this time in 2015, I had finally woken up enough to realize that marrying one of your best friends does not necessarily result in a happy or fulfilled marriage. I loved him deeply as a friend, but was never in love with him, and finally realized that for 11 years, I was trying to convince myself that I could learn how to be. After I had my daughter in 2008, my entire world changed. I had never, ever known how deeply I could love someone and how much I wanted to protect, love, and be with another human being. Through her, I realized love could be deep, real, and unconditional. But even my love for my daughter could not keep me from those vacuous feelings of depression and loneliness.

By 2015, after a year of therapy and fruitless effort, I realized that I was being unfair to myself and my husband by staying in the marriage. My husband deserved to experience a

deep love and connection with someone, and I owed it to him to get out of the way so he could have that. And so that maybe someday, I could have that, too. That year, we separated, and I filed for divorce. I began to live my life as a single mom, but very quickly realized that simply leaving the marriage was not going to make me happy, fulfilled, or at peace—not by a long-shot. I had a lot of work to do with myself, and I needed to learn how to create a life of my own.

In February 2016, I stepped into a training that would forever change the course of my life. While I would like to say that I loved it immediately, that didn't quite happen. After quite a few breakdowns, including storming out of the training, (and coming back, of course) and eventually many breakthroughs, I finally got over myself and my ego, and authentically embraced this work called personal transformation. Before then, I had never heard of things like *mindset* or *commitment* or *vision*—at least not in this way. It was through these skills and practices I learned and the personal work I did with myself that I was able to begin to finally see glimpses of my authentic self, my power, my passion, and my purpose. It was also during this time that I hit several devastating financial setbacks, and my daughter and I were forced to move into my Mom's house for 5 months. At that time, I was experiencing some of the lowest lows of my life, but also learning a new perspective on how life could be lived, and the possibilities life could offer, if I was willing to be

PREFACE

open and do the work.

For the next several months, I continued to absorb everything I could in the realm of personal growth and transformation. I was inspired and seeing dramatic shifts in the lives of the people we worked with. I wanted more, and I actually made that happen—BIG time. In the fall of 2017, I acquired and became Owner and CEO of a Transformational Training company here in Los Angeles—the very company I had just completed my trainings with a year earlier. I was determined to breathe new life into the company, hoping to bring my skills and the expertise that I had learned from running Simply Novel, my publishing company, for 12 years. For a year and a half, I worked day and night, feverishly doing whatever I could think of to make the company a success. I studied and practiced for months to become a certified Transformational Trainer to sharpen my skills and bring new insight into the company. I took online courses, set up new systems, developed and implemented a new marketing plan, spent hundreds of hours on calls, and tens of thousands of dollars to keep the trainings going, but it all simply just wasn't enough. Nothing was working. After a year of abysmal results and huge financial loss, I began to fear that this was the beginning of the end for me and the company. And this is when I finally hit the absolute lowest low of my life.

Although I had to cancel trainings, I didn't close the company right away. I was holding on for dear life, trying to

scramble to fix it, clean up my mess, and pull off the next scheduled training. But the damage was being done with every day that passed.

To most of the outside world, I presented myself as self-assured, happy, powerful, and passionate. Because of my position and experience, people looked at me for inspiration, and I felt like a liar and a fraud because inside, I was a master at self-beat-up, intoxicated in anger, resentment, shame, guilt, and blame. I was giving my power away to my negative thoughts and beliefs about myself, to people, to circumstances, and to my situation. Even through this, though, I had some powerful moments, especially when I was coaching people. I cared deeply and authentically and did everything I could to support people in what they were going through, often while I was falling apart inside.

I was at such a low point at this time that for several weeks, my friends and family were genuinely worried about my mental health. I was constantly in my head, berating myself, shaming myself, and blaming myself and others for my inaction and inability to produce the results I was quite clear I wanted. I cried, sobbed, screamed, and over and over said, "enough!" dusting myself off and getting back up again, only to have even the slightest negative comment or subpar circumstance knock me back down again, deeper into the hole. I was constantly either on the verge of tears or teetering on the edge of rage. The slightest thing could set me off either

PREFACE

way. I was merciless, and quite literally, abusive to myself. I expected others to see my light, and to shine it for me, or at the very least, to give me explicit instructions on how to be the bright, shining inspirational leader that I needed to be.

After threatening for three years, my world had finally come crashing down around me once and for all. One company was failing miserably, the other was suffering huge losses from being practically ignored, my ego was bruised, my heart was broken, my bank account was drained, I had amassed a huge amount of debt, I was completely exhausted from burning the candle at both ends, I had gained a shocking amount of weight, and I was totally lost and felt completely alone.

But even in that darkest moment there was something nagging at me that I could not ignore, no matter how hard I tried... and trust me, I tried. For weeks I numbed out through sleep and alcohol and food and nicotine—anything I could do to not feel, and not face up to what I was so horribly terrified of. There was—quite literally—a pull in my core: a nagging feeling inside my stomach that would not go away, no matter how hard I tried to sabotage it, to ignore it, and to numb it out. A nagging feeling that I had a gift and I was pissing it away—that I had a life, and a brain, and a heart, and a purpose, and I was throwing it away like a spoiled 3-year-old child who was denied a candy bar. The spiral of shame and guilt and depression was compounded by this nagging

feeling... and what was undeniably, a *knowing*.

What I kept coming back to, day after day, even through the breakdowns and mind-numbing avoidance was that I knew there was something more for me. I knew that my life was not supposed to be this way. I knew that I was not meant to go down like this—and that thought terrified me so much that I was willing to do nearly anything to sabotage it.

It came to me after a particularly volatile argument and a subsequent meltdown one day that I needed to simply get *real* about my life—the good, the bad, even the downright hideous. I needed to really *see* where I was, without the smoke and mirrors of shame and blame and resentment and guilt. I had to be honest and take a good look at who I was and what my life looked like. All of it. I had to look at everything and take responsibility for it. I had to be accountable, and to stop being a victim to everyone and everything around me. That day would become a turning point in my life.

I began to write down my thoughts, and to get really honest and to be truthful about the way things were, and to stop pretending that I didn't know what I was doing to myself. To stop pretending that I didn't see what was right in front of me. To stop hiding from and avoiding the painful or beautiful truths that were my life. To get honest about my relationships, about the state of my finances, about how I had been showing up with my companies, and with the people around me, and how I had been treating my body. It came down to one big

PREFACE

truth: I had been completely lying to myself, and it was literally killing me.

I then reconnected with something that I actually already knew but was blind to and had denied and fought for so long: that everything, *e-ver-y-thing* came down to me. It was time for me to accept and acknowledge and *own* that I was, and always will be, the common denominator, and there was no running from that as much as I tried. No amount of escape, isolation, withdrawal, or avoidance could take me away from *me*. The anger, frustration, disappointment, and resentment I felt for other people, other situations and circumstances in my life that I put on others was not about them. The guilt, shame, distrust, and fear were all me. I began acknowledging and owning that I was experiencing all of these things because of the stories and lies I had told myself. It was because of the beliefs that I had about myself, and because I was attempting to white-knuckle those beliefs with every ounce of strength I had in me. And when I realized this and actually really took it in and accepted this, I began to sob uncontrollably. I cried tears of relief, of acceptance, of surrender, and of hope.

This realization and acceptance then expanded outward, as I started being honest with others around me, actually taking responsibility, and consciously keeping my power and owning my thoughts, feelings, and actions. Ungracefully, but honestly, I started to reveal what I was feeling and thinking instead of holding back; I began to speak and admit that I was

pretending not to know what was really happening in my life. I pored through my finances and got real about the massive amount of debt I had incurred, how I was being with my businesses, and I got real about the fears and insecurities that I had not been willing to look at. I finally faced up to the me that was showing up in the world.

It was then that I finally made the decision to resign as CEO of the training company, cancel all scheduled trainings, and announce that I was closing the company altogether.

In the days and weeks following, I began to cautiously, but truthfully, acknowledge myself and be grateful for who I am, what I do, what I've been through, and where I was at *that* moment. Not an hour from then, not 10 years from then, and not 10 years earlier, but at that exact moment. I embarked on a brand-new journey of self-exploration. I began to feel lighter, and a sense of worthiness began to emerge. I began to feel that while I didn't have everything figured out, and nothing had miraculously changed overnight, I had a sense that I was becoming more aware, awake, and connected to myself—my wants, my needs, my fears, my desires, and my vision.

I slowly began to forgive myself, to accept myself, and to feel peace with where I was in my life's journey. I started to feel grateful for the journey I was on and became excited that I had been given the opportunity to create the life I wanted to live. I looked forward to discovering something new about

PREFACE

myself and learning to handle challenges in a way outside my normal patterns and automatic reactions. I loved that I was learning and growing, and not remaining stagnant. I loved being in my power, grounded about who I am and the passion I have for this life. I loved observing myself in a space of creating, of innovating, of designing my life. I began to practice looking at my failures not as an opportunity to beat myself up, but as course-corrections and valuable information for what *not* to do again. I deliberately practiced holding my results as neutral, rather than more evidence of my unworthiness or another excuse to give up or have a breakdown with the dramatic flair I had become known for.

I had been lying to myself, attempting to convince myself that all those destructive behaviors that I had taken on didn't matter. I was attempting to convince myself that all I deserved was shame, distrust, drama, and angst in my life. I was lying to myself that I didn't deserve happiness, or honor, or power. I was lying to myself that I didn't belong, that no one understood me, and that I wasn't worthy of a life of abundance, passion, purpose, and most of all, of loving and being loved. I was fooling myself into believing that I could simply have the life I wanted without having to actually show up and create it. I was raging a war within myself, and the lies had been winning.

My vision for myself and my life had always been clear. I had just denied it for so long, and allowed my fears and

insecurities and doubts have the best of me. I talked myself into playing a small game, and allowed the voices from my past to taunt me with *Who do you think you are?* and to run my life. But then one day, I not only owned up to all of it, I also recognized and accepted that I could do whatever I wanted with it. Hello, Dorothy: *you've known it all along.*

My journey continues. It is a daily practice to break old patterns, to stay awake and aware and to keep taking myself on. Some days are easier than others, but I am able to take the challenging days in stride better than ever before. I still experience moments of sadness, disappointment, regret, doubt, and anger—of course, I am human. However, I am able to recognize when I start to slip into these habits and patterns far more quickly than before. I am now able to see more clearly, and to allow myself space to learn and grow and create. Further, I am able to give other people in my life this precious space as well. I am now able to recognize and acknowledge that where I am and what I am feeling is what I am *experiencing*, and **not** *who I am*. I know now that my reactions are a choice, and that I can also choose reason, acceptance, peace, and courage.

You may be able to identify with my story to some extent. Maybe you've been through worse, or maybe you are still going through something similar. I tell this story for a couple of reasons. First, I want anyone reading this to know that I get it. I get you. I know your pain, I know your fears, and I know

PREFACE

your sadness, regret, and shame. But I also know your power, and I know your courage, and I know your light. I also know without a doubt that no one on this earth is doing anyone any good by hiding their gifts, giving away their power, or fading into the background of hopelessness and despair. Nothing can be created without a desire, and I know that you have the desire to create something new, and that *is* possible. It may be deep down, buried by years of doubt, shame, and fear, or it may be near the surface, nagging at you daily, like it was for me. But it is there, and it is time for you to own it, and I want to help you to do that.

Secondly, I want to tell my story because by telling my own story, I too, am working on my own healing and growth. My journey continues, and I am still doing the work. My intention with this book is to support you in discovering the authentic, powerful you that you have been looking for, and empower you to create a life you are proud to live. I know the path you are about to embark on. I have forged my own similar path, and this path is what brought me into owning my past, my present, and my future. You now get to forge your own path.

My hope for you is that you are kind and gentle with yourself, but that you are willing to take yourself on and do the work required to break through the walls that are preventing you from having the happiness and fulfillment that you desire. I wish you a life full of love, happiness, and

BECAUSE I SAY SO

acceptance—a life that you create from your heart and your truth. A life that you are proud of and can look back on with joy, peace, and fulfillment, when you are on your death bed. Only you can create these things for yourself—because you deserve to live authentically. You have permission to stand in your light, and to share your light with those you love. You are important, and you are significant in this world. And I am excited and honored to be with you as you realize this and embrace this on your journey ahead.

— ***Kristen***

Introduction

From the moment we are born, our only intention is to survive—to simply live. As we grow, it becomes more than just surviving; it becomes an innate instinct to thrive, to keep ourselves alive. As a child, we explore the world around us, learning and growing, and figuring out how the world works. Eventually, we begin to learn to navigate our emotions, and begin making connections. Of course, we do not know how to control these emotions at first. But we are intelligent creatures, and it doesn't take long before we learn to recognize patterns of all types. Like recognizing when a square block is out of place with all the cylindrical blocks, we also learn to recognize and make distinctions with patterns of behavior. Early in our development, we learn to manipulate our emotional reactions to keep us in the place of thriving. Depending upon our environment, we may either begin to notice that crying when we are hurt will elicit hugs, kisses, and warm words of comfort, or conversely, that crying when

we are hurt will cause us to be ignored, yelled at, or even punished.

We then begin to create beliefs based upon these patterns, and operate in the world accordingly. As toddlers and young children, these beliefs become seemingly “permanent” or “fixed,” and we then learn to live our lives based on these fixed beliefs—behaving, feeling, and making choices based on what we “know” from these belief systems. These beliefs eventually become automatic, held deep within our subconscious minds, where other automatic behaviors are housed, such as blinking, breathing, and digestion.

Think of a computer. On a computer, we read and write documents, make spreadsheets, use apps, check out social media, play computer games, and read and send email. We know we are doing these things, as we are consciously aware that we are choosing to do these things. Meanwhile, however, there are applications and processes running in the background that we are not even aware of. We may occasionally become aware that they are there, like when our computer freezes, but these applications and processes and electrical currents of data are running all the time, powering the computer, carrying out your commands without you even giving it one thought.

Now think of your brain like a computer. Every moment, we are operating from both our conscious and subconscious. Your subconscious is like the applications and processes

PREFACE

running in the background of a computer. While we often think we are making decisions or experiencing thoughts and emotions based on our conscious thoughts—the logical mind—we are actually making decisions based on our subconscious mind running like an operating system in the background, quietly in charge of the entire operation, without us even realizing it or being aware of it. Every once in a while, we “wake up” and our subconscious mind basically comes to the foreground of our conscious thought. So, why is this important? Until we become aware and learn to recognize and make distinctions between our subconscious and our conscious beliefs, attitudes, and habits, we will continue to be on auto-pilot, essentially allowing our past to dictate our future.

Patterns of behaviors and emotional reactions become second-nature, and we identify these beliefs—and subsequent emotions, feelings, and thoughts—as what makes us “us.” In some ways, it’s true. It is you—but it is not all of you. It is not the awakened you, the part of yourself that is in your true power, the essence of who you are at your core. These beliefs are so buried that we recreate moment after moment in our lives unaware that they are the direct result of these beliefs. If we were able to slow down and practice, we could then be conscious and aware enough to see that we are reacting the same way, over and over, to whatever triggers us. We could actually see that we are creating the same kinds of problems

in relationship after relationship, for example. But most of the time, we are totally unaware, and the processes continue, day after day, year after year. This is why we continue to find the same type of person and create the same kind of relationship problems, that we honestly believe *we didn't even see coming*.

What is important to note here is that these subconscious beliefs, the beliefs and thoughts by which we are dictating our lives and making decisions that affect our futures, may not even necessarily be true!

There is a parable from India that illustrates this point. While there have been many retellings, the story is about six men who were born blind. Each had heard stories about elephants their entire lives. They argued day and night about what elephants must look like, and what they were used for. Each of the men had a different idea, and they were finally given the opportunity to greet an elephant first-hand. The first man felt the elephant's side, and declared "This is nothing more than a mud wall!" The second man felt the elephant's trunk, and declared, "No, it's like a giant snake!" The third man felt the pointy tusk and decided "This creature is as deadly as a spear!" The fourth felt each leg, and asserted, "What this is, is a large cow." The fifth man felt the elephant's ear and claimed, "An elephant is like a magic carpet that can fly over the trees." And the sixth man, feeling the elephant's tail declared, "This is nothing more than rope!" They argued and argued, each one standing firm on his perspective until

PREFACE

finally, they were interrupted by a very wise man. “The elephant is all things. Each of you touched only one part. Perhaps, if you put all the parts together, you will then be able to see the truth.”

We can easily get stuck on one perspective, or interpretation. The more we can accept or even be willing to trust that we have developed our beliefs from an interpretation and not necessarily fact, we can then open up more possibilities.

The good news is that it is absolutely possible to get to this essence of who you truly are, of revealing and discovering the you that is free of the fixed image and the beliefs you have of yourself. The way you currently operate, the way you process thoughts, and the way you experience and express emotions can be altered. You have the power to basically “rewire” your brain to a new way of thinking, and in doing so, you can significantly alter the results in your life.

When we are able to awaken to what is our authentic self at our very core, we then have access to all our power as a human being. When we are awakened to these fixed beliefs and how we view the world, we can then see more than what we are familiar with, or think we already know. When we become conscious of the beliefs we have, and the patterns we operate from, we are then more able to recognize our automatic behaviors. If we become consciously aware, then we open ourselves up to more possibilities. We can then

choose whether to be—or operate—in the same way, or differently. That is choosing to be in your power, rather than on automatic response. When we are “being in our power,” we have more choices. We can choose love, respect, acceptance, passion, energy, or confidence, because they become more accessible to us than they were before.

This path of discovering your power and learning to live authentically, confidently, and lovingly begins with getting real about those fixed beliefs, those patterns of emotions, and those stories that you have been holding onto about who you are and who you have become. It’s about getting clear about your vision of who you really are and setting yourself on a path of *being* that vision for yourself. This path of transformation will require you to get real with yourself, acknowledge your path, and let go of what you think you are so that you can become who you want to be.

Each section of this book, and the questions that are prompted, are designed to take you on your journey of self-discovery and healing, and ultimately help you generate a life of clarity, confidence, and purpose. We are all on our own path of exploration. I am on my journey as well, and do not pretend to know it all, or to be complete in my knowledge. If anything, my own journey has revealed that there is so much more to learn, and I am on a personal quest to learn and discover more! I have my breakdowns, truly ugly moments. I cry, I scream, I am unkind to myself and others, and I get

PREFACE

stuck in my own limiting beliefs sometimes. But I also acknowledge who I am, and I am able to presence my power when I choose to, because I allow myself this space to learn and grow and practice. I invite you to allow yourself the same.

This journey can be valuable, exciting, and powerful if you choose to have it be. There is no inherent value in the questions that I ask of you, or the assertions I make. The value is in the exploration and what is revealed to you in your own work, and how far you are willing to go with yourself. The value is then who you choose to be as a result of this awakening of knowledge and insight. So, there are a lot of questions—powerful questions—for you to muse on, contemplate, mull over, and write about, so you can see what reveals itself to you, what you discover, what you choose to take on.

Remember that you are not on a journey to “fix” yourself. You are not broken. You are not wounded. You are not damaged. You are only you. Do you need some work? Maybe. But you can create what you want for your life, but only by being authentically you. That means acknowledging, taking accountability, being in your vision, and being the greatest version of yourself. No one can be authentically you, except you. You are a gift and you are extraordinary, and it’s time you believed that. It’s time you take on your life as if everything you do matters. Because it does, and not just to you, but to the world.

You have everything you need already inside of you, and you can become conscious and access all of you, if you choose to. As someone once said, nothing of value comes easy. It will take real work—deep, personal work—to unearth and reverse what may be years of beliefs. For some of you, fear may come up often. It is because of the fixed beliefs that you have about yourself and the world that you are experiencing fear. Not that it isn't truly, deeply real to you! But what's waiting for you on the other side of that fear is possibility: the possibility of discovering something you didn't know about yourself. The possibility of not having that particular fear show up anymore, or at the very least, not having that fear control your emotions, behavior, or choices. The possibility of owning and then letting go of that fear, so you can experience yourself being courageous, awaits. It is nearly always easier to stay in the familiarity of what we know. But you already know what that feels like, and I can pretty much assume that since you have this book in your hands, you're not exactly pleased with everything that's already familiar.

I invite you to commit to giving all of yourself, and being “all in.” Commit to being the authentic you, rather than who or what you think you should be. Allow yourself to be open and vulnerable to discover your true power and worth. Give yourself permission now to thrive and not merely survive. You have it in you, even if you don't see that right now. You are the key to it all, and that in itself, is powerful.

How to Use this Book

This book will lead you on a journey of self-discovery, towards connecting with your authentic self, your purpose, and your vision. It is broken down by topic, or distinctions. This book is not designed to be read like a novel, cover to cover, in a week or two. Within each Chapter/Distinction is work for you to complete, questions that you get to answer in a journal or notebook, that will support you in digging deeper. This book was designed to be a guided journey, and you are invited to participate fully by completing the work, not just by reading this book like another “self-help” book where the writer espouses answers and you passively listen.

As you read each chapter, set aside at least 15-30 minutes to do the *Journal Work*, in addition to the reading. I recommend that you allot yourself time do your reading and writing before you go to bed each night, but if you find that doesn't work for you, first thing in the morning works, as well. Simply keeping this practice and commitment to yourself

helps to build discipline, and keeping your word to maintain any discipline supports you in creating confidence.

There may be some *Journal Work* (such as in Chapter Two) that will take much longer—even several days. You may want to allot a few 15-20-minute increments daily to complete the work. You will definitely want to complete everything before moving on to the next chapter, as the work builds on itself. Stick with it, be kind to yourself, and make the commitment that you will do this for yourself.

Be sure that when you journal, you are alone and free of distractions. Turn your phone off or put it in airplane mode so that you are not distracted with phone calls, texts, or other notifications. Find a quiet area of your home where you can be alone to reflect, breathe, and be in your own space. Let your family members know that you are taking this time for yourself and allow them to honor you by giving you this time. In addition, privacy is important—not only the privacy to take your time journaling each day, but privacy in knowing that what you write will go unread by others. Keep your journal in a private place or request of others in your home to respect your privacy and allow you the space to reflect on your private thoughts without sharing them.

Consider meditating before or after journaling. Taking the time to make meditation a part of your daily practice will improve your breathing and focus, reduce stress, and enhance your self-awareness. Your meditation need not be long. Even

a simple 5-minute mindful meditation practice can prove valuable.

Resist the urge to read ahead or skip around. There is a deliberate progression of work to be done, and often, the completion of each topic relies on another, even though it all may seem random at first glance.

Complete the work, even though (and *especially* if!) you feel resistance. Don't judge yourself on how much you write but be real with what may be occurring for you emotionally when you write. There may be times when you feel yourself resisting, and you may notice that it occurs with certain topics and not others. If you notice yourself wanting to skip something, or are having trouble writing about a certain distinction, there may be something there for you to look at. Keep pushing through and ask yourself, "What is it about this that I am having such a hard time with?" Or "What am I holding back?" Listen and trust yourself. This is valuable information, so don't beat yourself up about it. Allow whatever it is to reveal itself so that you can do your work with it. Trust that this is a part of your journey and keep going. Doing this work may take a certain amount of surrender or detachment from what may be familiar patterns of feelings or thoughts. Surrendering to the radical acceptance of who you are, with no resistance to your wholeness and power, allows for an opening of awareness and new possibility.

While you may prefer to type your responses on a computer or keep them in an app on your phone, I highly recommend handwriting your responses. When writing on a computer, it is easier to go back and change, erase, or edit what you have written, even if it came from your heart authentically. Writing by hand helps to limit that and keeps you honest about what you may be experiencing in that moment. Unless it is a total distraction and it inhibits you from getting work done, challenge yourself to experience the vulnerability of using no technology to interfere with the connection of your heart and mind to your pen and paper. Find a beautiful journal and pen you love and use it specifically for this work.

Your journal entries need not be long, and some entries may be longer than others. Just let your thoughts and feelings flow and come out however they come out. Spelling does not count. Give yourself permission to let go of your handwriting, sentence structure, spelling, and the quest to “find the best word.” You may not always know the “right” things to say, or you may experience being confused about what you want to say. Simply write what is on your mind, and don’t worry about it making sense to anyone. This is only for you, and no one will be reading it unless you want to share. What you’ll want to strive for is called “stream of consciousness” writing—where your consciousness can flow freely wherever it takes you. There are no “right” answers and there is no “right” way

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

to do this. This is an exploration. In fact, you may experience that something you felt was important at the beginning simply doesn't matter to you anymore at the end, and vice versa. Let yourself be on this adventure of self-discovery, and allow things to change, grow, and reveal themselves to you as you go.

Don't feel as if you have to answer every single question, every single time. Some distinctions have a few powerful questions, while others have many questions that are designed to provoke thought or dig deeper. Allow yourself the space to answer and flow naturally. If you feel stuck, read more of the questions to see what comes up for you, and write about that. This is not school, and your completion and answers will not be checked. This work is not meant to be rigid or pedantic, but natural, free-flowing, and from the heart.

The questions "What are you experiencing?" and "What's coming up for you?" will be asked throughout this book. This is a way of asking what you are experiencing emotionally, physically, and even mentally. The answer to these questions can be expressed with words such as fear, anger, sadness, happiness, pride, regret, frustration: "I am experiencing frustration and anger"; or it can be a specific memory: "I am remembering the time when..." It can be future glimpses: "I am seeing myself, beaming with pride as I sell every last painting from my gallery..." or it can be physical responses: "I

am experiencing myself holding my breath,” or “I am experiencing my hands shaking.” All of this is awesome to notice. This is a part of connecting to and being with yourself. Take notice of what is occurring for you (emotionally and physically), and eventually, you will be able to recognize certain patterns that could be valuable to your transformation. Take a deep breath, acknowledge that you’re taking on a new practice, and keep going.

While you have permission and are encouraged to write freely and express everything that comes up for you in this process, it is important that you stay mindful about not beating yourself up, shaming yourself, or getting ugly with yourself. Continuously remind yourself that *you are on a journey* and acknowledge yourself for it. Your journey is unique, and only yours. You have permission to get real with yourself in a powerful and productive way; you do not have permission to solidify any ugliness you’re stuck on. Simply acknowledge and keep going. You are a work in progress and deserve to feel amazing about yourself and your life.

Final note: I am not a therapist, and this book is not intended to take the place of therapy. Any information, advice, question, prompt, or assertion I make is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment that can be provided by your physician, therapist, nutritionist, or any other health care provider. You are advised to seek professional medical or psychological

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

advice if you have or suspect that you have a medical or psychological issue, or if any of the topics or discussions bring up anything that you need to work through further with a professional.

Part One: Owning It

Chapter 1: The End of Living by Default

The best day of your life is the one on which you decide your life is your own. No apologies or excuses. No one to lean on, rely on, or blame. The gift is yours—it is an amazing journey—and you alone are responsible for the quality of it. This is the day your life really begins. — Bob Moawad

Congratulations! You are about to embark on a journey of self-discovery that will lead you toward experiencing a lifetime of possibility, purpose, and vision.

Take a moment to think about why you are reading this book. Maybe this book was given to you as a gift. Perhaps you bought it, yourself. However it happened that this book is in your hands right now, think about how perfect it is that this particular book ended up your life, at this moment in time.

Think about what you want to discover or learn about yourself. Think about what you want to let go of or be done with. Taking the first step is always the most difficult, and

committing to yourself to be on this journey of exploration may not feel completely comfortable to you at this point. You are on a sojourn into the unknown, and that takes risk and courage. You may have to get out of your comfort zone a bit in order to do this work.

The Comfort Zone

What is the “comfort zone”? We hear about it all the time. It’s that place we know we are not supposed to be, like a child getting caught in the kitchen with their hand in the cookie jar. It’s the status quo —“the way it is” or “the way things have always been” or “the way we have always done it.” It’s that place where we feel comfortable, safe—even numbed-out or apathetic. It can be what gets us to that pizza and beer kind of place... or the sleeping in until noon place... or the 7 hours of Netflix kind of place.

But more often, we know it as the place where we operate daily. The place that’s safe. The place, for most of us, where we feel most comfortable and naturally want to stay. Even though, like the child with his hand in the cookie jar, we know the cookie is going to make us fat and give us cavities, we remain, stubbornly fixed with our hand right there in the cookie jar, dubiously attempting to assure everyone in our lives that this is *what I really want*, and *I really am “happy”*

the way I am.

Why do we even need to get out of our comfort zone? Because out of the comfort zone is where we discover, learn and grow, where new possibilities emerge, and where opportunities are revealed. It's the difference between stretching, learning, and growing to rise up to make our dreams happen, or lowering our expectations and pruning our dreams to fit within our circumstances or limiting beliefs.

Although there are several scholarly models of what people assert happens outside the comfort zone, I contend that when we stay in our comfort zone, we avoid the discovery zone, the learning zone, and the growth zone outside of that. We are stuck in lack of possibility, growth, and forward movement. While the world changes, you will change and adapt to an extent. But when you are not in the learning or growth zones, it is not you in charge, controlling the change, or even better: creating it. Instead, circumstances, events, and people control where your life goes, and the velocity and direction are out of your hands. That is how you end up with half your life having passed you by, only to look back and wonder why you spent so much time in that crappy job or that draining relationship.

Ironically, the comfort zone is a bit of a misnomer. For most of us, we are actually pretty unhappy—and uncomfortable—staying totally comfortable. It is more of a place of habit, or the familiar. And most of us really do want

to live bigger, more fulfilled lives. In the backs of our minds, we know we are not really comfortable in our comfort zone, doing the same thing day after day, but to actually break out would require us facing our fears and taking a risk.

When you consciously venture out of your comfort zone, you are making the *choice* to experience forward, powerful, purposeful movement and to create something new in your life. You open up possibilities for yourself. You are embracing and practicing your own power. It's even been scientifically proven that essentially, our brains actually want to learn new things. We are wired to adapt, and in order to do this, we must learn new ways, new habits, new patterns, and new behaviors.

What it is going to take on this self-exploration is what it will also take in your life, if you are wanting to get to discovery, learning, and growth. It is going to take a certain amount of risk, and a solid commitment.

Risk and Commitment

Risk is the chance, or the possibility, of something different; many times, the word risk is associated with a negative—risk of losing something or facing a threat or something dangerous. I am not saying to be careless or dangerous. I am talking about mindful risk: letting go of being

in control, being right, or having things be predictable. In fact, you are immediately taking a risk once you declare that your intention is to get out of your comfort zone.

What must be present then, is *commitment*. Commitment can move you past the racing thoughts, the judgement, the upset stomach, the shaking hands, the doubt, and the fear. When we give ourselves over to a commitment—like truly, madly, deeply give ourselves over—it won't even matter what we “feel” like. If we are committed to it, we go for it anyway. Our commitment will have us push ourselves to not be apathetic or complacent, or to feed ourselves the lie that “This is just the way I am.”

So, what happens when we do enter that learning zone? Change. Growth. Possibilities. And eventually, a new comfort zone to break through. Further, something new opens up for us when we take risks and push ourselves out of that “box.” We can never go back to being that same person—our life path literally gets shaken up and altered slightly, and we can then choose to continue to challenge ourselves again and again, or choose to dwell there in that new comfort zone, in stagnancy. The power comes in knowing that we do have this choice.

It takes a commitment to possibility and the continuous practice of being a risk-taker to live in the learning and growth zones. Being in this practice is where we see the impossible become possible.

Moving forward in life always involves some degree of

risk. This is your opportunity to take a risk and learn about yourself and what possibilities lie ahead for you. As we learn and grow, we do risk not knowing, not feeling confident, and not being secure or certain. It is through the practice of risk and getting out of our comfort zone that we give the space to allow a bigger self to emerge. Only when we are willing to “put it on the line” and let go of what we are holding onto, can we then reach out and grab what could be. Taking risks can bring more excitement, meaning, and fulfillment to our lives.

The Onion Metaphor

Bring to mind an onion. Any onion will do: white, brown, red, green, yellow. Most of us have likely heard the metaphor of peeling an onion. It’s a grossly overused metaphor, albeit a relatively appropriate way to describe solving a problem or getting to the core of an issue, and is often used to illustrate our complicated identities or personalities. I’m not going to use that metaphor here—not really.

Think about the smell of an onion. It has a strong, even offensive odor, which scientists say is a defense mechanism. Onions are easily grown in many climates, and are harvested globally. To grow an onion, a seed is planted below the soil surface, and with the proper amount of water and sunlight, a green sprout eventually breaks through the soil. The onion

itself, the bulb, grows underneath the dark soil, until eventually the top part of the mature onion also breaks through the top of the soil, and a short time later, the onion is ready to be harvested.

You are like that onion. Your odor, or more kindly, your defense mechanisms, may be up at times. Like the onion that grows globally, you are going to have to allow yourself to grow in different climates, like when you are experiencing difficult feelings, especially resistance. You have the opportunity to grow by pushing through in order to mature. And yes, you will need to peel back your layers, even that super-thin transparent membrane found on the inside of the onion scale that we observe in biology class. You will need to be transparent, and willing to observe all the parts that make you you.

I believe that there are only two ways to come to a profound, life-altering breakthrough or awareness. We wake up and have a breakthrough by getting real and really looking and learning about ourselves, doing the work, and being committed to creating new life possibilities. Or what happens for most people, we are forced into a reality check and change is instigated by dramatic, possibly even traumatic, life events such as a cancer or diabetes diagnosis, a divorce, hitting rock bottom in addiction, losing a job or business, or even the birth of a child. Everything you want and need to know is within you. You can choose to discover what you need to know by

being willing to look at that reality and do the work, or you can just accept the default of life's circumstances.

And now that you know more than you've wanted to know about onions, you are well on your way...

Journal Work

Journal about what is coming up for you as you think about taking on this journey of self-discovery and personal growth.

What do you hope to discover or want to explore about yourself? What questions do you have?

What is it that you have decided you are committed to, or have had enough of, such that you are willing to take action by starting this journey?

What do you want to let go of or be done with?

What fears or doubts are coming up for you when you're encouraged to step out of your comfort zone?

In what areas of your life are you avoiding taking risks?

What might be possible if you were to begin taking risks and go for what you really want in your life?

What could you possibly lose out on by not taking those risks?

Chapter 2: Seeing the Big Picture

Be bold. Be brave enough to be your true self.

— Queen Latifah

With honesty comes tremendous personal power. Being honest with “what is” allows you to have certainty, clarity, and security in your life. By recognizing the facts and “what is” you have an opportunity to regain your power, right your wrongs, and cultivate new opportunities. Being honest doesn’t mean beating yourself up or patting yourself on the back. This is an opportunity for you to get real with yourself from a neutral, judgement-free, assessment-free, excuse-free zone.

You are going to take an honest inventory of each domain of your life. In business, when we take an inventory of our products, we are simply recording a detailed account of all the goods that are on hand or in stock. We do this so that we can evaluate what is or is not selling, or what we need to order more of or have a surplus of.

For this process, you are going to take a personal inventory: a simple recording of what is occurring, the people

SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

who are in your life, and what your present situation is, from a neutral, non-judgmental place, like an observer taking notes about a subject. Like a business person taking stock of the goods in his warehouse, having more yellow widgets than green widgets is simply information, and a decision can be made based on that information. At this point, you are simply going to be gathering information.

Journal Work

This process may take several days, so allow yourself the time to go through each of the domains thoroughly and completely. Be sure to complete each area fully before moving onto the next, and finish all areas before moving on to the next chapter. For each of the important domains of your life: relationships, money, work, emotional and physical health, contribution to others, and personal growth, write about any current situations, present circumstances, events, and people that come to mind when you take stock of what IS your life.

Relationships

First, start with an inventory of your family and your relationships, i.e. parents, children, intimate partner, friendships, coworkers, etc.

BECAUSE I SAY SO

What do your relationships really look like right now? What is happening? Who is involved?

What relationships are working and which ones are struggling?

On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the most ideal relationship ever possible, how would you rate each?

Challenge yourself not to dwell on any particular area or person, but keep writing whatever you can think of that is actually true at this moment. Not what you want, or wish, or hope could be, but what actually IS. Be specific and use details.

Money/Finance

Once you have completed the relationships section, move on to an inventory of your finances, or money matters.

Where do you stand financially? How much money do you have coming in and going out?

Do you have a budget? Is a budget important to you? How well do you stay within a budget?

What about your bills? Do you pay them on time? Do you even look at the envelopes, or do they stack up?

Do you make enough money to pay your bills each month?

Do you have money in savings or reserved for emergencies?

SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

Take an inventory of everything that comes up for you regarding your financial situation at this very moment. Again, not what you want, or hope, or wish it could be, but what actually IS.

Career, Job, or Business

Do you work? What's your job? Where do you work? How long have you worked there?

Do you make enough money to handle your expenses?

Is it fulfilling, or does it simply pay the bills?

What is the climate or "feel" of your workplace like?

Do you get along with your boss or coworkers?

Is this your dream job, or a stepping stone?

Remember that you are stating the facts—getting real about what IS at this moment in your work, not what you want, wish, or hope for in the future.

Health and Wellness

Move on to an inventory of your current mental and physical health.

Are you at a healthy weight?

Do you have any habits that you engage in that either support your health, like working out several days a week, or that harm your health, like smoking?

BECAUSE I SAY SO

How often do you exercise?

How would you assess your mental health?

How often are you stressed or exhausted?

Write about any situations, circumstances, events, people, and thoughts that come to mind when you simply take stock of what IS in the area of your health and well-being.

Contribution/Service

Continue your personal inventory, focusing now on yourself as a benefactor to others.

Are you a contribution to other people? What does your contribution to your community and the world look like right now? Do you do volunteer work?

How sincere or proud are you about what and where you contribute?

Are you forcing yourself to contribute out of guilt, or does it truly provide great value to you?

How connected are you with people in your community?

Whether you simply buy Girl Scout cookies, or build houses for Habitat for Humanity, write it all down. Remember that you are stating the facts—getting real about what IS at this moment in your life, not what you want, wish, or hope for in the future.

SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

Your Self/Your Spirit

Finally, write down anything else left about you. Take stock of where you are in regard to your *self*, including areas of personal growth and spirituality.

How often do you meditate?

Do you read or take classes? Do you read for pleasure?

How well do you take care of your own personal needs?

How is your spiritual well-being?

How well do you do with "alone" time?

How do you acknowledge or reward yourself?

Is your home or bedroom clean and organized or unkempt?

Do you ever treat yourself to a massage, professional shave, or manicure?

When is the last time you went clothes shopping or bought yourself a new outfit?

When is the last time you got dressed up for a special occasion?

When was the last time you had a real vacation?

Get clear about what IS and not what you would like it to be. Fill your conscious thoughts of everything you can think of—without judgement, without any negative energy. Simply take stock of where you are right now and write it all down.

BECAUSE I SAY SO

When you have completed your inventory for each of the domains, move on to Chapter Three for the next part of this process.

Chapter 3: Acknowledging What is So

*Acknowledging the good that you already have in your life
is the foundation for all abundance. — Eckhart Tolle*

What you have done with your personal inventory is take a good, honest look at where you are *right now* in your life. I want to acknowledge you for your courage in being willing to take a look. To make the effort to see. You may or may not like what you see; that doesn't matter. What matters is that you just did what most people don't have the guts to do, and that is to really look at the way things *are*. Now comes the time to acknowledge yourself and where you are.

You see, it is really easy for us to get caught up in everything we don't have. How we don't look, or how much money is not in our bank account, or what our relationships are lacking. We spend so much time looking at what our lives are *not*. It is time to acknowledge what is so, because only through this can we then create from a clean space.

The Power of Acknowledgement

In society, we often confuse the meaning of *acknowledgement* with *appreciation*. These words have distinct meanings, and it is important to address them here. To *acknowledge* is to simply recognize something from a neutral place. To *appreciate* is to value or place in high regard or be thankful for. There is a neutral connotation to the word *acknowledge*, and a positive connotation to the word *appreciate*. We are deliberately and consciously choosing to do this work from the neutral place of acknowledgement, and this will make more sense later.

I am not suggesting that you can't recognize and appreciate yourself and others for who they are or a job well done. What I am suggesting is that the opportunity for growth comes from getting rid of our filters and value judgements of good and bad, right and wrong (which come from our subconscious beliefs). When we are able to see *everything*, acknowledging *all* of what is, we actually can then learn to create better, appreciate more, and love deeper. It takes being present—not looking to the past of “what was” or “why,” and not looking to the future of “what could be” but being in the here and now. Being present with what is.

Here's an example: You had an argument with a spouse. The argument became heated, the two of you started

ACKNOWLEDGING WHAT IS SO

screaming and yelling at each other, and finally, you decided you'd had enough, so you turned around and stormed out of the room, slamming the door and screaming obscenities in the process.

To *acknowledge* that you slammed the door and left the room in the middle of a heated argument is *neutral*. You slammed the door and left. It is what happened: an event that was a part of a bigger event—an argument. To acknowledge from that neutral place I am referring to is to say something like “I acknowledge we had a disagreement. I acknowledge that we both screamed and yelled at each other. I acknowledge that I slammed the door and left.”

Again, when you acknowledge, you are simply stating “what is.” Acknowledgment is not meant to be praise or anything positive, but it is also not meant to be shame or blame or anything negative. To acknowledge yourself, a situation, a circumstance, an event, carries with it no inherent value judgement. You can judge and assess whether slamming the door and leaving during that argument was good or bad, right or wrong, but that judgement, assessment, or interpretation is just that: assigning a positive or a negative. You can then be aware that you are placing judgement or assessment on what occurred, and that your reaction to this event is based not on the event itself, but the judgement or assessment of the event that occurred.

To place judgement or make an assessment would sound

something like: “I walked out and slammed the door because you pissed me off and I was tired of listening to your crap.” Hear the difference? To acknowledge is neutral, and leaves out the all the judgment and assessment that is charged with energy and emotion.

Events are Neutral; Drama is Not

Events are neutral. From this neutral perspective, you have choice. Holding events as neutral allows for more possibilities, rather than simply those that come from your interpretation, reaction or judgement. From neutral, we can then open ourselves up to a wider spectrum of choice: to consciously choose how we hold it, see it, or act from there. *Anything* and *everything* else you bring to an event comes from you and your interpretations, which come from that subconscious belief system I discussed in the Introduction.

First, let’s look at our example where most of us often go: to reaction. When we come from that emotionally charged, reactionary place, we might say something like this: “I walked out and slammed the door because you pissed me off and I was tired of listening to your usual crap.” What possibilities are there from this? We can only feel a small range of emotion, and therefore few possibilities are clear: “I am pissed off at you. You are a jerk. You never listen to me. You

ACKNOWLEDGING WHAT IS SO

do this to me all the time. We should really end this relationship if we are going to keep fighting all the time like this. I'm done." While this reaction may seem ridiculous, and the conclusions here drastic, we do this all the time! We are constantly making real life decisions based our emotional reactions; based on our interpretations, rooted in our limiting beliefs.

Now let's look at the neutral perspective: "I acknowledge we had a disagreement. I acknowledge I screamed and yelled. I acknowledge that I left, and that I slammed the door." What possibilities can we see now? The emotion doesn't get to be the deciding factor on where this conversation goes. We can still experience anger, resentment, frustration, etc. but those emotions don't have a hold on us, and we are able to step back and acknowledge that our feelings are based on our interpretation. The fact is that you had an argument. You both raised your voices. You slammed the door. You left. From this place, you separate the event from emotion enough that you are not ending a relationship based on your reactions.

Sometimes, it may not be so easy to just "let go" of a reaction or emotion, especially one that makes perfect sense to us, and seems perfectly appropriate and natural. I encourage you to own your emotion or reaction. That is what you are experiencing, after all. What happens then is that once you own up to experiencing that immediate reaction of shock, hurt, anger, irritation, it won't last. You can then shift

from that emotion and choose whether to continue experiencing that same emotion, or move to a different one. And this takes practice. Even now, with my friends I practice this work with, it sometimes sounds like: “I am experiencing being pissed off at you!” And then a few minutes later, “I am still experiencing anger and hurt.” A few minutes later, “I am experiencing disappointment,” then “I am experiencing insecurity and doubt,” to finally, “Ok, I am experiencing calm, and I would like to talk about what happened.”

Stating what we are experiencing puts our emotions and reactions "on notice" - making us in control of our choices and reactions—rather than our emotions or reactions dictating our next steps. This then helps to separate ourselves from our emotions, allows us to keep our power, and gives us choice. I can choose to stay in this loop and continue to feel anger and disappointment, or choose to acknowledge that my anger came from insecurity and doubt, and then actually have a conversation addressing what is really going on.

You can interpret this argument as the demise of your relationship, blame the other person, and only see your spouse as “always doing this crap” or you can interpret this as an opportunity to have a different conversation, acknowledging further that you were angry and hurt and frustrated, and out of this, take responsibility that you chose to slam the door to end the conversation.

Now, for those of us who are used to drama, this may be

ACKNOWLEDGING WHAT IS SO

difficult to swallow. I have been accused my entire life of being a “Drama Queen,” and I am fully aware of how I often bring drama where there is none. For some of us, especially for those who grew up in a turbulent or unpredictable environment, we actually seek the drama and chaos because there is, ironically, something subconsciously safe or familiar with it. I have been known (... all in the past, *of course*) to get my feelings hurt easily, and on occasion, to actually become hostile and immediately go on the attack, where no offense was intended.

I have had to work hard when I am receiving feedback, or an opposing opinion, to consciously stay awake and aware that I have old beliefs that trigger me when I feel I am being told I am wrong or that I have done something wrong: long-held beliefs that I must be perfect, that I must be right, and that what I do and how well I do it directly equates to my worth and value as a person. Immediately, I begin to defend myself when I feel these beliefs about myself being threatened, and I must consciously recognize that my interpretations (based on my beliefs) are stirring the drama and all the feelings associated with it. The feedback or opinion can either be neutral, or I can have it spiral me into a tizzy of self-doubt and rage. The awareness and the *choice* of how I take the feedback is all on me.

I encourage you to notice when you are being reactionary or choosing to be dramatic for drama’s sake. Drama is a way

to avoid looking at what is really happening, and only exacerbates things.

Emotional Intelligence

I am not in any way suggesting that you cannot or should not experience your emotions and feelings. On the contrary, I encourage you to experience whatever emotions you are experiencing. However, it is important to notice that emotions and feelings are fleeting: they come and go. You may have at one time in your life experienced going from sadness to joy, or from surprise to anger almost instantaneously. Being able to recognize and separate your feelings as what you are experiencing, (for example: “I am experiencing anger,” rather than “I am angry”) allows you to then recognize that your emotions and feelings are not fixed—and they are certainly not *you*. You are simply *experiencing* these emotions or feelings. Keeping what you are experiencing emotionally separate from the facts allows you to see things more clearly and keep your power, and grounds you to be fully present to “what is.”

Acknowledging that you are experiencing emotions and feelings from this powerful place: “I am experiencing...” rather than “I am...” will support you in your journey. Learning to acknowledge what we are experiencing then puts

us in a position to make a choice: to continue this experience, or choose to experience something different. Sometimes, being able to powerfully recognize that we are consciously choosing to stay angry, for example, is actually a way to stop experiencing the feelings of anger, and to allow ourselves to experience something different. “I am experiencing anger” can lead to “I am experiencing feeling betrayed” which can open up “I am experiencing feeling frustration” which can then lead to “I am experiencing feeling hurt,” which gets to the root of the issue.

When you experience yourself stuck in any emotion, you may want to take a look at what that’s about. Ask yourself, “What is the payoff I am getting by being stuck in _____ (anger, frustration, sadness, guilt, etc.)?” You may learn that as ass-backwards as it is, you actually enjoy being stuck in that emotion because there is a payoff—or something you get from it. This can be anything from attention, to sympathy, to pity, to comfort, to making someone feel bad, and more. So, why would you want to stop feeling sorry for yourself if you get sympathy from others? It’s inauthentic and a game of manipulation. After a while, the game will get old—especially to other people. Instead of playing this game, keep your power, experience your experience, and deal with the real issue at hand.

Leave Your Judgement at the Door

Remember that acknowledgment has no judgement. As you go through your inventory in the coming process, you will need to remember this as key. In your inventory of relationships, you may have felt something along the lines of “I do not get along with my mother-in-law. She causes arguments between me and my wife. She puts a strain on our marriage. I don’t like that she comes over to the house all the time, and when she does, I do my best not to be around her.” In another area, for example the area of money, you may have come up with something like “I currently have \$21.37 in my bank account.”

What’s important is not how you feel your mother-in-law has wronged you, or that you feel justified because she is rude to you, but the facts are, you acknowledge you are feeling resentment towards her and choose to avoid being with her. It’s a plain fact that you get to own up to. To fully acknowledge this, you might say something along the lines of: “I acknowledge that I am resentful of my mother-in-law. I acknowledge that I avoid her, and that it hurts my wife’s feelings when I do. I acknowledge that our relationship needs work.”

In the area of money, to fully acknowledge that you have \$21.37 in your bank account might look something like: “I

ACKNOWLEDGING WHAT IS SO

acknowledge that I have \$21.37 in my bank account. I acknowledge that this is not enough to pay my bills or take care of my responsibilities. I acknowledge that I have been overspending and ignoring my bank statements.”

To acknowledge that you are experiencing resentment towards and have chosen to avoid your mother-in-law, or that you have \$21.37 in your bank account is as powerful as acknowledging yourself for being the top seller in your division at your company, or for making sure your family has dinner together at the table each night. Rather than focusing on what got you to that point, or how you feel about it, *simply acknowledge the facts* so that you finally can see all possibilities of what you can create from this place of truth and honesty.

Journal Work

Now that you have taken a full inventory of all areas of your life, take a few minutes to read through what you wrote. What do you need to acknowledge about any situations, events, circumstances? Who do you need to acknowledge, and for what?

For everything in your inventory, acknowledge that it is “this way” without judgement, without assessment, and

BECAUSE I SAY SO

without praise. Simply acknowledge it from a neutral place—simply state the facts.

For example, in your inventory, if you wrote something along the lines of “My husband and I are currently separated.” This could be acknowledged by saying something like, “I acknowledge that my husband and I are separated, and I acknowledge that I am at a new point in my life. I acknowledge I need to make a choice about whether I will do what it takes to work on the marriage or whether I will file for divorce.” This is all without judgement.

Start with the phrase “I acknowledge that...” and go from there. Start with that phrase for each item in your inventory, if necessary. Again, this process may take several days, but it is important for you to go through everything. It is important to hear yourself say it, see it in front of you, and to really *get it* in order to move to the next step.

Chapter 4: Being Grateful for it All

Gratitude turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion into clarity...it makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow. — Melody Beattie

Acknowledging “what is so” is a crucial part of healing oneself. A further step to this, and possibly even more powerful, is being in gratitude. But this may not look like your normal practice of gratitude. What you get to do is be grateful for what is—all of it. Not just the “good stuff.” Some things about your life you may absolutely love, and for those it is easy to be grateful, but the opportunity here is to be grateful for everything: good or bad, right or wrong, inspiring or disastrous.

To be grateful for it all allows us to recognize and acknowledge that we are not in the same place as before, that we are growing and learning, and are a work in progress. It gives us the opportunity to gain wisdom, insight, and certainty. You have the opportunity to surrender and be

BECAUSE I SAY SO

thankful for all of it. For the life lessons. For the hurt, the pain, the fact that you have been able to survive so far. For the opportunity to learn, to grow, and to feel.

This will take some serious connection with and compassion for, yourself. Yes, that means being grateful for being cheated on, or losing your job, or being grateful for a debilitating illness you have. All of it. What this now opens up is the opportunity to see a bigger picture, and to create something new. You may have to dig deep to see what losing that job, or amassing that giant pile of debt, or going through that divorce has actually opened up for you or led you towards. But being in gratitude allows a space for new growth and abundance.

It is so powerful to even be able to say, “I am grateful that I have the opportunity to learn a lesson through this,” even though you are not sure at this moment what the lesson is. Or to be able to say, “I am grateful I lost my job, because now I won’t have to worry and lose sleep every day thinking about the cutbacks. I am grateful that now I can move on to a new opportunity, and possibly find a job with more security.”

A Clean Slate

It seems like everywhere you turn these days, someone is doing a Gratitude Journey, or adding to a Gratitude Jar, or

sharing pics of their new Gratitude Journal on Facebook. While it seems like the practice of gratitude is the new trend, the practice has been around since pretty much the dawn of humanity, and is practiced in nearly all religions. However, if you're like I was, you may feel resistance to the idea of being grateful or practicing gratitude at first.

I grew up without an awful lot, and while I really was grateful for what I had, I was also often jealous of what other people had. I just wasn't raised to express gratitude. By no means was I raised not to be polite and or say "thank you" for what I received; nor was I unaware that I was fortunate to have what I had, which was a lot more than some people. I surmise that after the multiple generations of dysfunction my family had been through, they found little to be grateful for, and so it was never a practice in my family. On the contrary, resentment and bitterness was. Believe me when I say that learning to find what I was grateful for in my life on a regular basis was uncomfortable and difficult for me at first.

Similarly, envy, cynicism, and materialism cause us to dwell on comparison, which also makes it more difficult to feel authentically grateful for the way things are or for what we do have. For those of us who have high expectations of ourselves, we may feel as if we have no right to be grateful for things that are below our expected result. Some of us have been beating ourselves up for so long that we may be resistant to any form of positive self-recognition. Feelings of guilt can

also get in the way of expressing gratitude, especially when we feel ashamed of having more than others do, or are more successful than those around us.

You may also have a difficult time expressing your gratitude at this point because now that you are getting honest about the way things are, you're not exactly thrilled with what you see. Some of you may have to "go through the motions" of the practice of gratitude for a bit. I challenge you to keep going and digging deeper to find what you can and should be grateful for, especially if you are feeling resistant. There is actual scientific evidence that the practice of gratitude can change your brain, and it becomes easier.¹ By being grateful, we focus on the positive, our fears start to become more insignificant, and we can move into a state of abundance. Like there was for me when I was finally willing to push through the resistance and "go there" on my own journey, I promise that there is something for you to discover on the other side.

You are going to be practicing surrender and acceptance. Allow yourself to say, "Awesome! This is where I am, and all the cards are on the table. I have some work to do, but I get to start things off on a clean slate without the burden of emotional energy that distracts me from what I truly want to create in my life." Once you move into a clean space of being

¹ Joel Wong, Joshua Brown. (June 6, 2017). "How Gratitude Changes You and Your Brain." https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_gratitude_changes_you_and_your_brain

in gratitude, you are then opening a space to forgive yourself and others, to let things go, and to pave the way towards being your authentic, powerful self.

Journal Work

Take a look at everything you acknowledged in your previous work. Write down everything you are grateful for. Start with "I am grateful for..." and then explain why you are grateful, step by step, piece by piece. For some things, it may come easily, and flow freely; for others, you may have to do some real internal work to come up with some reason why you are grateful. But challenge yourself to really be grateful for it all. Find the silver lining in everything.

If you get stuck, ask yourself:

What opportunity or possibility could arise from that particular person, circumstance, or event having been in your life?

What do you see possible now?

What are you now more clear about?

Even if your entire world is crashing down around you, true gratitude will support you in finding hope.

Chapter 5: Declaring Your Vision

A vision is not just a picture of what could be; it is an appeal to our better selves, a call to become something more.

— Rosabeth Moss Kanter

If you had a magic wand, and could make things exactly the way you wanted them to be in your life, what would that look like? What stirs you? Excites you? Drives you? How do you see yourself when you envision yourself at your best—your greatest? What may seem entirely possible or on the contrary, utterly impossible at this present moment is not important. What's important is seeing the vision as though it is “so.”

While dreams and visions are quite similar, there is a distinction. A dream happens while you are asleep and is a fantasy while you are awake. A vision is a construct of our conscious mind, one that is based in reality while we are awake. A vision is created, while a dream simply “appears.” Vision comes from authentic connection with our true selves, and has nothing to do with wishing, hoping, or imagining.

Having a vision for yourself and your life is important, as

DECLARING YOUR VISION

our visions drive our ways of being, our commitments, and our actions. Without a clear vision, we operate blindly, moving through our lives as though driving a car in the middle of nowhere, at night, with no headlights on. Our vision becomes the guiding light that steers us on our way, navigating us on our journey. Once our vision becomes clear, it becomes the solid foundation and driving force from which everything else can thrive.

I Dreamed a Dream... or Five

When I was a child, I dreamed of being on stage, in front of an audience of hundreds— yep, all eyes on me! I told anyone who would listen that I was going to be a “performer” specifically because I didn’t want to box myself into being “only” a singer, or a dancer, or an actress. I wanted to be a “triple threat” like Olivia Newton-John, and had my sights set on it. If you don’t know who this is, I invite you to grab your popcorn and watch the movie *Grease*, and I challenge you not to want to be her, too. (And that’s not just for the women!)

I also had a dream of becoming a millionaire, owning my own business, being my own boss, because also very early on (I believe by the age of four), I had decided that I was a leader and not a follower. My sister can vouch for this, as I always made her act as my employee for all the businesses I started

from the age of 8, including the car wash/ gardening service, the amusement park in the backyard, the modeling agency, the dance company (I even had real clients!), the “dressed-up-bear” company, and later, the grocery service for the elderly, the cleaning company—and the list goes on.

For years, I performed whenever I could, through elementary and into high school, when I decided that I was going to study Musical Theater in college. I went to a local community college and immersed myself in the study of music, voice, dance, and acting. By the end of my three-year program, after comparing myself to others, I concluded that I wasn't a good enough singer to compete, so I decided to pursue acting only at a four-year college. I dreamed of being an actress on Broadway. I absolutely loved becoming different characters, exploring their motivations and practicing the harnessing of emotions, and bringing this to an audience, hoping I could move or inspire or affect their lives in some way with what I uniquely had to offer.

After studying acting and theater for three years, doing relatively well, I decided that acting was no longer my “thing.” I decided I wasn't good enough and that I didn't have it in me to deal with the rejection of auditions, so I gave up on the idea of becoming an actress for good. (Notice a pattern?)

However, since I now had my degree, and needed to find a job and grow up, I ended up getting a job as a high school English teacher, doing the thing I vowed I would never, ever

DECLARING YOUR VISION

do in my life...teach. (Hey, at least it wasn't junior high!) My mom was a teacher, so growing up I had the inside scoop on what teaching was like, and even though I was a kid, I quickly decided I wanted none of that. But teaching is exactly where I ended up, so I concluded that this was where I was meant to be, and I decided that my dream was now to make an impact on the youth of the world. This was short-lived, however, because within the next five years, I started my publishing company, and finally pursued my dream of being an entrepreneur!

All this to share with you that while I had many dreams throughout my life, it took me a really long time to realize that I actually had only one clear vision for myself, always resonating below the surface, trying desperately to fully manifest itself. I kept unknowingly creating a version of it in my life, as I navigated being a stage performer, wanting to touch and move those in the audience, to being a teacher and wanting to influence those young lives, to creating my publishing company with the mission of helping make teachers' lives easier, and finally owning the training center, and being committed to helping people create a life they love. For over 20 years I was disconnected with what I really wanted deep down, so I wandered aimlessly, following dream after dream, desperately trying to find my place and the "answer," that would make me happy and fulfilled.

It wasn't until that fateful day very recently that I referred

to in the Preface that I finally listened to that undeniable tugging in my core, and then started to take action on it, with the distinct awareness and acceptance that I don't know exactly what it will end up looking like out in the world, but I am clear about what my vision is, and what my life gets to be about. *My vision for myself is to use my unique gifts as a writer, educator, and entrepreneur to inspire others to be their authentic selves, and to share their own unique gifts with the world.*

Perhaps your vision for your life has always been clear, or maybe it has changed as you have experienced life, had challenges, and grown. And perhaps it will change again. But getting clear with your vision *now* is powerful, and will be a guiding light for your journey for the rest of your life, even if the specifics change. Maybe you are just like me, and have had many dreams, but never really figured out or fully connected with your vision. Maybe you are clear about parts of your vision, but it isn't driving you right now. I want to challenge you to look past only your dreams. What underlying vision have you always had for yourself? What nags at you? What pulls you? Remember, you are not looking for a hope, a wish, or an imagining. What's that thing that you would put everything on the line to be, do, or have, while it may even seem impossible at this very moment? What are you doing or experiencing when you close your eyes and picture yourself happy, fulfilled, and content?

But What If?

Some of you may be going into a mild panic at this point. Breathe. You may even be saying, “I don’t even know what I’m going to have for dinner; I sure as heck don’t know what my vision for my life is!” And that’s OK. Remember all that crap I went on and on about? The stories about me being a performer, and a teacher, and a candlestick maker? It’s absolutely OK to be all over the place. This is not going to be the be-all and end-all of your vision creating. You have had dreams, and you are going to continue having them. Your vision may be crystal clear, or it may be as clear as mud. Maybe you are at a place in your life you never envisioned, and are thinking, “How the hell did I get here?” All of this is great, and awesome to notice.

I invite you to do the work anyway and see what comes up for you. This may require you letting go of your stories that start with “I could never...” “I see myself (blank), but... I’m too ____ (old, fat, bald, young, short, untalented, poor, uneducated...), or “I have always wanted to (blank), but ____ (it was never the right time, I don’t have the time, I have kids now, I still live at my parent’s house...). As long as you keep telling yourself your stories, as long as you keep making excuses, you shut the door to possibility. Trust your intuition and go where your heart wants to lead you. You may be

surprised by what reveals itself to you.

And remember, no one is going to be checking your homework five years from now. Allow yourself to be a work in progress and go with the flow.

Journal Work

Complete the following statements in your journal. Once you are complete, say each one out loud. Write down anything and everything that authentically comes up for you.

Very important! Be sure that you are stating what you envision for yourself in a positive and forwarding way—not as though you are trying to solve a problem. For example, avoid saying “My vision for my health is to not be overweight and unhealthy.” Instead, say something like: “My vision for my health is to be lean, muscular, and a positive role model for healthy eating for my children.”

Further, be sure that you are not describing a process, the how, or the why, but the result you are looking for. For example, instead of “My vision for my finances/money matters is to pay my bills on time every month,” use “My vision for my finances/money matters is that all my bills be paid early or on time, with at least \$200 left over in the bank after bills are paid each month.”

DECLARING YOUR VISION

Complete the following statements:

- My vision for myself is..
- My vision for my family/relationships is..
- My vision for my finances/money matters is..
- My vision for my job/career is..
- My vision for my health is..
- My vision for my community/the world is..

Chapter 6: Because I Say So

Your word is the power that you have to create; it is a gift.

— Don Miguel Ruiz

Words are powerful: they can create things, and they can destroy things. Words also have the power to inspire, to soothe, and to hurt. Words are so powerful that a single declaration can bring forth something from nothing. They have the power to name things for common agreement of communication: for example, in English we agree to call a table, “table.” Some of us even have words ringing in our heads that loved ones, friends, or lovers said to us many years ago.

This is why we must be very, very careful what we say. There is a popular saying whose origin is debated: “Where your mind goes, energy flows.” This means that what we put our thoughts on, and further, when we speak into what we are thinking, we shift our energy to those thoughts and words. Essentially, when we put our energy on negative thoughts, we are taking energy off the positive. Words are the same. When

we speak negatively, we move our energy (and emotions) onto these negatives, and take our energy off the positive. It is through our word that we manifest everything.

Scientifically, we know that energy can neither be created nor destroyed. We have infinite energy, and it is all around us, constantly flowing. So, the question is: Where do you want to put your energy?

Jury Duty and the DMV

About a year ago, I was called for jury duty. I am one of those people who actually loves going to jury duty, and I get called nearly every year. If you've ever been called to jury duty, at least in California, you show up at the courthouse and check in to a large holding room, where there are usually about 100 people waiting. You wait in this room for your number to be called, sometimes an entire day. If it is called, you then receive instructions on whether you need to proceed to a courtroom, or whether you have been dismissed and can go home.

How many different thoughts and feelings do you think are being experienced in that jury holding room? There is the businessman who is pissed he has to be there, and gets frustrated and raises his voice to the court clerk about some "mistake" that has been made in his paperwork. There is the

18-year-old, who has no idea what to expect, and is curious and excited about being a part of the process for the first time. There is the frazzled stay-at-home mom, who had to take her kids to her mother's house 2 hours away to be there, and is worried about whether her kids are behaving OK and dreading the possibility of having to do this more than one day. There is the cynical woman who tried to be dismissed and was rejected, and bitches about it and the entire process to anyone in the room who will listen. There is the quiet grandmother, who calmly opens her bag to knit while she waits. There is the student who welcomes the distraction from his rowdy roommates, and who brought his backpack, finds an open desk, and writes an entire paper while waiting. I can go on.

How many times have you said, "Jury duty is a waste of time" or "The DMV sucks"? Jury duty is not inherently anything except jury duty. The DMV does not inherently suck. It just is what it is. We make up and speak into our interpretation of jury duty or the DMV, and work very hard to create evidence (i.e. find other people out there who agree) to support our interpretations so that we can be right.

Of course the businessman who is already pissed he has to be there gets into it with the clerk about some confusion in his paperwork. Of course the cynical woman was rejected for dismissal. Of course the student brought his backpack and was prepared to get work done in those long hours.

Subconsciously or consciously, each one of these people had decided how they are going to “be” about this event called “waiting in the jury room.” Further, their interpretation dictated their results. How they chose to be about jury duty made for either an aggravating or a productive result.

There can be so, so many ways to interpret something. And the way we interpret something is then how we interact with it. We are so powerful, we will even author situations and events to support us being right about the way we have it. Be aware of your interpretations, and especially what you say out loud. For when you say it, so it is...

The Lies We Feed Ourselves

Here’s the thing: we know that we are all holding onto thoughts and beliefs about ourselves that don’t serve us. We may not know exactly where they are coming from, except that they are deep in our subconscious, and decide to poke their heads out without warning. As children, we hear the words of our parents, our teachers, our siblings, our friends. And their words—their perspectives, thoughts and opinions—shape our perspectives, thoughts, and opinions.

But remember, these perspectives, thoughts, and opinions from the mouths of others come from their own subconscious understandings and beliefs (which have come from their

parents, teachers, etc., and so on). But as children we take what we hear as the truth. To give a very simple (and common) example, this is why when we heard our father say, “Big boys don’t cry,” we believed it as truth. And because we did want to be a big boy, we held back our tears, and shut off our emotions, and judged any boy who did cry as weak, and made sure our feelings were held back and controlled, and made judgements about people based on how much emotion they showed, and believed it is not important or necessary to express emotions or feelings in a relationship, and were thusly accused of being “closed off.” You can see how powerful words can be, and how lasting.

And we do this constantly with ourselves, even as adults today. We tell ourselves that we are not smart enough, or attractive enough, or outgoing enough, or talented enough — and the list goes on. We feed ourselves words that we live into and put our energy on. And we actually create real live evidence of how untalented, unattractive, or stupid we are to support this—that’s that energy flowing! Think about what you could create if you stopped believing all the lies you tell yourself and instead directed that powerful energy into actually believing that you are attractive, talented, or intelligent. When you are able to understand that you are constantly wielding energy, and become conscious to where you put your energy, a new perspective opens up.

BECAUSE I SAY SO

If nothing else, get that you are creating your reality, constantly. You may be thinking, “Sure. So, you are saying that if I just declare that I have the body of a model, then I could actually be a model?” Um, yes, that’s pretty much exactly what I am saying. But you have to convince your subconscious thoughts that you are not messing around, and that you really want this. You have to be about this, fully committed—to believe and operate as it is “so,” like it already is—to create the environment and surround yourself with anything and everything that supports this vision, and completely remove what doesn’t from your life.

Notice I am not even suggesting that you need to get into shape, and tan, and bleach, get an agent, shoot a portfolio, or whatever it takes to be a model. If that is a part of your vision, then make it happen. What I am asserting is that even if you are 100 pounds overweight, or are 4’11” or are in a wheelchair, if your vision is to be a model, and you align your thoughts, your words, and your actions with this vision, then you can absolutely become a model, without a doubt. People do not achieve the extraordinary by telling themselves they are ordinary. Stop putting your energy on the lies and your limiting beliefs and start declaring what you do want...
BECAUSE YOU SAY SO.

Making Powerful Declarations

As we refine our vision for ourselves, we are then able to make declarations, or assertions, about how we want things to be. Out of declarations, we make commitments to ourselves and others, which lead to ways of being and actions that support this vision. We get to make these declarations and speak them into being, simply because we say so. Not because we have proof, not because we have evidence, not because we know things will turn out, but purely because we have the power to create what we want simply by speaking into it.

Declarations are powerful statements that give shape to our actions and ways of being. By making a declaration, you are *declaring*—making a clear statement to the universe—what you say you will have happen. We are more familiar with affirmations, as affirmations act as declarations of what we say “is.” When you make a declaration, you are not only stating what you want to have happen, but at that moment, you become an active participant in the declaration actually occurring. In other words, our energy immediately begins to flow in this direction, and we instantly become that version of ourselves that lives into that declaration being true. You begin to live and breathe into what is so, at the moment you make the declaration. Declarations then become how you participate in life, shaping the way you live.

BECAUSE I SAY SO

As we choose to be that powerful human being capable of overcoming even our most difficult challenges and struggles, we literally become the person it takes to overcome those difficult challenges and struggles. This is not to say that once we make a declaration, we can sit back, relax with a glass of wine and wait for the universe to do its work. In fact, how you are being about the declaration, or how you are living into the declaration can take work. It takes commitment, and commitment takes action. It will take an alignment with who you are being to create actual tangible results before you. But it starts with a vision and a declaration.

Journal Work

Complete the following declarative statements in your journal. Once you have completed the declarations, say each one out loud. Then write down anything and everything that authentically came up for you in completing and speaking these declarations aloud.

I declare that I am...

I declare that I will be...

I declare that I will do...

I declare that I will have...

BECAUSE I SAY SO

I declare that I will learn...

I declare that I will see...

I declare that I will share...

I declare that I will experience...

Chapter 7: Discovering Your Why

I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live up to what light I have. — Abraham Lincoln

So far on this journey of discovery, you have gotten honest with what your life looks like and where you are, acknowledged and expressed gratitude for it, created your vision and made your declarations. The question to ask yourself now is: *why*?

Why do you want to learn and grow and become more powerful or a better person or start that business or have that family? Of course, we all want to experience things like pride, love, happiness, peace, and fulfillment. But experiencing these emotions is not enough. You could experience happiness from eating an ice cream cone and not put yourself through all that work. Your reason and purpose must be stronger than you alone. It must be more powerful than your doubts. It must be louder than the voices in your head telling you to give up. You now have your vision statements, and

have made your declarations, so why are these things important to you?

What is going to get you out of bed in the morning? What drives you? What inspires you? What is the reason for you to do what you do? What will give you that extra strength and courage when you need it most?

A way to discover your why is to ask yourself what are you at risk of losing or *not* having if you choose not to see your vision through. What will you never see or do or experience if you do not see your vision through? Who or what will you lose? Who will you let down?

To have a vision is, in itself, powerful, but the work must happen once you have declared that vision. You must discover your why—and it must be powerful enough that it will motivate, inspire, and kick your ass into achieving that vision for yourself. Because you will fail. You will be faced with naysayers and criticism. You will find yourself not wanting to get out of bed in the morning to do “it” all over again. You will get tired and weak, and you will doubt yourself. Your why must be powerful enough to get you through all that and more.

Clarity is Sexy

A few months ago, I decided that I was done being

overweight: or, obese, to be more accurate. I decided to do a program that came highly recommended and met with my coach to onboard. On our first call, she asked me if I had a why for getting healthy once and for all. I quickly answered “Yes. Of course I have my why.” My why was that I was tired of feeling fat, my clothes not fitting, and feeling less than sexy, and I had surmised that was all pretty good for a why and went on my merry way.

But something stayed with me, nagging at me. After some work and honest exploration, I had to admit that my why totally sucked. It took some work for me to realize that I was deliberately choosing to have these weak “whys” so that I didn’t have to fully commit and give it everything I had, (which meant getting uncomfortable and facing life without my binky, aka alcohol), and so that I could be right: right that another diet didn’t work, and that I was always going to be fat. By this, I could keep myself bitter, ashamed, and playing small and reinforcing limiting beliefs that I am weak, not good enough, and not worthy of being successful.

These beliefs could then keep me away from putting myself out there to get hurt in another relationship, keep me lazy and in my comfort zone, and could keep me playing a small game. I was sabotaging my win before I even had a chance. My why was not strong enough or personal enough to keep me going, to push me through challenges, or pick me up where I failed, and I had subconsciously designed it to be that

way.

I am getting healthy because I am committed to being an exemplary role model for my daughter, to being the source of becoming the best version of self, and because I get to have my external self align with and reflect the powerful woman I am on the inside.

Losing the weight and getting myself healthy is the last step in finally ridding myself of the baggage and stories I carried both internally and externally for far too many years. It makes sense that this was difficult for me to see at first. For a long time, my identity was attached to these stories. It is scary to let go, and to rid myself of the armor that kept me safe for so long. But I get to step into the courage to take my health on because my why propels me, and your why gets to drive and propel and inspire you, too.

Journal Work

Look back on your vision statements. I invite you to be still and reflect on just why you would want to put yourself through what you might need to (i.e. financial risk, criticism, self-doubt, rejection, etc.) in order to have your vision be realized. Your “why” should be deeply personal to you. Don’t worry about it making sense to other people, as long as you totally get it. But you must get it so clearly and so intently that it nearly moves you

DISCOVERING YOUR WHY

to tears. You may know what your why is right away, or you may have to work at it, and keep reflecting and coming back to it.

Write your why for your vision statement for each domain. Some of your whys may be similar, and that is OK. Let your whys be real—and raw—and give yourself permission to experience them fully.

Part Two: Busting Your Asphalt

Chapter 8: The Myth of Fearlessness

We suffer more often in imagination than in reality. —

Seneca

I am going to go out on a limb here and claim that the number one thing that stops people from being authentically who they are and having what they want to have in life is fear. Perhaps by now you are experiencing a little (or a lot) of fear as your life comes more into focus. You have created your vision and made your declarations, and found your why. Maybe you are feeling excited, or “pumped” and ready to take on the world! Or maybe, you are experiencing that all-too-familiar feeling of fear. And possibly, you may be experiencing a mix of emotions.

You may have heard of the term “fight or flight,” which refers to a physiological reaction to stress. Hormones surge through our bodies and prepare us to either stay and deal with the stressor, or run away to safety. First described by

American physiologist Walter Cannon, this response represents the choice our ancient ancestors faced millions of years ago. Truly, it is in our DNA to not only mentally experience fear (whether real or imagined, it does not matter), but to have a true physical reaction to it and to want to either face up to it or run away from it.

Remember, we can experience the fight or flight response from a “real” fear, such as an impending attack from a saber-toothed tiger, or from an “imagined” fear, such as what may show up for us emotionally when we are walking alone down a dark alley at night and our thoughts race with perceived doom. Either way, we may begin to feel a physical reaction: this physiological response.

Fear is actually very simple, yet the energy we put on fear, and what we do or don’t do with it, makes it one of the most significant and complex factors of our lives. Fear can be a result of a single traumatic event, or it can develop gradually. We can experience fear from our thoughts like the fear of being alone, or a fear of heights, or fear of an object, like the fear of spiders. When we are experiencing true fear, we experience distinguishable physical reactions—the fight or flight response.

However, we as a society, have become very comfortable with throwing that word “fear” around generously, whether something is just merely an annoyance or something we feel uncomfortable with, or whether we actually experience a true

“fight or flight” physical reaction. Think about the things you claim to be afraid of. Do you truly have a fear of heights, or do you simply get a knot in your stomach when you are in a tall building or up high? Are you truly afraid of needles, or would you simply prefer not to look and get lightheaded when you have to give blood? Do you really have a fear of being alone, or is it just that you get lonely and don’t like the feeling of being with only your thoughts? Do you truly have a “fear of success” or is it that you are just scared shitless to be a big person and go out and do whatever it takes to make it happen?

When Fear’s in Charge

Let’s take a look at Ella’s situation. Ella is terrified of speaking in public in front of any size audience. “I just can’t do it. My palms sweat, I can’t breathe, I get dizzy, I have trouble thinking, and I get sick to my stomach. These feelings are real—this fear is real.” Ella truly believes she has a fear of speaking in public. The fear is real and debilitating. If Ella were to continue, she would tell you that she avoids speaking in meetings, and although she is a super intelligent woman and can lead a small team in private, she does not take the lead in her team’s presentations publicly. Because of this, Ella has been overlooked for promotions, and remains stagnant in her position in her company. It is clear that Ella’s fear has a

hold on her. It controls her; it “has her by the throat” as one of my good friends would say.

So, what happens when fear “has” us? The first thing to do is breathe. As human beings, we need fear to kick in so that we can survive. But things have become more complicated as we have evolved into this modern age. The lines of what it means to survive, and the definition of “threat” have blurred. While Ella is not in any physical danger standing in front of the room and speaking to a group of people, her body may be reacting as though she were. But why? Simply, because her brain is telling her so. Ella is holding on to the belief that speaking is equivalent to being in danger. Her brain has been conditioned to believe this, and so it responds physically. As long as she interacts with this fear in this way, continuing to allow it to control her in this way, the fear will perpetuate, and may even become worse, eventually.

As a society, we interact with fear universally, whether it is a threat to our basic survival, or a threat to our perception of ourselves. For some people, the fear of inadequacy and not looking like a success to “friends” on Facebook carries with it nearly the same energy as the fear of losing their job or home. We claim to want to overcome our fears, yet we seem to want to surround ourselves with more of them every day. We use fear as the “all-purpose” emotion and excuse. We have an obsession with announcing our fears, finding comfort and camaraderie in all the fears and phobias that we carry. FOMO

—Fear of Missing Out—is actually a thing! Can you imagine traveling back in time 400,000 years ago and telling our ancestors: “Oh, yah, I sooo get what you’re saying about being afraid that you might be attacked by that wooly mammoth that you are trying to hunt so that you can eat for the next three months. I totally felt exactly that feeling when I was afraid I missed out on that concert that everyone was talking about. But I got tickets, so, yay me! But I get what you mean about fear...”

Fear is paralyzing us and it is controlling us. We have been giving our fears more power than our strengths, and it is time to knock it off. It’s time to take a look at how we are throwing that word “fear” around, and further to recognize where we allow ourselves to be a slave to our fears.

The Audacity of Courage

A few years ago, a woman I was coaching said, “All I want is to be done with this fear. I have been so afraid of everything my whole life. I am tired of it. I want to be fearless!”

Let me be clear about this: There is no such thing as being “fearless.” Fear is a basic emotion, one that is hardwired in our brains. And although I think we are throwing the word “fear” around carelessly at times, fear will always exist—and it must, in order for us to survive! I am encouraging you to be

THE MYTH OF FEARLESSNESS

mindful about what you label as “fear,” and when you allow your fears to have the best of you and to control you. However, we do need to accept the fact that fear does exist and always will. Fear is never going to completely disappear and suddenly become non-existent. It may lessen, possibly significantly with some work, but some form or level of fear will always be with you. We can never truly be fearless, and should accept that so we are not constantly chasing after the carrot we will never reach.

It is important also to make a distinction between fearlessness and courage. Fearlessness is the lack of fear. We may not experience fear in some aspects of our life, and for those aspects, arguably, we can behave fearlessly. What we have no fear about we put very little energy on. You may even have a difficult time coming up with things you are truly not afraid of doing, since you spend so little time and energy thinking about doing them, and you just do them, naturally. For example, I have no fear of eating vegetables. I am fearless when eating all kinds of veggies, and I am even willing to try new and exotic ones. When it comes to eating my veggies, I am fearless.

Courage is the ability and willingness to do something in the face of fear. Fear (or pain, or grief) must be present to exhibit courage. Those who are courageous experience fear, but do not allow fear to stop them. They experience the fear and move forward anyway. We develop courage by doing what

we fear no matter what emotions come up. Although I have quite a bit of experience on stage, I still experience nervousness and some fear when I step onto a stage, especially with a large audience, or when I am not totally confident I have practiced well enough. However, because I know that speaking on stage is part of my vision, I am able to muster the courage to bust through this fear and nervousness over and over again, and stepping onto the stage gets easier each time.

I challenge you to stop chasing after that elusive “fearlessness” and instead, practice courage. The more we practice courage, the less our fears “have” us—the less power and control they have over us. Start to practice courage in small ways. Take baby steps and work your way up to the bigger things, if you must—keep going, keep working, one step at a time, through the fear. Breathe. Remind yourself, “Of course I am experiencing fear. But I am also experiencing courage.” And go for it.

Journal Work

As you make this journey, you may come across fears about yourself that you have held onto for a very long time. Many of these fears come from certain events, and others are built into your psyche over time. But

THE MYTH OF FEARLESSNESS

holding on to fear can be paralyzing, and it can be what keeps our vision in hibernation.

Write about the fears that you have. Have you ever thought about where these fears come from? What scares you the most? This can be something tangible like snakes, or it can be intangible, like the thought of losing your home or the death of a loved one.

Make a distinction between those things that you have been claiming as fears and those that actually are real true fears.

What "fears" have you been using as an excuse?

What are you avoiding by holding onto these fears?

What would be possible if you were to practice courage and went forward anyway?

If your fears are debilitating or are affecting your life, what support do you need in order to begin to face or overcome these fears and regain your power?

What actions are you willing to take to get support?

Chapter 9: No Shame (or Guilt) in Your Game

Your shame hides in many places – in anger, blame, denial, workaholism, perfectionism, drinking, and anything else you compulsively engage in to make yourself feel better. But if you could just learn to be vulnerable for one second, and open up to the pain, you would find there's no place left for your shame to hide. — Adam Appleson

Dr. Brené Brown, famed researcher on vulnerability and shame, said, “Shame corrodes the very part of us that believes we are capable of change.”²

Shame is a powerful emotion and can often be the emotion that can make a person believe he or she is damaged irreparably. When we carry shame, we hide our full, true selves for the sake of believing that we are not enough...not good enough, worthy enough, attractive enough, etc.

² Brené Brown (March 20, 2013). “Shame corrodes the very part of us that believes we are capable of change.” Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/brenebrown/status/314532265382256640?lang=en>

NO SHAME (OR GUILT) IN YOUR GAME

Shame is like a dark, heavy blanket, that keeps our light hidden. Shame comes from beliefs of unworthiness, inadequacy, wrongdoing, regret, and guilt. It motivates us to hide, shrink, and isolate. It feeds the belief that we are bad, flawed, wrong, and damaged. Shame contributes to withdrawal and avoidance, and can lead to depression, aggression, anxiety, and addiction. Truly, shame can be one of the most potentially dangerous emotions that we experience.

With guilt, the focus is outwards. When we experience feelings of guilt, we feel responsible that a wrongdoing occurred towards someone else. This is different from shame, which focuses on the self.

Have you ever been in an argument and deliberately chose to say something you knew would be hurtful to the other person? We feel guilty that we hurt the other person's feelings (outward), but also, feel ashamed that we would deliberately choose to say something hurtful (self). We then would likely apologize to that person, but many of us will continue to beat ourselves up for being a jerk—so much so, that we hold on to this moment for months, days, and years, looking back and continuing to feel shame for our actions, and adding proof every time we do something that we feel can “back up” that feeling.

How much shame are you holding onto? And for what? For so many of us, there may have been some action or situation or circumstance 20, 30, 40 years ago that sparked

the shame, but we hold onto it as if it happened mere days ago and allow it to shape our emotions and define our lives right now. We still continue to punish ourselves and beat ourselves up, often totally subconsciously. We still continue to hide our true gifts, abilities, and talents from the world, and make choices that limit us and hold us back from living our full potential because of these shaming beliefs.

By holding onto shame and guilt, we are robbing our family, friends, and the world from our authentic self. To hold onto shame, we unconsciously become more and more self-centered. We focus so much on our own yuck that we cannot bring ourselves to be “all-in” in our lives. Holding onto shame is like trying to turn a doorknob with both hands tied behind your back. Feelings of shame and guilt keep us bound and restrained and in darkness, rather than free and living at full potential. When we allow ourselves to continue to bask in shame and guilt, it is yet another way of keeping us out of our light and invested in playing small in our lives. By getting real with what we hold onto, owning that it “happened” and that it is not *who we are*, we can begin to let go of these destructive emotions and start to move on with what is important in our lives.

You may not need to hear this, but I felt it necessary to add. Remember to be kind to yourself. Some of us are always so very hard on ourselves. We are good people, working very hard to live our best lives. We will screw up once in a while.

NO SHAME (OR GUILT) IN YOUR GAME

Just keep reminding yourself that given your circumstances and situation, and all the choices you had at the time, you made the absolute best choice you had available to you. You may not have liked the outcome of those choices, but it is no longer necessary or appropriate to beat yourself up for what happened in the past. You now have the opportunity to move on, and to create something new in this present moment. I invite you to instead take responsibility, and make new choices that empower you and move you toward your vision.

Journal Work

Write about what is occurring for you on the topic of shame and guilt. What are you holding onto? Is it shame? Is it guilt? What happened? Who was there?

How did it make you feel?

What is coming up for you about this experience now?

Is this something you are willing to let go of?

What would your life be like if you were to let go of the feelings attached to this event and were to allow the process of healing to begin?

Deep-rooted feelings of shame and guilt sometimes require the help of a professional. What support do you need? What actions are you willing to take?

Chapter 10: The Thief of Joy

Stay in your lane. Comparison kills creativity and joy. —

Brené Brown

In this age of social media, I felt it necessary to talk about comparison. If you're like most people, you likely check in on social media, read about what your friends are up to, and perhaps post a photo or share a snippet about what's on your mind at least once a day. According to a recent study by the Pew Research Center, 68% of American adults use Facebook, and out of that, 74% of those users say they visit the site daily.³

We are constantly being barraged with one-dimensional narratives about what others are about on a daily basis, and unless we personally see that particular person on a regular basis, we have no idea whether these stories are real or embellished. The majority of the time, we accept these posts as truth, and go about our day.

³ Aaron Smith, Monica Anderson, "Social Media Use in 2018," Accessed March 27, 2019. <https://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/>.

Only we don't always just go about our day. For some of us, we think about those posts, and those people, and look at our lives, and think, "What am I doing wrong?" We get stuck in the clutches of comparison, surveying our own lives against celebrities', trendsetters', influencers', and our friends' lives and for most of us, we do not come close to having the lifestyle, relationships, money, vacations, friends, or the career that it seems everyone else has. So, many people push harder, buy more, even feign how happy and "together" they are, just so that they can keep up.

Theodore Roosevelt is credited with saying "Comparison is the thief of joy." To constantly compare yourself to others can be addictive and depressing. The problem is that it is never-ending. We can do all the "right" things, and still come up short compared to others. We can bend over backwards trying to be something we are not, and still find that there is always someone else who has more, does it better, or looks better doing it.

Little Green Monster

I had gotten myself caught in the comparison game with my publishing company not long after I started the company. At the time I started my company in 2005, I felt I had a new and unique idea, and was building a company from the

ground up from literally nothing but an idea and a desire. In 2006, I heard about a brand-new little online company I thought would be a great idea to sell my products with, so I posted my products there and watched the sales roll in. My products sold like crazy and my brand began to thrive. For two years, I was the top seller on the site, earning in one month the same amount I made in nearly three months of teaching. I was interviewed by magazines and newspapers about all this amazing money I was receiving, bringing exposure and publicity to this site. Word spread, and by 2008, this little online company began to gain huge traction. By this time, I had been so preoccupied with building my company outside of this site that I was bumped as the top seller, however I still did pretty well for myself.

As this online company grew, I faced more competition than ever from other teachers selling their products, and everything moved very quickly. Soon, hundreds of thousands of teachers had signed up to sell their teaching materials on the site, and practically overnight, that little online company became a multi-million-dollar company, paying out millions of dollars to the top teacher/sellers. And while I was making decent money, I was unfortunately, not one of those millionaires. Where I had once been a top seller, I suddenly found myself now just one of the hundreds of thousands of sellers on the site, lost in the crowd.

But rather than taking this position and experience as an

opportunity to learn and grow and create, my soul-sucking subconscious thinking used it as the perfect opportunity to see myself as a complete failure and to spiral into constant thoughts of “What am I doing wrong?” “What do they have that I don’t have?” and “Their products are not better than mine! Why are they making the money and I’m not?” I was consumed with debilitating thoughts of “could haves” and “should haves.” I beat myself up for spending so much time on creating my business outside of this site, and was angry that I had my eye on the wrong ball. I might have even thrown in a pathetic, “It’s not fair!” and a self-pitying “I’ll never be good enough!” a few times.

I became obsessed with comparing myself and my products to the others, and spent thousands of hours feverishly updating my products to compete. Instead of getting support and bouncing ideas off my fellow teacher/seller colleagues, I angrily isolated myself. Instead of celebrating the growth of the site and my increasing sales along with it, I lamented not being at the top. Although it’s embarrassing to admit, I constantly watched the “Top Seller” list for any change in my rank, and was pissed that I had worked so hard from the very beginning, and that others had passed me and earned their spot on the list of “Millionaire Sellers.” I wasn’t interested in celebrating others and being a part of the growth together. I wanted to be the best. I wanted to be on top. I threw a baby-fit and shut down my creativity. I

wallowed in self-pity and anger. Comparison had me by the throat. And I was so bear-trapped in the teeth of envy that it eventually stunted the growth of my company so badly that I am still working to fully recover my brand and to gain the recognition that I once had—even today.

What I didn't realize at the time was that it was possible to use what I was experiencing as a clue. Had I been aware of what was really going on, and had I stopped myself from the reaction, I could have used all of what was happening to empower, rather than destroy myself. If I had been able to step back and experience my emotions and then move on, rather than allowing them to control me, I could have used what was happening to gain perspective and to see all possibilities. But it was easier to be “right” and to gather evidence that I wasn't good enough, that everyone else was better than me and that I wasn't worthy of being at the top. At the time, it was easier for me to focus on how I was wronged, rather than doing the work to create something awesome for the company. It was easier for me to be envious than to be innovative. It was easier to play small and complain about it, than to step into a big game and play with the “big boys.”

It wasn't until I started this work that I really allowed myself to step back and look at what was occurring for me. Experiencing this envy was a clue that there was something for me to look at. I asked myself, why am I so angry and bitter? After some searching, I realized that I was envious

because others were achieving the level of success I wanted. I had to admit that I was not putting in the work to achieve that level of success. I had neglected updating products and joining promo parties and all the stuff others were doing to promote their products and gain exposure at the time. My focus was elsewhere—on building my company outside of this site. I measured myself to ideals that were apples and I was actually building oranges. I allowed comparison to steal my wins and to rob me of moving forward productively—for years. My limiting beliefs once again wanted evidence that I was a failure and a victim, and not good enough, and that’s all I wanted to see, so that’s all I saw at the time. Once I accepted all of this, and owned that I was creating all this strife—and drama and distraction—I was actually able to be creative and innovative, and began to breathe new life into the company with fresh ideas and new insight.

What Am I Missing?

Sometimes, we allow ourselves to play this comparison game because deep down, we feel as if we are lacking something within ourselves or are missing something in our lives. It’s why so many people look to self-help books and seminars. It’s why dating sites and apps are a multi-billion-dollar industry. It’s why we give up on our dreams to become

a dancer, or a doctor, or a writer, or stop ourselves from going for a job promotion or starting a company. It's why we compare ourselves to others, and fight to "keep up with the Joneses." It's how we live our lives constantly, obsessively saying "If only I... then I could..."

Whether talent, ability, a good vocabulary, strong people skills, a wild imagination, loads of money, the right timing, or the right partner, we often decide that we are missing something necessary and valuable, and it can become a crutch, trap, and excuse for not living fully. If the desire and will is strong enough, we will go after our vision and be about our commitment no matter what. No matter whether it's the right time, whether there is enough money, whether you know how to spell or write, whether you know how to set up equations in an Excel file, or whether you feel like an idiot doing it. If you want something badly enough and it truly matters to you, you will figure it out, find a way, and make it happen.

By focusing on reaction, emotion, envy, comparison, you are wasting valuable time and may actually be missing clues and signs that are meant to teach you something or guide you somewhere. Like my total disregard and unwillingness to do anything but compare and be angry and be right about being a total loser, I missed out on years that I could have been innovating, exploring new options, and creating new opportunities and possibilities, and creating huge wins. The

truth is, we are not lacking anything. We have everything we need—to be, to do, and to have everything we want. We just need to get out of our own way to see it sometimes.

When you find yourself stuck in envy or comparison, ask yourself powerful questions, and do the work. Stop allowing your smallness to try to distract you from being the big person you are meant to be. Powerful questions to ask are “What am I not seeing?” Or “What am I missing?” There is an important distinction here with this question that I want to be sure you notice: remember, YOU are not missing anything. This question is *not* asking “What am I lacking in myself or my life?” Instead, the question is asking what is it that you are choosing to ignore or not see? What could be some other possibilities, if you consciously step out of the patterns and beyond the stories and conditioning you have operated from so far in your life?

Try asking yourself these questions:

What is it that I am missing about this moment that I could learn from?

What am I missing about this opportunity that I am not willing to see?

What am I missing about this situation that could provide a clue about where I get to go next with myself?

BECAUSE I SAY SO

What is it about this (person, situation, story) that I am so drawn to and focused on?

What is my focus and fascination with this (person, situation, story) about—what is actually being revealed to me?

Journal Work

Take some time to journal the following: Who do you compare yourself to? What is it about this person (or people) that you admire, or want, or are fascinated by?

What do you see in this person that you find yourself comparing yourself or your life to them?

Is this person someone you know closely, or is it someone that you've never met?

Do they have something you want to have, or are they the kind of person you want to be? What is that about?

What would be possible for you if you stopped comparing yourself to this person and instead, viewed this person as a positive inspiration?

What would you have to let go of about yourself and your beliefs?

What would you have to embrace or accept about yourself?

Chapter 11: The Tag-Team of Stress and Conflict

It's not stress that kills us, it is our reaction to it.

— Hans Selye

Stress is the response of that fight or flight reaction we talked in previous chapters. Our bodies react physically, allowing us to either run or stay and fight. Stress comes from everywhere and can be a response to something negative like the stress of losing a job, or something positive, like getting a promotion. Whether in response to a positive or a negative stressor, stress causes physical and emotional problems if experienced often or for prolonged periods of time. Stress can lead to headaches, high blood pressure, problems sleeping, and more. It can also lead to longer term emotional distress, such as depression and anxiety.

Conflict is a struggle between opposing forces. It can be external, such as a fight or struggle between people, as in an argument, or it can be in internal, such as when we mentally

wrestle with a decision, choice, or desire. It can also be a combination of both, like when we are faced with a decision about whether we should stay in a relationship with someone or leave a doomed situation.

Conflict is more than a simple disagreement, like how to fill the dishwasher, or a simple choice, like whether we should choose a salad over a hamburger for lunch. Conflict involves a real or perceived threat, which can cause that stress response, fight or flight, and can then result in the physical and mental problems mentioned above. The more conflict we have in our lives, the more stress—and the more stress, the more issues that arise from it.

How we handle, or how we interact with and deal with stress and conflict is a choice. There will always be conflict and stress in our lives. That is a given. I would even go so far as to tell you to stop putting your energy on trying to avoid conflict or stress. What we should be putting our effort and energy on is managing how we interact with or *be* with the conflict and stress.

In Los Angeles, traffic is both horrendous and inevitable. We can all choose to be miserable about it, complaining about moving along at less than 10 miles per hour for two hours, and blaming it for making us late all the time, or we can choose to accept that the traffic is always going to be there. We can leave much earlier to account for the extra time in

traffic and listen to an audiobook and make positive use of the time, or we can choose to remain miserable and angry and stressed.

Notice when you find yourself bringing stress into a situation when there is none. There is no inherent stress in being in traffic. It is just traffic. It does what traffic does—it is fairly predictable. How we *be* about the traffic can either make us miserable and ruin our entire day, or it can be an opportunity to be productive and catch up on that book we've been wanting to read or those phone calls we've been meaning to make. How we choose to be about this potential stressor is up to us.

Similarly, stop looking for conflict. Stop creating problems in your relationships by putting your own insecurities on the other person. Stop looking for the other person to say something hurtful. Stop looking to catch them in a lie. Stop trying to create more evidence that you should not trust him or her. You are putting a stress on yourself, on the other person, and your relationship. By operating in this way, you will literally create hurtful words, lies, and distrust in your relationship. Stop trying to be right about how you are damaged goods—and keep your power.

Notice when you are feeling insecure or afraid how you interact in your relationships. So many of us put our own crap on other people and expect them to be responsible for solving it. Instead, keep your power and be about your vision.

Immerse yourself so much in being about what you want to create in your life that is forwarding, and full of possibility and purpose that you don't have the energy or time to create conflict or strife. Don't allow yourself to get so bored that you create drama by initiating conflict or criticizing others. Instead, seek opportunity for growth and forward movement, and be only about your commitment.

Avoidance

Growing up, I was the mediator for conflict. Whether I was in the middle of a fight between my mom and my ex-stepfather, or an argument between my mom and my sister, or as the sounding board for my mom's frustrations about my dad or other problems in her life, I always felt caught in the middle. The one needing to solve the problems, to hear both sides, and to make sure no one killed each other—figuratively, and at least once that I can remember, literally. Even as a very young child, this was my role. I didn't want to “rock the boat” any more than it was already rocking, so I kept my feelings to myself, and handled my conflict and stress internally with food and the obsessive pursuit of perfection.

By numbing myself out, I tried to avoid feeling anything, so that I didn't need to deal with anything. I could internalize the turmoil and treat myself like crap. I did this into my adult

years, numbing myself out rather than allowing myself to work through these emotions and until recently, I had never learned any positive, healthy ways to express my feelings of frustration, anger, or disappointment. I didn't realize it was even possible to experience these feelings and actually come out on the other side alive. As I practice this now, it becomes easier, and each time I feel more and more empowered.

How do you handle difficult emotions, such as fear, shame, conflict, and stress? For some of us, we have healthy systems of release, like meditation, a hot bath, a good cry with a friend, a cup of tea, or a good workout at the gym. However, there are some of us who are not so adept at dealing with these emotions. There are some of us who choose to simply avoid these feelings, whatever the cost, so that we do not have to experience dealing with them.

There are many reasons we avoid: to feel less uncomfortable, to pretend not to know or see, to numb pain, to play small. We avoid by numbing out with food, alcohol, or sleep. We avoid by spending too much time on social media. We avoid by not speaking up, by holding our tongues, or by hiding our light from the world. We avoid by gossiping and judging others. And I am sure some of you can come up with your own ways you avoid as well.

Journal Work

Write about the kinds of conflict and stress you have in your life.

Where does the stress come from? How do you handle the stress?

Do you create stress or conflict where there is none? In what ways?

Does your "handling" of stress bring on more stress, or do you have a positive outlet for stress that is working for you?

What habits or behaviors do you use to avoid feeling something you don't want to feel?

What are you looking to avoid? Is it a feeling, an experience, a thought?

Write about the ways you avoid, and how it affects your life. How do you think this pattern of avoidance affects you? How does it affect others around you?

Do you have a support system to help you work through things, or do you try and play "Lone Ranger" and go it alone?

What would be possible for you if you were to handle these things differently?

Chapter 12: Letting Go of the Albatross

Forgiveness says you are given another chance to make a new beginning. — Desmond Tutu

Sometimes we need to simply forgive. Forgiveness is a part of the healing process. It allows you to regain your power and come from a place of strength and choice. To forgive does not mean that you are condoning or even forgetting what happened. By forgiving yourself or another, you are deliberately choosing to let go and to live in the present moment, rather than remain tethered to the past. When you forgive, you can release anger, sadness, or resentment. Carrying anger, resentment, bitterness, and other emotions inhibit clarity of vision.

Many people struggle with this act of forgiving another, especially when that person has done tremendous harm that seems truly unforgivable. Remember that forgiveness is not necessarily always for the other person. It is for ourselves as

well. It is a choice to be in a different space—to hold that person and that event as something that doesn't have power over you anymore. To forgive is to allow yourself to let go and make new choices. You can then act in accordance with your vision—with what you are up to—and surrender only to it.

The word *forgive* comes from *forgiefan* which means “to give, grant, or allow.” Rather than looking at the idea of “giving, granting, or allowing” anything to that person who hurt you, instead, look at it as “giving, granting, or allowing” something to both your present and future selves. By forgiving, you are giving *yourself* the space to heal now, and grow in the future. By forgiving, you are granting *yourself* permission to let go of the hurt, shame, and blame. By forgiving, you are allowing *yourself* to restore trust, to grow, and to live a vibrant and full life, free of the burdens of the past.

Walk a Mile

To genuinely forgive may require compassion and trust. It may call for compassion for yourself, and for the other person (or people). To feel genuine compassion for the “perpetrator,” we may have to put ourselves in their shoes. Might you have done the same thing that person did, given the situation? Is there some part of you that can understand the _____

(desperation, shame, ambition, fear, sickness) that this person acted from? Is there some part of you that can sympathize, or empathize, with the behavior in some way?

Again, I am not suggesting these as excuses for their behavior or actions. I am inviting you to find compassion for the person him/herself. If you can, that may help you to understand their fallible “humanness”—a connection that you may understand as a human being who may also act in seemingly unforgivable ways at times—and may allow you to discover true compassion towards this person.

If you absolutely cannot understand, and are having difficulty having compassion for this person, or simply do not want to because of the nature of the offense, that is OK. There are some people who have experienced heinous events in their lives, perpetrated by people who seem like pure evil. Finding any compassion for these people, when they displayed none towards you, may be very difficult. However, if there is an ounce of empathy that you can feel towards that person (whether it stems from their own hurt, anger, circumstances, past history, or mental illness), the quicker you will be able to release the energy you have on them. You get to be about taking control of, and choosing how you will live your life.

You also get to show compassion for yourself. You get to forgive yourself and look at it as whatever happened, happened. If you are the “perpetrator,” it is time to forgive yourself, and let go of whatever you are holding onto—the

shame, the guilt, the regret. Stop blaming yourself and punishing yourself, and let go of whatever is holding you back from creating a full, vibrant life. Give yourself permission to be human. You made a choice at the time, and that time has passed. If something is still occurring, put an end to it. It is time to live in your greatest, and allow yourself to live this one life you have been given without all that heaviness attached.

Trust and Forgiveness

Elizabeth Smart, who was abducted from her Utah home in 2002 at the age of 14, held captive and repeatedly drugged, raped, starved, and forced to endure the unimaginable for over nine months, is now an activist fighting on behalf of child victims of violence and sexual abuse and other survivors of kidnapping. She shared these powerful words on an Instagram post: "... to me forgiveness is another word for self love, and perhaps the greatest form of self-love. And I forgive my captors because I love myself enough to want happiness, joy, and freedom. And holding onto the negativity, pain, and suffering from my past doesn't allow me to embrace and live my life fully now."⁴

⁴ Danielle B. Wagner. "Elizabeth Smart Shares Powerful Message About Forgiving Her Captors: Forgiveness is Another Word for Self-Love" Retrieved from <http://www.ldsliving.com/Elizabeth-Smart-Shares-Powerful-Message-About-Forgiving-Her-Captors-Forgiveness-Is-Another-Word-for-Self-Love/s/88682>

Trust is a choice, and it is an action. Many of us have relied on trust as merely a noun—as something we either possess or do not. But in fact, it is the verb—the action of being trustworthy and trusting—that are the most important. Trust requires the effort to give, to receive, and to maintain. It takes risk, commitment, and consistency to build trust. When trust is broken, especially when it is broken by an important person in your life, it can be very difficult to mend.

Forgiveness calls forth a certain amount of trust, but it can also create new trust as well. It takes trust in yourself to forgive. You get to trust that by letting go of this albatross you've been holding onto, you will be OK. You may have to let go of your victim story, but what is then possible is you being in your full power—authentic, heartfelt passion and power, that will drive you cleanly to your vision. Some of us hold on very tightly to our story—especially those stories that happened to us when we were kids, that have shaped and contributed to who we are today. It is truly powerful to honor your past as the past, and own that “it” happened. What is now possible is giving yourself over to new possibilities for the future, from a place of ownership and choice.

When we forgive, we give ourselves the space to be in the action of trust. So many of us have held on, unforgiving, because we fear that if we were to forgive, we might forget and be hurt all over again. The reality is, that may actually happen. You can be willing to risk that you will be hurt all

over again, or chance living with fear, regret, and sadness. Until we let go of the muck and forgive, we may never know. We only have one life. Do you want to live your life in fear of what may happen, or do you want to experience all that life has to offer? Give yourself some credit and trust that you are capable enough, strong enough, and powerful enough and would survive whatever your wild imagination is picturing. Don't paint yourself into a corner; allow yourself to be free and see what you're capable of. That is how to truly live a meaningful, vibrant, and purposeful life.

Journal Work

Write about who you are willing to forgive, and for what. Don't forget to include yourself if you need to forgive yourself for something. Let it all go, writing down everything you need to say. For each entry/person/event, add the following Hawaiian Ho'oponopono prayer of recognition and forgiveness: "I love you. I'm sorry. I forgive you. Please forgive me. Thank you."

If you are willing or able, contact this person to express your forgiveness or ask to be forgiven. If you are experiencing difficulty forgiving, write about what would be possible for you if you were able to let go and forgive. In the spirit of moving forward in your life and living into

LETTING GO OF THE ALBATROSS

the greatest possible version of yourself, what would it take for you to move forward in this area, and move on in your life?

Chapter 13: Check Your Attitude

If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude. — Maya Angelou

I mentioned previously, Los Angeles traffic is horrendous—and inevitable. We are irritated that we had to spend two hours moving along at less than 10 miles per hour, and then we are angry that we are late to where we are going, and hang on to that anger for the next two hours, complaining to anyone who will listen about how bad it was on the 405 this morning. It's ridiculous, really. We can either choose to be angry and miserable and complain constantly about something that is not going to change, simply to complain and be miserable, or we can do something about it. We can't change the traffic, so what can we change? Our attitude about it.

Attitude is how you take on each moment. It is how you choose to act; it is how you think. It is how you speak and interact with the world. Attitude is 100% within your control. Attitude is a choice. A mindset. An action.

CHECK YOUR ATTITUDE

Too many of us allow our circumstances, events, or other people to decide our attitude. Having a positive attitude is not always easy—understood. It is a conscious choice to take on an attitude that is workable. It is making the choice to choose love, honor, respect, joy, gratitude, and more. It is the difference between seeing things as a chore, a burden, or an obligation, and seeing things as a “get to,” as in “I get to pay my car payment this month” as opposed to “I have to pay my car payment this month.” One is the attitude of choice, power, and opportunity: “I get to pay my car payment this month because I get to have a car and am so grateful that I am able to provide my own transportation to and from work rather than having to take public transportation!” This attitude keeps your eye on your bigger vision, allows you to see the positive, and lightens the perceived burden.

So, here’s the thing. Like our opinions, assessments, and judgements, our attitude is not truth. We see the world through our own filters, and one of these filters is our attitude. Yet we interact with our attitude about things as if it were the truth, and real.

What We Make Up

When someone asks to hear the story of your life, what do you tell them? Is it a story of tragedy or triumph? Is it a story

of sadness and loss, or of real happiness and fulfillment?

Every day, we have the opportunity to create and redesign ourselves and the life we want to live. We can choose the life we want, and we have the choice of how to perceive our present, past, and future. In the movie of your life, you are the actor, director, camera operator, and audience—and you control it ALL with how you choose to be with it. You get to choose how you interact with it, based upon your attitude.

As human beings, we tell ourselves things all the time. We feed ourselves stories like:

“I’m not good enough.”

“I would love that promotion, but I’m sure someone else will get it, over me.”

“I’m stuck in a rut in my life.”

“This relationship is going nowhere.”

“There is no way anyone can truly love who I really am.”

“I’m broken.”

As little kids we use our imaginations, wildly creating ourselves into princesses, pirates, doctors, and superheroes. Kids see themselves this way, and there is no doubt or judgement or assessment keeping them from it. When we grow a little older, our world view grows, and we begin to see differences. This is when we make up things like “I’m not good at math” or “I’m the dumbest one in the class” or “He’s

CHECK YOUR ATTITUDE

being mean to me” or “You love my sister more than me.”

What happens at some point in our young lives is that we begin to believe these things we tell ourselves. We begin to have the attitude that supports this story and to focus on whatever supports what we believe is the truth. For example, we only notice when Mom pays attention to or hugs our sister instead of us. Our stories become supported by what we perceive or see around us. Our focus becomes narrower, and we eventually literally do not even recognize when Mom shows us affection or attention, and instead, continue to add up all the times when our sister receives attention and affection, all to reinforce the belief that “Mom loves my sister more than me.”

By adolescence, we’ve convinced ourselves that our stories are true, and continue to gather evidence to support it. What was once “I’m not good at math” when we are in the first or second grade becomes giving up and not even studying by high school. Further, we don’t dig in to our classes and work our butts off to improve our grades or apply for scholarships, because we already believe that college is impossible.

So now, as adults, we continue to believe and hold on to stories that we have held on to all our lives, and we continue to make up new ones about ourselves, and even have the audacity make up stories about other people! When you experience yourself reacting emotionally, sticking with that crappy attitude, it is powerful to stop and ask yourself, “What

am I making up right now?”

Do an attitude check. Are you being about your vision, moving forward, growing and being in your power? Or are you being whiny, only focusing on how the world is out to get you?

Responsibility

You, and only you, get to decide how you navigate this thing called life. Your attitude will determine your misery or your happiness, because your attitude will determine your perception of the world. If you want to choose the kind of life you want to lead, you are going to have to let go of blaming other people, circumstances, and situations for your misery. You are going to have to start taking responsibility for your attitude. You get to own that you are responsible for what you decide about yourself and who you are going to be. You get to own the breakdowns and take responsibility for making choices based on emotions. Own that you have a past history of stories that may still be contributing to your behaviors and that because of those stories, you may be interacting with perceptions and attitudes that don't work in your life.

It simply does come down to attitude and choice. Rather than saying something like: “I'm not good enough for this project at work, and I have no clue why they chose to dump

CHECK YOUR ATTITUDE

this on me. They should know better that I can't pull this off. I'm going to look like an idiot," choose to make up something that works to shift your attitude. "I'm making up that I deserve to work on this project. It is not above me, and even though I am experiencing fear, I am ready for the challenge. I am ready to step up to a new level, and to step out of my comfort zone. I am worthy of having this opportunity or they would not have chosen me to be on this project."

Allow yourself to feel empowered by making up a new story. You can then open yourself up to the possibility of experiencing a different experience—one of trust, power, creativity, self-love, acknowledgement. An attitude of empowerment that will move you to towards your vision, rather than living stuck in the past.

Journal Work

Write about your general attitude. Are you generally positive or negative?

Do you have a "chip on your shoulder" about something?

Do you have something you are holding over someone?

What have you made up about yourself that you could rewrite into a new narrative?

Do your friends, family members, or coworkers see you

BECAUSE I SAY SO

the same way you see yourself?

Ask at least 5 friends, family members, and coworkers to give you feedback. You may even want to write down their answers so you can go back later to think about what they have said.

You may want to ask them questions like:

- What mood am I usually in?
- How do I handle having a bad day?
- How do I handle criticism or judgment?
- How do you see me handle mistakes?
- How often do you see me take on new projects or challenges?

No matter what their responses, graciously thank them, and do not argue or make comments or justifications. Write about what others see, and how it compares to how you view yourself. Are you surprised? Are you happy with how you're being perceived?

Finally, take a few moments to come up with ways you can reframe your thinking from "have to" to "get to" thinking. What are some things you currently view as burdens, obligations, or "have tos" that could be "get tos?" Write a few of them down. Take a minute or two to write about why it is better being a "get to" rather than a "have to."

Chapter 14: Confidence Doesn't Give You Answers

If you hear a voice within you say 'you cannot paint,' then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced.

–Vincent Van Gogh

So many of us go through life, searching for the seemingly elusive sense of confidence. I spent countless years using some form of either “I just don’t feel confident enough yet” or “I wish I were more confident” to keep myself from taking risks, in the thread of the belief that “I’m not good enough.”

As kids, we don’t question our quirks, or obsess over our kinky curls or our chubby rolls, or doubt our ability to build a rollercoaster in the backyard. While we may be aware of other people’s feelings at a very early age, at some point in early childhood, most of us begin to listen to others’ opinions, ideas, and counsel. We need to learn how the world works, and parents, school, and society help us to navigate our environment and become social beings. We need to have

understanding and empathy for others, and to learn new ways from wiser people. But that does not need to come at the cost of our sense of self, and too often it seems to. We question our own instincts, opinions, and ideas. We lose our sense of self, and rather than learning to accept all possibilities, most of us choose to give up and give in to being small. Is confidence something we are all born with, lose at some point, and then must seek again? Or is it something else?

Although many people define it differently, confidence is a conscious certainty of one's powers, strengths, or abilities, and a knowing that things will be the way we expect them to be. We gauge our confidence by knowing that we can do something well, when we are in our element, trusting that we are able to fully express our talents and abilities. We feel confident when we are certain that things will turn out the way we expect, or are sure that we will have the power and ability to handle any challenges. And we feel confident when we reveal our best self, internally or externally....until we don't.

What happens for most of us is that we don't always feel super powerful in our abilities or our talents, or that we look good, or can handle everything. We doubt ourselves. We second-guess ourselves. We nitpick every last thing about ourselves, until we become a blubbing mess of uncertainty. We have it that confidence *is*—or it *isn't*. It's *there* or it's *not*. But it's not that “black and white.”

One of the problems with this black and white thinking is the conditionality. We put a condition on confidence and treat it as an “if/then” equation: “*If* I were to lose 40 pounds, *then* I would feel confident.” “*If* I could only be in a relationship with someone who really loves me, *then* I would be confident.” “*If* they would only promote me, *then* I would be confident leading my department.” What happens is that with this sort of thinking, we are then totally shocked when days, months, or years later, we find that even though we have lost the 40 pounds, found a juicy relationship, or attained a promotion, we are still unhappy, unfulfilled, and lacking confidence.

I mentioned my marriage in the beginning of this book. I was married when I was 29. I thought it was time and felt like I was ready. I wanted a family, and I truly believed that getting married and having a family would finally give me the security and confidence and happiness I was seeking at that time in my life. I knew I could be a good wife and mother. I would have a place and a purpose, and I would feel confident building my home. I was convinced; and all I needed to do to prove it was to get married and have children. Only, it doesn't work that way, and it took me breaking my ex-husband's heart and breaking up our family for me to finally discover that.

I was being totally conditional. Although I made the best choice I could, given where I was at that time in my life, looking back I can see how my marriage failed. I was

depending upon those external things to make me feel like I had a place and a purpose. I was looking outward, including making incredibly unfair demands on my husband and the status of our marriage, to be responsible for my happiness. I had operated fully on the if/then equation, and had done the math, and at the time, it all calculated correctly. Get married = have a loving relationship. Have a baby = be forever happy and loved. Get married + have a family = totally happy, loving, purposeful life. Only it didn't work that way. My math never has been good.

When we make confidence—or anything for that matter—conditional, we not only limit possibilities, we put our energy on the condition rather than creating what we want. We take ourselves and our power out of the equation. We set ourselves up for disappointment, shame, embarrassment, and regret when that “thing” doesn't result in the confidence, happiness, or purpose we were looking for. I was wanting to not feel insecure, lonely, and lost. I looked to someone else and something else to provide that answer, as so many of us do. What ended up happening, of course, was feeling insecure, lonely and lost throughout my marriage. Nothing was solved. I had brought all of that with me to our relationship and was responsible for causing pain to not only my ex-husband, but later to my daughter, as well.

Insecurity and Success Are BFFs

We have it that confidence and insecurity cannot exist in the same space at the same time. Insecurity—feeling unsure or doubtful—does not have to mean that you cannot be confident. The truth is, it is possible for both to coexist. We can allow ourselves the space to experience doubt or uncertainty, and at the same time feel confident in who we are and what we are about. For example, we can doubt that our painting is as good as a Picasso or a Monet, but at the same time feel absolutely confident that we are expressing our authentic self through our own painting.

It is possible to experience the insecurity and vulnerability of putting yourself “out there” starting that podcast you want to start, for example, but it is absolutely possible to concurrently feel confident that sharing what you have to say is a part of your vision for yourself. In fact, there is a power and rush to experiencing doubt and fear and insecurity, and still have a pull to crush that goal you have. It is this power that drives our intention. We cannot be successful without vulnerability, and vulnerability often comes from experiencing some level of insecurity. We might as well simply embrace it and head full-on towards the goal, because these feelings of insecurity and doubt are not going anywhere. And if we are ever going to experience success, insecurity in

some form is always going to be coming along for the ride.

We have it that confidence is unattainable and elusive, except by “others” who have achieved some level of greatness that we (or society) define. And if we don’t compare—don’t have what others have, or do what others do—we talk ourselves out of who we are and the unique gifts we have. What occurs then is that we think we are not supposed to appreciate and feel confident in our own unique qualities and abilities, because we are stuck on comparison—and we have already touched on the damage that can do. “If only I were more confident” is a judgement that keeps us playing small, as if having confidence alone is the hard-and-fast answer to living the life we always dreamed of.

In my own case, rather than owning my insecurities, I let them dictate how I was going to live my life. I did this subconsciously, of course. I was not awake enough at the time and did not have the tools to allow myself to experience moments of insecurity for what they were—moments. I was trying to find an answer for my insecurities, and I wanted to be rid of them once and for all.

Confidence in Action

Confidence is being real with who you are, accepting and appreciating where you are in your life, and acknowledging

your unique qualities, abilities, and gifts. It is knowing that you've failed, owning up to the mistakes, experiencing events that you may not be proud of, and being certain—assured—that you have the power to make a new choice. In fact, confidence is not something you attain. It is not the “end-game.” It is how you interact with and relate to challenges or uncertainty, for example. It is an ongoing action and a conscious choice.

Having confidence is not something that suddenly or even eventually shows up; *we choose to be confident*. We choose confidence when we step into our authenticity or out of our comfort zone, or when we keep our power and use our voices to speak up. It is when we choose to notice our patterns, and when we connect with others. It is choosing to accept the person we see in the mirror, and embracing our imperfections and celebrating our uniqueness. It is honoring our vision. It is a practice that we choose to take on daily, as we navigate our circumstances and challenges. It is taking a chance to experience the yuck—the feelings of fear, doubt, and insecurity—and “going for it” anyway.

You've been practicing confidence as you have been taking yourself on, throughout this journey. It takes not only confidence, but courage, to get real, face up, acknowledge, and continue to be in discovery. To be self-assured, or being “sure of self” is confidence, and this is practiced as you continually choose to know yourself, be honest with and true

to yourself, and acknowledge yourself for who you are and the journey you are on.

Like fearlessness, we need to stop chasing after confidence as if it is an answer. Rather than the pursuit of confidence as a solution, be in the relentless practice of *being* confident. In order to do this, you will need to get out of your own way and stop using “lack of confidence” as your shield, because it is simply not true. The more you practice being confident, as with anything, the easier and more generously it will start to flow. Step into being confident, and with that intention, you then will *BE confidence*.

Journal Work

How do you define confidence? What does confidence look like to you? What is coming up for you?

In what areas of your life do you feel very confident? In what areas do you feel less confident? What do you think that is about?

Write about what you're experiencing regarding confidence, and your own personal search for confidence in your life. What would be possible for you if you were to allow yourself to experience your feelings of self-doubt and insecurity and still allow yourself to *BE confidence* in your life?

Chapter 15: The Invisible Thread of Connection

The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be felt.

— Frederick Buechner

In society today, to be connected to someone can mean that that person has “friended” you on Facebook or is following you on Twitter. We’ve been conditioned to light up when someone has liked or commented on our post about our day, and it can feel lonely when something goes unnoticed and you receive no “likes.” It’s easy to see how we can be “connected” to 500 friends on Facebook, and all the while, lack true connection with those who are physically present.

As human beings, we have a basic need to belong. But social media and the Internet brings a false sense of connection. You may be able to hear from your friends from 20 years ago through Facebook, and keep a connection that might have otherwise fizzled, but it is important to

acknowledge just how often we are giving up human connection for virtual connection.

Many of us disappear into our phones and computers each night, practically ignoring the human beings who live within our home. We disconnect from those around us, relying on a false sense of connection through social media, online chatting, YouTube videos, and other virtual worlds. The result is a void and a reliance on an inauthentic connection. To truly, authentically connect with another human being, it takes listening, communication, compassion, giving and receiving support, sharing ideas and stories, and experiencing laughter and tears—together.

To improve genuine connection, it is important to be present, in the moment, sharing our thoughts, feelings, and dreams. Connecting is really listening to another person, being intimate and vulnerable with them, and allowing them to be intimate and vulnerable with you. To connect with another person means that you honor who they are and the journey they are on, and allow them to honor you for the same. When connecting with someone, we are in service to them, relating to them in a partnership of intimacy and trust. The deepest form of connection, which comes from sharing physical space—a smile, a touch, a hug—is what many of us are truly lacking, and desperately craving.

We are beginning to become used to being disconnected from those around us, and especially those who are not in our

immediate “circle.” Our social and political climate is fracturing us from within, and it is becoming easier to see hate and witness ugliness everywhere. We live in a world where school shootings, suicide bombings, fear-mongering, political mud-slinging, and a general “us versus them” mentality is becoming acceptable. The result is a society that is emotionally fractured, universally depressed, and malcontent. We are becoming more and more disconnected from each other, and it is easier than ever to make comments that are malicious and cruel, all from a relatively anonymous veil.

We are all unique human beings, with fears, desires, wants, and dreams, and hopes. I believe that every human being basically wants these three things: to belong, to feel secure, and to be loved. We can and should welcome and appreciate our differences, disagreements, challenges, and uniqueness. But it is possible to do this from a place of sympathy, compassion, and genuine respect for each other. And it starts with us making a choice to be the source of sympathy, compassion, and respect.

Remember that we see people through our own lens—through the lens of our own history, stories, judgements, perceptions, and beliefs about ourselves and the world. We have been making distinctions throughout this journey through the pages of this book. To make a distinction is to separate “something” from “everything else.” We are bringing

an awareness to and exploring new perspectives as we separate out what forgiveness, fear, confidence, etc. are, and what they are not. Until we have an awareness of these perspectives, we cannot “see” similarities or differences.

If we can understand that we can be in a relationship with anyone and everyone, we can then begin to *connect* to them. To connect involves listening, understanding, and empathy. This may mean that we must put aside our own ego, or sacrifice some of our own selfish wants and needs at times. We may need to let go of the stories we have told ourselves about the other person. We may need to give the other person space to learn and grow, which may mean giving up our need to control or be right, or to give up our own beliefs about ourselves and the world. When we come from this idea of connection, we nurture relatedness, or relationship.

Man (or Woman) in the Mirror

When we relate to other people, we have the opportunity to make distinctions rather than judgements. Notice and be more aware of where people are “coming from.” Listen not only to the words they say, but pay attention to their actions and behaviors, and make distinctions. From here, we have a greater capacity to see possibilities in others. People will reveal themselves and their fears, hopes, dreams, and desires

if we listen closely enough. When we are able to hear what people are actually saying, we gain the ability to see ourselves in them. It is quite an opportunity to then notice who we attract into our lives and what we can learn from them—and vice versa.

I am not suggesting that everyone can be trusted, and that you should follow a stranger into a dark alley because you see the possibility in his greatness! I am suggesting that you be discerning, and pay attention to when you are bringing your own listening (your own experiences, past history, assessments) into a relationship.

Several years ago, I worked with a gal I'll call Penelope. Penelope is one of those people I saw as desperate to be liked. I saw her bending over backwards to interject herself into conversations, invite herself to gatherings, and dominate conversations with stories about who she went out with, partied with, or was friends with. She did things that I saw as not necessarily “her” for the sake of fitting in with those around her, and went out of her way to share stories of her outrageous adventures with the hope that people would find interest in her. She revealed other people's secrets, gossiped, and faked being happy all the time. In short, I found her obnoxious.

This was all my assessment of her, and because I saw her this way, I was in total judgement and miserable working with her. I did not respect her or her irritating behavior. I avoided

her as much as possible and feigned a polite smile whenever I came into contact with her. After months of gritting my teeth, I finally shared with a friend how this woman was irritating me. I went into all the details, annoyed and flabbergasted at this woman's lack of social skills, disregard for personal space, and general desperation. I even told my friend I couldn't stand Penelope.

My friend finally stopped me in my tracks with one question: "How is Penelope a perfect mirror for you?" Ouch! I had not even seen it coming. Almost instantly, with this question, I recognized myself in Penelope, and that is why it had been so easy for her to get under my skin. I could *totally* identify with the desperate need she had to want to fit in, to belong. I was taken back to how many times I had been hurt by people I thought were my friends throughout my life, and the deep sense of loneliness I held. I could identify with wanting to be invited places and not being invited. I saw myself doing things that were uncomfortable and not "me" just to feel like I belonged. I could see what it looked like when I was not comfortable with who I was and looked to other people to give me confidence and security. I saw myself, simply trying to do my best to find my way in the world. I was annoyed and irritated and ashamed of that part of me that *was* Penelope. I saw this in me, and didn't like it, so I was judging Penelope the same way. I was holding her as an annoyance rather than a possibility. I finally checked my

blatant arrogance and self-righteousness and began to really see and *hold* Penelope differently from that day on.

Once I was able to listen—not just to the words that came out of her mouth, but to what she was saying behind the words—I was able to listen differently when she told me her stories. Not from a place of pity, but out of genuine compassion and empathy. Nearly overnight, she “became” a different person right before my eyes. She became more genuine, and less pushy. She didn’t try so hard and seemed to relax, rather than be so high-strung and desperate. How I held her literally allowed me to see another side of her: a soft, feminine, genuinely powerful side, that I was not able to distinguish before.

Practice being relatable. Be open to new ideas, insight, and perspectives. Be willing to shift and be vulnerable to seeing people and perspectives differently from how you’ve always seen them. Develop the ability to harmonize with other people’s views of the world, and be an opening for compassion, empathy, and collaboration.

Finally, to relate and be in connection with another, it is also crucial that you stop trying to fix or change other people. In fact, there is no “fixing” or “changing” possible. All that you can do is be responsible for who you are, and who you choose to be. So, give it up. If we can start to listen to others from this place, we can relate. There are catastrophic results at the end of disconnection, and we are witnessing it every day.

Choosing to see others as a possibility, in their greatness, and holding them to their highest and best self allows us to honor them—and ourselves—as human beings. It wasn't Penelope who was making me miserable. I was miserable with myself, and unwilling to relate to her. I saw her as the problem, when the problem was how I related with her and held her. The problem I had was with myself.

Journal Work

Evaluate yourself on your level of connection with others. Take a look at how you relate with those on social media. Take a look at those in your immediate circle, including family and friends.

Who are you most connected with? What is this connection like? What do you value about this connection?

What relationships are suffering from lack of authentic connection?

How much do you rely on Facebook, Instagram, or other online connections to provide you a sense of belonging and support?

How often do you choose to communicate only through text, rather than making a phone call or a visit in person, when possible?

THE INVISIBLE THREAD OF CONNECTION

How is your balance of virtual and human connection? Acknowledge what is working for you and what isn't. What could be possible if you had a closer connection to those who are physically present in your life?

What would it take of you to create this connection?

Chapter 16: Living Your Purpose

The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience. — Eleanor Roosevelt

One of the most significant achievements people want to attain in their lifetime is to leave some sort of legacy; a way of being remembered when they are gone. We want to be remembered as someone who made a difference: someone who was a contribution. We want to know that when we die, we have made some sort of impact with someone—to know that who we are and what we did mattered. We search for a purpose—something that gives true meaning to our life.

One of the things I hear the most from people is their desire to find their purpose. So many people are looking for the *why* of their life, asking, “Why am I here?” and “What am I meant to do in my life?” The fear of not having an impact and leaving some kind of memory or legacy behind when we are no longer on this earth is very real. We seek meaning and purpose to our lives, consciously or unconsciously, as purpose

gives us hope.

The search for our purpose can lead us on many paths. We may find ourselves on different roads throughout life, learning, growing, discovering what makes us happy and what truly fulfills us inside. Having a sense of purpose gives our life bigger meaning, bigger impact, and supports us in the belief that we matter to the world.

Finding one's purpose is not always easy, however. For some, discovering one's purpose takes a life-defining moment or event. For others, it can take a journey like the one that you've been on throughout the pages of this book to uncover and delve deeper into who you are and why you are here. For others, it may take a complete lifetime to discover or realize that they've had a purpose all along. No two people's journeys are the same.

So, what exactly is "purpose?" We throw this word around a lot, and those who are not clear about their purpose can often feel lost and hopeless. According Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, *purpose* is "something set up as an object or end to be attained." But I feel as if purpose is more than that. It is not something set up to be an "end" or "attained," but rather that purpose is ongoing. While we may have an end goal in mind, it is the action of how we continue to interact with that end goal in mind that is *living our purpose*.

Gina declared her purpose in life is to be a contribution to those without clean water in Africa. She is committed to

raising money and visiting Africa to help those in need gain access to safe and reliable water sources. She feels passionate about the project and feels that it is her purpose in life to give to those who so desperately need something that we take for granted each day. She shares her story, posts articles and photos on Facebook, takes trips to Africa with the group she is involved in, and gives lectures on the conditions these communities are up against.

While her ultimate goal is to help everyone on the earth eventually have access to clean water, it is not her one and only purpose. Through this work, she becomes her purpose, which translates to sharing ideas, stories, and her vision with the world. Her purpose becomes more than just a linear “answer” or end. Instead, it becomes so much more robust, as her purpose dictates her way of being, and her passion and commitment fuel her to continue.

If you are feeling as if you are lacking purpose, you are not alone. But here’s the thing: you have a purpose. It is called being YOU. The authentic, powerful *you* that you are. Your purpose is nothing more than honoring yourself as a gift to this world and sharing those gifts with everyone around you. Rather than holding “having a purpose” as some sort of answer or holy grail, ask yourself how you would like to share your gifts of who you authentically are, in contribution to others and to the world. One way to achieve this is through service.

Service and Giving

Service is the act of giving selflessly, without the expectation of anything in return for ourselves. When we give to others, we put others ahead of our own agenda, acknowledging others' needs, and giving of ourselves to be in service to them. Service can be everything from buying coffee for the person behind you at Starbucks, to regularly volunteering to work at a homeless shelter or making an annual donation to a favorite charity. It could even be volunteering in your child's classroom or regularly checking in on your elderly neighbor. It can be a generous listening ear, a smile, or expressing something like a simple "I'm proud of you" or "Great job!" to someone.

Service is putting others first, and it is in the giving of yourself that you have the most impact. The most effective and powerful way to give of yourself is to be your authentic self with others... to be full power-on, as yourself, sharing your unique gifts with those around you. When we hold back, live in the depths of doubt or fear, we are robbing the world of our gifts. It is quite selfish and arrogant to deprive the world of who you are, frankly. We are not doing anyone a favor by neglecting our talents, shying away from our gifts, and hiding our light. In fact, you are doing a disservice to the world!

It is important that a distinction is made here. When we are giving generously, we are putting others first, and being in contribution to them, without expectation. It is important to recognize, however, that when we work so hard to please, give, and be in service of others, we must not sacrifice ourselves and our needs in the process. Too many of us give up our desires, wants, needs, and dreams for someone or something else. We are trying to be selfless, and be a giver to those in need, but some of us “over-give” at a personal price. When you constantly give because you have a need to be appreciated, or crave constant approval, or feel obligated, you may need to evaluate your relationship with the idea of giving. When you feel burdened, or burned out, or even when you apologize for the way you give, you may want to consider taking a step back and looking at what is motivating you. Some of us have become so accustomed to giving so much to others that we neglect ourselves. A true giver is able to give from a cup that is overflowing, not almost empty. When you are so depleted that you are unable to share your gifts or give yourself over to your own vision and commitment, you have lost the concept of what it means to give. That is being a “taker”—being in service for the sake of the action—rather than giving from the heart.

Consider the oxygen mask in an airplane. We are instructed that if we are traveling with children to always put on our own oxygen mask first, and then put the mask on the

child. To put your oxygen mask on first could be perceived by some as being selfish, but in fact, it is life-preserving. We can't act and put the mask on a child if we are unable to breathe. It is only with our own "oxygen mask" on that we can support others, share our gifts, and lead the way for the growth and development of ourselves and others. Consider others in your choices, and be kind, but do not be ashamed to take care of yourself—to nurture your vision. Learn to set limits, and begin practicing self-care as a means to becoming a giver. From here, the giving can be abundant for all, including yourself.

Focus Out

At the same time, we must be aware when too much focus on ourselves and our own wants and needs causes a vortex, sucking the life out of everyone around us. Having rough times in life is a part of being human. Sometimes, however, we can get stuck in this negative place for days, weeks, even years! Notice when you are "taking" from others around you by wallowing in self-pity, irritation, anger, resentment, frustration, and disappointment. Allow yourself to experience your experience, but don't allow yourself to get stuck there. You are not doing yourself or anyone else any good by spinning in self beat-up, criticism, doubt, loneliness, or insecurity. You are not doing yourself or anyone else any good

by being stuck like a broken record in “If only I...” or “I should have...” or the like. The energy and vibration you create in this space is contagious and generative. It will spread to and affect all areas of your life, and to other people and their lives. When you continually choose to stay in this place, you become a vampire, sucking the life out of the space, and bringing everyone around you down right along with you.

Rather than choosing to stay in that muck, choose to handle it another way, like focusing on someone or something else. One of these ways is to “focus out.” To focus out is to put your own needs in the background and make someone else a priority. It takes the attention and energy off you and places it elsewhere, helping to free yourself of negative thoughts and behaviors. When a friend of mine is feeling stuck in her crap, she will make a giant tray full of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, drive down to a homeless camp and hand them out to those in need. Immediately, her focus (and mood) shifts, and she gets out of her funk. Focusing on supporting others takes her mind off of dwelling on her problems, and instead, uplifts those around her, doing amazing things for her own soul. There are so many people in this world doing far worse than we are.

Choose to be a “giver” and shift your energy to someone else in need. Call a friend and really listen, rather than talk. Go visit a local convalescent hospital and see how you can contribute. Offer to babysit a friend’s kids so they can have a

date night. Go sit at Starbucks and ask people what their vision is for the world. Take note of where your energy goes, and how your mood shifts when taking part in any of these things. Sometimes, a little change in perspective is all we need.

Journal Work

What does being in contribution mean to you?

How would you like to contribute to others?

In what ways could you be in contribution?

What would be possible for you if you lived your purpose fully, sharing it with others? If your purpose is to live authentically as yourself, contributing your unique gifts with the world, write that would look like to you.

What kind of giver are you?

Are you someone who over-gives? What affect does that have on you? In what ways could you start to fill your own cup?

How do you feel when you are being "positively" selfish and self-caring?

How often do you take the time to nurture yourself and take care of your own needs? Write about what is coming up for you when you think of the idea of being "selfish."

BECAUSE I SAY SO

What are some ways you could begin to focus out when you're feeling stuck in negativity?

Write at least 15 ways you could start to focus on other people, showing support and unconditional love. Commit to doing at least one of these things the next time you experience yourself focusing on, dwelling on, or wallowing in your own problems or issues.

Chapter 17: Being “All In”

If you always do what you've always done, you'll always be where you've always been. —T.D. Jakes

Commitment is a statement, and a state of being. It is a dedication to what matters to us, something that comes from inside us, drives us, and calls us to perform in extraordinary ways. Commitment supports us in having the results we want to have in our lives. It is what separates those who get their desired results in their lives, and those who are governed by excuses, circumstances, and reaction. Commitment has us buckle up in the driver's seat, rather than living life as a nagging, miserable backseat driver to life's circumstances, challenges, and stories.

Intention and commitment go hand-in-hand. Intention is basically living and breathing your commitment in real time—in the present moment. Intention is being engaged with your commitment as if it is already happening. It is stepping into the future as if it is occurring now. It is surrendering to the commitment in such a way that no excuses can exist,

challenges are mere annoyances, and the “how” doesn’t matter one damn bit.

Results Don’t Lie

When we look at our results, we attain valuable information about how much we were willing to do, or how far we were willing to go, to have our commitment happen. If we get the results we are looking for, then we can say that we were clearly committed to having it happen. If we don’t have the results we were looking for, we must look at what we were actually committed to, or what our intention actually was. If you don’t have the results you wanted, there was something you were more committed to that stood in your way—plain and simple.

Here’s the way it goes: I say I intend to buy a car before the end of the year. I intend to buy a car, and it is my full intention to buy a car. I even tell the world that I am fully committed to buying a car. I pick up a couple extra shifts, bring my lunch to work rather than go out, and skip going out on occasion so that I can save up. But the end of the year comes, and I don’t have the money. Not even close. I decide not to buy the car and wait another six months until I have saved up enough money for a good down payment. I promise myself that I will do whatever it takes, and pick up more shifts

and look for more ways to save up. Sound familiar? We want something, we *really* want it, and then when it comes down to it, it doesn't happen. Or more accurately, we don't make it happen. For some of us, this occurs over and over, and we look back on our lives to a series of disappointments and failures. We then lose confidence, as we have created evidence of the countless times we've come up short, and we begin to believe that we are never going to be that badass who has their life together.

Here's another example: If I say *I am committed to losing 10 pounds in the next 4 months* and it doesn't happen—if I am being real and honest with myself—the results show that I actually wasn't truly committed to losing that 10 pounds. I wanted it, *I really, really wanted it*, but I wasn't fully committed to having it happen, as evidenced by my results. However, I have a valuable opportunity here to learn about myself. I can look at what I was actually more committed to. I can then look at the last 4 months and acknowledge all the times I chose to remain sitting on the couch rather than going to the gym and easily conclude that I was more committed to *being comfortable* than to losing that 10 pounds. Or how many times I chose to eat potato chips rather than choosing a healthier alternative: I was more committed to *instant gratification* and/or to things *being easy*, rather than choosing a healthier option and holding off for the long-term reward of losing the weight. Results don't lie. The opportunity

here is to look at how often “being comfortable” or “instant gratification” gets in the way of getting what you want in life. I guarantee, if these things are continuing to stop you in one area of your life, they are stopping you in other areas of your life, as well.

Being All In

Looking at our results is not always easy. Let’s use the example of a man I’ll call Joe. Joe has been married 17 years, and insists that he is committed to having a loving, intimate relationship with his wife. He says that his wife has gained a lot of weight recently, that she is nagging at him more recently, and that they argue all the time. He says that he has been sleeping on the living room couch more often, and that he recently started driving Uber. When doing a complete inventory of his relationship with his wife, he admits that his relationship with his wife is actually strained, passionless, and is hanging on by a thread.

Although he says he wants otherwise, Joe’s results are clear. Simply, Joe is not actually committed to having a loving, intimate relationship with his wife, or he would have that. This strained, passionless marriage is Joe’s result. And before you start to defend Joe, pay attention to how looking at that as his result from a place of honesty and

acknowledgement could actually be empowering for Joe!

Joe has not been BEING intimate and loving. In fact, when he dug deeper, he was able to uncover the truth and actually see that he was more committed to being right during arguments, to being right about how his wife has gained weight and isn't attractive to him anymore, and that he was not helping with the daily household tasks. He was expecting his wife to be the one to fix herself and therefore, he took on driving Uber, not because of money, but so that they would avoid getting into fights. He realized that where he was coming from was not only supporting his strained marriage but was creating it. If Joe's wife could also do her own work in this way, and they both could begin to operate from this place of honesty, acknowledgement, and responsibility, they could make a complete 180 degree change in their relationship—if they chose to.

It is going to take you *really* looking at what you were actually committed to, to see why your results are what they are. As soon as we are able to acknowledge our true commitment, we can then create from a new place, and new possibilities can emerge. Being committed to having something the way you want it takes sacrifice, discipline, and surrendering to having that commitment be the only force that drives you forward. If you are committed to *really* having a loving, intimate relationship with your spouse, then you've got to take responsibility and be fully committed to making

that happen. If that is what you are committed to, YOU are the ONLY one responsible for creating it. ALL IN.

We are creatures of “wanting to know.” When we live in stress, shock, or fear, we focus on what we don’t want rather than what we do want—even when we have clearly stated what our intention is. We try to control and predict an outcome because of patterns we have actually forged in our brain to try to protect ourselves. We want to know that we are going to be “OK” and often do what is comfortable and familiar, rather than what is being called forth from us. The more we practice taking risks and breaking habits (such as falling back into comfort) we begin to rewire our brain and cut new pathways.

Rather than Joe stepping into and fully committing to what he does want—a loving, intimate relationship with his wife, and being about creating that, Joe gave in to trying to control the situation, avoid, and be comfortable. He was more committed to being in the familiar place of his marriage not working than he was to doing whatever it would take to be 100 percent responsible for his marriage and becoming the man his marriage needed him to be.

Commitment is Not Your New Year's Resolution

Looking at your results is also a powerful way to evaluate how committed you are to your commitment. Commitment requires sacrifice and surrender. So often, we look for guarantees in life. We want to win, naturally. We think that we need to be in charge, and we try to manipulate and control and steer accordingly—often totally unconsciously. But being truly committed, and giving ourselves over to that, actually gives us freedom. If you surrender to your vision, rather than your circumstances or your need to control or be right or be comfortable, you don't have to worry about the "how tos" and the "what ifs" because they simply do not matter. When we are fully committed, we shift and adjust and transform in whatever way to completely surrender to our vision, while literally being our vision at the same time.

Simply being "motivated" to do something doesn't work. Motivation is just not enough. Too many of us rely on motivation or whether we "feel like it" to do something. We must forge new habits—a new mindset—and continually and consistently come from white-hot burning intention. To do this, we must stop treating our commitments like our New Year's Resolutions. So many people fail every single year because they allow old patterns and habits to get in the way of

their commitments. They have relied on being motivated by the idea of the “fresh start” of new year, and the rest of the world declaring their own New Year’s Resolutions. Once the motivation flounders, however, 80% of us go back to being a couch potato.

Being committed to having something the way you want it takes sacrifice and discipline. You must surrender to having that commitment be the only thing that drives you forward. This will mean not waiting until you are “motivated” to get something done. This means going to the gym even though you’re having a bad day or don’t “feel like it.” This means letting go of the idea that you need to be ready, or be confident, or be fearless. This means being fully about what you are committed to, while experiencing every bit of the fear, the doubt, the insecurity, the discomfort, the difficulty, and even the sting of failure.

We can’t expect to get different results doing what we have always done. As we have all heard, that is the definition of insanity. Fully surrender to your intention, and have that drive you to committed action. Check in on your results, watch for patterns, and course-correct as necessary according to the feedback you receive. If you are consistently not getting the results you want, check in on what you are actually committed to. If you really listen, your results will reveal everything.

Journal Work

How have you been about your commitments?

What beliefs about yourself are you holding onto?

Where have you been holding back?

When have you chosen comfort, the "right time" or "feeling like it" rather than fully surrendering to your intention?

What is it that you are avoiding?

What patterns do you see?

What would be possible if you were to fully surrender to your commitments?

What are you fully committed to taking on now?

Chapter 18: Identifying Your Kryptonite

The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any. — Alice Walker

The idea of having “power” can be intimidating, exciting, seductive, or even flat-out frightening to some. In mainstream society, we often equate power with social or political status, having gobs of money, being influential or famous, or being physically attractive. We make choices for our lives based on this notion that we have something to “live up to”—ideals that are not our own, and standards that rate us on what we have attained or what we look like. We compare our own status, influence, and looks to these ideals, and by deduction, without status, money, and model-looks, conclude that we have no power. Sadly, even when we attain some aspect of this perception of power—by having a good career, or a lot of money, or even having that chiseled model physique—we are still not satisfied. We continue to push ourselves to have all of

it—the trifecta of power—status, money, and good looks. The struggle never ends.

Based on this paradigm, what happens is that when we decide we have no power, we behave as if we don't matter, and that those with this "power" do. We hide our talents, give up our dreams, don't speak up or speak out, and allow others to decide where our life will end up. We often (knowingly or unknowingly) welcome other people, situations, and circumstances to choose our path so that we can take the easy way and avoid stepping into our greatest self.

When we let other people, circumstances, and events decide how we live our lives, we are giving away our power. When we play a "small game" in life, quitting on our dreams, hiding our talents, and being a slave to circumstances and other people, we are giving away our power. I assert this: Power is being authentic and true to yourself, acknowledging your gifts, inspiring and connecting with others, and being consciously aware of your capacity to choose it all.

When we choose to be authentic and connected, acknowledge our gifts, and operate from the fact that we are responsible and have choice, we are being in our power. You get to keep your power. You get to experience being true to yourself, being the gift that you are to this world. You get to "get" that you matter in this world, and that you, my friend, are a powerful, beautiful human being. Start living from that power, embrace it, and empower others to start living this way, and I guarantee it will change the world.

Being True to Yourself

To be authentic is to allow ourselves to be true, honest, and vulnerable. When we are connected to our authentic self, we are connected with our heart, our deepest longings, and our vision. When we are authentically ourselves, it only makes sense that we let go of those thoughts, interpretations, and emotions that do not serve what we are up to. We can “check in” with whether we are being authentic by asking ourselves “What am I holding back?” or “How do I really feel about this?”

One of the most difficult things to face up to in life is looking back and realizing that you have not been true to yourself. Whether you realize that you have been staying in a loveless marriage, hiding your sexuality, or not expressing your true talents and gifts, coming to terms with the fact that you are not being true to yourself means realizing that you are not being who you authentically are.

Some people may be experiencing some resistance to or may be questioning the idea of being “true to yourself.” You may even be tempted to skip this chapter—or do a fast skim. Some of you may even be saying, “This all sounds great, but I don’t know who the hell I am, and if you would just tell me so I can get on with my life and be this amazing ‘me’ that I am supposed to be, that would be great. Thaaaaannnks.” To this,

IDENTIFYING YOUR KRYPTONITE

I will say that deep down, you know. You do. You may need to try different things, experience different experiences, get your heart broken a few times, but you really do know. For this, I invite you to surrender to the you that is aching to break free.

Surrendering to the radical acceptance of who you are, with no resistance to your wholeness and power, allows for an opening of awareness and new possibilities. Let go of the expectations you hold about yourself. Let go of comparison of not only yourself to others, but of who and what you think you should be doing, how you think you should be living, and who you think you should be. To surrender is to let go of it all, so that you can be in a clean space of creating what you want, rather than dwelling on comparison or the past.

Surrender to your vision. Give yourself over to it and stop fighting with your ego about “I’m not good enough... tall enough... rich enough... old enough... young enough.” Enough! Simply surrender to THIS moment and allow your vision to guide you. You will make mistakes. You will fall down. You will fail. But your vision will be what supports you in getting up, standing up again and again, and taking those steps forward.

Responsibility is Power

One of the ways we deny being true to ourselves is by

hiding—not putting ourselves “out there” to be seen. To be truly authentic, you must allow yourself to be absolutely vulnerable. For many of us, myself included at one point, we see vulnerability as weakness. However, vulnerability can actually be one of the most powerful qualities in a person. A person who is willing to be vulnerable is willing to be seen, to be heard, and to fully experience *everything*.

Vulnerability is being willing to take things *responsibly* rather than *personally*. To be responsible for your experience, for your choices, for your reactions. We resist vulnerability because we want to protect ourselves. We want to avoid pain, shame, regret, fear. When we feel as if we are put in a position that we might experience these emotions, we immediately want to “wall up.” We want to ensure our safety, and in doing so, we disengage and disconnect.

I have had to do my own work with this. I am a very sensitive person by nature. I wear my “heart on my sleeve,” am quite emotional, and take things very personally. I have a pattern of interpreting things in a negative rather than a positive way, which is not only disempowering, but harmful.

A few months ago, I had been feeling left out, ignored, and cast aside. I was feeling that the people who I thought were my friends were not there for me, and that they didn’t care about me anymore. I was angry, disappointed, and hurt, and stewed in this feeling for several days. I decided very quickly that I didn’t need anyone, and mentally wrote-off those

people who I felt had wronged me; a common pattern for me was to shut out and “wall up.”

While I was going through this difficult time, I really felt completely alone. I had convinced myself that I had no support and no friends, even though I actually knew literally dozens of people who would support me if I reached out. When I did talk to anyone, I would literally say the words, “I have no friends.” And one day, a friend said to me, “Well, I guess you get to be right about that.”

One night, the phrase “Take things responsibly, rather than personally” came to me quite unexpectedly. To take things personally means that we view what others do as a personal offense to ourselves. It is using what others do, or do not do, as evidence to support how screwed up we are. We use these events to trigger our sensitivities and remind ourselves how unwanted, alone, worthless, insecure, and insignificant we are. We take things personally to be able to blame the other person or people for what we have already decided about ourselves, and in doing so, we become reactionary and emotionally charged.

To take things responsibly meant that I got to take a look at how I created the situation I was in, and what I was going to choose to do now that I was in it. I had to step back and take a good hard look at what was actually occurring. I did not receive a ton of calls of support, or invitations to go out, but in that time, I was so deep in my own self-pity that I had cut

myself off from the rest of the world. I did not reach out and call anyone, and the few people who did call me had to listen to me lament about how my phone wasn't ringing off the hook.

I was alienating and frankly, pissing off, the people who did care enough to reach out. I needed to evaluate how often I was "there" for someone else in the past. I needed to really look at what kind of friend I had been. I needed to stop focusing on only myself and my ego and get off it so that I could see the possibility that people were respecting my space, were tending to their own lives, or were even unaware of what I was going through! I had to admit that I was on a set of rails to make myself feel like crap, solidify my old beliefs, and that is all. I was so committed to being right about having no friends that I had literally created that showing up in my life. I had given away my power to the n^{th} degree, simply by not being mature or responsible enough to experience my experience, and get over my ego long enough to call and ask friends for support, and graciously accept the support of those who did reach out.

Being aware of our patterns and automatic reactions can be powerful. I have mentioned numerous times throughout this book the patterns I have, and how I act when I get "reactionary." I will always have these patterns. I will always want to be "thrown" to these reactions. I can't undo the last 45 years of conditioning (and a little DNA) in a few years of

IDENTIFYING YOUR KRYPTONITE

work. What I can do, however, is be aware of these patterns and reactions. I can notice when something's a-bubblin' and choose to react in a way that I know is me being on automatic, or I can stop, breathe, experience my experience, and make a choice. From this, I can keep my power and act, rather than react from my subconscious conditioning.

About a week ago, in the spirit of this book, I decided to dig up some of my old journals. I kept journals from the age of 12 through my third year in college. While I didn't write daily, I wrote quite a bit. I had not read through these journals in probably 15 years. I sat down one night and read through them all. I was shocked to find some patterns I had not recognized before. Even in hindsight, I didn't really see some of the patterns until I actually read what had been going on in my mind from the age of 12 to 22.

It makes sense that some of the patterns are still emerging today, and how I decided for many years that I was worthless, unlovable, undesirable, and insecure. I also saw patterns of a fighter, a powerhouse, a fiercely giving woman, and someone who loves deeply. It makes sense that I still have all of this still show up in my life. It is who I authentically am and will always be. But the power is in how I choose to have it be in my life. We can choose to give our energy away to negative thought patterns and limiting beliefs and allow them to have us by the throat, or we can choose to take things responsibly, allowing our biggest and best self to be in charge.

Often, we turn to something repeatedly because there is a payoff or a reward of some kind. Some of those payoffs could be to make a situation more comfortable, to avoid something unpleasant, or to get attention. To break a pattern or habit, one first needs to be aware. Then we can take the steps to interrupt the habit, replace the habit with something more positive, or reach out for support in quitting altogether.

Honor yourself by not allowing your thought patterns and habits to define or “run” you. Being aware of what your automatic thoughts are and being able to recognize when you are being swept away emotionally by those thoughts is crucial. For example, do you have a pattern of putting yourself down in your head? Are you constantly telling yourself how dumb you are, or how inadequate you are? To notice these patterns is essential. Once you can start to notice these thought patterns, you can then learn to keep them from running your life. Pay attention to the lies you tell yourself, and notice when these thoughts occur. Is it in response to a particular situation or person, or when you’re alone? Start to notice when you are slipping into your automatic thoughts and pay attention to what triggers them. Honor yourself by being in this practice, and by giving yourself room to make a different choice of how you react, rather than allowing old patterns to rule new futures.

Honor the Gift You Are

You are truly unique. Sometimes, that fact can be empowering, and other times, frightening. The fact that each of us is unique means that there are no hard-and-fast truths that fit all of us like a cookie cutter. We all have gifts and YOU are a gift to the world. Something that many of us do not do often enough is to celebrate our gifts, or the gift we are to the world.

To honor the gift we are means to take pride in who we are, to love ourselves unconditionally, and to respect ourselves authentically. Honoring oneself is highly valuing yourself, getting that you matter in the world, and that you deserve respect, compassion, acceptance, and love. Often, when we live in shame, blame, or fear, we allow others to dishonor us because we feel we somehow merit it, or we may dishonor ourselves because we are unhappy with something about ourselves or our past and feel as if we deserve the punishment. We may even do this subconsciously. It takes courage and confidence to speak our truth, to be our authentic self unapologetically, to respect ourselves, and to forgive ourselves compassionately.

You deserve to be here. You deserve to live a life of happiness and fulfillment—at your greatest! You deserve to have a life of purpose, passion, and possibility, and all it takes

is the choice. All it takes is you stepping into your power, allowing yourself to blossom, forgiving yourself when you muck it up, and choosing to keep doing this over and over. Treat yourself kindly and compassionately, and don't let yourself get away with playing small. You were meant to live this thing called life, and you get to choose what it will look like. Watch for patterns and habits, nip them in the bud, and choose to be the you that is a big person. Bust through, and keep busting through until you are shining bright.

Journal Work

What ideas or notions have you held onto about what it looks like to have power?

How do you feel about having power? Is this an uncomfortable or foreign way of thinking about power, or have you known this all along?

Are you being authentically yourself in all domains of your life?

Are you speaking and being your truth?

In what ways are you not being authentic?

Do you notice any patterns emerging, such as the pattern of holding back and not speaking up or saying what you really mean in relationships, or the pattern of pretending to be something you're not on social media,

IDENTIFYING YOUR KRYPTONITE

for example?

What would be possible if you were to authentically live in accordance with and accepting ALL of who you are? What do you think others' reactions to you might be?

How well are you honoring yourself?

Do you devalue or degrade yourself regularly, or are you in the practice of generally being compassionate, kind, accepting, and authentic with yourself?

How do you allow others to treat you?

What do you need to let go of to begin to honor yourself fully?

In what ways could you begin to honor yourself more?

Part Three: Living Your Vision

Chapter 19: Revisiting Your Vision

When you have a vision that is strong enough and powerful enough, nothing can stand in your way. — Lewis Howes

This book is now nearly at an end, and the thrilling thing is that your journey is only beginning. (Seriously, I am so excited for you!) You have taken yourself on in so many ways, and you get to acknowledge yourself, be in gratitude for the journey and what has been revealed, and now, take action based on what you have uncovered.

Like you did at the beginning of this journey, you are going to connect with your vision for yourself.

Look back on the vision statements you wrote at the beginning of your journal. Now that you have done this powerful work, really looking at yourself and how you are showing up in the world, you are going to refine your visions again. As mentioned in Chapter Five, we may refine our visions occasionally, as we are in the process of learning and growing and discovering our authentic selves, which is what we have done throughout this book. Eventually, you may

discover that your vision becomes clear, solid, unquestionable, and permanent.

Connect again with your vision. Remember that clear visions drive our ways of being, our commitments, and our actions. What vision do you have for yourself? Your life? While it may seem entirely possible or utterly impossible at this present moment, that doesn't matter. What's important is seeing it: really visualizing it as it is so. Being with it as if it is already occurring, because truly, it is. Again, as vision becomes clear, it becomes the solid foundation and driving force from which everything else can thrive.

Journal Work

Read through each of your vision statements. Say each one out loud. Get a feel for them, being with each. Revise or tweak anything that has changed, or doesn't feel right at this moment, given the work that you have done. Once you have finished, write down anything and everything that authentically comes up for you about this process.

My vision for myself is...

My vision for my family/relationships is...

My vision for my finances/money matters is...

BECAUSE I SAY SO

My vision for my job/career is...

My vision for my health is...

My vision for my community is...

My vision for the world is...

Write a letter to yourself, acknowledging yourself for your courage and compassion, and for caring enough about yourself to be on this journey. Be in gratitude for however it looked: however messy the journey has been for you. What are you learning about yourself?

Finally, journal about your next steps. What actions are you willing to take to see these visions for yourself manifested? You may even want to go back through your declarations and revise or make new ones, based upon the growth you are making and the breakthroughs you are experiencing.

Chapter 20: The Decluttering Process

Clutter is not just physical stuff, it's old ideas, toxic relationships and bad habits. —Eleanor Brown

To be in your power is to live your best life, authentically, cleanly, and true to yourself. Something that may be holding you back from truly being in your power and being your vision is clutter. Clutter is not only what we see in our physical environment, but there can be personal “inner clutter.”

Not long ago, I got a spring-cleaning bug and decided to go room-to-room through my apartment, purging anything that wasn't working for me, or that was just taking up space or that I no longer really used. Under my bed were about 4 long, flat “under-bed” plastic bins chock-full of clothes that were too small for me. Some of them were brand new items with the tags still on. Some of these items of clothing I had bought at the thrift store when I found a great bargain, but never wore. Other items were hand-me-downs from my thinner

sister or mom. All of these I had held onto in these under-bed bins, hoping that I would lose enough weight that I would fit into them someday.

This particular day, I decided to pull out the bins of clothes to try them on. Item after item, nothing fit. As I made my way through the bins, I threw everything that didn't fit on top of my bed. The pile grew and grew. As I stepped back and looked at the massive pile on my bed, I realized that I had amassed a ridiculous amount of clothing that I had been keeping, hoping that someday I would be thin enough to fit into them.

Seeing this pile wasn't new, however. I had been playing this *stash away the skinny clothes until you can fit them* game my whole adult life. I never lost the weight, only gained, and the sizes grew larger. This "motivation game" never worked. (Apparently hiding clothes under your bed is not a strong enough incentive or reminder that eating pizza and drinking beer on a regular basis makes one fat.)

But this time, I had a new revelation. It never occurred to me until that day that I have been not only subconsciously telling myself that I was "hoping" to get thinner to fit the clothes, but that I would be too poor to buy a new wardrobe, and would have to use hand-me-downs and thrift store clothing to clothe myself when I did lose the weight! It was a double-whammy of a realization. It revealed so much about how I held myself, and the unworthiness and scarcity that was

my conversation. I had been subconsciously telling myself for over 20 years that I was never going to be thin (so don't even think about keeping those clothes in your closet), and that I was never going to have money (so be sure to keep everything, because surely you will not be able to afford new clothes). It was a huge slap in the face about how I held myself, and one of those "rock my world" moments for me.

So, I decided to be done with that conversation and to get rid of it all—not only everything under my bed, but anything that wasn't flattering on me, was out of style or worn out—from my closets and drawers as well. I donated 9 full trash bags of clothes and shoes, and was left with very, very few items, as I also noticed how much of the clothing in my closet was either tattered, at least 15 years old, or plain unflattering or ugly. I was left with the absolute bare bones, and I am working to this day on building a wardrobe, as I continue to finally lose the weight I have been holding onto for so long.

I kept going with the rest of my apartment, mindfully decluttering other closets and drawers, my kitchen, and my garage. Doing this, I also discovered that I was holding onto my wedding dress and other items from my wedding, including knickknacks I received as wedding presents. Now that the marriage is over, all these items do is remind me of a time in the past—not my vision for my future. I either donated them or gave these items to my ex-husband, or put away a few special things for my daughter to have when she is older and decides what she would like to do with them.

One Step at a Time

What conversation are you holding about yourself? What do your “things” say about you?

Now that you have a good idea of your vision and where you want to be in your life, I invite you to start to declutter your life in a way that is about your vision for yourself, and not your past beliefs, stories, or vision. Begin to clean up your physical environment and rid yourself of the clutter that holds you back from passionately being all about your vision for your future *now*.

Some areas you may want to tackle are closets, drawers, your car, your kitchen, the garage, your cosmetics and beauty products, and craft rooms.

Clean up your physical environment of anything that isn't supporting your vision and what you're up to. Take each area, step by step over the next several months, and go through everything. Donate or trash anything that is holding you back from living the life of your dreams. Remember: this is going to take time! Be patient with yourself.

Mending Fences

Another area that may need a good tidying is your relationships. Clean up any past grudges, resentment, or

THE DECLUTTERING PROCESS

unfinished business. Think about the people you are still holding hostage with your thoughts. Either speak to them and clean up the mess with a conversation, or once and for all, let whatever it is really go, and decide never to allow it in your space again.

If you have unfinished business, such as an outstanding loan you need to pay back, communicate with that person and put in writing an agreement about the day and time you will have that loan paid back, and do whatever it takes to make it happen by that day and time. If you are engaging in bad habits that are not serving you, choose a quit date, and be about that commitment. As we explored in the chapter on commitment, have everything drive you to your intention of seeing your vision manifested. Create an environment of everything to support you, including those habits and relationships that need to be cleaned up. Having to put our energy on things other than what we are up to is a distraction and disperses the energy that we could be using for forward movement.

Be in excellence about all things in your life, from the inside out. And remember again, this process will take time. Be patient with yourself and continually reconnect with your “why” as you go through this process.

Chapter 21: The Power of Choice

The strongest principle of growth lies in the human choice.

— George Eliot

One of the most powerful and decidedly compelling capacities of a being human being is our ability to make distinctions, and therefore wield the power of choice. Many people have decided that they have no choice, and this in my opinion, is not only disheartening, but dangerous.

Society has been telling us what choice is, but this is not really choice. It's the illusion of choice. Real choice is so much broader and deeper. While we arguably did not have choice about the family that we grew up in, or the circumstances in which we were raised, the talents or abilities we were born with, or the body that we were born into (although there are some people who believe otherwise), we do have choice about how we interact with it all. We can choose to be unhappy, or be resentful or ashamed of our upbringing, or we can choose now to acknowledge, be in gratitude, and choose whether those circumstances and situations will be a factor in our

future journey. We can be on automatic and allow ourselves to keep doing the same thing we have always done, and getting the same results we always have, or we can get off “automatic” and choose to create something else.

I must interject here to say that there is a lot of conversation about whether the single mother raising her children in poverty ever really has a choice; or whether the woman who had a miscarriage had a choice; or the parents whose child has cancer ever had a choice. Circumstances, problems, death, sickness, hate, discrimination, racism, prejudice, abuse, hunger, war and general ugliness absolutely happen. These things are very, very real, and we do not necessarily or always have the power to choose or not choose these. And with these things come the emotions of grief, sadness, anger, resentment, guilt, etc. We can and should fully experience *all* our emotions, no matter what they are.

We are all powerful beings who have the choice of how we continue after we have experienced—or even while we are experiencing—these deep and very real circumstances and events and emotions. We can choose to beat ourselves up or punish ourselves with feelings of shame or blame for the rest of our lives for the terrible events that happened, or we can choose to forgive ourselves and others, and create something new from a powerful place of courage, wisdom, and acceptance. We can choose to succumb and live miserably, or we can be in the place of acceptance and gratitude or do our

very best to overcome seemingly impossible circumstances. Adhering to the idea that we do have choice over how we interact with our circumstances allows us more control, power, freedom, and possibility.

One of the most inspirational stories that keeps me going is the story of J.K. (Joanne) Rowling, the author and creator of the Harry Potter series. While writing Harry Potter, her mother passed away, she married and had a daughter, divorced and became a single mother, eventually finding herself jobless and living on government assistance in a humble apartment. She experienced a deep depression and admits she considered suicide.⁵ Her manuscript for Harry Potter was rejected 12 times, until finally a publishing house in London agreed to print 500 copies of her book. Her seven Harry Potter novels eventually sold over 400 million copies and spawned a media empire. Rowling is now one of the wealthiest women in the world and the first billionaire author, giving much of her fortune and time to dozens of charities.⁶

Whether to operate as if you have choice or not is up to you. Ultimately, you can choose to operate with what gives you a sense of integrity, confidence, security of self, clarity,

⁵ Rachel Gillett, "From welfare to one of the world's wealthiest women - the incredible rags-to-riches story of J.K. Rowling," Business Insider, 2015, <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-rags-to-riches-story-of-jk-rowling-2015-5>.

⁶ Jacob Shamsian, "How J.K. Rowling went from struggling single mom to the world's most successful author," Insider, 2018, <https://www.thisisinsider.com/jk-rowling-harry-potter-author-biography-2017-7>

THE POWER OF CHOICE

and empowerment, or you can choose to operate with a sense of powerlessness, helplessness, and doubt. Even in this, you have the choice. Recognizing that you have authority over how you choose to live allows you to get out of shame and blame and victimhood and be in a neutral place of acknowledgement and accountability. This also allows you to see other possibilities in the future and choose differently the next time an opportunity or situation presents itself.

I ascribe to the belief that you have the power to choose your next steps on your journey, as we have now reached the end of our time together. You get choose what you will do with the insight you acquired, the wisdom you uncovered, and the power you have gained through your deep exploration of self. For some of you, you may wish to continue your journey through further trainings, workshops, coaching, or further research or journaling. (See the “Resources and Further Study” section for more about this.) Some of you may choose to have this be a “nice experience” and do nothing with what you have uncovered. I urge you to take what you have learned and gained in this experience and do something with it that empowers you, furthers you on your journey, and serves others. The choice gets to be your own.

You have now uncovered some powerful tools and the ability to make choices based on knowledge, rather than ignorance. I encourage you to choose the option that allows you to keep your power, make your dreams come true, and be

on the path to living the life you want to live. Choose wisely.

Once you complete your final journal work I encourage you to **CELEBRATE** the heck out of your completion! This journey is a powerful one. One that has taken you a lot of work. You deserve to celebrate your accomplishment of making it through to the end, **BIG TIME!** Take yourself out to dinner, go dancing with a group of friends, buy yourself a new outfit, give yourself a day off from work to go to the beach, treat yourself to a massage or a mani/pedi—whatever you choose to do to celebrate this win, you get to do it—because you deserve it!

Journal Work

How does it make you feel to have the power of choice about your future? What is coming up for you now?

What possibilities would open up for you if you began to live your life from the concept of having a choice about how you get to be in the world, rather than living by default?

What “next steps” are you choosing to take, now that you have completed your journey? Will you be taking further courses or trainings, continuing to journal, hiring a coach, or creating an action plan? Make a commitment to yourself to have this journey be a powerful one for you, and then take the steps to make it happen.

Epilogue

My life has taken many twists and turns, and looking back, I can see why and how I created this journey to have me end up here, supporting people in living their dreams, becoming their powerful and authentic selves, and creating the life they want to live. I went from being a singer and dancer in musical theater, to earning an acting degree, getting my teaching credential and being a high school English teacher, to starting my publishing company, to getting my Master's Degree in Education, to delving into transformational work, to owning and becoming CEO of a transformational training company, becoming a certified Trainer, to closing the training company and resigning as CEO, and now to writing this book, and being a trainer, speaker, and coach. I have gone from being single, to married, to a divorced single mother. From an outsider's perspective, it may look like I've been all over the place—but I can see now how absolutely perfectly engineered my life has been.

BECAUSE I SAY SO

While I have had many, many challenges in life, one pattern has always remained true: I always pushed through and picked myself up by my bootstraps to take on the next challenge. I fought to finally break free of the limiting beliefs I held about myself and now, I feel totally confident saying that I have embraced the authentic “me” that I fought, avoided, and ignored for far too long. It took me getting real with who I am, giving myself permission to acknowledge my journey, being grateful for it all, and choosing to take on my vision for myself in a big way for me to get here. And I am here to tell you that if I can do it, so can you!

So now what? What do you do with all these new discoveries and powerful revelations about yourself? The answer: anything you want. What you have now is valuable information to begin your creation. You have discovered the true gem of who you are at your core. You have made strides with your self-confidence, and your vision for your life, and have put your stories and excuses on notice. You have become more awakened, more self-aware. The choice now of what to do with all of this is up to you. And I hope that possibility is exciting for you!

When you are caught in the moment, noticing your reaction, hesitation, doubt, or fear stop yourself to ask: What am I experiencing? What is my *why*? What choice could I make right now that would support my vision and what I am up to in my life? Remember your why, or what’s at stake for

EPILOGUE

you. Continually come back to asking yourself, “What is most important to *me*?” If you are consistently finding that you choose something that does not support your why or your vision, then they are not strong enough for you, and you should go back and revisit them to make them stronger, more specific, or more personal.

The more you can tune in with your thinking and automatic behaviors—where you “go”—the more you will be able to nip things in the bud before they even occur, so much so that things that don’t support your vision don’t occur in your “space” as often anymore. Start by being a master observer and just noticing. As you practice this, you will naturally become more aware, and able to “see things coming” before they happen, and be able to see the possibilities for you that you otherwise may have not seen.

I encourage you to go back and reread your journal entries every once in awhile to see/measure your progress and evaluate your results. Get an accountability buddy, or find a coach. If you’re not seeing the results you want, ask yourself what you’ve really been committed to. Adjust from there, get recommitted, and be in action. You’ve got this. Because you can. Because you choose to. You get this one life—and you deserve to be happy, fulfilled, and authentically yourself. You have people counting on you. You’ve got people pulling for you. And you’ve got people cheering you on and championing you.

BECAUSE I SAY SO

I continue to be on my own personal journey, and I hope that my story inspires you. We all can choose to live the life we were meant for. We can all choose to be "big" people, living wildly full, authentic, and purposeful lives. Believe in the gift you are, and shine on, simply BECAUSE YOU SAY SO.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank you, the reader, for trusting me to be on this journey with you. You are amazing, you are powerful, and I cannot wait to hear what you create in your life!

I have so many people who have supported me on this journey, not only in writing this book, but the journey leading to it. I am so grateful to have such a loving and supportive tribe of people—and to all of you, too many to name—I say thank you.

To Julie Hatch and Joann Claspill for their support and hugely valuable feedback and ideas on the first draft.

To my Heroes Quest Circle - and especially Krishna Aru, Shaina Little, Kyle Leighton, Sandra Mendez, and Carolina Garcia, for being “beta-testers” and giving me feedback for the first round of this book. You are all such amazing people and I

am so honored to know you.

To my sister Stephanie, thank you for being my sister and friend. You have always fought for me to win, and I know that you always will.

To Dr. Ray Blanchard for your mentorship and undeniable love and support. For sharing your gifts with the world, for your insight, knowledge, and valuable discussions. Thank you for always taking a stand for, and believing in, me.

To Rick Delia for being one of the first people to really believe in me, for pushing me to believe in myself, and for allowing me to be my authentic self with you. You inspire so many and are a gift to this world, and I would be remiss not to mention you as one of the reasons this book was even possible. Thank you for being my friend for all these years.

To Daniel Paraszky, for being my buddy, and the spark of inspiration for me to actually sit down and finally start writing. For picking me up when I believed I couldn't get up on my own, for coaching me and championing my vision, and for being able to see past the crazy and still to be my friend.

To my mom Kathleen, who was not only my editor, but is—and always has been—my absolute biggest supporter and

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

cheerleader. I love you beyond words (although you know that I could string a bunch of sappy ones together, separated by 15 commas!) I wouldn't be who I am without you always seeing and believing in the true me. Thank you for putting up with my frantic calls, last minute changes, bouts of doubt and questioning, and for having a discerning eagle eye to help me see my vision through.

Further Study/Resources

To find out more about speaking engagements, workshops, coaching, or upcoming events, visit my site at kristenmbowers.com, or follow me on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/kristenmbowers> or on Instagram at <https://www.instagram.com/kristenmbowers/>.

If you would like to know more about Simply Novel, my educational publishing company, visit simplynovel.com. We specialize in supplemental educational materials for English Language Arts, Grades 2-12. You can follow Simply Novel on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/simplynovel/> on Pinterest at <https://www.pinterest.com/simplynovelpins/> or on Instagram at <https://www.instagram.com/simplynovelteachers/>.

For more about Heroes Quest, visit theheroesquest.com. Heroes Quest is a powerful experience, exploring distinctions

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

through bi-weekly webinars and live meetings created by my mentor and friend Dr. Ray Blanchard. There are study groups with “everyday heroes” throughout the United States. Visit the website to see if there is a group near you, or join a virtual group to study online with people from all over the world.

The transformational trainings I refer to throughout this book are called “three tier” self-awareness trainings. There are many companies throughout the world conducting similar trainings. My good friend Daniel Paraszky picked up where I left off and started Life Design Education offering the exact same trainings I took here in Los Angeles. To find out more, visit their website at LifeDesignEducation.com or on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/LifeDesignEducation/>. I *highly* recommend checking out these amazingly powerful trainings!