The Unapologetically Selfish Guide to Building and Living a Life You Actually Love

Me First!

JENNIFER THOMÉ

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THE UNAPOLOGETICALLY SELFISH GUIDE TO BUILDING AND LIVING A LIFE YOU ACTUALLY LOVE

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First edition, 2026.

ISBN (paperback): 979-8-9951556-0-7

ISBN (ebook): 979-8-9951556-2-1

Published by Aion Press

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to you, and the unapologetically happy, empowered, and thriving version of *you* that *you* are about to become.

Thank you for showing up, and taking a chance on living a life that you truly love.

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

I have spent a good part of my life at the table.

Not at the back of the room, not reading about important people in the morning paper, but seated across from them. CEOs who could move a market with a single sentence. Chefs whose names hang in gold above doors in cities people dream of moving to. People who write laws, shape culture, and whose massive impact ripples not just across days but generations.

And here is the thing that always bothered me.

They were not better than everyone else.

I want to be precise about this, because it is easy to misconstrue. I am not saying they were frauds, or that their work is not extraordinary. Much of it is. I am saying that when I looked at these people, in the spotlight, and the people behind the scenes, I often got the sense that both sides were equally qualified to change the world. The talent was there in both rooms. So was the intelligence. So was the work ethic, the creativity, the plain decency. In many cases the person who never "made it" had more of all of it.

So what was the difference?

For a long time I assumed it was confidence, and I left it there. But confidence is a performance, and performances can be faked on a bad day. What these people had ran underneath the performance. It did not flicker when a deal collapsed or the reviews came in cruel. It was steady when the room turned against them. It was there before they walked in, and it was still there after they left.

It was self-worth.

Not the belief that they were good at something. The belief that they were worth something, fully, before they had done a single thing that morning to earn it.

Once I saw it, I could not stop seeing it. I started watching for it everywhere, and what I found made me angry on behalf of nearly everyone I knew.

Because the people with the most self-worth were almost never the people who, by any fair accounting, deserved it most. Self-worth did not track with goodness. It did not track with effort, or talent, or how much a person had given up along the way. Some of the most entitled people I have ever met were running on a full tank of it. And some of the most gifted, generous, hardworking people I have ever known were running on empty, apologizing for taking up space, and asking permission to exist.

That is the injustice this book was born out of.

If you are reading this, I suspect you already know which group you have been living in. You are probably very good at what you do. You may be the person others rely on, the one who holds it all together, the one who says yes before the question is even finished. And still, somewhere underneath the competence, there is a low hum that says it is not enough, that you are not enough, that the moment you stop performing, the whole thing falls apart.

I wrote this book because that hum is a lie, and because I got tired of watching good people believe it.

Here is what changed everything for me. I am, by training and by temperament, a researcher. I spent years learning to take apart what looks like instinct and find the structure hidden inside it, to ask what is actually happening underneath a thing that everyone else treats as a given. So I refused to accept the easy explanation, the one that says some people are simply born sure of themselves and the rest of us are not.

I went digging. I read the neuroscience. I studied the nervous system, the way the body decides long before the mind does whether you are safe enough to belong to yourself. I looked at the psychology of people-pleasing, at why so many capable people are wired to earn their right to exist over and over, every single day. And the deeper I went, the clearer it became.

Self-worth is not a personality. It is not luck, and it is not a gift handed out at birth to a fortunate few. It is built. It can be built on purpose. The people who seem to have been born with it were, almost without exception, simply built that way early, by circumstance, while the rest of us were built another way.

Which means it can be built again.

If you're here, there's a good chance your life already looks pretty "successful" on paper. You have the job, the responsibilities, the title, maybe the family, the calendar full of commitments. You are the reliable one. The capable one. The one everyone turns to when something needs to be done, fixed, held, or solved. And yet underneath all that competence there's a quiet ache: *shouldn't I be happier than this?*

This book is especially for you: the burned-out professionals, the over-responsible high achievers, the ones who have carried more than their fair share at work and at home for years and are paying the price in exhaustion, resentment, anxiety, and a nervous system that never gets to exhale. Your life has not been a failure. It has been a training ground. And now, we're going to use everything you've learned to build something that finally feels like it belongs to you.

That is the whole promise of what you are holding. Not a louder voice in your head insisting that you are great. Something far steadier than that. A foundation underneath the performance, so that your worth stops depending on the next achievement, the next yes, the next person you keep happy at your own expense.

I wrote this book because I went looking for that map, could not find one, and decided to draw it myself.

The people across the table from me were not better than you. They simply had something you were never taught you were allowed to have.

So let me teach you.

A FEW NOTES BEFORE WE BEGIN

A few quick things, and then we dive in.

This book is grounded in neuroscience, psychology, somatic therapy, and spiritual traditions, but you won't find footnotes interrupting the flow. This is a conversation between two souls, not a textbook. If you want to go deeper, I've collected every study and idea I reference at the back of the book.

I do have to point out that this book is not a replacement for therapy, medical care, or professional support, especially if you're dealing with trauma, mental health conditions, or a situation where your safety is at risk. It was carefully written to shed light on the things too many of us go through alone. But if you need extra help, these practices work best alongside professional support, not instead of it.

I know you're eager to jump in, but I highly recommend you read the steps in order and do the exercises as you go. The method builds from the ground up, body first, then mind, then soul, and each step is what makes the next one possible. Skipping ahead is the fastest way to end up right back where you started. I'll explain much more about this in the book.

And finally, know this. When I started my own *Me First!* journey, I wasn't coaching from a mountaintop. I was a newly divorced single mom with an angry ex, six figures of debt, no financial cushion, and no free time. I built everything in this book while living in survival mode, juggling single parenthood, financial pressure, and constant fear. So when I tell you transformation is possible from wherever you're standing, I'm not speaking from ease. I'm speaking from the trenches, because that is exactly where I learned all of this.

You deserve a life that feels like yours.

Let's go build it.

WHAT'S POSSIBLE FOR YOU

Before we begin, I want you to know this works. Not in theory. In real life. In real *lives*.

One client came to me certain her twenty-year marriage was over. She wasn't leaving because she'd stopped loving him. She was leaving because she'd disappeared inside it. So we didn't work on her marriage. We worked on her. She learned to say the hard thing, ask for what she needed, and stop managing everyone's feelings but her own. Six months later she told me her marriage felt brand new, because for the first time, she was actually in it.

Another had spent a decade at war with her own body, and had the diet graveyard to prove it. So we didn't touch her meal plan. We worked on safety. Once she regulated her nervous system and climbed out of constant fight-or-flight, the white-knuckle battle with food quietly ended. Her body changed too, but that's not the part she cries about when she tells the story. The part she cries about is finally feeling at home in her own skin.

A third hadn't asked for a raise in eight years. She was terrified of rocking the boat. When she finally sat across from her boss and named her worth out loud, she didn't just get the raise. She got the respect that had been missing the entire time, and a version of herself who would never again wait to be noticed.

And one more was buried in debt, convinced she'd be working until the day she died. Putting herself first meant getting honest about her money, investing in her own future instead of everyone else's problems, and building the kind of security that is letting her walk away from work years earlier than she ever thought possible.

Different women. Different dreams. The same method.

SO WHAT IS THE METHOD?

Me First! moves you through five steps, in a specific order, because the order is what makes it work.

Step One: Wake up.
First we tear down the people-pleasing lie for good and get crystal clear on what it's actually costing you: your health, your time, your money, your one precious life. This is where "selfish" stops being a dirty word and becomes your superpower.

Step Two: Reclaim your dream.
Before we build a new life, we remember what you actually want. The dream you buried to keep everyone else comfortable. Then we design a life with you at the center of it.

Step Three: Recalibrate your body.

Here's what almost every self-help book skips: you cannot think your way into a new life while your body is stuck in survival mode. So we start in the body, regulating your nervous system until you finally feel safe enough to change.

Step Four: Reprogram your mind.
Once your body feels safe, we go after the old mental code, the "I'm not enough," the "I have to earn love," the automatic thoughts running your life on autopilot, and replace it with programming that actually serves you.

Step Five: Reignite your soul.
Finally, with a calm body and a clear mind, we reawaken your intuition, your sense of magic, and your ability to call in the life you want. This is where it all starts to feel effortless.

Body, mind, and soul, built on a foundation of waking up and designing your dream life.

And here's why the order matters so much: most people try to start at the top, with mindset and manifestation, while their body is still screaming that it isn't safe. That's why their breakthroughs never last. We do it the other way around, from the ground up, so that when the changes come, they stay. For good.

Your turn starts now.

YOUR FREE ME FIRST! TOOLKIT

This book is a journey, and every journey is easier with the right gear.

Before you turn another page, grab yours at www.JenniferThome.com:

The People-Pleasing Type Quiz.
In Part One you'll meet the eight types of people-pleasers. Take the free quiz now so that when you get there, you'll know exactly which chapter is about to read you like a diary.

The *Me First!* Workbook.
Every exercise in this book, printable and in one place, so you can scribble, score, and dream without wrecking these lovely pages.

Subscribe to My YouTube.
I regularly post videos of the most helpful tools and insights to my YouTube channel. You can find it at: youtube.com/@jennifer-thome

Follow Me on Instagram.
Here's where you'll get the latest insights, tools, and inspirations from my ongoing research and coaching work.
www.instagram.com/jenniferthome

All are free, because your transformation shouldn't wait for a budget line.

And if at any point on this journey you find yourself wanting company, know that there's a whole community of us walking it together. You can learn more about that on my website.

Go get them! I'll wait right here.

PART ONE
THE WAKE-UP CALL

Welcome back!

You finally found your way back to yourself!

The you that you're meant to be has been waiting.

I know it's been a long time since you've been here, the place where your needs come first. Where you do what you want to do. Where every thought, action, and feeling is aligned and feels right.

You might not recognize it yet. Like a house that's been sitting empty for too long. The lights are still off, the windows are dusty, and you can only see the faint silhouette of your dream. But it's loaded with potential, and you can feel it. I know you can. You felt it the moment you first met me, or the moment this book caught your eye. You *instantly* knew it was time to come home to a life that you love. And that is exactly what we're going to do in the coming days and weeks.

If you don't know me yet, allow me to introduce myself. I'm your guide, Jennifer Thomé, a former people-pleasing overachiever who nearly drowned in my own goodness, and who finally played the "f*** this! I'm done!" card, burned the rulebook, and started living my life on my terms.

It took a lot of courage, mixed with panic, hope, frustration, excitement, and research to get there. Luckily I excel at all of those. I was raised by two psychologists, so I had a good sense of how the brain works. Oh, and my career in intelligence and marketing psychology? The skills I learned there were also priceless. Nonetheless, it took everything I had to get to a place where I really wanted to be. And now, I'm handing you everything it took to get here.

These chapters are filled with the framework, the tools, truths, and the occasional loving roundhouse kick of tough love and inspiration you'll need to get started and keep moving. We'll dip into the science and soul of how we got stuck in unfulfilling lives, rediscover what

happiness means to you, redesign your life to circle around the most important person in it (clue: that's you!), and then I'll arm you with the tools to get there.

And at the end of this journey the real adventure starts. A life that feels right. Your goals, your passions, and your happiness will become clear and crystallized. The weight of other people's expectations and your own BS excuses will be a distant memory.

This will be the most important work you ever do. And it won't be easy. You're about to rip out decades of programming: the toxic notions about what makes you a "good" person, a "successful" colleague, and a "loving" family member. You'll discover what it actually takes to live a wildly joyful, successful, and yes, impactful life with YOU at the center. Yes, YOU. Lit up, unburdened, and unapologetically real.

You'll see exactly how you got trapped in the wrong life, and you'll design the right one, pack your bags, and move into it. You'll regulate your nervous system so you have the courage and calm to burn down what's broken. You'll rewrite the old mental code that's been running and ruining your life, and by the end, you'll even reconnect with the magic of existence.

This, of course, is no small feat. Which is why this next part is so important. We are going to be selfish. Because when you're finally in the center of your life, where your happiness, health, and bliss come first, your light doesn't blind the world. It lights it on fire. You'll become the spark, the torch, and the lighthouse that shows other people how to come home to themselves. And when needed, you'll be the firestorm that burns down what stands in the way.

Now, before you panic, let me assure you that you still get to be a wonderfully nice, good, and delightful person. You'll just be doing it on your own terms, and in a way that actually makes the world a better place.

You see, you've been playing small for too long. We all have. But here is the first loving truth that I want to share with you. The odds of you being alive are so small. Infinitely small. One popular thought experiment puts them at 1 in $10^{2685000}$. That's a 1 followed by 2,685,000 zeros. Is that number real science? No. Nobody can truly calculate such a thing, and that's the point: it's poetry doing the math. Over the course of our 13.8 billion years in this universe and 4.5-billion-year history on this planet and 300,000 years of humankind, your soul has beaten the odds time and time again. The right people had to survive, meet, fall in love, and create life at just the right moment for you to exist.

Now, I don't know about you, but this number, to me, might just suggest that your being here is not just to live a life that is good enough. No, you were put here to thrive, to evolve, to expand, and to light up everyone around you, and the way that you do that is by finally treating yourself like you are the most amazing thing that's ever happened, because you are. We all are.

So. Are you ready to find out why sacred selfishness is the key to lasting happiness, to meaningful relationships, and to profound impact?

Yes?

Good.

I'm glad you're finally waking up from years of sleeping on your dreams.

Welcome back to day one of your new, gloriously self-centered, self-obsessed, and ruthlessly unapologetic life.

THE ME FIRST! MANIFESTO

I put myself first. Always.
Not because I don't care about you.
But because I care about me.

I don't set myself on fire to keep anyone warm.
I don't wear exhaustion as a badge of honor.
I don't perform for approval.

I take rest without guilt.
Pleasure without apology.
Success without permission.

I say no when it's a no.
I say yes only when it feeds me.
I say nothing when silence serves me.
And I speak loud when truth demands it.

I am not your fixer, your cushion, or your clean-up crew.
I will not shrink so you can take up more space.
I will not carry your burdens because you can't or won't.

I was not born to be nice.
I was born to be real.
To be whole.
To be free.

I don't ask for space. I take it.
I don't wait to be chosen. I choose myself.
I don't dim my light because it blinds you. Put on shades or turn away.

Call it selfish.
Call it too much.
Call it whatever you want.
I call it mine.
I call it my birthright.
I call it my one shot at living the life that I know is mine.

YOU HAVE ONE LIFE. STOP WASTING IT ON OTHERS.

Being nice has many benefits, but is it really serving you?

As I write this book, I am a proud forty-three-year-old. I've been married, divorced, have two kids, and have had a solid career in research and marketing. I've had a really good run so far, and I am grateful for it. But over the years of doing everything right, I started having a sinking feeling in my gut and often found myself wondering, "If I've done so well at so many things, shouldn't I be happier?"

While I was uncertain of how to make myself happier in the moment, I started taking small, selfish actions. I did things for me, and I learned to listen to my gut. With every step, every action, and every word spoken in my highest good, things started to shift, and not only did happiness begin to trickle in, but I also began to understand what it truly is. Autonomy, independence, respect, and a life that felt like it was mine.

A snowball started to form. The more things I did for myself, the happier I became… and the angrier. I started seeing just how much a life lived for others had cost me over the years, and that, my dear friend, sparked rage, resentment, and all of the other delicious emotions that fueled me to finally cut the cords to my old way of being and step fully into the version of me I was always meant to be. Happy. Liberated. Secure. Thriving. Loved. Respected. Unstoppable.

And that is the person I want you to become too, so to kick off your process, I want to take you on a little thought adventure, and ask you: "What have you lost by being nice?"

When I sat with this question, the first answers were obvious. Time. Self-respect. My youth. My joy… but I love numbers and I wanted something more tangible, so I started looking at the numbers, and found a painful truth: people-pleasing has cost me around $200,000 over the years (that's around $8,000 a year on average. Ouch!) and close to a decade of my life.

In case you're wondering, I came to this number by calculating how much more I could have earned by asking for more or being less loyal to one job (this alone, I found out, came out to about $20,000 a year towards the end of my employed life), the cost of medical bills from burning myself out and suppressing my feelings, not asking for my fair share in my divorce, loaning money, covering the cost of trips to see those who never came out to see me, and more.

During my own *Me First!* journey, I taught myself about finances and investment, and that knowledge made me wonder what that sum might look like in twenty years. If I was losing an average of $8,000 a year on being nice, that amount, invested, could add up to $400,000-500,000 in retirement funds in twenty years.

And that was just the money! Not the time, potential, health, energy, and joy that were also wasted on trying to please others and keep the peace. These things all added up, and they all collected interest. So the question that kept on nagging me was: If I was investing this much in making everyone else happy, shouldn't I get something out of it?

Now, I'm not saying that taking care of others is a bad thing. Inherently it's not. But the numbers don't lie. I'm guessing that since you picked up a book on how to realize *your* dreams by putting yourself first, you've tried that model and it didn't work, and that the whole thing is starting to feel a bit unfair.

Amazing work for minimal raises, emotional space-holding met with zero growth from the other side, and unfair shares of workloads with no rewards. You know the feeling. And as a people-pleaser, you might let those injustices slide. You carry burdens that were never yours to carry. You quietly pay a bill you didn't agree to with your time, energy, health, and wealth. And here's the worst part: the longer you do it, the higher the price becomes. You're being bled dry and you're supposed to feel grateful for it.

And that ends now.

THE PRICE OF PEOPLE-PLEASING

People-pleasing costs you in every single area of your life: your health, your time, your wealth, your energy, and more. So let's get crystal clear on the price you're paying for being a people-pleaser, and then, we'll make sure that starting now, you get what you actually deserve!

Here are some shocking examples from your friends, the researchers:

- Women who don't negotiate their salaries earn $500,000-$1M less over their careers, and research shows people-pleasers are far less likely to advocate for themselves. That's a house. A decade of retirement. Your freedom.
- Chronic, long-term stress, like the kind you get from being a doormat and piling on other people's problems like you're running a crisis hotline, increases your risk of coronary heart disease by up to 43% according to a major study on work stress and heart health. That's not a rounding error. That's your body keeping score.
- And giving more emotional labor than you receive is directly linked to higher rates of depression, burnout, and even physical illness. In fact, the average woman (and, I'm guessing, the people-pleasing man) spends the equivalent of a full month every year on unpaid emotional labor, such as listening, soothing, mediating, and organizing. By the time you retire, that's well over three years spent dealing with other people's problems.

Now I want to clarify that I'm not talking about caring for your children or helping a friend through a genuine crisis. I'm talking about chronic, one-sided emotional and physical labor where your needs never make it to the table, and your input is not rewarded or repaid.

And don't be fooled! These are not just minutes, these are sticky minutes, because other people's drama and trauma get into and linger in your nervous system. Your friend vents for twenty minutes. That's not just twenty minutes. That's twenty minutes of listening plus three hours of ruminating plus two weeks of checking in and carrying their anxiety in your body.

In psychology, catching other people's moods like this is called emotional contagion: their anxiety literally rubs off on your nervous system. And it has a partner in crime called hypervigilance: marinate in other people's problems long enough and your nervous system starts scanning for trouble on its own, even when everything in your life is O.K. The result, you guessed it: stress!

Oh, and the lie that you tell yourself? That it's no big deal? That is how it keeps happening. Emotions and energy are team players. They always follow your ill-spent time out the door, and this toxic mix drains your psychological battery so fast that you don't even remember what a full charge feels like.

Our brains were never designed to handle this many open problems at once. They were

designed for resolution. Simplicity. Survival. Our brains are tired, and no amount of matcha, coffee, B vitamins, or nootropics will give you the energy that alignment and peace will. It's up to you to decide what to let in and what to keep out.

My father, a normally very eloquent psychologist, has always had a blunt way of putting it: "Don't let people sh*t in your brain."

But it doesn't stop at wasted time and nerves. Let's continue our calculation and figure out the compounding effect.

The chronic stress of always being "on" floods your body with cortisol, wrecks your sleep, screws up your immune system, and wraps your waist in a snug layer of protective fat. You cook whatever is easiest because you don't want the discussion. You skip workouts because "work comes first" or "the kids need me." Before you know it, your body is carrying the proof of every single boundary you failed to hold.

And wealth? Forget about it.

Selflessness will clean out your bank account faster than any shopping spree, and you won't even get a new bag out of it. You don't ask for a raise because you don't want to rock the boat. You lend money without asking for repayment. You tip or donate more than you can afford because you're doing "well" and they're "struggling." You spend money you don't have to keep up appearances, or money you should be investing in yourself to fix others' problems.

All of these little financial band-aids add up, pushing your goals, your retirement, and your well-deserved abundance further down the line. Globally, one in ten people faces financial hardship in retirement. And while so many systemic factors play into that statistic, I've met enough people in this group, or on track to join it, to know that selflessness all too often has something to do with it.

One client added up the cost of the take-out, massages, therapy, treatments, and treats they gave themselves just to keep from burning out, and it came to close to $20,000. And the sad part is, they would have had so much more fun spending that money in the pursuit of pleasure, not as a stopgap to keep from drowning.

That raise you're afraid to ask for? $5,000 a year, invested at a modest 7% growth, becomes more than $200,000 in 20 years, and close to $500,000 in 30. If you earn the stock market's historical average of 10%, that 30-year number climbs to around $800,000. Is it still not worth one awkward conversation?

And of course, it can easily go the other way. That debt you can't pay off because someone isn't paying you your worth? It grows 3-5 times faster than your investments do, just in the wrong direction.

Then there's the lost opportunity cost. Is there something you've always wanted to do, to build, but never had the time and energy for? Now you might know why. Even an hour a day spent on your goals instead of other people's problems will build your dream. Your time is precious, if not priceless.

Here's the part that makes all of this so dangerous: these costs don't stay in their lanes. They feed each other. I call it the exhaustion spiral. One "yes" you couldn't afford turns into three more problems to manage. One sleepless night cleaning up someone else's crisis leaves you too

foggy to advocate for yourself the next day. One financial hit triggers stress that tanks your health, which eats your time, which drains your energy, which leads to impulse spending, which leaves you too tired to work on the life you actually want.

These are not simple setbacks. They are spirals. And if you've lived in them, like I have, you know that feeling broke, exhausted, and buried by obligations doesn't just rob you of the joy you deserve to feel every day. It makes it that much harder to climb back up to it.

Every time you give more than you can afford, whether it's time, energy, or money, without getting at least that much back in joy, growth, or satisfaction, you are stealing from your future self.

So let's stop calling it kindness when it leaves you depleted. Let's stop thinking you can keep paying the bill without going bankrupt. You can't.

Starting today, if the cost is unsustainable and the benefit is unclear, it's a no.

The good news? There's a mirror-image spiral going in the other direction. Every *Me First!* decision you make (one boundary, one raise requested, one hour reclaimed for your dream) starts a compounding effect. Tiny shifts add up to more energy, more clarity, more money, more self-respect. The spiral doesn't vanish. You just start walking it in the opposite direction.

Before we go further, I want you to grab a piece of paper and write down what being nice has cost you over the years. Don't sugarcoat it. Write it all down, even if it seems petty or stupid or it feels embarrassing or painful.

This exercise is not about finding fault or assigning blame. The point is to create awareness. The more aware we become, the better decisions we can make in the future. It's that simple. We'll get to the part where we rewrite your past a little later.

NO REGRETS. ONLY LEVERAGE.

Let me guess: after that last chapter and crunching your own people-pleasing numbers you have a big uncomfortable knot in your stomach? Or perhaps a sinking feeling? Maybe your ears are burning with rage?

Good! We are going to put that energy to good use!

But first, let's talk about regret.

After doing the work, I no longer regret anything. Not the bad choices. Not the wrong turns. Not the messy relationships, the dumb financial decisions, the jobs that drained the life out of me, or the nights I cried myself to sleep thinking I'd ruined it all. Not the time, money, and effort I wasted trying to make everyone around me happy.

Why? Because regret is a prison, and I refuse to serve time for being human.

We are wired by nature to care for others. We're programmed by society to be "good people."

And at the end of the day, we're human. We learn by doing. Our boundaries reveal themselves when crossed. What feels good and what doesn't becomes clear through experience. It's all part of the journey. And when we learn more, we know more, and then we do better.

So when you find yourself feeling bad about the past, remember to step out of that rusty prison, lock it behind you, and throw away the key so you can never go back.

Regret, like all of our emotions, is a powerful teacher and motivator when we learn to understand it. We'll go into all the emotions in depth later on, but for now, I leave you with this: No amount of regret you feel can change the past. The only real use for regret is to inform our better tomorrow. So thank it. Learn from it. Take the lesson, and leave the bad feelings behind.

Living with regret is like trying to drive a car with the parking brake on. You drag, and it fills your surroundings with smoke and noise… but once you release the parking brake, you fly! The smoke clears. And before you know it, you're soaring so fast that you forget it was ever there. Moving forward, the only time you use the parking brake is when you actually need it: when you're parked on the hill of a big decision, and you need to keep yourself from rolling backwards by remembering what happened last time you didn't choose yourself.

So let's swap regret out with optimism, with growth!

Regret says, "You should have known better."

Growth says, "How could you? You've never lived this before."

Regret shames you.

Growth thanks you and cheers you on.

As I went through my *Me First!* journey I came to realize that every bad decision taught me something. They taught me how to set boundaries, how to manage money, and how to trust my gut.

They broke my heart into so many pieces that I finally learned to love myself. They knocked

me flat on my ass so I'd stop for a moment to realize just how much I'd been ignoring my own needs.

In fact, I don't even think of them as bad decisions anymore. I think of them as leverage.

Leverage to be brave knowing that I can survive, and thrive, in any situation.

Leverage to spot a bullshitter, and run the other way.

Leverage to say yes when I want to, and no when I don't.

Leverage to trust my gut without needing permission.

Leverage to be daring enough to build something, knowing it might fail.

And no, this isn't just blind optimism or joy-washing. It's science. Research in cognitive psychology shows that people who actively reframe their past experiences and who look for growth instead of regret report higher life satisfaction, greater resilience, and even stronger mental health. It's called cognitive reappraisal, and it rewires your brain to see challenges as opportunities. This doesn't mean denying what happened or excusing bad behavior, not yours or others'. It means extracting wisdom without drowning in shame.

So when you choose growth over regret, you're not lying to yourself. You're training your brain to work for you instead of against you.

Regret is a choice. You don't "have to" regret things just because society says you should. You can decide right now that you're done carrying that load. You can say: I don't regret my past. I honor it. I make it my teacher, and I use it as leverage to make my next chapter the fiercest one yet. I love the person I was, because she got me to where I always wanted to be.

So here's a powerful thought experiment: what if you thanked all of your bad decisions?

Seriously. Let's try writing some of these down to see if we can't prime your brain for more optimism.

"Thank you, terrible job, for teaching me I will never again trade my health for a paycheck."

"Thank you, toxic relationship, for teaching me I deserve so much more."

"Thank you, financial disaster, for teaching me how to rebuild and grow wealth."

"Thank you, past self, for doing the best you could with what you knew and what you had."

Gratitude burns regret to ash. And like a phoenix, you rise from those ashes.

BUT I LIKE BEING A NICE PERSON

Let's just rip the band-aid off: you can be nice, but you've got to do it from the right energy.

Right now, you might not even think twice about giving away your time, energy, health, and money. Maybe you tell yourself that you're getting something back from it. Maybe you actually are getting something from it: validation, security, a sense of purpose. But those aren't real returns. They're just crumbs you're feeding yourself to keep from starving, instead of nourishing yourself.

I get it. I used to be that way too. And you can still be a kind, supportive, generous human while also being selfish enough to put your needs first.

But let's be clear, if you're people-pleasing to fill a need, you're drinking from a poisoned cup because you don't know how to draw water from your own well.

You might not know how to fill your own cup, or what you really want in life yet, and that's normal. You've been trained since birth to follow someone else's dream. To fit in. To play the game by the rules. You've got layers of lead-based societal paint on your soul that we're about to scrape off together.

Here's a simple litmus test for kindness vs. people-pleasing you can use to get started:

Kind: You give from overflow, and it energizes you.

People-pleasing: You give from depletion, and it drains you.

Kind: You can say no without guilt.

People-pleasing: "No" feels impossible.

Going off and pursuing your own happiness can seem so daunting, especially if you've done well with people-pleasing. This was my case. The pain of staying stuck wasn't enough to move me toward my bliss. Until it was. Until I hit my breaking point.

I was raised to be a good girl, the diplomat, the one who made life smoother for everyone else. I got the grades, wore the right clothes, never stepped too far out of line. I became a master at reading rooms and morphing into whatever people needed me to be.

I settled into a relationship because he worked so hard to win me over. Isn't that how it's supposed to work? And I told myself I had enough. I had two kids, moved states when he wanted to be in a better area, and then worked nights and weekends to keep our life afloat. I carried the mental load, the workload, and the loads of laundry, and swallowed my own needs until there was nothing left.

I was running on empty. Glowing and successful on the outside, while deep down hoping that I'd wake up, realize it was all a bad dream, and get a do-over. Lunch hours were spent with doctors and psychologists instead of with friends, late nights were spent researching how to undepress myself. I was at my professional peak, but also at my personal rock bottom.

In short: The "better" my life got, the more miserable I was.

And that is when I started walking back all of my people-pleasing ways. Sometimes in leaps

into murky waters, sometimes in carefully planned tip-toes, sometimes in very poorly articulated outbursts on the phone, and sometimes by just cutting ties and walking away.

It wasn't easy or elegant, although I will admit that parts of it were beautifully researched and executed. But day by day, I stood my ground. And when the weight of everyone else's expectations finally fell away, I had more energy than I'd ever had before in my life.

I donated real money I'd earned to causes I actually cared about. I consulted with companies whose missions lit me up. I played with my kids instead of answering late-night emails. My time and energy finally went into things that made me proud, and not into fixing other people's messes while mine were left to fester.

That's the selfishness I'm talking about. It's the kind that is possible for everyone, including you. And it's the kind that makes you nice, generous, and dangerous, in the best possible way, to the system that tries to cage you.

So take a moment to entertain the thought: "If you weren't acting out of guilt and scarcity, but from abundance and conviction, how would you be the best possible version of yourself?"

CONNECTION OVER CONFORMITY

We've been told that community is crucial for survival, that loneliness will kill us, and that fitting in will get us far. And biologically, yes, of course, our hunter-gatherer ancestors needed their tribe. Rejection meant hardship or death. Research shows the brain processes social pain, such as rejection, using some of the same neural regions as physical pain. That's why being left out can feel so much like a gut punch.

And loneliness isn't harmless either. A landmark meta-analysis of over 100 studies found that a lack of social connection increases mortality risk by 50%, which is roughly equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Now imagine the benefit of finding genuine connection rather than living in isolation because your genuine self hasn't found its people yet.

Here's a hidden truth inside those studies: fitting in is not the same as connecting. You can be surrounded by people and still feel isolated and starved for real connection. That's not survival. That's a slow death.

The famous Harvard Study of Adult Development of more than 700 people over the course of 85 years (and running) found that the quality of your relationships is the single strongest predictor of long-term health and happiness. Not wealth, fame, number of friends, or length of relationships. Just quality.

So if fitting in means masking, you're paying for belonging with your health.

If you haven't heard the term masking, it means hiding your true self (your feelings, needs, and your natural way of being) to fit in. You know, saying yes when your whole body screams no. Softening your truth until it's unrecognizable. It's like living in an emotional corset: presentable on the outside, crushed on the inside.

Chronic masking triggers constant low-grade fight-or-flight activation in the nervous system. That means elevated cortisol, immune suppression, and higher risk of heart disease, depression, and burnout.

Masking also impacts mental health directly. A 2020 study found that masking was strongly associated with burnout and even suicidal ideation in autistic adults, not because autism is inherently harmful, but because hiding who you are is exhausting for anyone. While this study focused on autistic adults, people-pleasers experience similar exhaustion from constant self-suppression.

Now, here's the twist: selfishness isn't isolation. Sacred selfishness means choosing quality over quantity. It's choosing people and commitments that energize you instead of draining you. It's deciding that your well-being comes first. Not as a negotiation, not as a "once I've taken care of everyone else," but as the foundation for everything you do. This is why I had to make a radical shift.

When I stopped living for other people's comfort, I became more generous, more impactful,

more alive. I wasn't patching leaky boats for people who refused to pick up a bucket. I was building ships that could actually sail, and inviting the right people on board.

And you can do the same. And you don't need anyone's permission. You just need to stop asking for it.

From here on out, consider me your selfish bestie. I'll walk with you, challenge you, and remind you when you're slipping back into old habits. Because this isn't just about saying no to others, but about saying yes to yourself so clearly that no one can pretend they didn't hear, and doing it with so much conviction and consistency that being true to yourself becomes second nature.

So let's stop being nice at our own expense. Let's start being good in ways that actually do good, for us and for the world.

SACRED SELFISHNESS

Let's deal with the word, because it's the whole reason you hesitated to pick up this book, and maybe the reason you almost put it back down.

Selfish. It lands like an accusation, doesn't it? Somewhere along the way you were taught that it's one of the worst things a person, and especially a woman, can be. Selfish was the word used whenever you wanted something for yourself. Whenever you said no. Whenever you rested instead of giving. It was the leash, and you learned to correct yourself before anyone else had to.

So let me say this clearly, right at the start: the word was weaponized to keep you small. And I'm about to take it back, and hand it to you as the most powerful tool you own.

THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF SELFISHNESS

Here is the distinction that changes everything, and once you see it you can't unsee it. There are two completely different things hiding under one ugly word.

The first is selfishness from emptiness. This is the kind you were warned about, and rightly so. It's taking because you feel you don't have enough. It's the person who drains the room, who keeps score, who needs everyone else smaller so they can feel big. It comes from scarcity and fear, and it leaves less behind than it found. This is the toddler-tantrum, corporate-greed, screw-everyone kind. We're not doing that.

The second is selfishness from fullness. This is sacred selfishness, and it is the opposite. It's tending your own well so carefully that it never runs dry, and then letting it overflow to everyone around you. It's choosing the people and commitments that feed you, resting before you're wrecked, and treating your own life as though it matters, because it does. It doesn't take from others. It stops taking from you.

Same word. Opposite acts. One empties the world, the other fills it. When people clutch their pearls about selfishness, they're picturing the first kind. They've never been introduced to the second.

WHY "SACRED"

I don't use the word sacred loosely. I use it because your life is not yours to squander. You were given exactly one, a wildly improbable, once-in-the-history-of-the-universe shot at being here, and tending it well isn't indulgence. It's reverence. Letting yourself run empty to earn everyone's approval isn't humble. It's a slow refusal of the gift.

Think of your energy as a well. For years you've been hauling bucket after bucket out of it to keep everyone else watered, and never once stopping to let it refill. That's not generosity. That's a well going dry, and a dry well helps no one. Sacred selfishness is the radical act of tending the source. And here's the miracle of it:

You don't create a better world by draining yourself to serve it. You create a better world by filling yourself up so fully that your overflow blesses everyone you touch.

That's the whole book in one sentence. Read it again. When you are full, well, and rooted in your own truth, you don't become less generous. You become more generous, more powerful, more magnetic, because now you're giving from overflow instead of scraping the bottom. The people who love you have never needed your empty. They've needed your overflow. They just didn't know how to ask, and you didn't know how to give it.

You'll notice I have a few words for this: sacred selfishness, radical selfishness, unapologetic selfishness. They all gesture at the same thing. But from here on, the name is sacred selfishness, because that word carries the truth the others miss. This isn't merely healthy, like flossing. It isn't merely radical, like a trend. It's sacred, like a duty to the one life you were handed. Keep that word close. It's your permission slip and your compass, all at once.

If you're worried you'll slip into the bad kind, good, that worry is proof you won't. But here's a simple test for any choice, so you never have to wonder. Ask two questions:

Am I acting from fullness or from fear?
Fullness says, "I'm choosing this because it's true for me." Fear says, "I'm grabbing this because I don't trust there'll be enough." Sacred selfishness always comes from the first.

Does this fill my well, or just move water around?
Saying no to a draining obligation fills your well. Taking something from someone else to soothe your own scarcity just moves water around, and leaves everyone thirstier. Choose the fill.

Run any decision through those two questions and you'll never mistake sacred selfishness for the other kind. One roots you. The other empties everyone, including you.

This is the lens for the whole rest of this book. Every boundary you set, every dream you chase, every no you finally say out loud, you're not being the bad word they warned you about. You're tending something sacred. So the next time that old voice hisses "selfish" at you, smile, and say: "Yes. Sacredly so."

Now that you know what it really means, let me show you the seven truths that prove it.

SEVEN TRUTHS ABOUT SELFISHNESS

You've been taught that selfishness is a sin. That good people sacrifice. That love means putting others first. That the world gets better when we all do our part. That giving and forgiving will fill the void and solve the problems created by an unjust system. That fixing others is your responsibility.

Bullshit.

Do you want to know what really changes lives? Your own and everyone else's?

Being radically, unapologetically, sacredly selfish.

If you're here, it's because you've tried selflessness. You've bent over backwards, sideways, and upside-down to be who they needed, when they needed, how they needed. You've poured until your own well was dry, and realized that it still wasn't enough. That's the thing about people-pleasing. It's a bottomless pit, because everyone gets a quick fix (including you) but nothing ever changes for the better.

You've played the helper, the fixer, the supporter. You've smiled through resentment. You've bitten your tongue and choked on your own blood. Lowered your standards. Sacrificed your needs for the greater good, only to end up burnt out, bitter, and secretly wondering if anyone's ever going to take care of you.

Selflessness didn't make you more lovable or more respected. It certainly didn't change the world for the better. All it did was keep the status quo and wear you down.

Here's what they don't tell you: When you're full, when you're well, and when you're rooted in your truth, that's when you become a real force for good.

Not when you're running on fumes.

Not when you're trying to earn your worth through performance.

Not when you're shape-shifting for scraps of appreciation.

When you're selfish in the right way, you stop the leaking. You seal up your energy. You show up whole. And guess what? Everyone around you benefits. They start to notice that there is another way of doing things, and hopefully, begin doing the same for themselves.

Don't believe me quite yet? Here are the truths you need to know about sacred selfishness.

TRUTH #1: SELFISHNESS MAKES YOU HAPPIER

Let's start here: when you prioritize yourself, you feel better. Simple, right?

Your needs get met. Your energy stays protected. You stop hanging around people who suck you dry. You say yes to things that feel good, and no to things that don't.

You start living like your own happiness matters.

And when you're happier, you treat those around you better. You're easier to be around. You smile more. You laugh louder. You're present. You're generous. You're magnetic.

No one wants to admit it, but here's the truth: happy people are more helpful, because they have the energy to spare. They don't do it because they are trying to prove something, but because they can. They have the clarity, the time, and the desire to make real positive change.

They may take the same actions, but from a different vibration, and that makes a world of difference.

You don't create a better world by draining yourself to serve it. You create a better world by filling yourself up so fully that your overflow blesses everyone you touch.

TRUTH #2: SELFISHNESS MODELS WHOLENESS

Every time you say "no" to something that doesn't serve you, someone watching learns that they can say no, too. Every time you ask for what you need, someone realizes they're allowed to ask for their needs to be met.

Every time you choose rest over martyrdom, boundaries over burnout, desire over duty, you're modeling what it means to live in integrity. People-pleasing may make others happy in the short-term, but showing them it's possible to choose themselves? That's what lights them up for years.

Think about the people you admire. The ones who seem lit from within, who radiate something you can't quite name. Odds are, they're not overextended. They're not secretly fuming while folding everyone else's laundry. They're not performing sainthood to earn a gold star in the afterlife.

They're selfish. They choose themselves. And by doing so, they show you that it's possible. And you can do that for everyone else around you.

TRUTH #3: SELFISHNESS FORCES CLARITY

When you commit to living selfishly, you start asking different questions:

- What do I want?
- What do I need?
- What makes me feel good?
- What am I no longer available for?

These questions are terrifying if you've been conditioned to live for other people's approval, and if your palms are sweating reading them, you're exactly where you need to be. But they're also the doorway to your actual life. Being selfish doesn't just mean treating yourself to bubble baths and solo trips to Bali (though by all means, do both). It means taking radical responsibility for your experience. It means deciding that your joy, your growth, and your peace aren't negotiable.

And here's the kicker: once you start getting clear on what serves you, everything changes.

You stop chasing the wrong jobs. You stop dating people you have to fix. You stop saying

yes when you mean no. You stop leaking time, energy, and money into relationships and responsibilities that don't nourish you. You reclaim your life.

And the ripple effect of that is unstoppable.

TRUTH #4: SELFISHNESS ENDS RESENTMENT

Let's talk about the silent killer of relationships, careers, and mental health: resentment.

Resentment builds when you keep giving without receiving. When you say yes to keep the peace, but rage simmers beneath the surface. When you're the reliable one, the strong one, the nice one, and everyone expects you to stay that way.

But here's the truth: no one's making you do it. You are.

Yes, there may be consequences. But you're choosing those consequences over the consequence of losing yourself.

When you live from obligation instead of intention, when you give out of guilt instead of joy, when you overextend because you're scared to disappoint, resentment is inevitable, and no amount of gratitude can fix that.

But when you choose selfishness, resentment dies, because you are no longer betraying yourself.

You're no longer expecting people to read your mind. You're no longer building up invisible debt with the people around you.

You're clear. You're direct. You're honest. You give from fullness, not fear. And when you do give, it actually feels good.

TRUTH #5: SELFISHNESS STRENGTHENS YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

This might sound counterintuitive, but I'll say it loudly for the people in the back: Selfish people have better relationships.

They're not relying on others to meet every need, stuck in codependent cycles of caretaking and resentment, and they are not afraid to speak their truth. They are not afraid to walk away from what no longer serves them, which gives others the incentive to start working on themselves.

When you put yourself first, you stop expecting your partner to be your savior, your parent, your everything. You stop choosing people just because they need you. You stop tolerating behavior that drains you. You stop expecting others to fill the void you've created by abandoning yourself.

And saying no to things that don't please or serve you may feel weird at first, but it opens up so much space. Space in which love actually has room to grow, where you stop performing and start showing up, where people respect your boundaries, and you cultivate intimacy, not obligation.

Real love, the kind that is healthy, conscious, and sustainable, requires selfishness.

You have to know who you are, what you want, and what you're not willing to settle for. Otherwise, you're not loving. You're settling, enabling, and coping.

TRUTH #6: SELFISHNESS BUILDS YOUR LEGACY

You were not put on this planet to be liked by all and to keep the status quo. You were not born to people-please your way to irrelevance.

You're here to create. To build. To take up space. To leave a mark. To say something real.

That doesn't happen when you're shrinking yourself to keep the peace.

The world doesn't need more martyrs. It needs souls on fire, who own their power and trust themselves more than any rules that were written by those who don't have their best interest in mind.

Selfishness (living *Me First!)* is what allows you to build your dream life. To write the book, start the business, take the sabbatical, say no, say yes, and to do all of those things in a way that serves your highest good. Because you know what, every time you serve your highest good, you elevate the possibilities for everyone around you. When you choose you, the world expands.

TRUTH #7: SELFISHNESS MAKES YOU A BETTER PERSON AND PARENT

When we choose ourselves first, we grow. And when others see us grow, they get the crazy idea that they can as well. Not only does carving out time and resources for yourself level you up, but it raises the bar AND levels the playing field for everyone else.

And if you're a parent, you've probably been told that good parenting means constant sacrifice. That your kids come first. Always. No matter what.

Here's the problem: Children learn more from what you live than what you say.

If they see you depleted, resentful, voiceless, or joyless, that's what they internalize as love. They learn that love is pain, self-erasure, sacrifice, and resentment. That love is losing yourself in service to others.

But what happens when they see you honoring your needs, setting boundaries, expressing yourself, investing in your dreams? They learn a new story, where you are the hero, where you don't have to sacrifice, compromise, or hide parts of yourself. Where you are happy. They learn that happiness isn't selfish, but that it's the foundation of a better life. A life you can choose to change for the better.

YOU'LL NEVER FEEL READY. START ANYWAY!

You might be thinking, "I'm not ready!"

Perfect! That means you understand the magnitude of what you're about to do. Let's break it down.

Change is not something you wake up one morning and execute flawlessly. It takes mental effort to think it through, emotional effort to handle other people's reactions and your own fears, and physical effort to try new things. These efforts are not separate: they are woven together in one large-scale transformation that demands something from every part of you.

But here is the truth you need to hear. Living a life that is out of alignment with your values, constantly carrying the weight of other people's expectations, and denying yourself the right to put your own needs first takes just as much effort. Sometimes more. You're just used to it. It's a slow leak that never stops. Change is intense but temporary. Choose your hard.

When you first begin this journey, you might look in the mirror and say, "I'm not ready to change my whole life." And you would be right. The person who lives that life does not exist yet. You just started the process of becoming them.

The person who trusts their gut must first learn to hear it, to interpret it, and to act on it despite the fear. The person who can say no without guilt must learn new words, new boundaries, and new skills for handling pushback. The person who follows their dreams must first uncover them, then take small steps toward them, or, if courage strikes, leap into the unknown. The person who holds boundaries must learn to listen to their body and respond to its signals without apology.

Right now, you are *not* that person. But page by page, action by action, word by word, you will become them. And the best part is that every time you level up and live more authentically, you will unlock the courage, energy, and insight you need to keep going.

I promise that if you act on your highest good, one day you'll wake up and living this way will feel natural, amazing, and even "yummy," as my bestie Laura likes to say. Don't you want a yummy life?

When I walked away from work that drained me, it took effort. I had burned myself out saving up to make a change. I had to relearn to trust my gut and activate my instincts, which were buried under a lifetime of peacekeeping. It took therapy, mindfulness practice, and conscious self-reflection to unearth them. I had to regulate my nervous system before I could even admit I had dreams. Big dreams. Chronic stress kept my brain locked in survival mode, which limited my creativity and long-term vision. The sticky note that read "*Me First!*" stuck to my whiteboard for four years before I acted on it. I had the skill to write it long before I began, but I needed the heart, the clarity, and the belief that my voice mattered.

For me, the turning point came when I stood by my values, said no, and got myself fired.

After the shock wore off, I finally made myself the priority, and realized that all of my challenges were there to help me escape gravity on the way to my dreams.

And once I was in orbit, it was incredible!

Change does not happen on a perfect timeline. Change happens when you become the person who can make it. The key to making it happen is thanking and celebrating the person who is making change (that's you!) every single day. I have friends and clients who jumped in the deep end. I needed a few tower moments to push me.

So start with one tiny action. Not because you're ready, but because action creates readiness.

As you set out on your own journey, refuse to judge yourself for how long it takes or how many times you fall back on old habits. Each attempt builds strength. Each moment of gratitude fuels you. Research on neuroplasticity shows that each small action rewires your brain. Why not put that to the best possible use?

The price you pay for this change is mental, emotional, and physical. But the reward? It pays with interest. Waking up and recognizing yourself in the mirror. Feeling at home in your own life. That's worth everything.

YOUR PEOPLE-PLEASING TYPE

This is the chapter that will ruin people-pleasing for you forever. You're welcome!

Because once you see yourself here, you can't unsee it. You'll start catching yourself mid-performance. You'll hear the phrases you've been programmed to say, watch the patterns play out in real time, and think, "Oh no! I do that!"

And you'll finally get why you're so tired all the time.

Your people-pleasing type (or types; most people see themselves in several) is just a distortion of your greatest gifts, and when you step into your power, those same gifts become your greatest strengths. Every single one of these unhealthy ways of living is just your brilliance pointed in the wrong direction. Once you aim that brilliance at yourself, you don't just stop people-pleasing, you become magnetic, powerful, and, dare I say, unstoppable.

So here's your permission slip to drop the act, keep the gold, and finally use your gifts for your own life. Let's meet your type, and the version of you that you were always meant to be!

THE MARTYR

THE OLD YOU

If I don't do it, it won't get done. I'm exhausted, but I'm also proud of what I can carry. I like being the capable one, the reliable one, the person everyone turns to when things fall apart. The problem is that people stopped appreciating it a long time ago. Now they just expect it. I resent being needed this much, but I don't know who I'd be if I weren't the one holding everything together.

THE REAL YOU

You were never meant to prove your worth through exhaustion. Your grit, resilience, and ability to endure are extraordinary gifts, but they were never supposed to be spent keeping broken systems alive. You stop carrying the world and start building a better one. You protect your energy fiercely because your energy is the engine that drives your purpose.

Your mission as a Martyr is to stop proving your worth through sacrifice and start using your incredible strength, stamina, and determination to build a life that actually nourishes you.

You have spent years being the one who shows up, the one who handles it, the one who keeps everything moving when everyone else falls apart. Your ability to endure is remarkable, but endurance was never meant to be your identity. The world does not need you exhausted. It needs you alive, inspired, and fully present.

Your next evolution is learning that being needed is not the same thing as being valued. You do not have to bleed for people to believe you matter. You do not have to carry everything to prove you are strong. True strength is knowing what belongs to you and what belongs to someone else.

The *Me First!* version of you does not stop caring. She stops abandoning herself in the name of caring. She takes her incredible capacity and directs it toward her own dreams, her own purpose, and her own joy. She becomes a creator instead of a caretaker of chaos.

Your energy is precious. Spend it like the treasure it is.

THE PEACEKEEPER

THE OLD YOU

I just want everyone to get along. I can feel tension before anyone says a word, and I hate it. So I smooth things over, swallow what I really think, and tell myself it's not worth the conflict. Maybe if everyone else is happy, I'll finally feel safe too. I know I disappear sometimes, but that feels easier than risking rejection or anger.

THE REAL YOU

Your gift was never silence. Your gift was peace. Real peace isn't pretending the fire isn't there. It's having the courage to point to the smoke and say, "Something needs our attention." You stop managing everyone's emotions and start trusting that honesty creates stronger foundations than avoidance ever could.

Your mission as a Peacekeeper is to stop confusing silence with harmony and start using your gift for creating genuine peace through honesty, courage, and authenticity.

You have a rare ability to sense what others are feeling, notice tension before anyone speaks, and understand the invisible dynamics happening beneath the surface. This awareness is a gift. But when you use it to avoid discomfort at all costs, you end up creating the exact thing you are trying to prevent: disconnection.

Real peace does not come from everyone being happy all the time. It comes from people feeling safe enough to be real. It comes from trusting that relationships built on truth are stronger than relationships built on pretending.

The *Me First!* version of you does not create peace by disappearing. She creates peace by standing firmly in herself. She knows that her truth is not a threat. Her needs are not an inconvenience. Her voice does not ruin the room; it completes it.

You were never meant to be the person who absorbs every storm. You were meant to be the person who teaches others how to find calm within themselves.

THE SAFE SPACE

THE OLD YOU

People tell me things they've never told anyone else. They come to me when they're hurting, and I don't know how to turn away. I carry their stories, their pain, their fears. Somewhere along the way, I became everyone's emotional storage unit. I wish someone would hold me the way I hold everyone else, but asking for that feels selfish.

THE REAL YOU

Your ability to hold space is sacred, but holding space and carrying burdens are not the same thing. You become a guide, not a container for everyone else's pain. Your emotional home becomes so strong and so steady that others can rest there briefly without moving in permanently.

Your mission as a Safe Space is to stop carrying everyone else's emotions and start using your incredible capacity for compassion to empower others without losing yourself.

People feel safe with you because you have a beautiful ability to listen, understand, and hold space without judgment. You make people feel seen in a world where so many people feel invisible. This is a powerful gift.

But somewhere along the way, you may have confused being supportive with being responsible. You became the place where everyone dropped their pain, but forgot that you also needed somewhere safe to land.

The *Me First!* version of you understands that compassion does not require absorption. You can witness someone's struggle without making it your own. You can love someone deeply without carrying their wounds. You can offer guidance without taking over their journey.

Your heart is not a storage container for everyone else's emotions. It is a source of wisdom, warmth, and healing.

Protect your peace not because you care less, but because your peace is what allows you to care from a place of strength.

THE SAVIOR

THE OLD YOU

I can see exactly what people need to do to fix their lives, and it drives me crazy watching them struggle when I know I can help. If I can solve the problem, why wouldn't I? Besides, if I'm fixing everyone else, I don't have to look too closely at myself. Being needed feels safe. Being indispensable feels valuable.

THE REAL YOU

Your compassion is enormous, but your purpose was never to rescue people from their journey. You stop dragging people uphill and start reminding them they have legs. The fire you once used to save everyone else becomes the fire that transforms your own life and inspires others to do the same.

Your mission as a Savior is to stop rescuing people from the lessons they need to learn and start using your immense love and leadership to inspire them to rescue themselves.

You have a heart that notices suffering immediately. When someone struggles, your instinct is to help, fix, solve, and make things better. Your compassion is powerful, and your desire to make the world a better place is deeply admirable.

But love becomes limiting when it removes someone's opportunity to grow. Sometimes the greatest gift you can give another person is not the solution. It is your belief that they are capable of finding one.

The *Me First!* version of you does not become cold or indifferent. She becomes wise. She understands that everyone has their own path, their own lessons, and their own moments of transformation.

You do not have to save everyone to prove you are valuable. Your value exists before you fix a single thing.

Take that incredible fire you have always directed outward and turn it toward yourself. Build your dreams. Heal your wounds. Create the life you keep imagining for everyone else.

The world does not need another exhausted rescuer.

It needs you fully alive.

THE SAINT

THE OLD YOU

I'm easygoing. Low maintenance. Happy to help. I don't ask for much, and honestly, needing things makes me uncomfortable. I pride myself on being selfless, but if I'm really honest, it hurts when nobody notices everything I give up for them. Sometimes I wonder if anyone even sees me at all.

THE REAL YOU

You were never meant to disappear in order to deserve love. You are generous because generosity is your nature, not because sacrifice earns you belonging. You give from abundance, not depletion. You fill your own cup first and allow the overflow to nourish everyone around you.

Your mission as a Saint is to stop earning love through self-denial and start honoring yourself as deeply as you honor everyone else.

You have a beautiful instinct to give, support, forgive, and make life easier for others. You see what people need before they ask, and your kindness often becomes a source of comfort for everyone around you.

But kindness without self-respect slowly becomes self-abandonment. When you constantly place yourself last, you teach others that your needs are optional. When you disappear to make room for everyone else, eventually there is no one left to receive your own love.

The *Me First!* version of you understands that caring for yourself is not selfish. It is sacred. You are not taking something away from others by choosing yourself. You are showing them what healthy love looks like.

You are allowed to have needs. You are allowed to have boundaries. You are allowed to be a priority in your own life.

Give because your heart is full, not because you are hoping someone finally notices how empty you feel.

Fill yourself first.

Then let the overflow become your gift to the world.

THE DIPLOMAT

THE OLD YOU

I can fit in anywhere. I know exactly who to be in every room, what to say, what not to say, and how to make everyone comfortable. But sometimes I wonder if anyone actually knows me. I spend so much time translating myself for everyone else that I'm not even sure which version is real anymore.

THE REAL YOU

Your adaptability was never meant to make you smaller. It was meant to make you influential. You stop becoming whatever the room needs and start becoming the person who changes the room itself. Your brilliance, charisma, and creativity become unstoppable once they're rooted in authenticity.

Your mission as a Diplomat is to stop shrinking yourself to create harmony and start using your incredible ability to connect, innovate, and transform the spaces you enter.

You have always been a bridge builder. You understand different perspectives, sense what people need, and find ways to bring seemingly opposite worlds together. Your adaptability is extraordinary. You can walk into almost any room and figure out how to create connection.

But the gift that allows you to connect with everyone can become a trap when you start abandoning yourself to belong everywhere. You were never meant to be a reflection of everyone around you. You were meant to be a source of light that helps others see differently.

The *Me First!* version of you stops editing herself for approval. She understands that true belonging does not come from being perfectly acceptable to everyone. It comes from being fully yourself and finding the people who celebrate that.

Your ability to see possibilities is powerful. Your creativity is needed. Your perspective can change conversations, organizations, relationships, and entire communities. Stop spending all your energy making broken pieces fit together. You were not created to be the glue. You were created to be the architect.

THE LOYALIST

THE OLD YOU

I don't give up on people. I stay. I fight. I try harder. Leaving feels like failure, betrayal, or abandonment. If I just love enough, work enough, sacrifice enough, maybe I can save this relationship, this job, this situation. Walking away feels wrong, even when staying is hard.

THE REAL YOU

Your loyalty is beautiful, but it belongs to you first. You stop watering dead gardens and start planting seeds in fertile ground. You choose relationships, places, and projects that nourish you as deeply as you nourish them. Loyalty becomes a source of life instead of a sentence.

Your mission as a Loyalist is to stop confusing commitment with self-abandonment and start directing your devotion toward people, places, and dreams that choose you back.

Loyalty is one of your greatest strengths. When you love something, you show up. You keep your promises. You fight for what matters. You do not walk away at the first sign of difficulty, and that kind of dedication is rare.

But loyalty without discernment can become a cage. You may have stayed too long in relationships that drained you, jobs that diminished you, or situations that required you to keep sacrificing pieces of yourself just to prove you were a good person.

The *Me First!* version of you understands that walking away is not always quitting. Sometimes it is wisdom. Sometimes the most courageous choice is accepting that something has completed its purpose in your life.

You are not here to resurrect everything that is dying. You are here to nurture what is alive.

Your devotion is a gift. Your determination is powerful. When you choose environments where you are respected, supported, and encouraged to grow, your loyalty becomes the force that creates incredible things. You are not meant to spend your life proving you can survive. You are meant to find where you can thrive.

THE EXPERT

THE OLD YOU

If I know enough, prepare enough, and plan enough, nothing can go wrong. I collect information because information feels safer than vulnerability. I need to have the answer, the backup plan, and the backup plan for the backup plan. If I can just make everything perfect, maybe I can finally relax.

THE REAL YOU

Your brilliant mind was never meant to be a bunker. It was meant to be a launchpad. You stop using intelligence to protect yourself from life and start using it to create one that excites you. You trust yourself enough to know that even when things go wrong, you'll figure it out. Your wisdom becomes a tool for expansion instead of defense.

Your mission as an Expert is to stop using knowledge as armor and start using your brilliant mind as a tool for creation, curiosity, and possibility.

Your mind is extraordinary. You notice patterns others miss. You research deeply, analyze carefully, and prepare for possibilities most people never consider. Your intelligence has helped you navigate uncertainty and create a sense of control in a complicated world.

But knowledge can become a hiding place. You may have learned that if you know enough, prepare enough, and perfect enough, you can avoid disappointment, criticism, or failure. But life was never meant to be solved like an equation. The *Me First!* version of you does not abandon wisdom. She expands it. She knows that mistakes are not evidence of failure. They are information. She knows that uncertainty is not danger. It is possibility.

Your brilliance was never meant to keep you locked inside a fortress of preparation. It was meant to build bridges to new ideas, new experiences, and new dreams.

Stop asking, "How can I make sure nothing goes wrong?"

Start asking, "How can I make something extraordinary happen?"

Be honest: how many of these did you see yourself in?

Most people-pleasers don't become just one. We become shape-shifters. The Martyr at work. The Peacekeeper in relationships. The Savior with family. The Expert when things feel uncertain. We learn which version of ourselves keeps us safe in each room and we become very, very good at playing the part.

The problem is that eventually the costume starts to stick to your skin. You forget that the role was something you learned, not something you are.

Because here's the truth nobody tells you:

The Martyr was never weak. She was powerful enough to carry impossible things.
The Peacekeeper was never cowardly. She could simply see every angle and every possible consequence.
The Savior loved so deeply that she couldn't bear to watch people suffer.
The Saint had a generosity that most people will never understand.
The Diplomat could build bridges where others only saw battlefields.
The Loyalist knew how to stay when everyone else ran.
The Expert learned how to create certainty in an uncertain world.

None of these parts are bad. None of them need to be destroyed.

They simply need a new job. The Real You doesn't kill these parts of yourself. She promotes them. She takes the gifts and leaves behind the fear that created them. She keeps the loyalty and releases the self-abandonment. She keeps the compassion and releases the rescue mission. She keeps the wisdom and releases the armor.

Because people-pleasing was never your personality.

It was your protection, and protection is beautiful until it becomes a prison.

The good news?

Prisons can be left. The door was never locked. You were simply taught that leaving would make you selfish.

It won't. It will make you free.

ME FIRST! IN ACTION

When I first started telling people about this book, I got two reactions:

"YES! This is the book we need! Why has it taken so long for someone to write this?!"

And, less encouragingly…

"People are already way too selfish. You need to teach people how to be good. This is a terrible idea."

Ouch!

After I stopped reeling from the strong responses, I realized two things.

First, I refuse to abandon this book just because it makes people uncomfortable. Wow! That showed me how much I had evolved from my people-pleasing ways! A comment like that from a respected mentor would have destroyed me in the past, but now, I felt the sting, processed it with my therapist (and my dogs), and kept writing anyway.

The second thing I realized is that these comments are coming from the same place, but a different perspective. Allow me to explain. Both reactions are really about the same fear: that if people stop over-giving, the world tips into selfishness and no one is cared for. One person is living that fear from the inside, exhausted by it. The other is pointing it at the world from the outside. Same fear, opposite vantage points.

The first comes from the person who has reached burnout, has been bled dry and realized that their people-pleasing ways were not delivering the results they had hoped for. On some level, they understood that they were manipulating situations to keep everyone happy, trying to control others through "niceness," and quietly disintegrating in the process. They knew they wanted change, but didn't know how to move forward without the tools that once kept them safe: approval-seeking, avoidance, compliance.

The second group was also perfectly right. Some people are way too selfish, which is why it's so important that those of us who have given too much start taking back what is ours.

Regardless of what people think and why, I think it's important to remember that life is complex. Humans are complex. Communities are complex. Life is not a zero-sum game. We're not divvying up a fixed pie. The universe is abundant. Overflowing. Teeming with opportunity. We don't create change by shrinking ourselves. We do it by showing up fully and truthfully.

What matters is that people learn to stop denying their dreams and their passions. That while abundance may be limitless, your time and energy are not. That's why being selfish isn't cruel. It's smart. It's necessary. It's your only shot at sustainable happiness. And that's why we're here, and why I want to share some real-life experiences of what being *Me First!* looks like, so when someone calls your choices into question you know how to stay in your selfish center.

PEOPLE-PLEASING VS. *ME FIRST!*

One of the first questions that always come up is whether or not living selfishly means you can't be nice anymore. Of course not! You can still be nice, but you'll be coming at it from another energy, another perspective, and you can easily discover where you're coming from by asking yourself some simple questions, such as: Am I giving because I feel guilty or because I feel abundant?

Energetically, emotionally, and psychologically speaking, those choices are not the same. One drains you. The other fuels you. Even shifting your intention from guilt or need for stability or approval to clarity is powerful. You can complete the exact same action with a different intention and dramatically shift the impact it has on you. And it all starts with asking "What's best for me in this situation?" rather than reacting to fix the situation. Remember that you are now your north star. By the time you finish this book, this will be second nature and it will bring you so many positive results.

And yes, we will practice this throughout the book. But until this becomes second nature (which I promise it will), remember: You cannot pour anything from an empty cup. Except maybe your bitter tears. And you know who loves those? The people who depend on you staying small, even if they don't realize it.

Me First! questions you can (and should) ask yourself:

- What's in this for me?
- Does this meet my needs, emotionally, mentally, and/or financially?
- Will this help me grow, learn, or thrive?
- How will this benefit me in the short term and the long term?
- Does this make me happy?
- Is this a sustainable solution or just a quick fix?
- Does this bring me closer to my goals?

Here are just some examples of people-pleasing vs. *Me First!*

Money: As a people-pleaser, you give because you want others to feel better, and to feel better yourself by helping them, and never ask for repayment. Living *Me First!*, you can still loan people money, but you'll set clear expectations, or maybe use that money and invest it in yourself.

Emotional Caretaking: As a people-pleaser, you keep counseling your friends through the same drama cycles, softening your wisdom so as not to hurt their feelings, and resenting how much time this is costing you. Living *Me First!*, you tell them the truth, set and enforce boundaries around your time and your energy, and teach them how to rise, model resilience, and lead by example.

Success: As a people-pleaser you shrug off the compliments, and feel a little guilty about

your success, so you dim your light. You may even work overtime to pull up everyone else to share the spotlight so that they don't feel left out. Living *Me First!,* you *own* your success, celebrate it, and shine so brightly that others remember they're allowed to shine too. You go from being a savior and an unpaid coach to mentoring and inspiring, sharing your success by showing others how to be successful themselves.

Wisdom: As a people-pleaser, you give away your advice. Constantly. Without compensation. Every request is met with a yes, leaving you with barely enough energy for your own life and dreams. Living *Me First!,* you take that wisdom and experience and reserve it for paying clients, genuine friends, or your own growth.

Family Relationships: As a people-pleaser, you take yet another call from your mom about how hurt she is that your brother has distanced himself from her, only ending the call to listen to your brother complain about how unreasonable your mom is. Living *Me First!,* you remind them: "I love you both, but I can't be the go-between. You two need to talk directly."

Let's dive into some of these situations in more depth, shall we? See if you recognize yourself in any of these situations, and if you can identify places where you are living out of alignment with your highest self.

ME FIRST! AT WORK

Once upon a time, I tried to make everyone happy at work. I was the star of the show! Late nights, awards, big praise. I worked directly with the C-suite, juggled a dozen projects, played priority ping-pong with several opponents, and prided myself on being the nice one who never said no and smiled when someone threw a paddle across the table in frustration.

But I wasn't being rewarded for it. No overtime pay. No raise until I quit. I was afraid to ask for one, as it might rock the boat. Afraid to *need* something. And while I earned everyone's approval, I lost track of my health, family, and personal ambitions.

Eventually, I collapsed under the burdens I was creating for myself by keeping everyone happy. My *Me First!* moment wasn't born of bravery, but of desperation. That's when the "*Me First!*" sticky note first went up on my whiteboard, adding a bright spot of hope over a never-ending to-do list, and when I swore that if I lived to tell the story, I'd help others get on a different path, and hopefully, way before they ever reached the point of secretly hating their life.

Looking back with perfect hindsight, I could have addressed things sooner, before collapse forced my hand. But I don't regret the outcome. I could have simply asked for what I needed. But that felt harder than working myself to the point of burnout. Instead, I could have sat down with myself, figured out my goals and priorities, and started working on those instead, growing the skills and the confidence to actually live the life I knew I deserved, but was afraid to ask for.

So if you're feeling like a people-pleaser who's not getting their worth at work, ask yourself:

- Am I asking for the opportunities I deserve?
- Am I setting boundaries around my time and output?
- Am I getting credit? Growing and advancing my career?

- Am I afraid to push back because it might make someone uncomfortable?

If you answered yes to any of those, it's time to *Me First!* your work life.

ME FIRST! IN RELATIONSHIPS

Romantic relationships are often a breeding ground for codependency disguised as kindness, or settling disguised as honor, and many of the patterns we practice in relationships were inherited at an early age. Our parents and loved ones, bless their hearts, did the best they could to people-please their way into good social standing, but the lessons they taught us weren't always healthy, nor are they useful for the modern world.

If you're a people-pleaser in any area of your life, you may be one in other areas as well, and relationships are where those tendencies tend to be the strongest, especially if you're always the caretaker, the fixer, and the understanding one.

So, how do you feel about your relationships? Be honest. No one's reading your mind.

Do they light you up? Do they give you fuel? Do they make you feel seen, strong, sexy, and do they challenge you to grow? Or do they feel "meh"? Good enough? Checking all of the boxes, when really you want to live a life outside the box? Or worse, do they wear you down?

If you suspect you might be people-pleasing in relationships, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I showing up honestly, or am I performing a role?
- Am I convinced that if I try hard enough, I have the power to change this person or their behavior?
- Am I sacrificing my needs for their comfort, or are they giving me comfort, and making me feel like I deserve this just for being myself?
- Am I afraid to outgrow this relationship because it might make them feel insecure, or because it might rock the boat? Perhaps I'll be judged for severing ties or divorcing?
- Am I afraid that there's no better version of this relationship, or any relationship? Am I afraid to admit there IS a better version?

As you're reading these questions, I know you can feel in your gut whether you're in a relationship that fills you up or depletes you, and if it's the latter, it's time to start being honest with yourself, and once you have clarity, with others.

Being selfish in relationships doesn't mean being cold. It means being real. This might look like setting strong boundaries or having honest conversations, and then keeping your eyes open to see if real change happens. If it doesn't, then distance or separation is your next step.

It took me years to work up the courage to have honest conversations, fearing that they would implode my perfectly structured life. And when I finally did, that's exactly what happened. I went from a nuclear family to a single mom, a doting daughter and sensitive sister

to the family black sheep who said out loud what everyone was thinking. It was one of the most stressful and lonely periods of my life.

But then, the magic started happening. The depressed husband and absent dad? Once I set clear boundaries and asked for what I needed, he became a dear friend again. The kids finally developed a relationship with him, and found their own peace with the fact that he was not there for the daily grind, but that he would gladly fly them around the world for grand adventures.

The family? My brave non-compliance in the family drama and codes of silence forced them to deal with each other. To talk to one another and hash out their hurts and disappointments. There were many ups and downs, but eventually, the dust settled. People aired grievances and the hurt began to heal. Forgiveness was soon to follow. And the constant, passive-aggressive side chats? Those have vanished.

And the noncommittal boyfriend? He faded out and found himself, and after some healing, left space for someone to come in who was committed, who did housework, who supported my dreams and loved me just the way I am.

When all was said and done, we all came out winning in our own way. It wasn't easy, but once I let go of the need to fix everyone's problems and soothe everyone's emotions, I opened the space for actual progress to happen. Yes, the truth hurts, but in retrospect, the short, acute pain of breaking free from the holding pattern was far less painful than living in a constant state of agitation and unease.

And of course, you don't need to quit, be fired, or divorce to start living *Me First!* You just need to take the time to get clear on what it is you want, and realize that you deserve to have it. That can come through five minutes of honesty just as much as it can come from a dramatic life change. I suspect that the universe threw in an extra handful of drama in my life to propel me forward and make for a good read.

So get still, get centered, and ask yourself: "What would my relationships look like if they were truly healthy and flourishing? What does my ideal relationship look and feel like?"

That vision? That's yours to have. It's already yours. You just have to embrace it, demand it, and start living it.

WHY/WHEN THEY PUSH BACK

Now that you're on board with selfishness and authenticity, seeing it not as weakness but as your greatest strength, it's time for the reality check: other people won't love it.

Not right away, at least.

They'll bristle. They'll call you cold. They'll ask, "What happened to you?"

Love of approval dies hard. And with every boundary you set, every "no" you say to them and every "yes" you say to yourself, you'll feel their discomfort.

This isn't because you're actually being a jerk. It's because they've been conditioned to expect your compliance, your time, your availability, your emotional labor. And the culprit? You! You trained them to expect all of it. You got them hooked on the drug of codependence. Of course that's going to hurt, and they will have to grow past that, but you will finally have enough life left in you to fully live.

When you reclaim yourself, you don't just rewrite the script, you rewrite whole realities. You hand them the pen of destiny and show them that they can write their own tales just as you do. And that is going to make a lot of people uncomfortable at first.

But let me remind you that people's discomfort is not your responsibility. It never was. You're responsible for HOW you communicate. You're not responsible for their emotional response.

And always remember: the unseen sets the scene. The unspoken becomes the soundtrack of your sorrow, your anxiety, and your feeling of something being off. Just because we avoid our true feelings doesn't mean they don't exist. No. Our ability to feel deeply is part of our nature, and when we choose to avoid our feelings, they will find other ways to surface, be it as physical pain, anxiety, depression, or a dull sense of disenchantment. The same is true when we don't share our feelings honestly or someone isn't honest with us. We know. They know.

When you light up in your own right and begin to live authentically, others will realize what was there all along: that each and every one of us has the right and the responsibility to craft a life we love. To become whole and fulfilled. To make the most of our brief moment here on earth.

Sure, they may have to move through anger, resentment, and jealousy to get there, and that's O.K. Or maybe they won't realize it. But that is not your problem to deal with.

When they get angry, teflon it. It's not yours and it will not stick.

When they get sad, let them be sad. They need to mourn the loss.

When they try to guilt you, recognize the trap for what it is and move on.

Me First! isn't selfish indulgence. It's authentic living. And that authenticity gives others permission to do the same. If they choose to.

REJECTION IS REDIRECTION

Let me tell you about a friendship I held onto for years longer than I should have.

We'd been close since our twenties. The kind of close where you finish each other's sentences and share shorthand that nobody else understands. She knew my history. I knew hers. And for a long time, that shared history felt like the whole reason to stay.

But as I started doing the work to achieve what I truly wanted in life, something shifted. I started saying no to things that didn't feel right. I stopped shrinking myself in conversations to make other people more comfortable. I started choosing differently, showing up differently, *wanting* differently. And she didn't like it.

Not consciously, maybe. But I could feel it. The subtle digs dressed up as jokes. The way she'd revisit old versions of me like a museum. "*Remember when you used to do this?" "Remember when you were like that*?" as if she was trying to orient me back to something smaller, something she recognized. The way she went quiet when things started going well for me.

I kept explaining myself. Kept softening. Kept trying to bring her along.

And then one day she pulled back entirely, and I had to sit with the loss of a twenty-year friendship and ask myself an honest question: had she actually left? Or had I finally stopped leaving myself, and she'd just made the gap visible?

That question changed everything I thought I understood about rejection.

Here is what they don't tell you about coming home to yourself: it costs you people.

Not strangers. Not acquaintances you can lose without ceremony. People you love. People with history. People whose absence leaves a real, specific shape in your life.

And it will hurt, because it feels like abandonment.

But here is the thing I need you to understand, the thing that took me longer than it should have to see clearly: that hurt is not evidence that you did something wrong. It's evidence that something is working.

Rejection, when you're in active transformation, is not what it looks like. It isn't failure. It isn't proof that you're too much or not enough or somehow broken in a way that keeps costing you connection. It's the world recalibrating around the new coordinates of who you're becoming. It's your life editing itself in real time to make space and energy for all that you are becoming. And trust me, that space fills up again quickly with people and situations that will truly light you up. Rooms that are big enough to contain all of your brilliance.

If this is something you're afraid of, I want you to imagine this:

Everything you wanted has come true. You've arrived at your dream life. You've done the work. You've regulated your nervous system. You've rewritten the old stories. You've learned to speak your truth without apologizing for it. You've started to feel like yourself. Really, genuinely, unmistakably yourself.

Now imagine every person who only loved the old version came along for the ride. Every relationship built on your smallness, your over-functioning, your willingness to accept less than you needed. Every dynamic where you were the one holding everything together while quietly disappearing. All of it, intact, came with you to your new life.

You'd be at your dream destination with the tattered, threadbare baggage you've been dragging for years. You deserve better than that.

The magic in their distance is that they are setting you free. When someone self-selects out of your evolving life, they are doing something for you that you might not yet have been able to do for yourself. They are making the mismatch undeniable. They are closing a door that needed to close. They are clearing space that your new life is going to need.

If they choose to upgrade alongside you, that's wonderful. That's a relationship worth keeping and worth celebrating. Genuine growth shared between two people is one of the most beautiful things that exists.

And if they don't, appreciate the role they played in your life while you were finding the way back home to yourself. Back home to your dreams.

Either way, you'll be out in the sunshine of your own self-worth. And it is warm there. And it is real. And it belongs to you entirely.

MEET THE ONE WHO ALREADY MADE IT

There is someone I want you to meet.

They know you completely. Every version of you. The one who stayed too long, the one who doubted themselves in the mirror at 2am, the one who almost gave up on the whole thing somewhere around chapter four of their own transformation when it got harder than they thought it would be. They were there for all of it. They watched every stumble, every setback, every moment you were convinced you'd gotten it wrong.

And they never, not for a single moment, doubted you.

They are your future self. And they have been waiting, patiently and without worry, for you to find your way to them.

Your future self is not a fantasy. They are not a vision board or a projection or a hopeful fiction you're constructing to get through the hard days. They are *real.* They exist on the other side of the work you are doing right now, in the life that is already being built by every choice you're making, every truth you're learning to speak, every moment you choose yourself over the performance.

They made it. All the way through.

They sat in the uncertainty you're sitting in right now and they didn't fold. They felt the loneliness of the transition. The in-between time when the old life had loosened its grip and the new one hadn't fully arrived yet. And they stayed with themselves through it. They did the body work. They rewrote the stories. They learned, slowly and then all at once, to trust the voice inside them that had been trying to guide them home for years.

And now they're there. Genuinely, quietly, unperformatively *there.*

And from where they're standing, they can see something you can't see yet from inside the middle of it: that it all made sense. Every single piece of it.

They also know why it had to be hard at times.

But they can see the whole map now. They can see how the relationship that broke you open was the only thing that could have broken you open in exactly that way. How the friendship that fell away created the space where something truer could grow. How the version of you that hit the floor in the middle of this journey, the one who wasn't sure they had anything left, was the version who finally stopped holding on to what wasn't working, because they'd simply run out of the energy required to keep pretending.

They can see that the suffering passed. Not because you pushed it away, but because you moved through it. They can see that it left something behind: not damage, but depth. Wisdom that lives in your body now, not just your head. A quality of compassion for yourself and others that only comes from having genuinely struggled.

They wouldn't trade it. That's the thing that might surprise you most about them. Given the choice, knowing everything they know now, they wouldn't go back and smooth it out.

Because they understand, in a way you're just beginning to, that the magic didn't happen *despite* the hard parts.

The magic happened *inside* them.

So let's go meet them.

Close your eyes, if you're somewhere you can do that. Or just soften your gaze and let the words do the work.

You are in a room that feels immediately, inexplicably like home. The light is the good kind, the warm afternoon kind that makes everything look a little golden. There are two cups of tea already made, already the right temperature, waiting.

They're already there. They knew you were coming.

They look like you, but there's something settled about them that you notice immediately.

They smile when they see you, and pat the cushion next to them.

Sit down. I've been wanting to talk to you.

They wrap both hands around their mug and look at you for a moment before they speak. You know, the way someone does when they're not in a hurry and they have nothing to prove.

I know where you are right now, they say. *I know how it feels from inside the middle of it. I know you're not always sure it's working. I know some days the doubt is louder than everything else and you wonder if you're just telling yourself a story, doing all this work, making all these changes, and maybe you'll end up in the same place anyway.*

They shake their head, just slightly.

You won't. I'm the proof.

The things you're afraid to let go of? You let them go. And I know you can't imagine that yet. I know some of them feel like they're attached to something vital, like releasing them means losing a part of yourself. But they weren't a part of you. They were armor you put on so long ago you forgot it wasn't skin. When you finally took it off, you were so much lighter. You had no idea how much you'd been carrying.

The hard parts made sense. I know they don't yet. But they will. Every loss, every disappointment, every moment you hit the floor was moving you toward something. Not as a reward. Not because the universe was running a point system. But because growth doesn't happen in the comfortable parts. You know that now, intellectually. One day you'll know it in your body too, the way I do.

You didn't break. You broke open. There's a difference. And everything that came through that opening: the clarity, the self-trust, the relationships that are actually real, the way you move through the world now like you belong in it. None of that was available to you before. It needed what you went through to become possible.

They reach over and put their hand over yours for a moment.

You're going to be all right. You already are, more than you know. In fact, things are going to be so wonderful. I am so excited for you.

• • •

Your future self is not a destination you'll arrive at one day and then be done. They are a relationship. A living, available, always-accessible relationship with the most healed, most whole, most fully realized version of yourself. And they are with you right now, in this moment, in every moment where you choose to remember them.

When you're standing at the edge of a hard conversation, unsure whether to speak your truth or swallow it again, you ask them. *What would you do?* You already know the answer. They've been showing you.

When you're in the middle of a transition and the in-between is lasting longer than you thought it would, and the doubt is creeping in at the edges, find the couch. Make the tea. Sit with them. Let them remind you that they are the proof this all works out. That the confusion you're in right now is not a detour. It's the path.

When you've done something that the old version of you would have done, like fallen back into a pattern, softened a truth you should have spoken, chosen comfort over growth in a moment that asked for more, they don't judge you. They never have. They simply hold out their hand and say: *come back. There's no falling behind here. You are just where you need to be.*

They have been waiting for you your whole life. Not with impatience. Not with disappointment that it's taken this long. With the calm, steady, absolutely-certain love of someone who always knew you'd find your way here.

Everything from here, the body work, the stories you'll rewrite, the voice you'll learn to trust, is how you close the distance between who you are now and who they already are.

So let's go become them.

PART TWO
RECLAIM YOUR DREAM

Let me ask you: When did you stop dreaming of your dream life?

Was it slow, like fog rolling in over the ocean, until one day you looked up and couldn't see the horizon anymore? Or did someone rip the dream from your hands, tell you it was stupid, unrealistic, selfish even, and you, trying so hard to be good, let it go?

Was it the teacher who said, "You would be a great lawyer"?

The parent who furrowed their eyebrows when you shared your dream?

The colleague who asked, "But how will you pay the bills?"

The partner who looked through you and said, "Be serious."

The kids who needed so much from you that there was nothing left for yourself at the end of the day?

Or maybe it wasn't one person. Maybe it was hundreds of tiny moments that taught you to shrink. You learned that it was safer to stop wanting, to stop imagining, to stop reaching. The paved path looked safer than the wilderness. You convinced yourself you didn't need dreams to be happy, or that you would never be successful if you chose to chase them. That responsibility was noble. That being realistic was maturity. That "being successful" was enough.

And now let me ask you: Did this choice make you happy?

No?

Then let's get you inspired again! Today is the day we start believing that when we follow what feels right our lives will blossom in ways we can't imagine. The universe plants those seeds of desire in you for a reason. When you fertilize and nurture those seeds, it feels good, life-giving, uplifting. When you deny them and do what you're told, an innate part of you withers. It's like the universe has planted a perfect system to let you know when you're off track. You can trust that!

Next up we'll take a quick dive into why dreams, vision, and purpose are so important, and then we'll take a good long look at your life as it is today, and how we can get you back to the path you were born to take!

YOUR DREAM IS NOT OPTIONAL

Let's start here: not with data, not with philosophy, but with that wish you carry in your chest. The dream that refuses to leave you. Maybe it was being on stage, or starting your own company, or buying a little parcel of land where you'd finally feel free. The dream of what you want your family to look like.

Whatever it was, you've carried it with you for years, sometimes glowing like a lantern, sometimes flickering like a dying ember. And here's the truth: that dream is not just a nice-to-have. It's not decorative, indulgent, or childish. That dream is essential. And if you can't remember your dreams right now, that's normal. We'll uncover them together in a few pages, when you get to dream selfishly.

Dreams are the evolutionary software upgrades of the human species. They're the whispered future calling us forward. To abandon them is to abandon not just yourself, but your part in elevating everything around you.

Neuroscience shows us that dreams, the waking kind, are tied to motivation, creativity, problem-solving, and emotional resilience. Growing research suggests that people who orient toward dreams, goals, and visions live longer, experience fewer chronic illnesses, and report higher life satisfaction. And spiritually? The ancients told us the same thing in poetry and scripture: Without vision, the people's souls starve and perish.

Dreams are not luxuries. They are what makes us human.

THE SCIENCE OF DREAMS

Your brain is not just a record of the past. It is a problem-solving prediction machine. Your nervous system is constantly scanning, forecasting, and running simulations of what might happen next. And when you carry a clear, compelling vision of the future, you give your brain a template it can organize itself around.

Studies in neuroscience show that visualizing a desired outcome lights up the same neural pathways as actually experiencing it. The prefrontal cortex, the brain's "CEO," begins coordinating decisions, habits, and attention to move you toward the picture you hold. This is why elite athletes spend nearly as much time rehearsing in the mind as they do training on the field.

But here's where it gets thrilling: many now believe that intuition and instinct are not just echoes of the past but whispers of the future. They're memory-like signals from the self you're becoming. That gut pull, that sudden knowing? It might be your future self leaving breadcrumbs.

When you honor those flashes, when you allow yourself to trust that inner knowing, you collapse the distance between who you are and who you are meant to be. Having a dream

sharpens instinct. Instinct accelerates your dreams. Together they form a loop that pulls you forward faster than logic alone ever could.

And it doesn't end there. Holding a vision isn't just a mental exercise. It creates measurable shifts in physiology. When you imagine a future you are deeply invested in, whether it's healing, success, love, or freedom, your brain begins to release neurotransmitters that match that reality. Dopamine surges in anticipation, motivating action. Oxytocin rises when you envision belonging or love. Even serotonin levels adjust as your brain rehearses the satisfaction of completion.

Your nervous system calibrates itself to your dream. This is why embodying the feelings of your vision is so powerful. When you don't just think about a future but feel it in your chest, your gut, your skin, your body begins to believe it's real. And bodies that believe behave differently. They stand taller. They radiate energy. They attract opportunities, because humans are wired to notice aliveness in one another.

NEVER GIVE UP ON YOUR DREAMS

No, this isn't a generic inspirational statement. It's science. This is important, so listen up!

Studies on mortality risk show that lack of purpose correlates with early death. One 2014 study in *Psychological Science* tracked thousands of people and found that having a strong sense of purpose added years to their lives. While causation is complex, the correlation is striking enough to take seriously. Purpose here wasn't defined as saving the world, it was defined as having something to live for.

When people stop dreaming, they stop thriving. Their biology shows it. Stress hormones rise, immune function weakens, and depression sets in. The body knows when the soul has given up.

Most stories of extraordinary success include someone who held a vision others couldn't see, and refused to abandon it despite failure.

Oprah has said that her entire career was guided not by strategy, but by vision. She imagined herself as a teacher to millions, and every choice was measured against that picture. Nelson Mandela's vision of reconciliation sustained him through imprisonment and became the moral foundation of a new nation.

Successful people are not luckier than the rest. They are fiercely loyal to their dreams. They feed them with their thoughts, their actions, and their environment. They eliminate the things that hurt them. They don't abandon them when they feel ridiculous or far-fetched. They understand that the brain needs a lighthouse, something to orient toward in the storm.

Now let's tie this to *Me First!* because putting your dreams at the center is the most selfish, and therefore, the most important, act you can commit.

People-pleasers abandon their dreams in the name of service. They convince themselves it's noble to sacrifice, to "be realistic," to put others first. But what do they actually give? Resentment, burnout, half-energy. Their children grow up watching a parent who never lived fully. Their communities lose the inventions, books, art, and leadership they could have offered.

Chasing your dream isn't indulgent. It's contribution to the greater good.

Think of the books that saved you, the music that carried you through heartbreak, the invention that made your life easier. All of those came because someone said, "I refuse to abandon my vision." Your own dream has the same potential ripple effect.

Your dreams are not selfish. They are the wellspring that waters you. And the overflow? That is the energy that nourishes everything you come into contact with.

And it's not enough to think about your dream like a distant fantasy. The mind alone can't carry it. You must let your body experience it now.

When you want freedom, breathe as if you are free.

When you want success, carry yourself with the posture of someone who has already arrived.

When you want love, open your heart as if love is already flowing through you.

This is not "fake it till you make it." This is aligning your nervous system with your future. Your subconscious doesn't speak checklists. It speaks in feelings. And when you teach it the feelings of your vision, it organizes your thoughts, choices, and actions to maintain that state.

When you play with your dreams, scribbling ideas, sketching visions, fantasizing about "what if," you enter a state of flow. Psychologists have shown that flow states are where humans feel most alive. Time vanishes. Effort feels effortless. You touch something timeless.

In the coming pages, you'll learn to embody the feelings, so you can collapse the gap between desire and reality.

YOUR LIFE AUDIT

Before you tear down and rebuild your life, you have to know what is standing on the lot. A life audit is exactly that: a clear-eyed look at how happy, fulfilled, and alive you really feel across every area of your existence.

Most people skip this step because it is uncomfortable. You sense the cracks but keep painting over them. You say things like "it is fine" or "I can't complain," while secretly feeling the quiet ache of a life half-lived. But denial does not protect you. It only delays your freedom.

The purpose of the life audit is to stop guessing and start seeing. To gather data on your own happiness the way a scientist gathers data on an experiment. Because your life is an experiment, a grand, ongoing research project in which you are the subject, the creator, and the observer all at once. When you take stock of where you are, you reclaim authorship of your story.

A life audit shows you exactly where you're doing well and where you want to do better.

This process is not about judgment. It is about truth. It is taking inventory. You are separating emotional fact from fantasy so that when you start making changes, they are based on reality, not guilt, not fear, not comparison. Awareness is the first act of rebellion against unconscious and uninspired living.

The beauty of the life audit is that it gives form to feelings that have long been floating just beneath the surface. When you start scoring each area such as health, relationships, finances, and self-love, you are creating a map of your inner world. You might discover that the place you thought was fine is actually quietly starving for attention, or that a part of your life you have neglected has been humming with hidden potential all along.

The goal is not to chase perfection across every category, but to identify leverage points, those areas where small shifts can create massive returns in happiness. Maybe improving your health will unlock energy to build your business. Maybe healing a friendship will soften the fear of intimacy that has been holding you back from love. Your life's areas do not exist in isolation and are constantly changing, and looking at all of them honestly is a surefire way to discover what is energizing and what is draining you.

And yes, it can be emotional. You might cry when you realize how long you have been postponing joy. You might get angry at the years you spent playing roles that were never truly yours. That is part of the awakening. Emotion is data.

Once you see your life clearly, you can stop chasing other people's definitions of success and start designing your own. This audit is your blueprint for the version of you that has been buried under duty, distraction, and doubt. As you move through the next exercises, you will begin to see how every choice either expands or contracts your happiness.

And when you begin making decisions from that awareness, everything changes.

QUESTION 1: HOW HAPPY ARE YOU?

I'm going to wager that as you were exploring the idea of being more selfish, you felt a flutter of panic, or perhaps an uncomfortable knot in your stomach. "Have I gone crazy?" you might have asked yourself. Or maybe you started wondering if this was just going to be another failed attempt at finding a way to be happy.

My friend, I promise you, it is not. There is nothing more liberating than pursuing your dreams, even if you have to walk through a few dark nights to get there.

So to keep you focused on why this matters, I want you to take a simple assessment of your life. Grab your highlighter, and get ready!

For each of the following, fill in the level of how thrilled you are with the current state of your life, from 1 to 10, where 1 = unhappy or needs immediate attention and 10 = thriving.

I left some blank spaces in case there are areas you want to work on that aren't listed. And of course, if an area of your life isn't a priority, skip it, or celebrate that it's not! For instance, if you've chosen to be a full-time mom, you can either fill that in as your career, or skip that row.

	Take Action				Refine			Keep Going		
Areas	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
Health										
Career										
Family										
Friendships										
Relationship										
Finances										
Self-Love										
Spirituality										
Environment										

Did you fill up the sheet? Did it threaten to spill over? Or was there a little puddle that made you want to cry when you realized how long you have been denying your happiness and well-being in some areas of your life?

If that's the case, don't worry! That's why we are here. This is your moment of clarity. The universe's sharp poke in the ribs that you are meant for something greater. That you are ready for something greater!

Feel free to get angry or sad, and use that emotion to motivate you to make changes. To start saying no. To start saying yes. To start actually saying what you want, whether it's out loud to others or to yourself.

QUESTION 2: WHAT WOULD IT TAKE FOR YOU TO BE HAPPY?

What would it take for you to fill up these bars? What's been holding you back? What are you afraid will happen if you start filling them up?

Reflect on the following questions for each area of your life. Be honest, cry, and dare to dream!

- What are the first feelings that come up when I think about this part of my life?
- What's going well in this area?
- What could be better in this area?
- What would this area look *and feel* like if the score was between 8 and 10?
- What is stopping you from reaching this level? Describe not just what is happening, but how it makes you feel.
- What are some actions you can take regularly to get closer to your goal? What would the me that has already reached this level of happiness be doing in their life?

Your dreams may feel small now, but as you move through the exercises in this book, release the emotions holding you back, calm your nervous system, and feel safe being you, THE REAL YOU, you'll notice that your dreams will start glowing just like they did before you were told to tone them down.

And if you don't know what would make you happy, start with what's making you unhappy. Sometimes it's just as important to weed out that which is stealing our joy, and doing so often leaves space for us to remember what it is we actually do wish and hope for.

QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO TO MAKE YOUR DREAMS COME TRUE?

Now, for each area that feels low and sad, write down a few "I am" statements that reflect actions you will start doing to improve this area of your life.

When you write "I am" instead of "I will," you flip a neurological switch.

Instead of: "I will start exercising."

Write: "I am someone who moves my body daily."

Instead of: "I will be more confident."

Write: "I am confident in my decisions."

"I will" positions your dream in the future, keeping the brain in a state of anticipation rather than embodiment. But "I am" activates neural networks as if this reality is already present.

Functional MRI scans show that self-affirmation lights up the brain's reward and self-relevance

circuits, particularly in the prefrontal cortex, which governs decision-making and habit formation. And the present tense matters for a simpler reason: "I will" files your dream under someday, while "I am" hands your brain an identity, and your daily choices organize themselves around identity. Pair that with vivid imagination, which engages many of the same neural pathways as lived experience, and your neurons start wiring for the person you're declaring yourself to be.

By declaring "I am," you condition your nervous system to align behavior, posture, and even hormone release with that identity now, collapsing the gap between who you are and who you're becoming.

Getting your mindset right is the first thing.

Now, don't go penciling anything into your calendar quite yet. We will get there soon enough, but first, we are going to reclaim your nervous system and rewire your brain so that you're set up to win when you do start realizing your dream life.

QUESTION 4: WHAT DERAILS YOU?

Before we move forward, let's look backward. Understanding your past is essential to designing your future.

Many years ago, I had the immense pleasure of working for an incredible couple: Mike and Toni. They are inspired, supportive pillars of the community. They appreciated my work and created an incredible space to grow by inviting me to join them at professional events.

At one of these events I met a businessperson who taught me this incredible exercise I want you to try as well.

Place a sheet of paper horizontally, and draw a line across the middle. Place tick marks at the bottom for every year you've been alive. Then, mark out the most significant events of your life, good and bad, along that line. Positive events go above the line. The higher the dot, the better the feelings were. And negative events go below the line. The worse the event, the lower the dot. When you're done placing the events, connect the dots into a line to show your happiness trajectory.

Now, reflect on this trajectory, and ask yourself the following questions. Write down your answers. Don't censor them. Don't make them pretty. These answers are your north star.

- What were the events that created happiness? What about unhappiness?
- What were the turning points that caused the trajectory to shift upwards or downwards?
- Are there common themes that arise, such as abandonment and betrayal, helpful people, or personal freedom?
- Did this feel worse when it happened than it does now?
- What did I learn or do that moved the trajectory up for me?
- What did I ignore that caused the line to move downward?

Before doing this exercise, I unknowingly held on to a large bucket of negative feelings: I was disappointed in myself and the choices I had made in life. The red flags I had ignored. The compromises I had made. But I never realized it, or maybe I didn't allow myself to realize it. It was like a low-grade ick that was festering in my heart, dampening my confidence and my belief in myself.

One of these experiences was making the choice not to leave for college. My mother was caring for my grandmother, my father was working overseas, and my brothers were off doing their own thing. I felt that I needed to help, and passed up offers at better schools to be there for my family. For years, I choked back jealousy at my friends who saw new cities and attended great schools.

But when I saw this trajectory everything changed for me. Yes, I was a person who passed up an opportunity, but going to my local university also put me in touch with some of the most incredible people I've met. Not only that, it also, quite by accident, launched my decade-plus career in China, where I had nothing but opportunities. I had the freedom of a young woman living in an extremely safe country. I was already established in Beijing when everyone wanted to make it in China, often dining with legendary chefs and business leaders. I became fluent in a language and a culture whose massive impact wouldn't be known for another twenty years, and whose depth and beauty shaped me in ways I could never imagine. It also led to job opportunities that would buy me the freedom to write this book.

Oh, and that grandmother? Even though dementia had taken so much from her, I got to experience her fire firsthand. The same fire that faced down angry neighbors when she invited a person of color to her house. Sure, that fire was directed at me sometimes, but that too prepared me for many of the adventures and challenges I had yet to face.

And as the years go on, as my own mother ages, I am immensely grateful for those evenings we had watching cooking shows on the couch, drinking greyhounds with fresh grapefruit juice from her Arizona trees, and munching on my famous chili lime popcorn.

This exercise showed me that even the worst of situations can be the seed for something magnificent, and showed me just how many helpers, angels, and true friends there are in the world, and how much resilience and creativity we can truly muster.

So give it a try, and see if you can't find a surprising new take on just how amazing you are.

QUESTION 5: WHAT ARE YOUR DANGEROUS QUESTIONS?

If you want to get back into dreaming, you've got to get comfortable asking those uncomfortable questions that don't always have pretty answers… at least not at first.

There is a famous quote, inspired by a line from the Greek poet Dinos Christianopoulos, that reads: "They tried to bury us. Little did they know we were seeds." Plant this line in your heart, your soul. Everything that has happened to you is soil, and you are the seed. You always have been. Now, as you reflect on these questions, let them free you from captivity as you begin to flourish.

Ask yourself:

- What would I do if I had never been hurt?
- What would I want if I didn't care what anyone thought?
- What would I do if money, time, and energy weren't obstacles?
- What do I secretly envy in others?
- What version of me exists only in my imagination?
- What is keeping me from being the best version of myself?
- Who do I become when no one is watching?
- Who am I when I am around the people who light me up?

These questions are dangerous because they wake things up inside you. They start to rattle the bars of the cage you've built. They poke at the lies you've believed and the roles you've outgrown. And maybe your answers feel small at first. That's O.K. As you give yourself permission to grow, you will grow, and so will your dreams.

MAKE PEACE WITH YOURSELF

After that exercise, you may be feeling a bit blue about the time and opportunities you've lost. If so, this next step is critical. Before you rush off to dream up a whole new life, you have to clear some space. That means acknowledging the dreams, opportunities, and relationships you passed by, and forgiving yourself for them.

So, what is your lost dream?

- The book you never wrote.
- The city you never moved to.
- The great love you gave up on too soon.
- The moment you failed to seize.
- The business you never launched.
- The version of you that you thought would have "been happy" by now.

If thinking about this makes you uneasy, good. That means it mattered. It took up space in your heart and your mind. We often forget that pain is the shadow of love, so if something hard rises up, know that it was big enough to be important.

You can't skip this step. You have to feel it. Let the grief move through your body. Journal it. Cry for it. Rage about it. Burn the list if you have to.

And once you've felt it, we release it. Not by pretending it didn't cost you, but by forgiving the version of you who was doing the best they could with what they had.

A PRACTICE FOR FORGIVING YOURSELF

This one is simple, and it only takes a couple of minutes. Do it out loud if you can, because your body needs to hear it.

Find somewhere quiet. Place one hand on your heart and, if it feels right, the other on your belly. Take a slow breath, and let your exhale be longer than your inhale.

Now bring to mind that earlier version of you. The one who was scared. The one who said yes when they meant no. The one who set the dream down, or never picked it up, because they were too busy surviving. Picture them clearly, the way you'd picture someone you love.

And say to them, softly:

"I see you. I know you were doing the best you could with what you had."

"You were scared, and you were surviving, and that was enough."

"I forgive you for the dreams we set down, and for the times we didn't stand up for us."

"Thank you for getting me here. I love you, and I've got us now."

Sit with that for a moment. Notice if anything softens, in your chest, your shoulders, your

throat. You don't have to feel a lightning bolt. Sometimes forgiveness is just a small loosening, a quiet acceptance. That's the sign it's landing. Come back to this practice as many times as you need, because forgiveness usually isn't a single event. It's a door you walk through more than once.

Because here's the thing: forgiving yourself isn't just emotional, it's neurological. When you hold onto guilt or shame, your brain stays locked in survival mode, constantly scanning for threats, including your own perceived failures. That triggers chronic stress, which reduces activity in the prefrontal cortex, the part of your brain responsible for creativity, problem-solving, and goal-setting.

Self-forgiveness deactivates that threat response. It lowers cortisol, shifts your nervous system out of fight-or-flight and into rest-and-digest, and returns your brain to the state where imagination, intuition, and innovation are possible. In other words, when you forgive yourself, you don't just feel better. You become free to dream again.

And hear me on this: not following your dreams wasn't stupid. It wasn't a failure. It was a detour. A detour that grew you into the person with the perspective, the courage, the anger, the fire, the finances, and the wherewithal to actually pursue them now.

This is a sacred path we all walk, and it brought you to this exact moment.

And now, you get to choose again.

DREAM SELFISHLY

You've been told to dream *within reason*.

To dream *modestly*.

To dream *realistically*.

To dream for the sake of a better world.

That's not what dreams are.

And starting now, that is no longer what you do.

In this space, you are at the center of your dreams. You dream big. Loud. Ridiculous. Unapologetic.

You don't ask, *"Is this fair?"* You ask, *"Does this light me up?"*

And when that voice in you nags you or the fear tears at your chest, place your hand on your heart and your belly, take a deep breath, and say to yourself: "Relax. We're just dreaming here!"

Later in this book you'll learn how to bring every cell of your body, mind, and soul into alignment in order to fearlessly pursue your dreams, no matter how selfish or challenging they seem.

So let's play. For the next five minutes, write a no-holds-barred list of everything you want.

And I mean everything. Don't censor. Don't qualify. Don't edit. Don't worry about hurting anyone's feelings. We're just dreaming, remember?

So write it.
Write through the tingle of excitement.
Write through hot tears or cold chills.
Just write.
Write until this vision lights you up.

And remember: this is not about how. It's about *what*.

You can't chase what you can't name, but today, you don't just name it, you claim it.

BRING YOUR DREAM TO LIFE

Here's where it gets juicy!

Your dream is important, but even more important than your dream is the feeling it gives you. This is what energizes you, and if you believe in the woo, this is what makes you magnetic to your dreams. You see, much of our time on this planet wasn't defined by language or items. It was defined by feelings, and when we activate them, they activate us!

Most of us get stuck when we fixate on the form of the dream. *I want to be a published author. I want to have a million-dollar business. I want to fall in love. I want someone to fall madly in love with me.*

But what we really want is the *feeling* that we know our dream will bring us.

Instead of obsessing over the exact shape of the dream, ask:

- What does this feel like in my body?
- How does this make me feel alive? Awakened?
- How good can this feel?

When you focus on the feeling, you not only stop limiting yourself to one rigid path, you speak the ancient language of the universe. Your body and energy start to activate. Remember, they were born to feel good! And then, the universe starts surprising you. Your brain starts surprising you. And before you know it, you have ripped open the doors to inspiration and miracles.

So hold your dream in your mind.

Visualize it.

Now step into it.

Feel the feeling.

Let it fill you up and spill over.

Breathe it in!

And then, hold on to the feeling and drop the vision, knowing this or something better is already starting to unfold in front of you. My friend Laura calls this her magic wand space. She zips around her imagination with a magic wand that can make anything happen, and then basks in the joy of it.

This is the feeling you can take with you into any situation. It will highlight the things in your life that already feel amazing and make you seek out more of them. It might not be exactly what you imagined, but it will delight you nonetheless.

And here is the fun part. In the book *Positive Intelligence*, author Shirzad Chamine describes a threshold that we can reach where an upward spiral is created. If you are below the threshold,

everything feels like it's dragging you down. But once you hit that upward spiral? Everything feels light and full of momentum.

That's the space we are aiming for, and this is the exercise to get you there.

Dreams don't come true because you wrote them in a journal once. Or even a thousand times.

They come true because you start living like they're inevitable. They come true because you make them come true, and, as the famous saying goes: "You can't get ahead without getting started!"

Here's how to begin:

- Pick one dream. The one that feels the most electric, the most you.
- Identify your "next aligned action." Not the whole staircase. Just the next step. A Google search. A phone call. A decision.
- Create a sacred container for your dream. Not a rigid schedule yet, just a home for it: a private folder on your desktop, or a notebook that only holds things that feel like magic.
- Tell someone who believes in you. Not someone practical. Someone who sees you. Someone who *wants* you to win.
- Keep the dream close, somewhere you'll see it often, so it stays alive while we do the deeper work.

You can use this method on any of the areas of your life, or a few of them at once. Do what's right for you!

If you're overwhelmed and life feels out of control, create a sacred space to start getting organized. Get a system in place, or find a person who can help you with that.

If you want to get into shape, plan thirty minutes for a workout or a walk, or sign up for a boot camp. I highly recommend anything Kim Constable does. She's the master of holding a vision even through the most challenging of times and exercises.

Is your living space calling for a refresh? Create a vision of what that could look and feel like, and then set it into action! Even if money is short right now, you can start spending fifteen minutes a day in Buy Nothing groups in your area, asking for items or cherry-picking your life upgrades. The point isn't to plan it all out or get it all done, it's to become the person who lives the life of which that upgrade is a natural consequence.

CHOOSE WHAT MATTERS FIRST

If you did the Dream Selfishly exercise properly, you're now holding a gloriously messy list of everything you want. A dozen dreams. Maybe forty. Some enormous, some tiny, some that surprised you. Good. That list is proof your desire is still alive.

And now you're probably feeling the second thing that list brings: overwhelm. Because you can't chase forty dreams at once, and some quiet, cruel voice is already whispering that if you can't do all of it, maybe you should do none of it. That voice is lying. Here's the truth that turns a wish list into a life: being Me First! doesn't mean grabbing everything at once. It means choosing, on purpose, what comes first.

This matters more than it sounds. Research on decision-making keeps finding the same thing: when we face too many options, we don't choose better, we freeze, and we enjoy whatever we finally pick a good deal less. A scattered focus is how most dreams quietly die, not from lack of desire, but from being spread so thin that nothing ever gets real traction. So we're going to do the opposite. We're going to pick a small number of dreams for you to pour yourself into now, knowing the rest aren't canceled, just queued.

Here is the filter I use. Run every item on your list through it. It takes about fifteen minutes, and a pen.

THE ME FIRST! FILTER

1 Circle the ones your body reacts to. Go down your list slowly and watch your body, not your logic. Which ones make your chest lift, your stomach flip, your eyes sting? In the last chapter you learned that the feeling is the real target, so trust it here. Circle every dream that gives you a physical yes. Cross out the ones that were really someone else's dream wearing your handwriting (you'll know them by the flatness). Don't judge, just feel.

2 Find the keystone. Among the circled ones, ask a different question of each: if this came true, how many of my other dreams would get easier, or stop mattering? Some dreams are keystones. They hold up a whole row of others. "Leave the job that's draining me" might quietly deliver rest, creativity, time with my kids, and the energy to chase everything else. Mark the two or three dreams with the widest reach.

3 Cross-check with your audit. Pull up your Life Audit scores. Which of your keystone dreams touches the areas you scored lowest, the parts of your life that are quietly bleeding? A dream that also relieves your most painful area is pure leverage: it lights you up and stops a leak at the same time. Give those extra weight.

4 Choose your anchor. From that short, powerful list, choose one dream as your anchor for now. Just one. This is the dream you'll design a real path toward in the next chapter. Choosing it

is not a betrayal of the others. It's a sequence. When your anchor is underway and steady, the next one gets its turn, and you'll have more energy, proof, and self-trust to give it.

Why one, and not five? Because focus is how the brain actually builds anything. Attention is the soil; scatter it across forty seeds and none of them break the surface. Pour it onto one, and you get a tree, which then shades and feeds everything you plant next. Choosing your anchor isn't shrinking your dreams. It's the fastest route to all of them.

A quick example

Nadia's list had eighteen items, from "learn to surf" to "leave corporate" to "stop apologizing when people bump into me." Her body reacted hardest to three: leave corporate, build a little coaching practice, and finally feel unhurried. When she asked the keystone question, one answer was obvious. Leaving corporate would deliver the time, the calm, and the room to build the practice. It was holding up the whole row. Her audit confirmed it: "career" and "freedom" were her two lowest scores, a 3 and a 2. So her anchor chose itself: build toward leaving corporate and starting the practice. Surfing and the rest didn't die. They just got in line.

Write your anchor dream at the top of a fresh page. Underneath it, copy your runners-up, the other one or two keystones, so you can see them waiting. Then turn the page, because now we design the path.

FROM DREAM TO BLUEPRINT

Here's the part the word "design" has been promising this whole time. You've named your dream and chosen your anchor. Now you're going to reverse-engineer the path to it, the same way an architect works backward from a finished house to the first shovel of dirt.

Most people do dreams the hard way: they stand at the bottom of the mountain, stare up at the summit, feel tiny, and quit. Designers work the other way. They stand at the summit in their imagination first, then trace the trail back down to exactly where their feet are right now. That backward trail is your blueprint, and the beauty of it is that you only ever have to see the next step, not the whole climb.

We'll build it in five moves. I'll walk Nadia through each one so you can see it work, then you'll do your own. Grab paper, or a page in your dream notebook.

Move One: Stand at the finish and describe it

Close your eyes and go to the day your anchor dream is fully real. Not the milestone, the lived reality. What does an ordinary Tuesday look like? What do you see when you wake up, who's around, what's different in your body? Write it in the present tense, richly, the way you practiced feeling your dream a chapter ago. You can't chart a course to a place you can't picture.

Nadia writes: "It's Tuesday. I make coffee with no dread in my stomach. I have two client calls this morning that I actually look forward to, and the afternoon is mine. My calendar is spacious. My shoulders are down. Money is steadier than I feared. I feel like myself."

Move Two: Mark the milestones backward

From that finished picture, walk backward. What had to be true just before it? And before that? Keep stepping back until you reach today. You're not planning every detail, you're dropping a handful of landmarks on the trail. Three to six is plenty.

Nadia's trail, from the top down: a full practice → first paying clients → a website and an offer → three practice clients for free → a certification or first course → savings to cover six months → the decision, out loud, that she's doing this. That last one is where she's standing right now.

Move Three: Name the next aligned action

Ignore the whole staircase. Find the very first stair, the smallest real action you can take in the next few days, and make it so small it's almost embarrassing. Not "build the website." "Spend thirty minutes looking at three coaches' websites I admire." The job of the first action isn't to finish the dream. It's to prove to your nervous system that motion is safe.

Nadia's next action: open a separate savings account and move fifty dollars into it, today. Tiny. Real. Undeniable. The dream just became something her hands have touched.

Move Four: Build a container (a light one, for now)

Your dream needs a home, not yet a rigid schedule (we'll build your body and mind up for that discipline in the parts ahead), but a place it lives so it doesn't evaporate. A private folder on

your desktop. A notebook that only holds this. A note on your phone. Somewhere you'll return to often, where the blueprint and the next action wait for you. Keep it close and keep it visible.

Nadia makes a folder called "The Practice" and drops in her finish-line description, her backward trail, and a screenshot of the savings account with its first fifty dollars. Home built.

Move Five: Name the fear, and name your person

Every real dream comes with a fear, and pretending otherwise just drives it underground. So say it plainly: what are you most afraid of here? Then choose one person, not a practical skeptic, but someone who wants you to win, and tell them what you're building. A dream spoken to a believing witness is far harder to abandon quietly.

Nadia's fear: "What if I leave and fail and can't get back in?" Her person: her friend Priya, who has watched her shrink for years and has been waiting for exactly this. Nadia texts her the finish-line description. Priya writes back: "Finally."

Now build yours

Take your anchor dream from the last chapter and run it through all five moves. Don't aim for perfect, aim for honest and specific. When you're done, you won't just have a dream. You'll have a blueprint: a finish line you can see, a trail of landmarks, one small action for this week, a home for it all, and a witness. That is what designing a life actually means, and you just did it.

And here's the quiet magic of doing it this way. The mountain hasn't gotten smaller, but you're no longer staring up at the whole thing. You're looking at one stair, which you can absolutely climb. Then tomorrow, the next. That's not wishful thinking. That's engineering, in the direction of everything you want.

BUT WHAT IF I FAIL?

If this is the question circling your mind, good. It means the dream is real enough to cost you something. Let me stop you right there, though, because we're going to look this fear straight in the face instead of pretending you shouldn't have it.

First, the reframe you already half-know: you're only failing if you're not trying. Right now you're living with the regret of a dream unlived, and that weight is heavy. You've already survived a life that isn't yours. You've made it this far. That's not failure. That's a starting point. Your worst-case scenario is going back to where you are now, and you've already survived that, haven't you? You know exactly what's waiting for you there, and even then, you'd go back wiser and more empowered. But how amazing would it be to find out what's waiting for you where you were always meant to be?

That's the pep talk. Now let's do the real work, because a reframe you don't believe in your body won't hold the first time you actually stumble.

What Failure Actually Is

We use one word, "failure," for two completely different things, and the confusion is what keeps us frozen.

The first kind is an outcome that didn't go the way you wanted. The pitch got a no. The launch flopped. The relationship ended. The business closed. This isn't failure. This is data, and it is the price paid by anyone who has ever built anything worth having. Every person you admire has a graveyard of these behind them. You just don't see the headstones.

The second kind is the real one, and there are only two entries on the list: not trying, and staying somewhere that's killing you slowly because you were afraid to risk the first kind. That's it. That's the only failure that should scare you, and notice that it's the exact life you're living right now if you let this fear win. The riskiest thing you can do is nothing.

So from here on, we retire the word "failure" for outcomes. A no is a redirect. A flop is tuition. An ending is a clearing. The only thing we'll call failure is the slow betrayal of not trying, and we're done with that one for good.

Why Failure Feels Like Dying

If failure is just data, why does the thought of it make your chest seize and your mouth go dry? Because your nervous system did not evolve for pitch meetings. For almost all of human history, standing out and being wrong in front of the group could get you cast out, and being cast out could get you killed. Your body still runs that ancient code. To the survival brain,

"What if I fail publicly?" and "What if the tribe exiles me?" register as the same threat, and it floods you with the same alarm.

This is genuinely useful to know, because it means the panic you feel is not a prophecy. It's not your intuition warning you the dream is doomed. It's a smoke detector wired for a world of predators and small tribes, going off in a world of emails and second chances. You can thank it for its service and proceed anyway. The fear is real. The danger, almost always, is not.

And here's the part that changes everything: the same body that panics can be taught that risk is survivable. Every time you take a scary action and live, you hand your nervous system proof. Do it enough and the smoke detector recalibrates. That's not positive thinking. That's how the wiring actually updates, through evidence you give it, one brave action at a time.

The Time I Actually Failed

I want to tell you about a time I fell flat, because I'm not asking you to risk anything I haven't. Years ago I bet everything on a version of my life that didn't work. I poured in money I didn't really have, ignored the quiet signals that it was wrong, and when it finally came apart, I was left with debt, embarrassment, and the particular shame of having been so sure. For a while I was certain it was proof I'd gambled and lost, that I should have played it safe.

Here's what I know now. That collapse cleared the ground for everything I actually love today. It taught me what I refuse to repeat, it introduced me to my own resilience, and it handed me the exact material I'm using to help you right now. I wouldn't be writing this book without it. The failure wasn't the falling. The failure would have been staying down, or worse, never having climbed at all.

The Failure Reframe

So what do you do in the moment a real setback knocks the wind out of you? You don't just "stay positive." You run it through a process, the same way you'll learn to run negative thoughts through a converter later in this book. Here are the five steps. Keep them somewhere you can find them on a bad day.

State what actually happened. Just the facts, stripped of story. Not "I'm a failure who ruins everything," but "The launch made three sales instead of thirty." Your brain can't work with a catastrophe. It can work with a fact.

Separate the event from your identity. You did not fail. A thing you tried didn't work. "I failed at this" is a report. "I am a failure" is a lie your survival brain tells to keep you from risking again. Catch it, and correct it out loud.

Collect the tuition. You paid for this experience, so take what you bought. What do you know now that you didn't before? What will you never do again? Write down at least one thing this cost you and one thing it taught you. That's the receipt.

Find the redirect. Ask what this failure made possible, or protected you from. The job you didn't get, the relationship that ended, the plan that fell apart, each one closed a door and,

almost always, opened a hallway you couldn't see yet. You may not spot it for months. Trust that it's there.

Choose the next aligned action. Failure's favorite trick is to freeze you. Break the freeze with one small, deliberate step in the direction you still want to go. Not a giant comeback. One stair. Motion is how you prove to your body that you're still in the game.

Run this even once and you'll notice something: the setback stops being evidence against you and becomes fuel for you. That's the whole trick. Not avoiding the fall, but knowing exactly what to do when you land.

And Then, Become the One Who Can Handle It

There's one more piece, and it's the most powerful. The surest way to stop fearing failure is to become the version of you who could survive it and keep going, and you don't have to wait years to meet them. You can step into them now. That's exactly what the next exercise is for.

So let them call you reckless. Let them roll their eyes. Let them watch while you rise. You're not going to fail in the only way that matters, because you're not going to stay small, and you're not going to stop trying. Now let's go borrow the strength to leap.

BORROW OTHERS' STRENGTHS TO GET THERE

You don't get the life you want by chasing a dream. You get it by becoming the person who achieves the dream.

This is the key no one talks about. Realizing your dreams isn't just about affirmations or vision boards. It's about embodiment. It's rehearsal. It's shifting your internal identity so powerfully that the outside world can't help but catch up. And so that you can't help but catch up either.

Here's why it works: when you vividly imagine an experience, your brain fires up many of the same neural pathways it would use if you were really living it. So when you visualize yourself in a specific situation, like speaking on stage, walking into your dream home, or having a difficult conversation with unshakable calm, you are rehearsing a new identity at the level of your wiring. This is called mental rehearsal, and it's been used for decades by elite athletes, Navy SEALs, and high performers in every field. In one famous study, people who only imagined doing strength exercises gained real, measurable strength. Not as much as the group that physically trained, but they never moved a muscle. Mental rehearsal doesn't replace real practice. It's the amplifier that makes your practice, and your life, land deeper.

But here's where it gets delicious: you're not just rehearsing a skill. You're rehearsing a new version of yourself.

So let's do exactly that.

THE EMBODIMENT EXERCISE

There are two powerful people you can step into, and they work in exactly the same way. Start with whichever one feels more alive to you today.

The first is someone who already has what you want. A person who lives, breathes, and moves through the world the way you long to. Borrow their strength, their vision, their style, their confidence. Instead of admiring them from the outside, you're going to become them, one breath, one thought, one decision at a time.

The second is your future self: the most magnetic, radiant, fully-realized version of you, a few years down this road. Not just successful, but centered. Grounded. Clear. They walk in their truth. They don't chase, they attract. They speak, and people listen. This is the you that you're building in these very pages.

Whichever you choose, here's how you step in.

Find a quiet space. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Picture that person standing in front of you, smiling, ready to share everything they have. If it's your future self, notice that their smile carries something extra: they're grateful, because they remember being exactly where you are now, and they know you're the one who became them.

Scan them from the top of their head to the tips of their toes. Notice how they think, how they carry themselves, how they feel. Feel their confidence, their poise, their calm.

They give you a nod. You may now step in. Take a step forward so your bodies merge, then turn to face the same direction, and feel what it feels like to be them. Sit in that for a moment, and ask yourself:

- What am I thinking, and how do I feel about myself?
- How do I stand, move, and breathe? What does the world look like from in here?
- What does this version of me know that I don't quite dare to believe yet?
- How do people see me now?
- What am I finally done with, from myself and from others?
- What do I do when doubt tries to whisper in my ear?
- How would I approach the exact goal or fear I'm facing right now?

Stay in this energy as long as you like, soaking in what it feels like to be this powerful.

When you're ready, step back out and turn to face them again. They're smiling, proud, certain you have what it takes. Hold on to the feeling as they slowly fade, because that feeling is yours to keep. Then open your eyes and journal on your next steps, using the gifts they just handed you.

What makes this so powerful is that you get to try on a whole new self, keep every part that serves you, and start using it in your real life today. It also hands you a wider perspective on whatever you're facing. Goals that felt impossibly big start to feel achievable, because you're seeing them through the eyes of someone who's already there. You don't have the answers. You are the answer. And all of that strength, fire, and confidence is yours, now and forever.

TIME TO PRACTICE

This isn't a one-time performance. It's a practice. A portal. A reprogramming.

Do it when you're afraid to send the email. When you're about to undercharge again. When you stop yourself before starting. When you're shrinking back from visibility. When you feel like you've been defeated one more time.

Because your life doesn't change the moment you decide you want it to, or the moment you visualize it. It changes when you become the person who makes the change happen. And until you're solid in your own strengths, which you're building chapter by chapter, you get to borrow.

Every day, spend a few minutes stepping into the person you want to borrow from, or the future self you're becoming. Journal as them, writing about your life from their perspective. What would they do differently? Then make one real decision as them, and act on it.

And the next time you feel yourself giving in to the life you don't want, pause. Breathe. Borrow. Ask: "What would they do?" Then do that, and watch the shift. The one where you realize you're not pretending, you're not faking. You're remembering how to embody your full power.

Stop negotiating with your limitations and start responding from your future self. Your higher self. The version of you who never questions whether they're worthy, because they already know that you are.

PRACTICE MAKES PROGRESS

Practice makes progress, not perfection, and that distinction is the whole point.

By now you know you don't wait to feel ready, you become the person who's ready. What we haven't talked about yet is how that becoming actually happens: through practice. Through repetition.

It was never going to be an overnight switch, with all your fears dissolved and your nervous system suddenly purring like a kitten. If only! You wake up today, where you are, and take one brave, selfish, aligned action. Then you do it again tomorrow. And the next day. And the next.

Once you practice living the way you want to live, even just a little, it rewires something in your nervous system. You notice when something is misaligned. You start to expect better. You stop settling. You don't even entertain the old bullshit anymore because your body remembers what it feels like to be in alignment.

This is the power of progress.

It's subtle at first, almost invisible. But it accumulates. Every tiny act of bravery, every refusal to betray yourself, every time you choose your needs over someone else's expectations, you're not just changing your circumstances. You're changing your *identity*.

You become someone who walks differently. Speaks differently. Chooses differently.

Just like swimming or riding a bike, once you get the hang of it, you don't have to overthink every move. It becomes instinct. Muscle memory. A new default setting.

Living in alignment becomes your baseline. Speaking up becomes automatic. Self-trust becomes the soundtrack in your head.

It doesn't mean you never wobble. You will.

But you'll catch it faster. You'll course-correct without shame. You'll know exactly what to do when you fall out of flow, because this is your new normal.

When you practice, you make your dream life not just possible, but probable. And you've built the resilience to navigate whatever comes.

And slowly, before you know it, you become the self you always wanted to be.

The living, breathing version of your dream in the making.

PART THREE
RECALIBRATE YOUR BODY

Congratulations! You've made it through parts one and two: the radical reprogramming of everything you thought you knew about selfishness AND designing your dream life. You now understand the high price of people-pleasing and the possible (and temporary) side effects of putting yourself first. You also have a vision of what your life will look like when you emerge on the other side, living *Me First!*

Next up, we are going to rewire your body, mind, and soul to set you up to live that dream.

And yes, we will be doing it in this order! Body. Mind. Soul.

"But Jennifer! Can't I just manifest my way into a better life?"

Sadly, the answer to that is no. Thinking, praying, and manifesting are all incredible tools, but if we don't address your body's ability to feel safe and joyous and to hold everything you're bringing in, your wins will be short-lived. You'll slide back into your old ways faster than you can catch yourself, or you'll hit a wall and be left wondering where you went wrong.

So even if this first part is hard, stay with it.

"But Jennifer! I want to feel good now!"

Here's the thing: you can start feeling better now. Remember what we practiced! Tap into that version of you that feels good as much as you can, and before you know it, your feelings will start catching up.

Living *Me First!* requires a lot of honesty, both with yourself and with others. And honesty? It can hurt. Unfortunately, temporary discomfort will likely be part of this journey.

It's going to feel weird. Probably bad at first. You might feel guilty, selfish, rude, flaky, or even like you're losing your identity. You may feel uncertain about how this is all going to shake out. And you should feel that way. You are exploring unknown waters, but you're doing it with

the goal to remove the things that don't serve you to make room for those that do, and if that isn't worth the temporary discomfort, I don't know what is.

Feeling this way means you're no longer defaulting to survival mode. You're stepping into your power. This section will help you rewire your nervous system, decode your emotions, and say "no" like you mean it, because you do!

And remember, it's temporary. Think of yourself as a phoenix, burning it all down so you can rise into the version you are meant to be!

You've already lived enough of your life in discomfort. Now it's time to choose better. Do better. Live better. It's time to build something amazing.

This is where you'll discover: What if I made every decision based on what I actually want and need? Theory becomes action, and insight becomes embodiment.

This section is here to arm you with everything you need to actually live like your life belongs to you. Not your partner. Not your parents. Not your boss. Not society. You.

This isn't self-help. This is self-leadership.

THE TIMELINE

Anyone who tells you they can change your life in a certain amount of time is selling snake oil. Sometimes we move faster, sometimes slower, and you can decide what pace of commitment and transformation feels right for you.

Here's what progress looks like for many of my clients:

- **Phase 1: Body (Weeks 1-4):** You'll learn to recognize when your nervous system is in survival mode, build safety, and create pockets of calm. This is what allows you to make different choices instead of defaulting to people-pleasing.
- **Phase 2: Mind (Weeks 5-8):** Once your body has even a little more breathing room, we'll rewrite your inner code: the stories, thoughts, and scripts that have kept you small. This is where you stop earning your right to exist every day.
- **Phase 3: Soul (Weeks 9-12):** With a calmer body and clearer mind, we'll reconnect you to the bigger, wiser part of you (whether you call it soul, intuition, or simply your deepest self) and start living in resonance with the life you actually want.

Your timeline may be faster or slower. You might spend more time in one phase than another. That's normal. This is not a boot camp. It's a reclamation. But having a rough map will help you notice your progress and give your brain something concrete to hold onto while you're dismantling the life that's been draining you.

So let's do this!

RECONNECTING WITH YOUR BODY

We live much of our lives in our heads, and it's not serving us.

The modern world rewards analysis, abstraction, and verbal cleverness, and it quietly teaches us to treat the body as a machine to manage rather than a partner to listen to. So we push our bodies into productivity, medicate them into silence, and override their whispers until they erupt in pain, anxiety, or illness. But your body is not a vessel carrying your brain around. It's an intelligent organism with its own language and its own way of knowing, and when you relearn how to listen to it, you rediscover your capacity for safety, wholeness, and deep healing.

Here's the part that changes everything: your body isn't just taking orders from your brain, it's constantly sending information up. Most of the signals traveling along the vagus nerve, the great communicator of your nervous system, flow upward, from body to brain, not the other way around. Your body reports on threat and safety, and your mind interprets, narrates, and reacts. It's also why trauma and chronic stress don't just live in your memories. As Bessel van der Kolk famously put it, the body keeps the score: stress can show up in muscle tension, in your hormones, and in the way you see the world.

The trouble starts when that dialogue gets disrupted, by trauma, by stress, or by years of being told to ignore yourself, and you lose touch with your own signals. There's even a name for the sense that reads them: interoception, your ability to feel what's happening inside, from hunger to heartbeat to tension. When you've been detached for so long that you can't feel your body accurately, everything downstream suffers. You can't regulate your emotions, make clear decisions, or feel safe. Rebuilding that inner sense is the whole game, and it comes down to two skills: listening, and talking back.

LISTENING TO YOUR BODY

Listening is harder than talking. Modern life rewards distraction, numbing, and speed, all of which drown out the body's subtle signals. True listening asks for slowness. Your body usually speaks in whispers: a knot in the stomach before a meeting, a tightening jaw during an argument, a fatigue that sets in long before you collapse. Ignore those whispers long enough and they turn into shouts: chronic pain, panic attacks, autoimmune flares.

If you've been under stress or survived trauma, your body amplifies possible threats to protect you, which means listening can feel threatening at first. You're finally allowing yourself to feel the thing you've been hiding away. This is exactly why safety comes first. Your body won't reveal its messages if it doesn't believe they can be handled. So approach with curiosity, not judgment: "What is this sensation?" instead of "This shouldn't be happening."

When you do, you'll often find your symptoms carry wisdom. A headache may be asking for a break from screens. Tightness in the chest may be asking for slower breath, or for some-

thing you need to say. Fatigue may be asking you to realign your life with what actually matters. As Gabor Maté notes, illness can be the body's final attempt to force us to pay attention. Listening turns your symptoms from enemies into guides.

None of this is possible without safety, and by safety I don't just mean the absence of threat. I mean the felt sense of being secure enough to rest and explore. Your nervous system is always scanning, below conscious awareness, for cues of danger or safety, and when it senses danger it drops you into survival mode, where open dialogue isn't possible. (Of course, if you're in an actually unsafe situation, get to safety first. These practices don't replace removing yourself from harm.)

So let's build some safety. Externally, that might mean turning off your phone, taking a mental health day, stepping away from certain people, or calling in the ones who support you. Internally, it means meeting your own experience with compassion.

Stillness is a great place to start. You may feel anxious at first, which is the perfect moment to breathe and speak to your body. Breathe deeply, place a hand on your heart, and remind yourself that you are safe. Then let the stresses and pains emerge slowly. Feel them, name them, and remind yourself again: you are safe. Take a slow stroll around the block if you need to, breathe, and remind yourself once more.

Sometimes dancing is the fastest way to override the rigid programming keeping you stuck. I have a "reset" playlist for when I'm feeling frenzied, full of songs like the Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations" that get me moving and make me feel silly enough to drop back into the present moment.

Then get curious. Ask your body what it's trying to tell you. Maybe it's stuck in an old memory. Maybe it's asking for change. Whatever it says, listen, breathe, let go, and remind yourself that you're still safe. Remember, this part of the journey is about creating safety, not solutions. Safety allows curiosity, curiosity is the key to healing, and healing is what gets you to the solutions.

Rituals make powerful anchors. A daily practice of checking in with your breath, placing your hands on your body, or repeating a gentle affirmation tells your nervous system that connection is safe. Over time, these small rituals shift your baseline, so your body starts to expect safety where it once expected threat.

TALKING TO YOUR BODY

Talking to your body isn't about speaking aloud in a mirror. It's about building a dialogue of respect and curiosity. Your words and thoughts have physical impact: self-talk influences your cortisol levels, your muscle tension, even your immune response. The tone you take with yourself, harsh or gentle, demanding or supportive, matters more than you think.

Curiosity is the key. Instead of "Stop hurting," ask, "What are you trying to tell me?" That small shift turns pain from an enemy into a messenger. Instead of ordering your breath to deepen, try, "Breath, would you like to expand a little more?" This is the heart of somatic work: cooperating with your body's rhythms rather than dominating them.

Touch, posture, and imagery are part of the conversation too. Placing a hand over your heart or stomach while offering yourself kind words creates a multisensory message your nervous system reads as warmth and reassurance, often more powerfully than logic alone.

Starting is simple. Place a hand on your heart and whisper, "It's all right. We are safe." Or prop your hands on your hips and declare, "Dang! We are doing great today!" As you do, you might hear some feedback, sometimes kind, sometimes critical. When the critic shows up, ask whether you're being a little too harsh, and remind yourself that you are safe, lovable, and worthy, or whatever it is your body needs to hear. Say what the most loving version of you would say.

And remember to thank your body after it does something hard. Remind it that it's safe. Remind it that you're growing. Your nervous system may run much of the show, but you, the thinking you, have the power to rewrite the narrative and help your body feel good again.

THE BIOLOGY OF FREEDOM

Picture this for a moment. You wake up without the sense of dread that used to chase you into the day.

When someone asks something of you that doesn't feel right, you say no, and the word lands clean, without the crushing weight of guilt.

When you say yes, you mean it, and your body relaxes into the commitment rather than bracing against it. Your voice carries steadily in the room instead of shaking at the edges.

Decisions feel less like walking through fog and more like standing on solid ground. You no longer fear speaking your truth. Creativity flows. Rest restores. Intuition whispers, and you actually hear it. You stop waiting for permission to be yourself. You simply are.

This is not some fairy-tale existence reserved for monks on mountaintops or the impossibly lucky. It is not a personality transplant or a feat of willpower. It is biology. It is what happens when your nervous system is regulated. When your body has learned that it is safe enough to stop bracing for danger and start living. When you can finally trust your body fully, because a body that feels safe stops crying wolf. A dysregulated body will sound alarms all day for dangers that are not there. An aligned one tells you the truth.

In a regulated state, the fear center of your brain, the amygdala, quiets down. The false alarms soften. You stop scanning every room and situation for threat, either real or imagined. With that shift, your prefrontal cortex, the part of your brain that handles reasoning, creativity, and choice, lights back up. Instead of reacting from pure survival instinct, you regain access to the wise, nuanced part of your mind that sees options where before you saw only danger.

Your body chemistry changes too. Cortisol, the stress hormone that keeps you wired and exhausted at once, finally settles toward healthier levels. Energy stops leaking out through hypervigilance, and digestion, immunity, and sleep begin to repair themselves. The system that was once locked in survival mode starts to prioritize thriving. People describe all kinds of changes when they finally feel safe in their bodies: deeper sleep, steadier moods, skin that clears, shoulders that drop from around their ears. My friend Chelsea swears she slept through the night for the first time in years the week after she left a toxic job. Your version will be your own, and it won't look like anyone else's.

Life begins to feel very different from the inside. Instead of spinning from one reaction to the next, you find yourself with space to choose: how to respond, what to give energy to, where to place your attention. The tension between your shoulders eases, your breath lengthens, and presence returns. The world feels more vivid. You stop living in constant anticipation of "what if" and start inhabiting the richness of "what is." You get excited about all of the things you can create.

This is the shift from hypervigilance to presence. From brittle self-doubt to embodied confi-

dence. From the timid "Am I allowed to?" to the grounded "Watch me!" A regulated life doesn't mean difficulty disappears. It means you finally meet life with the full strength of your biology working with you rather than against you. It is the quiet power of a nervous system that remembers safety, and in that remembering, gives you the power to live your life fully.

This is exactly what we're going to work on in this chapter.

YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM
SAFETY IS THE MISSING PIECE

You've spent your whole life trying to make everyone else comfortable, smoothing tension, biting your tongue, holding your breath, hiding your needs so you could be loved.

Let me ask you something: How's that working out for you?

Are you calm? Clear? Free?

Or are you anxious, exhausted, resentful, and secretly wondering why the hell everything feels *so hard?*

If your nervous system is fried, your emotions are flatlining, and you're starting to forget what it even feels like to want something just for you, you're not crazy. You're not weak. You're not selfish. You're just dysregulated. Or, in layman's terms, your body is confused about how safe you actually are, and is firing off stress hormones to keep you on your toes.

Even in safe environments, our incredible body picks up on incongruities and risks. People saying they are O.K. when they are not. The news telling us we are not safe. Public figures telling us we are being poisoned. People lying to you about what's really going on. You turning a blind eye to problems so as not to cause a fuss.

Your body has been living in a war zone of external influences and your own silence, and it's time to call a truce and send in a rescue mission.

Your nervous system is not just your nerves or your ability to resist stress. It's the command center for your entire life.

It's your health.
Your mental health.
Your energy.
Your intuition.
Your emotions.
Your personality.

It decides whether you feel in control and energized, or frazzled or flat, or maybe even a puddle on the floor.

And it's made up of a few factors, which we're now going to get re-acquainted with, so we can all start working as a team so you can feel what you actually feel, start feeling good, and tune into your inner radar. So that you are always in alignment with what you truly want and need.

Your central nervous system is your brain and spinal cord (or as I like to call it: the hard-

ware), and your peripheral nervous system makes up the wires connecting your brain to your body.

Inside that is the autonomic nervous system, which is the software that runs your involuntary functions, such as your heart rate, hormones, digestion, immune system, and energy levels.

The autonomic nervous system has two programs, both designed to help you survive and thrive: The sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system.

The sympathetic nervous system is there to help you survive. It's your go-go-go, your fight or flight. This system was designed to help you avoid danger, or, when met with it, to get out of harm's way so you're most likely to survive. It's the reason we experience stress and why we're so good at blocking out uncomfortable situations that might put the status quo at risk.

Your parasympathetic nervous system is designed to help you thrive. It's your rest, digest, repair, create, and receive. This is designed to be your resting state. The state in which your higher self can unfold, in which you can create and procreate. The state where you can enjoy your life.

Sadly, many of us live in a state of nervous system dysregulation, which is a bit like having error codes in your software. Your body wants to rest and digest and be happy, but it can't. It's firing warning signals left and right, even if it's not sure why. And the result is that you're not feeling your best self or thriving the way that you imagine you should be, which is also why we start this process in the body, and not in the mind or in the soul. Once we've ironed out the kinks in this part of the system, you'll find your thoughts and your connection to the divine are things that come so much more easily.

The good news is that your nervous system can be upgraded and rewired, and doing so will let your body feel not just safety, but joy, ease, gratitude, and stillness, even when you're facing challenges in life. It just takes a bit of practice to get everything running on the latest operating system, and once you do, you can move between these two states with ease. Your nervous system will be regulated.

So let's break our four survival-mode error codes (fight, flight, freeze, and fawn) down further to see if you recognize yourself in them, before we dive into healing your nervous system from the ground up.

FIGHT: SURVIVAL WITH YOUR FISTS UP

Fight is the trauma response that charges in swinging, sometimes with words, sometimes with silence that cuts sharper than a blade. And the sad thing is, it's not about being angry. To your body, it's about staying alive.

It's snapping when you feel cornered.

It's controlling every detail so nothing can surprise you.

It's the drive to defend yourself so fiercely that any intimacy feels like a threat.

When fight activates, your body is flooded with adrenaline, your sympathetic nervous system is lit up like a bonfire, and your brain is shouting "If I stay on the offense, I can't get hurt."

Studies on stress responses show that fight-mode brains over-activate the amygdala (the part wired to spot danger), which hijacks your ability to think calmly. So when you find yourself "overreacting," you're actually reacting exactly as you're supposed to, your body might just be misinterpreting the threat.

FLIGHT: SURVIVAL AT FULL SPEED

Flight mode feels like a constant, rushed attempt to fix things and make them work. In modern times, it often manifests as staying busy or avoiding new things in order to stay away from stress, avoiding conversations, or jumping ship at the first sign of trouble. It can also look like chasing or running away from things that matter so you never have to sit with the discomfort of stillness. You know, like yours truly, whose house has never been cleaner than when she decided to publish a book.

When your brain detects danger, your sympathetic nervous system sounds the alarm, flooding your body with adrenaline and telling your muscles to get the hell out. Evolution designed this so you could outrun predators, but nowadays, the "predator" is an awkward conversation or the possibility of rejection.

Here's the catch: you can't outrun your own nervous system. The more you sprint, the more you teach your body that stillness, presence, and depth are unsafe.

FREEZE: SURVIVAL BY DISAPPEARING

Freeze is the trauma response that goes still as stone. On the outside, you look calm, but on the inside, you're locked in a cage. It may look like zoning out mid-meeting, or staring blankly at a screen instead of just replying. It can feel like you're trapped in a fog while the whole world moves on without you.

If you find yourself in this state, you may feel lazy or unmotivated, when actually, you're in lockdown mode.

Trauma researchers describe how, when fight and flight feel impossible, the parasympathetic nervous system slams the brakes. (Yes, the same rest-and-digest system from a few pages ago. It turns out your "thrive" program has an emergency brake too.) Your heart rate slows, your body numbs, and your brain says: "If I can't win or escape, I'll hide."

This is the same primal reflex that makes animals play dead. Effective at escaping predators, terrible for chasing your dreams.

FAWN: SURVIVAL IN A SMILE

Fawning is the trauma response that hides in plain sight. In order to keep yourself safe, you work overtime to make sure everything and everyone is doing well, with the exception of yourself.

It's saying yes when you mean no.

It's shrinking to avoid conflict.

It's solving everyone else's problems because you think that's how you earn love.

It's being useful instead of being you.

And here's the kicker: it's not a choice.

You're not "just being nice." Your body believes that approval is survival. Research backs this up: a landmark study in the journal Science found that social rejection activates some of the same brain regions as physical pain. That's right, disappointing someone can actually hurt, neurologically speaking.

So now you know why you feel bad for setting boundaries. Your brain is screaming "DANGER!" when you stand up for yourself, because it is afraid of being excluded.

HOW DID WE GET SO DISCONNECTED?

Before I go on, I want to take a time out to kick shame to the curb. Many people, including myself, feel ashamed of not feeling great. We should be grateful for what we have, right?

We have a roof over our heads, clothing, food. As a matter of fact, we're living more comfortably than most of our ancestors and, in most cases, than a huge share of today's population. So why on earth are we not happy and thriving?

As I went through my own healing journey, I realized that modern abundance doesn't necessarily equate to happiness. In fact, it often causes overwhelm, denial, and stress, which is why putting yourself first and learning to say no are more important than ever!

Let's break down some of the biggest factors influencing our state of happiness. Let these sink in and keep them on your radar as you move through your day, so you can start safeguarding your happiness against them.

TRAUMA AND HARDSHIP

Trauma is a complicated topic. It could mean big T trauma, little t trauma, or simply the fact that our bodies were not made for the pace of life we're living. The way I see it, anything that puts a dent in the shiny bumper of your car is a trauma, and only you can know and define what a trauma is to you.

After talking to countless people who have gotten stuck in life, I've seen that it is not what happened to you that defines what type of trauma you have, but how your being reacted to it. I use the term "your being" rather than "you" because all too often, it was the nervous system that responded to the event and that got locked into chronic fear, and not just your conscious mind.

Or, in other words: Trauma isn't what *happened* to you, but rather what happened *inside* you when something overwhelmed your system and you didn't feel safe.

If you say that something traumatized you, I will be the first to believe you. No questions asked. Your feelings matter. The days of allowing others to negotiate how you feel are over, starting right now.

Now, on the other hand, if you say that you were *not* traumatized by something, I will also believe you, but I will also leave you space if you ever realize or decide that maybe you were. Sometimes it takes time for us to realize just how stressful and impactful certain situations are, and our system keeps us in the dark until we are ready to process it. Or perhaps we think it didn't affect us, and perhaps the head is O.K., while the body is still screaming for someone to save it. If you are stuck with symptoms you can't explain or low energy, I simply ask you to leave open the door that maybe you have trauma stored somewhere in your

nervous system. I will share one of my own experiences where this happened a little later in this book.

Let's invite the godfather of nervous system trauma work into the discussion: Dr. Bessel van der Kolk. His book *The Body Keeps the Score* didn't just make waves, it cracked open the entire field of trauma healing.

Here's what his work describes:

- People with trauma often show measurable differences in brain activity.
- The amygdala (the fear center) can become hyperactive.
- The hippocampus (the memory and context center) may be smaller.
- The prefrontal cortex (the logic and reasoning center) can go offline under stress.

So when you freeze up during a confrontation, say "it's fine" when it's not, or completely shut down after a tense email, that's not weakness. That's your biology sending a signal flare.

And while that wiring helped you survive, it's not built for a thriving life. To have freedom, clarity, and pleasure, you have to retrain your system. You have to teach your body that you are safe now. As long as you are stuck in an agitated state, your nervous system will always orient outwards because what's outside of us often determines our safety. Once you've reset your inner sense of safety, living a *Me First!* life will come naturally.

Our culture isn't really known for embracing vulnerability, weakness, or feeling down. In many cultures, these things are even considered taboo. We should be grateful, lick our wounds, and focus on the future. Bigger, better, onwards, right?

Yeah… screw that! If you had or have feelings, you now have a space where we will hold them and heal them. Even warriors retreat from battle to heal their wounds, and you have permission to do the same.

As a former corporate employee, I've seen countless people succumb to chronic allostatic load over the years. Allostatic load, by the way, means the wear and tear from constant, chronic stress, even if it's low-key. Thank you, Mom, for sharing that word with me! It wasn't a big trauma that did them in, but the daily grind of passive-aggressive smackdowns and endless emails and messages.

During this time I invented a new word that you are welcome to start using, because in our corporate speak there wasn't a word for f***ed up situations that we had to accept, such as a managerial temper tantrum. The word is "K.O." and it means: the opposite of being O.K., but we can't really do anything about it. I welcome you to start using it in your day-to-day life to stop being O.K. and start being honest with yourself and others.

O.K.
"It's fine, but not great, and I don't feel empowered to change it."

K.O.

"It is the literal opposite of O.K. It's messed up. But there's nothing we can do about it. So let's call it what it is and work on how to survive this."

OVERSTIMULATION AND DISCONNECTION

Long gone are the simple days where we knew what to do, and how to do it.

We are living in an age of overstimulation and constant change. We consume more information in one day than many of our ancestors did in their whole lives. We are constantly bombarded with lights, sounds, and smells, and consciously or unconsciously, we are making thousands of decisions every single day. We are living in an age of overwhelm.

47 unread emails? 17 new things to buy! How many brands of toilet paper can we possibly choose from? Did you see the latest invention from China? Should my kids learn Vedic math? How can I train my dog to only use one corner of the yard as his toilet? Did I remember to order groceries? That is a small list of the thoughts rumbling in the back of my head as I write.

It's all a lot, and all we really wanted to do was get our work done, eat, drink, and sleep. Things were not easier, but they were simpler. Nowadays we're constantly being asked to improve everything we do, and as I mentioned, it's a lot for our brains to handle, especially for people-pleasers, who aren't just looking to serve themselves but others, and who often get their validation from making the best choices, finding the best deal, or doing it better than others, and for others.

Oh, and did I mention it's always bright? No more natural rest cycle. Nope, we're blasting our poor little brains with artificial lights, screens, and scents all day long. And they don't love it!

And if you're a neurodiverse individual (show of hands, neuro-spicy family!) this type of stimulation hits you even harder, because all too often, your brain can't filter out what's pressing and what is not.

And to make matters worse, we're simultaneously overstimulated by inputs, and understimulated by meaningful connection. This is where disconnection comes in.

While the number of relationships we have has exploded exponentially, our close relationships have shrunk in number, depth, and duration.

We can no longer smell or see or sense many of the people in our lives. We follow people online that we've never met, feeling a temporary, dopamine-fueled high of connection, only to feel even more lonely and anxious when we put our phones down. I usually only see my parents on a tiny screen or hear them chatting in my ear, but I can tell my body relaxes the moment I step into my childhood home and fall into a hug. I adore chatting with my best friend Julie online, but there's nothing quite like actually sitting with her in person.

It's so much easier for my body and brain to make sense of human beings, not their online avatars. It allows me to pick up on cues that may not be available otherwise, to form deeper connections and for it all to make sense to my nervous system. It releases the right chemicals (oxytocin) for me to feel connected and safe.

And if you don't believe me, try this experiment.

Imagine a chat message from your manager: "Hey! Do you have a moment to chat?"

This could mean a dozen things: good, bad, or neutral. It could be work-related, personal… you don't really know. And now, your nervous system is on pins and needles, guessing what might happen next, and guessing is exhausting.

Here's a totally un-fun fact: The last time I got that message, I thought it was to congratulate me on a $3 million launch. Instead, I was being fired for insubordination, because I reported an executive for unethical behavior.

Now compare this to running into your manager in the hallway: "Hey! Do you have a moment to chat?"

Scanning her body language and her face, you have a good sense of how she's feeling and what's coming down the pike. Whether your sense is that it's good or bad, your body knows how to react. You're not spinning or wondering. You are responding.

LIVING OUT OF ALIGNMENT

Last but certainly not least, there is living out of alignment. When you are living a life where things aren't right, even small things, it's like sailing down a river with unruly waters, bends, or rocks. You're trying to enjoy the ride and get to your destination, but things keep nudging you off course, or even worse, ramming into your boat.

These could be things such as having the wrong partner, friends whose negativity drags you down, or following a dream that isn't yours. Regardless of what it is, these things cost you time and energy. They wear you down, and the longer you drag them along, the harder it feels to reach your actual goal.

And that's because this actually makes it harder to reach your goals. Let me explain!

You want to live in a home that's tidy and peaceful, but you spend an hour (or two, or three…) every day nagging and picking up socks and ice cream wrappers, stepping around the donation pile, or searching for something. This is friction. Even if it just robs you of 1% of your joy, it is friction, and it builds up.

And that dream that sits on the back burner of your mind, unlived? It's just an idea, right? Not quite! When you have an unlived desire, every time you encounter that desire outside of yourself it steals a little joy. Every time I saw a best-selling author, I'd feel bad about myself and the life I hadn't lived. It robbed me of my joy. It was an open tab in my brain, eating up my processing power.

Living in alignment isn't always the easier path, especially at first. It takes effort to change course or to pick up your boat and drag it to a new location. You may not be sure the water is better there. But you know what? When you prove to yourself that you can make a change, you prove to yourself that your life was always there for you to create. Maybe it'll be a wild success, or perhaps "just" an improvement, but no matter what happens, you walk away with a newfound sense of self. Strength, resilience, and proof that you can create and live your own life.

START HEALING YOUR BODY

The first step to healing your body is actually learning to feel and trust your body again.

Right now you may be feeling your body in all the worst ways: tired, achy, sad, overwhelmed and anxious. But can you feel where these feelings are coming from?

This is, once again, where embodiment comes in. I don't mean the vague "listen to your body" stuff. I mean actually being present in your body and learning to feel again. That's your gateway to freedom.

Most people-pleasers live from the neck up. We don't eat when we're hungry. We don't notice we're overwhelmed until we collapse. We can't tell if we're sad, angry, or just tired, because we've numbed ourselves for the sake of fitting in.

Embodiment reverses that. Embodiment means:

- Giving yourself space and permission to feel.
- Feeling your gut say "no" and actually honoring it.
- Noticing when your chest tightens and slowing down.
- Recognizing that rage is rising up and honoring it as your sacred compass.

And the best part is that when we stop gaslighting ourselves, we actually get to the root of our dis-eases and can start healing them. As Sun Tzu said in *The Art of War*: "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles." Sometimes those just happen to be the same person. Your body was never the enemy. The stranger you became to yourself was.

And science agrees. Research suggests that stronger interoceptive awareness, our ability to feel internal sensations, directly correlates with emotional regulation and resilience.

Or in other words, when you allow yourself to feel what you're actually feeling, you learn to trust yourself. And that, my friend, is real power.

FLIPPING THE SAFETY SWITCH

Let's talk about regulation. Nervous system regulation is the process of shifting your body out of survival mode and back into a state where you actually function and thrive.

That doesn't mean being zen all the time. Quite the opposite! It means being angry when you should be angry, sad when you should be sad, scared when you should be scared, and living in a natural state of peace, joy and inspiration when you don't need to be fighting for your survival.

You see, humans were designed to survive. We were gifted the most incredible tools for

making that happen. A body that can fight bears and build houses. Instincts that guide us away from danger. Emotions to signal when things aren't serving our higher good.

And then, modern life overwhelmed these ancient systems. In the pages ahead you'll learn to read your emotions instead of fearing them, and rewire your safety switch so you can live in your true natural state: clear, focused, calm, flexible, and resilient.

Once your body understands that there is no constant threat, you'll switch fully into your parasympathetic nervous system, your literal happy place.

MAKE FRIENDS WITH YOUR WORST FEELINGS

Let me know if this rings true: for as long as you can remember, you've been told to tame your negative emotions. Smile when you want to scream. Pretend you're fine when you're breaking inside. Be grateful instead of jealous. Calm instead of anxious. Polite instead of angry. They told you it was being "mature."

Well, I'm sure this comes as no surprise by now, but I disagree. Suppressing your feelings is unhealthy, it enables bad behavior from others, and it slowly costs you your well-being, your authenticity, and your sense of self.

Your so-called negative emotions are not proof you're broken. They're proof you're alive. They're not weaknesses to fix, but tools to learn to wield. I'm talking about anger, fear, anxiety, jealousy, sadness, depression, apathy, and disgust. The very ones you were told to hide are the ones that will set you free.

Every strong emotion carries the DNA of what you value, what you're sick of tolerating, and what boundaries you will no longer betray. Emotions are adaptive signals designed to guide you. Suppress them, and you cut yourself off from your own wisdom. Deploy them, and you become unstoppable. Cultural norms around emotions vary, so honor your context while you honor your needs.

So here's how this chapter works. First I'll hand you a single toolkit that works on any hard feeling. Then we'll walk through all eight, and for each one I'll show you what it's really trying to tell you, and the one move that works best for that particular feeling. Learn the toolkit once, and you'll never be defenseless in front of your own emotions again.

THE UNIVERSAL TOOLKIT: FIVE MOVES FOR ANY FEELING

Whatever the emotion, these five moves are your reliable path through it. You won't always need all five. Some feelings clear after one. But when you're underwater, run them in order.

1 Name it. Put one precise word to what you feel, out loud if you can. "Frightened." "Humiliated." "Grief." As you'll see in the next chapter, naming a feeling measurably settles the brain's alarm in a way that describing your situation never does. This is always step one.

2 Move it. Emotions are energy in the body, so give the charge somewhere to go. Shake your limbs, dance, walk it off, wring a towel, cry. The point isn't to explode, it's to discharge and then let your system settle.

3 Speak it. Say it to someone safe: a trusted friend, a therapist, an anonymous forum, a voice note to yourself, or a chatbot you've set to "compassionate bestie" mode. Spoken out loud, a feeling loosens its grip.

4 Decode it. Grab your journal and ask the feeling one question: what are you here to show

me? Every emotion is pointing at something, a crossed boundary, an unlived dream, a change you've been avoiding.

5 Act on it. Take one small step in the direction the feeling pointed. Not the whole staircase. The first stair, today, before anyone talks you out of it.

One caution before we begin: some of these feelings, especially depression and severe anxiety, can be biochemical, not just circumstantial. This toolkit is a companion to professional care, never a replacement for it. If a feeling is persistent, overwhelming, or frightening, please reach out to a doctor or therapist. Asking for help is a Me First! move, not a failure.

Now, the eight feelings, and the signature move for each.

ANGER: THE FIRE THAT BURNS THE BULLSHIT

Anger is the most policed emotion, especially in women. Be nice. Don't be difficult. Don't be that person. But anger is not your enemy, it's your fiercest protector, your heat rising up and screaming "Enough!" It points to every boundary that's been crossed and every compromise you swallowed to keep the peace, and it hands you the courage to walk out of toxic jobs and demand respect. When you swallow it instead, it doesn't vanish, it turns inward. So don't apologize for your anger. Aim it.

Signature move: Move it, then aim it. First discharge the physical charge: blast music and dance hard, go for a furious walk, shred paper, knead bread dough. (A note, since anger research is clear on this: the goal is to discharge and settle, not to hit things harder and harder, which just rehearses the rage.) Then, once the fire dies down, aim it. Channel it into one true action: write the resignation letter, set the boundary, cancel the plan. You don't have to send it, but drafting it turns raw heat into direction.

FEAR: YOUR COMPASS TOWARD GROWTH

Here's an unpopular opinion: I love fear. It took me years and a couple dozen existential faceslaps to get there, but I now know that if I'd faced my fear sooner, I'd have left the wrong relationships and jobs years earlier. Fear activates not just the amygdala but regions tied to learning and memory, which means fear is less a stop sign than a highlighter, circling what matters most. The real question isn't "Am I afraid?" It's "Am I afraid because I'm in danger, or because I'm about to grow?"

Signature move: Decode the fear, then take the smallest step. Fear is like mold: it thrives in dark, sticky corners and hates an honest light. So name it out loud ("I'm scared as hell of this, and I'm going to do something about it"), journal on where it's pointing you, then break that direction into small steps and take the first one now. You don't have to ask for the raise today. You can ask your manager how they'd like to be asked. Let the light in, and watch the fear shrink.

ANXIETY: THE SYSTEM UPDATE YOU CAN'T IGNORE

Anxiety is the shallow breath, the racing thoughts, the 3 a.m. catastrophizing. But it isn't a character flaw, it's data: your nervous system saying "Something here needs to be addressed." Sometimes the threat is real, sometimes it's a ghost from the past, and sometimes it's just a burned-out system begging for change. Psychologists have known for over a century that a moderate dose of stress can sharpen focus, while too much tips into paralysis (the Yerkes-Dodson law). The problem isn't the anxiety, it's how you interpret it. Call it failure and you sink. Call it feedback and you rise. One reframe helps enormously: you are not an anxious person, you are a person with anxiety. That shift turns it from an identity into a situation you can work with.

Signature move: Build a safety protocol. Anxiety loves to freeze you, so decide your moves before you need them. Make a short list of things you can do anytime, anywhere: slow breathing, a favorite song, gentle somatic shaking, splashing cold water on your face, calling a friend. Save it as your phone's lock screen (use emojis if you want privacy) so it's always at hand. And phone a friend to spill every worst-case scenario out loud until it sounds ridiculous. Roughly one in three people will experience an anxiety disorder in their lifetime, so when you reach out, you will find people who understand.

If anxiety is persistent or disabling, medication and therapy are legitimate, effective tools. It's also worth checking the physical inputs, from caffeine to blood sugar, with a doctor, since even "perfect" eating can mask a medical cause.

JEALOUSY: THE SPOTLIGHT ON YOUR HIDDEN DESIRES

Jealousy is one of the most honest emotions you'll ever feel. That sting when she gets the promotion, when he buys the house, when they announce the engagement? That's your soul pointing at something you secretly want. Research finds that envy, in its healthy form, is less about wanting others to lose and more about realizing you want the same, and it can fuel genuinely ambitious goals. (Keep some perspective, though: the grass usually only looks greener. Focus on the feeling the thing would give you, not the thing itself.) Jealousy isn't a character flaw. It's a GPS.

Signature move: Run the jealousy audit. When the pang hits, get specific: what exactly about their life lights me up? A partner who adores them? A boss who values them? Freedom? Name the real desire underneath, thank your body for revealing it, and put that thing on your vision board. Then make a plan to become the kind of person who has it. There is no shame in wanting wonderful things.

SADNESS: THE MEDICINE THAT SOFTENS AND HEALS

Sadness is the emotion we run from hardest, and one of the most essential. It tends to make us more reflective, more careful, more connected. It shows up when something real has been lost,

when a chapter has closed, when your heart needs time to knit itself back together. Without sadness there's no grieving, and without grieving there's no release. Skip it, and you stay stuck, "fine" on the outside and crumbling underneath.

Signature move: Let the wave finish. When you're sad, be sad. Cry, wail, be ugly about it, on the shower floor or in a friend's lap. Let it exist in every cell rather than managing it. You may feel worse before better, and that's the process working, not failing. And don't ride it out alone: even a few minutes of a trusted friend's time can lift the weight and remind you that you don't have to carry it by yourself. Once the first wave passes, you can begin to rewrite the story into something that comforts.

DEPRESSION: THE FULL STOP THAT FORCES THE RESET

Depression is terrifying because it feels like nothing. No spark, no energy, no will. But that nothingness can be your system screaming "We can't keep going like this." It often emerges when you've been grinding against your own truth for too long, until your body pulls the emergency brake. It is a forced pause, not weakness, laziness, or a lack of gratitude. Instead of beating yourself up, ask: "Where am I living so out of alignment that my body had to shut me down?" And if there's no clear answer, that's O.K. too.

Please hear this first: not all depression comes from circumstance. Sometimes it's biochemical, and in that case it deserves medical care. If this is you, please talk to a professional. What follows helps you survive the days; it does not replace treatment.

Signature move: Shrink the task, and say one honest sentence. Depression lies and says brushing your teeth is too much, because your decision-making circuitry really has powered down. So make basic care easier rather than forcing more: eat off paper plates, stretch in bed, skip washing your hair. Small acts of care signal safety to your nervous system. And break the silence with one true line to someone you trust: "I'm not O.K. right now." If you can't face a call, send a text, or record a voice note and play it back. Hearing your own truth strips the shame and reminds you you're still here.

APATHY: THE BORDER BETWEEN NUMBNESS AND CLARITY

Apathy feels like depression's little sibling, and the two can blur. You feel flat, uninterested, unmotivated, and it can scare you because it feels like losing yourself. Your brain dials down dopamine when it stops seeing value in what you're doing. Sometimes that's a red flag pointing toward depression that needs help. Other times it's clarity: a signal you've been forcing yourself to care about things that no longer fit who you are. Stop seeing apathy as failure. Start seeing it as a filter. The key question: "Am I burned out and need rest, or have I outgrown this and need to move on?"

Signature move: Prune ruthlessly. Apathy usually means you've been pouring energy into the wrong things, so cut one loose. Cancel the plan, quit the group, end the fake commitment. Even dropping a single draining task can hand you a surprising surge of life. If everything feels

flat, try a 24-hour stimulation break, no screens, junk food, or fast fake pleasure, to give slower, realer rewards a chance to register again. Then make a short "what actually matters" list and, for the next week, do one thing from it each day. Aligning your energy with what lights you up is the fastest way to bring motivation back from the dead.

DISGUST: THE BOUNDARY BUILDER

Disgust is primal: that full-body "ugh" when you witness a lie, hear toxic gossip, or sit in a room that makes your stomach churn. It evolved to protect you from poison, and it still does, only now it's guarding your soul as much as your gut. When you override disgust to be nice, you let the poison seep in. When you trust it, it becomes one of your clearest boundaries: "Not this. Not here. Not with them." Disgust doesn't make you judgmental. It makes you safe.

Signature move: Name the line out loud. Disgust draws the boundary, but naming it makes the boundary real. When your stomach flips, step away, then say it plainly to yourself, a friend, or a voice note: "That was dishonest." "That felt manipulative." "That crossed my line." Naming the violation cements your values so you honor them next time instead of rationalizing them away.

ALWAYS REMEMBER: YOUR FEELINGS ARE YOUR FRIENDS

You've been lied to your whole life about these emotions, told to suppress them, smile through them, or medicate them away. But they are not weaknesses. They are your fiercest allies. Anger sets your boundaries. Fear shows you the way. Anxiety pushes you to evolve. Jealousy lights up your hidden dreams. Sadness heals you. Depression resets you. Apathy clarifies your priorities. Disgust protects your soul.

Stop apologizing for them. Start asking what they're trying to tell you. Run the toolkit, use each feeling's signature move, and you stop being the person who bends and breaks to keep everyone else comfortable, and start becoming the person you always, deep down, wanted to be.

NAME IT. RELEASE IT.

We all know this moment.

Something happens. A message you didn't expect, a conversation that went sideways, a silence where there should have been words. Something rises in you. Sometimes fast and hot, sometimes cold and sinking. It fills your chest and crowds your throat and suddenly you are not thinking clearly, not responding thoughtfully, not the grounded, self-possessed person you've been working to become. You're just in it. Overwhelmed by a wave you can't name, being pulled in a direction you didn't choose.

Most of us were taught one response to that moment: manage it. Push through it. Explain it away or logic yourself out of it or wait for it to pass. We describe it to ourselves in elaborate, circling sentences. *I feel like everything is falling apart. I feel like nobody understands what I'm going through. I feel like I'm failing at everything that matters.*

And the wave keeps coming. Because we gave it a story, but we never gave it a name.

But it doesn't have to be that way. All you need are one or two words to put it to rest.

In 2007, UCLA neuroscientist Matthew Lieberman put people inside brain scanners and showed them images designed to produce emotional responses. Then he did something simple: he asked one group to put a name to the emotion in front of them.

What happened next wasn't about insight or processing or understanding why they felt what they felt. It was faster and more physical than that.

As they named the feeling, the group showed measurably reduced activity in the amygdala, the part of the brain that processes threat and generates emotional pain. The prefrontal cortex, the seat of reason and response and clear thinking, activated. And the two systems did what they always do when the prefrontal cortex comes online: they counterbalanced each other. The alarm quieted. The pain decreased.

Not therapy. Not time. Not understanding the root cause or tracing it back to childhood or reframing the narrative. Two words. A precise emotional label. And the brain shifted systems almost immediately.

This is not a metaphor for feeling better. This is neuroscience. This is what is measurably, physically happening in your brain when you stop describing your feelings and start naming them.

This distinction between describing and naming matters more than it might seem, so I want to slow down here.

Most of us think we're naming our feelings when we're actually describing our situations. They feel similar from the inside, but to your brain they are completely different events.

I feel like everything is falling apart. That's a situation description. Your brain receives it as information about circumstances. It cannot activate the relief pathway from circumstances. It stays in the amygdala, cycling, looking for a threat to respond to.

Frightened. That's a name. Your brain receives it as emotional data. The prefrontal cortex activates. The amygdala quiets. The pain decreases.

I feel like nobody understands me. Situation description. More cycling. More pain.

Lonely. A name. The alarm quiets. Measurably, within seconds.

The more precise the label, the greater the effect. Lieberman's research found that specificity matters. Not just *sad* when you mean *grief-stricken*, not just *upset* when you mean *humiliated*. Your brain rewards precision. The closer the word is to the actual texture of what you're feeling, the more completely the system shifts.

Research since has found the same quieting when people name their own emotions, not just ones on a screen.

This means that one of the most valuable things you can develop is an emotional vocabulary. Not to sound sophisticated. Not for anyone else's benefit. But because the words you have available to you are the medicine available to you. More words, more precision, more relief.

Here's how we are going to start using this tool to live a more *Me First!* life.

You have been carrying feelings you have never named, wrapped in elaborate stories and what-ifs. Not because you weren't feeling them. You were, fully, in your body, in your behavior, in the way certain situations would set something off in you that you couldn't quite explain. But because nobody gave you permission to name them. And so you learned to manage and push through. To create a story to pad the reality of what you were feeling.

Think about the feelings that have been circling in you lately. The ones that rise up in certain situations, with certain people, in certain moments. The ones you've been describing to yourself in long, complicated sentences that never quite resolve into relief.

What are they actually called?

Not the story around them. Not the situation that caused them. Not the person you'd like to explain them to.

Just the feeling. One or two words maximum.

Sit with the question until something precise arrives. And when it does, when the right word surfaces and something in you goes "*yes, that!*" notice what happens in your body. The slight loosening. The sense of something landing. That's not coincidence. That's your prefrontal cortex coming online. That's the medicine working.

So let's expand our vocabulary so that no matter what life may throw at us, we can name it and release it, before the story takes hold and we have time to talk ourselves out of our feelings.

There is a whole landscape of emotional experience that most of us have felt but never named. Here are some of the words that tend to carry the most relief when people finally find them:

- *Ashamed*: not just bad, but specifically exposed. Afraid of being seen as fundamentally flawed.
- *Humiliated*: the particular pain of being diminished in front of others, or in your own eyes.

- *Grieving*: not just sadness, but the specific ache of loss. Of something being gone that you loved.
- *Resentful*: the slow burn of giving more than you received, for longer than was right.
- *Overwhelmed*: not just busy, but genuinely beyond capacity. More coming in than you can process.
- *Lonely*: not just alone, but specifically unmet. Present with people and still not reached.
- *Helpless*: the particular agony of caring deeply about something you cannot change.
- *Relieved*: because positive feelings need naming too, and the brain responds to precision in both directions.

These are not weaknesses. They are information. And when you name them precisely, your brain treats them as such, processes them, integrates them, releases the grip of them. And just like that, they are no longer sounding the alarm, looking for a resolution that description alone can never provide.

I want to connect this back to where we started, to the first pillar of the *Me First!* Method, to the body, to the nervous system, and why regulating it is where all the rest of the work becomes possible.

Affect labeling, the clinical term for what Lieberman studied, is not a thinking exercise. It is a somatic one. When you name a feeling precisely, you are not just updating your understanding of your situation. You are physically shifting the state of your nervous system. You are moving from the reactive, threat-activated, amygdala-driven state where nothing can be clearly seen or thoughtfully chosen, to the regulated, responsive, prefrontal state where you can actually work with what's happening.

This is why the work begins in the body. Not because feelings aren't also mental or spiritual. They are all three, always. But because the body is the access point. The name is the key that opens the door. And behind that door is the version of you who can handle this, who can feel the feeling fully without being swept away by it, who can respond rather than react, who can choose rather than be chosen.

You have always had access to that version of yourself. You were just, sometimes, missing the word.

BREATHE LIKE YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT

Not too long after my son was born, I was diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder. A bad one. The kind with harsh drugs and rapid decline in quality of life. The kind that didn't have a cure. While juggling work, a depressed husband, and a newborn, I was also quickly losing feeling in my extremities and losing lung function, and was constantly exhausted.

But I was also a determined people-pleaser who really wanted to breastfeed for the first year, so with my doctor's begrudging approval I turned down medication (for the time being) and turned to hypnotherapy to help me manage my symptoms. Here, it turns out, people-pleasing was my greatest blessing.

My hypnotherapist is a kind soul with blonde, shaggy hair. Relaxed. Casual. Instantly inviting. I sank into the couch and followed his instructions, and the world melted away. That's the last I remember of it, until I heard him counting me back into reality. "Five, four, three, two, one. Welcome back!"

This one-hour session was not only one of the best naps I'd ever taken, but also the most enlightening one. What he had realized, and dozens of doctors had missed, is that I was so anxious that I was barely breathing. My pain, fatigue, and numbness were the result of my stress suffocating me, and once I started following his advice and actually breathing again, most of my symptoms vanished. The anxiety and fatigue that remained were those of every other working newborn mom out there.

This, of course, is a personal anecdote and I am not claiming that breathing will cure your autoimmune disease. I share this story because deep down, I have full faith that something greater than me put me through the spiritual wringer so that I can be here today to tell you to breathe like the quality of your life depends on it, because it does, and all too often it is overlooked.

DEEP BELLY BREATHING

A quick note before you begin, for all the breathwork in this chapter: gentle, slow breathing is safe for almost everyone, but the deeper and more intense practices aren't right for everybody. If you are pregnant, or you live with a cardiovascular condition, epilepsy, a seizure disorder, a respiratory condition, or a history of fainting, please check with your doctor first, keep to the gentle version, and never push to the point of dizziness. Lightheadedness is a signal to ease off, not a milestone to chase. Your breath should feel like a soft tide, never a struggle.

Deep belly breathing activates your vagus nerve, the central command of your parasympathetic system. The longer your exhale, the stronger the calm signal you send your brain.

Research shows that just five minutes of slow breathing can improve heart rate variability and decrease stress.

So let's try this together:

Inhale for
1
2
3
4

Hold for
1
2
3
4

Exhale for
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8

And repeat until you feel calmer. Try it for a few minutes.

ADVANCED: HYPNOTIC BREATH TO RELEASE

For those of you who want to go a little deeper, hypnotic breath is a practice of conscious exhalation that releases accumulated tension, processes emotions, and clears the residue of daily stress. Unlike calming breathwork that relaxes the nervous system, this technique guides you inward, into a soft trance-like state where your mind loosens its grip and your body remembers how to let go. Just know this: You might feel lightheaded at first. This is normal. If it's uncomfortable, return to normal breathing.

When I first tried this exercise I was amazed at how much I released in just one session. All of the unspoken stresses that had accumulated in my nervous system bubbled up, poured out through my tears, and after forty minutes, I felt lighter than I had in years.

Hypnotic breathing works like a gentle reset button. The hypnotic quality of the rhythm allows you to bypass mental chatter and access a quieter, wiser layer of your being. By extending the exhale, you activate the parasympathetic nervous system, signaling safety and allowing buried feelings to surface and dissolve. The rhythm of breath quiets the racing mind, opening space for clarity and fresh perspective.

But like many great things, hypnotic breathing can be awkward at first, and in trauma survivors can be re-traumatizing. I highly recommend finding a practitioner to guide you through the process.

If you want to try it out on your own, find a great soundtrack online (they usually have a techno feel to them) and do this:

- Settle in: Sit or lie down somewhere comfortable. Close your eyes. Let your body feel supported.
- Begin with awareness: Notice your natural breath without trying to change it. Feel its rhythm.
- Lengthen the exhale: Slowly begin to extend each exhale so it's slightly longer than the inhale. For example, breathe in for a count of four, breathe out for a count of eight.
- Add a loud sigh: With every out-breath, imagine sighing away what no longer serves you: tension, thoughts, even the weight of the day. Let sound help if it wants to.
- Find the rhythm: Continue until your breathing feels like a gentle tide. Let the rhythm hypnotize you. Each cycle is an invitation to sink deeper into release.
- Stay as long as needed: A few minutes may be enough to shift your state, or you may want to stay for around twenty minutes, letting layers of holding unravel.

The hypnotic breath is less about doing and more about allowing. With practice, your body learns that release is safe. The longer you stay with it, the more your inner system recalibrates to a state of peace.

WRITE IT DOWN, LET IT GO

Journaling is a powerful tool, especially when you do it by hand. Your brain lights up, and allows you to process trauma and stress, identify patterns and triggers, release your emotions into a safe space, and create new solutions.

One of the most surprisingly powerful tools I discovered is a method created by Dr. James W. Pennebaker. He found that it is possible to rewrite experiences and the emotions associated with them, which can help you reframe them and give you more room to breathe. Please remember that for significant trauma it's also recommended to work with a professional.

The process is simple. Find a quiet place, and answer the following questions either three days in a row, or a couple of days apart. It only matters that you do it three times. Write like no one will ever read this, as no one ever has to. It should take about twenty minutes each time.

- What happened?
- How did it make me feel at the time?
- How has it affected my life since then?

I did this exercise with a painful work situation and was surprised not only at how much emotion I had never realized I had about the situation (including betrayal and shame), but also at how much I changed in those three days.

The process works by processing the experience repeatedly, which can reduce its emotional intensity and help integrate it into your narrative. It's like boxing up the items you don't love but can't throw away and putting them into storage. They still exist and always will, but they won't be the first thing in your mind when you wake up. While there is nothing we can do to make experiences disappear, over time, these practices will make sure they hold less power over our lives.

TIE UP LOOSE ENDS

There are certain kinds of "knowing" that don't just live in the mind, but in the being. They are trying to complete something. And until they do, part of you stays suspended in ambiguity: not quite present, not quite past, looping in a kind of quiet vigil, waiting for resolution.

An unfinished conversation. A relationship that ended without a real goodbye. The version of you who never got to grieve, or rage, or simply say: *that happened, and now it's done.* These aren't dramatic wounds necessarily. Sometimes they're small. The apology you never gave. The door left ajar. The thing you kept meaning to resolve and never did.

But small doesn't mean weightless. In fact, they often gather into a collective unease that weighs you down more than the bigger challenges you're facing.

In the 1920s, the story goes, the psychologist Kurt Lewin and his students were sitting in a Berlin café when they noticed something peculiar about the waiters. The waiters could hold entire complex orders in their heads. Twelve people, customized dishes, specific requests. But the moment the bill was paid and the table cleared, they forgot everything. Ask them five minutes later what table seven had ordered, and they'd look at you blankly. It was gone.

This fascinated one of those students, Bluma Zeigarnik. She went back to her lab and tested it systematically, and what she found is why we now call this the Zeigarnik effect, one of the foundational findings in cognitive psychology: your brain treats unfinished tasks differently than finished ones.

Your brain treats an unfinished spreadsheet and an unfinished relationship surprisingly similarly. To your nervous system, both are open files. Both demand a small, persistent portion of your mental and emotional resources to maintain. And unlike a computer, you cannot simply add more RAM. The capacity you spend holding open threads is capacity you don't have available for the life you're actually trying to live.

This is what I want you to really sit with, because most of us have been taught to manage the *symptoms* of overwhelm: the anxiety, the exhaustion, the sense that you're constantly behind. We reach for better planning systems. We try to sleep more. We download another meditation app.

But almost no one asks: *how many loops are actually running?*

The thing about the weight of our unfinished business is that we adapt to it. You stop feeling these issues as distinct. They fold themselves into the background noise of your interior life until you no longer register them as separate things, you just feel vaguely heavy. Vaguely tired. Vaguely like you're wading through something you can't name.

Think about the emotional threads you might be carrying right now. Not just the obvious ones, like the divorce, the estrangement, the grief. Think about the smaller ones. The friendship that drifted and was never formally released. The version of yourself from a decade ago who took a path she didn't choose, and never got to mourn what else was possible. The apology you

owe someone. The apology you deserved and never received, so you're still in some corner of yourself waiting for it.

Each one of these is a thread. Each thread is drawing current.

In structured closure work, where people are guided through deliberate completion practices, participants consistently report something remarkable afterward: they feel lighter. Not because anything changed in their external circumstances, but because the loop closed. And with the loop closed, the energy that had been quietly circling that open wound came home.

That energy is yours. It belongs to your actual life.

Before we talk about how to close threads, it's worth understanding why we leave them open in the first place. Because it's rarely carelessness or laziness. More often, it's one of three things.

The first is *hope disguised as incompletion*. As long as the conversation isn't finished, there's still a version of the future where it ends differently. Staying in the loop is a way of keeping the possibility alive. If I never fully grieve this relationship, maybe it isn't really over.

The second is *confusion about what completion actually means*. We tend to conflate closure with resolution, as if the only way to finish something is to fix it. But unfinished things rarely need to be fixed to be completed. They need to be *witnessed*. They need a container, an ending, a form. The goodbye doesn't require the other person's presence. The apology doesn't require the other person's forgiveness. The completion is an internal event, not an external negotiation.

The third is simply *not knowing it's a thing you can do*. No one teaches us deliberate closure. We're given funerals and divorce papers and graduation ceremonies, but for the thousand quieter endings, such as the almost-relationships, the paths not taken, and the identities we shed, we're left to figure it out alone, or more often, to just keep carrying it.

The Practice: Closing the Threads

Let's walk through a completion practice. Not a visualization exercise, not a journaling prompt. A real, deliberate act of closure that your nervous system can register as *done*.

Find a quiet hour. This is not a ten-minute thing. Give it the time it deserves.

Step one: Inventory.

Take a piece of paper and list every emotionally unfinished thing you can bring to mind. Don't filter for significance. The massive ones and the minor ones both belong on the list. You may be surprised by what comes up. Items you thought you'd dealt with. Old names. Old versions of yourself.

Step two: Identify the completion each one needs.

For each item on your list, ask: *What does this need in order to be done?* Some need an apology, either yours to give, or yours to stop waiting to receive. Some need a goodbye, a formal acknowledgment that something has ended. Some need a witnessing: *this happened, it mattered, and I am releasing my grip on it.* Some need a decision, not resolution of the thing itself, but a decision about how you're going to hold it from here on out.

Step three: Do the completion.

Write the unsent letter. Say the goodbye out loud, even to an empty chair. Speak the apology

to yourself in the mirror if the other person is gone or unavailable. The medium matters less than the sincerity. Your nervous system is listening for signal, not performance.

Step four: The release statement.

For each completed item, say this out loud, because your body needs to hear it: *"This is complete. I release the energy I've been spending keeping this open."* Then cross it off the list. Physically. Slowly.

This last step matters more than it sounds. The crossing-out is a somatic signal. It tells your nervous system: *filed. No longer active. Resources returned.* Your brain, which has been dutifully holding this item in working memory, receives the message it was waiting for.

This is a practice I like to use with clients who've been told, or who have told themselves, that there's something wrong with them. That their anxiousness, their exhaustion, and their inability to be fully present are proof of some inherent flaw. Because often, that brokenness is the symptom of a person who is running too many programs at once, tied to their past with a mess of knotted strings. Once we start cutting those strings and releasing them, the mental clutter starts to clear. The fog vanishes. And the energy that's been leaking towards excusing the past suddenly becomes available in the present.

So try cutting one string today. Just one. Cross it off the list. Say the words.

Notice what comes into the space.

And the quiet you feel after? That's you. That's the you who was there all along, underneath the noise of all the unfinished things.

DANCE IS THE SHORTCUT BACK TO YOURSELF

Dance is one of the most primal and profound ways to connect with the body. Long before human beings had written language, they moved in rhythm, telling stories through gesture and motion. Movement was not just entertainment: it was prayer, communication, and medicine. In modern times, dance remains a powerful way to bridge the gap between mind and body, helping us feel alive, safe, and whole.

At its core, dance reconnects us with the body's natural intelligence.

Unlike structured exercise routines, dance invites freedom and expression. Whether it is a formal practice like ballet or an improvised sway in the kitchen, dance invites you to listen, to perceive. Muscles, joints, and breath become guides, leading the body into rhythms that match mood, energy, or the music playing. This act of tuning into your body enhances your interoception, the ability to sense internal bodily states, which research shows is essential for emotional regulation and resilience.

Dance offers a safe way to mobilize the stuck survival energy of fight, flight, or freeze that lingers long after danger has passed. Moving rhythmically with music helps regulate the autonomic nervous system, shifting the body toward balance and safety.

The psychological benefits are equally powerful. Dance therapy has been shown to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, improve self-esteem, and strengthen cognitive function. By bypassing the verbal, analytical brain, dance provides a pathway for emotions to surface and resolve. People often find that feelings too complex to articulate in words can be expressed in movement, leading to a sense of release and clarity. In this way, dance functions both as creative expression and as a form of embodied psychotherapy.

I remember my first encounter with dance as a healing tool. I was a burnt-out working mom stuck in a toxic relationship and decided to go blow off steam at a Zumba class. I'd seen a news story about how Zumba creator Beto Pérez designed the courses to make people happier, and happiness is what I was looking for. I was awkward and didn't know any of the steps, but as my body started picking them up, I found this deep wave of grief welling up and releasing. I decided I'd be the lady who cried in class (and planned never to return), but quickly realized that no one minded. I wiped my tears and continued to move, letting feelings surface and dissolve, and to smile. Turns out I hadn't forgotten how.

Dance cultivates joy. The simple act of moving rhythmically stimulates endorphins, dopamine, and oxytocin, the very neurochemicals linked with pleasure, bonding, and reward. This biochemical cascade explains why even a few minutes of dancing can shift your mood dramatically.

And here's the best part: dance is accessible. You do not need formal training or special equipment to reap the benefits. Whether it is structured classes like tango, contemporary, or hip-

hop, or informal free movement alone in a bedroom, dance adapts to you. It can be vigorous or gentle, solitary or social, choreographed or spontaneous.

And bonus points if you do it with others! This fosters co-regulation, where your nervous systems sync up through the shared rhythm, creating a deep sense of belonging, and more happy chemicals for you!

In a world that often pulls us into disconnection, dance calls us back to the living body. Each step, twist, or sway is a reminder that healing, joy, and wisdom reside not only in the mind but in the rhythms of flesh and bone. To dance is to remember what it feels like to be fully alive.

LIVE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUR BODY

Talking to and listening to the body is not a one-time exercise but an ongoing relationship. Like any relationship, it requires trust, respect, and regular attention. Over time, this dialogue reshapes identity: the self is no longer just a mind commanding a body but an integrated whole participating fully in life.

In fact, there are countless benefits to living this way. Emotional regulation improves as bodily cues are recognized earlier. Physical health often stabilizes when the body's needs are acknowledged rather than suppressed. Perhaps most importantly, a sense of safety and belonging emerges. Not from external validation but from the inner knowing that one is in partnership with oneself.

Living in partnership with the body also reconnects us to intuition, which we'll get to next. Intuition is not a mystical power floating above reason but the body's rapid processing of subtle signals, often experienced as gut feelings. Research shows that people with higher interoceptive awareness tend to make decisions more aligned with their authentic needs. By listening to the body, we reclaim access to this form of intelligence.

The challenge is that culture often pushes us toward disembodiment. The noise of screens, the cult of productivity, and the stigma around vulnerability all encourage separation from the body. To resist this trend is an act of quiet rebellion, a choice to honor life in its most intimate form. By talking to the body and listening, we restore dignity to our existence and make space for genuine healing.

PART FOUR
REPROGRAM YOUR MIND

Your body is regulated. You've learned to listen to its signals, trust its wisdom, and work with it instead of against it. That foundation? It changes everything. Because now, with your nervous system online and your body feeling safe, you're finally ready to tackle the code that's been running your life on autopilot.

And trust me, some of that code is absolute garbage.

"I'm not good enough." "I have to earn love." "My needs don't matter." "I'm too much and not enough at the same time."

These aren't truths. They're programs. Lines of code written into your mental operating system when you were too young to question them. And they've been running in the background ever since, shaping every decision you make, every relationship you enter, every dream you abandon before you even start.

You didn't write this code. Your parents did. Your teachers did. Society did. Every person who ever made you feel like you had to shrink, perform, or people-please to be worthy contributed a line or two.

And here's the kicker: most of it isn't even conscious. It's subconscious programming that fires automatically, determining what you think is possible, what you believe you deserve, and what you're "allowed" to want.

But here's the good news: code can be rewritten.

In this section, you're going to learn how to debug your limiting beliefs, identify the cognitive distortions keeping you stuck, and install new programming that actually serves you. You'll learn how to catch the automatic negative thoughts that sabotage your progress before they spiral. You'll discover how to tune your inner voice from critic to champion. And you'll activate your intuition so you can make decisions from alignment instead of anxiety.

This isn't positive thinking. This isn't "just change your mindset" nonsense. This is deep, intentional reprogramming of the mental patterns that have been holding you back your entire life.

And because your nervous system is now regulated, this work will actually stick. You're not trying to think your way out of a body problem anymore. You're building new neural pathways from a foundation of safety and trust.

You'll learn to recognize when old code tries to run. You'll develop the ability to pause, question, and choose a different response. You'll stop believing the thoughts that cross your mind and start treating them like data to be evaluated, not gospel truth to be obeyed.

Your mind is incredibly powerful. But for too long, it's been running someone else's programming.

It's time to take back control. To question everything you've been told about who you are and what you're capable of. To rewrite the story from the inside out.

Your mind is ready. Let's reprogram it.

PICK YOURSELF FIRST

You know the feeling.

You're standing at the edge of the playground, somewhere between hopeful and terrified, trying to look casual while your whole nervous system is running a single program on loop: *pick me, pick me, pick me.*

You're watching the captains: the ones who got to be captains without anyone explaining why, they just were, and you're doing rapid mental calculations. Who's already been chosen. Where you rank. Whether you'll be picked early enough to feel good about it or late enough to feel the specific, quiet humiliation of being what's left.

You're scanning the other kids, cataloging their qualities. That one's fast. That one's funny. That one's good at everything and knows it. You're assembling everyone else's best attributes in your mind like a scout, thinking about what they bring, what they're worth, what would make someone want them on their side.

And somewhere in all of that furious outward focus, you forgot to look at yourself.

Nobody taught you to. That was the whole architecture of the moment: stand there, be evaluated, wait to be chosen. The idea that you might assess your own value independently, that you might decide for yourself whether you were worth picking before anyone else weighed in, that the opinion forming inside you about you might be the only one that actually mattered… that wasn't part of the game.

You learned something on that playground. You learned it so young and so thoroughly that it stopped feeling like a lesson and started feeling like a fact.

You learned to wait.

Here's the thing about childhood lessons: they don't stay on the playground. They follow you into the boardroom and the relationship and the mirror at 7am and the moment you're about to do something that scares you. They follow you into the parts of your life where you are, objectively, an adult with full autonomy over your choices, and they whisper the same thing they always whispered.

Wait to be chosen. Let someone else decide if you're worth it.

So you wait for the promotion to be offered instead of asking for it. You wait for the relationship to become serious before you let yourself invest. You wait for someone to notice what you're capable of before you act like you believe it yourself. You hold yourself at arm's length from your own potential, keeping one eye always on the door, waiting to see if the world is going to confirm what some part of you suspects: that maybe, just maybe, you are someone worth picking.

But while you're waiting, life doesn't pause. The game keeps going, and the people who chose themselves are out there playing on the field, imperfect and fully committed, playing like they belong there because they decided they did.

What would happen if you decided that too?

What Self-Selection Actually Looks Like

I want to separate this from the self-help version of the idea, because "choose yourself" has been on enough mugs and Instagram graphics that it's started to lose its edges. I don't mean choose yourself as a feeling. I don't mean a moment of self-affirmation in the bathroom before a big meeting.

I mean choose yourself as a *practice.* As a daily, specific, sometimes inconvenient act of loyalty to the person you are and the person you're becoming.

This looks like taking a chance on yourself before you feel ready.

It means standing up for yourself in the room. Not performing confidence you don't feel, but refusing to be the first one to vote against yourself.

It looks like being the person who celebrates what they are good at and what they are passionate about.

It means staying on your own team when things go wrong. When you make a mistake, when you fall back into an old pattern, when you do the thing you promised yourself you wouldn't. The moment right after that is the most important moment. That's the moment where you either abandon yourself the way you always have, or you do something different. You say: *I'm still here. I still choose you. Let's figure out what happened and keep going.*

That's what a loyal teammate does.

YOU ARE THE MVP

Here's what the playground forgot to tell you.

You. With all your contradictions and your half-finished edges and the parts of yourself you're still figuring out. You are genuinely, specifically, irreplaceably worth having. Not in spite of your imperfections. Not once you've resolved them. Right now. As you currently are.

You are the one who will make or break this game called life. You may take the blame for the fumbles and love yourself anyway, but you know what? You're also going to be the one who takes the glory for all of the shots you made.

And that is why it's so important to choose yourself, bet on yourself, and believe in yourself.

The captains on that playground weren't picking the perfect players. They were picking the ones who showed up fully. The ones who wanted to be there. The ones whose energy said *I'm in, I'm ready, I belong on this field.* Perfection was never the point. Full presence was.

And the truest, most present, most fully-arrived version of you? That person is extraordinary to be on a team with. That person makes everything around them better. That person is exactly who every great team is looking for.

But they have to be chosen first. By you. Before anyone else gets the chance.

Think about what it would mean to have a teammate who believed in you completely. Who noticed your best qualities and named them back to you. Who didn't bail when you were having a bad season. Who invested in your growth not because the return was guaranteed but

because they genuinely thought you were worth it. Who was still in your corner after every mistake, every stumble, every moment you weren't your best self.

Who said, every single time: *I'm not going anywhere. You're my person. Let's go.*

That teammate exists. They have always existed. They are you.

You just haven't been playing the role.

So get off the sidelines.

You have been standing at the edge of your own life for long enough.

You have been scanning the field, cataloging everyone else's strengths, waiting for someone to point at you and say *that one, we want that one*… and in the waiting, you have missed the fact that the game has been going on without you. That your spot on the field has been there this whole time, with your name on it, waiting for you to stop asking permission and just walk onto it.

Pick yourself. Today. Not when you're ready, because ready is a myth your fear invented to keep you waiting. Not when you've fixed the thing you're always trying to fix, because there will always be another thing. Now. As you are. Imperfect and capable and entirely worth it.

Be the teammate you've always needed. Show up for yourself the way you show up for the people you love best: with patience, with investment, with the kind of loyalty that doesn't have an exit clause.

And then watch what happens to the team that forms around you.

Because when you stop waiting to be picked and start picking yourself, when you step onto the field fully, with your whole self, all in, you will find that the players worth playing with have been waiting for someone exactly like you.

They just needed you to show up first.

So show up. Tag yourself into the game, and go!

YOUR INTUITION INITIATION

Intuition may not be the first thing that comes to mind when you think about your mind, but it's the bridge that connects your newfound body intelligence to the part of yourself you know best: your mind.

Albert Einstein is said to have mused: "The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift."

I think he was on to something. So let's start here, with an intuition initiation.

You have a built-in GPS. A divine compass. A knowing that lives in your bones. It whispers truths, warns you of dangers, and invites possibilities. It's powerful beyond measure, and yet, for so many of us, it's the voice we were taught to ignore.

Most of us learn to gaslight ourselves from a very young age, when well-meaning parents tell us things are O.K. when they aren't, or when we're asked to set aside our opinions, desires, and feelings in order to fit in. Our senses always knew when something was off, but over the years the people around us showed us, even if indirectly, that our intuition wasn't to be trusted. And so we went about our lives ignoring hunches, signs, and feelings, wondering all the while why something felt wrong. Lost, stuck, anxious, and uneasy in situations everyone kept telling us were fine.

Here's a fun statement I heard from one of my graduates the other day: "Fine is f*cked-up's younger sibling." Harsh, yes, but by the end of this chapter you'll see just how true it is.

So let me remind you: you were never broken. You were just taught to mistrust the most sacred, powerful part of yourself. And starting today, we're done with that. We are not just going to turn your intuition back on. We're going to get it fired up.

THE SCIENCE OF INTUITION

Contrary to popular belief, your intuition doesn't live in your mind. It lives in your body. The brain is just there to translate its messages into a language you can understand. That's why we spent the last chapter reconnecting to, and feeling safe in, your body.

Intuition is your ability to rapidly, and often subconsciously, process information and make decisions based on patterns, signals, and stored experience. The insula, the anterior cingulate cortex, and the vagus nerve all play a role.

Your gut plays a powerful part too, and doesn't get nearly the credit it deserves. It contains over 100 million neurons and produces 90% of the body's serotonin. That's why scientists are starting to call it your second brain. When you're anxious, your digestion slows. When you're excited, your stomach flutters. When you're in danger, you might feel nausea, heat, or a wave of

exhaustion. That's your intuition speaking through sensation. Your body knows what's up before your mind catches on.

And here's one important reason to cultivate it: studies show that people who trust their gut often make better, faster, and more accurate decisions, especially in complex or uncertain environments.

If you're a highly sensitive person, this is especially good news. Your sensitivity may have felt like a curse, but it's actually discernment. You're acutely aware of subtle shifts in energy, tone, truth, and meaning. That unharnessed superpower has probably been driving you mad, setting your stomach aflutter, and telling you to flee rooms you were told were perfectly fine. Now that your nervous system belongs to you again, that same radar is going to shine a high beam on every decision you make.

STOP GASLIGHTING AND LYING TO YOURSELF

Many of us were raised in homes where "everything was fine" even when it wasn't.

Dad doesn't spend time with the family? "He's just tired from work." Mom never pays attention to you? "She loves you in her own way." You felt sick and overwhelmed at school or at family gatherings? "You're just being dramatic."

This emotional dissonance, the gap between what you feel and what you're told, creates confusion. Over time, you learn to override your instincts. You label your discomfort as being too sensitive, or shy, or introverted. Eventually you adopt the survival tactic that lets you fit in and keep the peace: you lie to yourself. You say you're happy when you're not. You say you're fine when you're falling apart. You say yes when your whole body screams no.

And what else could you do as a child? That's what you learned. But here's the truth: pretending doesn't protect you. It poisons you. Truth is the soil where intuition grows, so to reconnect with yours, you have to break this legacy and stop lying to yourself, even when it's inconvenient, even when it makes you the odd one out.

The first step is to speak the truth to yourself. Start by slowly replacing the dishonest, protective inner dialogue you learned from your environment with an honest one. This can be as simple as taking out your phone, turning on a voice memo, and talking to yourself about how you really feel. Keep the note or delete it. That's up to you.

I first did this on a brisk spring morning, sitting outside with my matcha latte before the day began. Something had been nagging at me and I needed to talk to someone, but it felt so immense that I didn't want to bother anyone, especially at that hour. So I pulled out my phone, hit record, and told myself how miserable I felt. As I spoke my truth, it crystallized and became real, and then the tears started flowing.

Just as speaking our desires brings them to life, speaking our pain allows it to surface and begin to evaporate. Social neuroscience shows that vocalizing your worries triggers circuits wired for communication and co-regulation, even when no one else is present. Your nervous system reads spoken expression as a step toward connection and resolution, which reduces your limbic load, the emotional weight carried by the amygdala. Journaling untangles thoughts,

but speaking externalizes the problem in a way your body and brain register as action, making it even more effective for relief.

So find a space and start being honest, out loud. If something feels awful, admit it. If you're angry at someone, admit it. If you're sad, admit it. No excuses, no plan to fix it. Just whisper to yourself: "Wow, that felt awful." Every time you practice radical honesty with yourself, you strengthen your intuition and learn to trust yourself again.

PRACTICE LISTENING TO YOUR BODY

As you get honest, pay attention to where you feel your feelings. Is fear in your tummy, or in your heart? Does frustration show up in your shoulders?

This isn't about fixing anything. It's about noticing the signals your body is sending, and acknowledging them so your body knows you're listening. Once it knows you're not trying to gaslight, fix, or ignore it, you can start asking it why it's upset. Be patient. Before long, you'll start to understand what it's saying.

So when you feel uneasy, take a few deep breaths and ask your body what it's trying to tell you, preferably out loud. Talk to yourself until the answers feel safe enough to reveal themselves. Then breathe into it, and let the sensations be there.

For me, this was a critical practice in easing hip and lower back pain that years of physical therapy had failed to remedy. My colleague Tracy introduced me to a book called *Messages from the Body*. While parts of it felt far-fetched, the messages relating to my symptoms were spot on, and once I started being honest with myself and others, the pain began to leave. Sometimes an unexplained ache is nudging us to make a change. First, though, always let a doctor rule out the physical causes: pain, and symptoms like chronic fatigue or digestive trouble, can point to real medical conditions that deserve real medical care, and this practice is a complement to that, never a replacement for it. Once your body has a clean bill of health, you're free to get curious about what else it might be telling you.

If you're curious what your body might be saying, you can search things like "spiritual message of tight hips" or "what does Traditional Chinese Medicine say about waking up at 3am?"

If you feel pain or tension in your lower back or kidneys, your root chakra may be out of balance. In both Reiki and Traditional Chinese Medicine, this area stores fear, insecurity, and exhaustion.

Pain or cramping in your lower abdomen or hips may reflect an imbalance in your sacral chakra, the center of emotion, pleasure, and creativity. In TCM, the spleen and reproductive organs hold worry and rumination, signs that you're over-giving or disconnected from joy.

Discomfort in your stomach, liver, or mid-back may mean your solar plexus chakra needs attention. This is your power center. Anger, resentment, or suppressed ambition often show up here, and when you hold yourself back, the liver stagnates and digestion suffers.

Tightness in your chest or shallow breathing may indicate that your heart chakra is

protecting old grief. In these traditions, the heart and lungs process love, sadness, and joy, and when those go unexpressed, the chest constricts and circulation dulls.

A chronic itch in your throat, a crick in your neck, or tightness in your jaw can signal a blocked throat chakra. Here, the throat, thyroid, and vocal cords govern expression, and when you silence yourself, energy pools as tightness or inflammation.

Tension between your brows, headaches, or eye strain may mean your third-eye chakra is overloaded. In this tradition, that's when clarity fades, intuition blurs, and anxiety takes hold.

And pressure in your head or dizziness may mean your crown chakra is struggling to connect. This center is said to bridge body and spirit, and imbalance often arises when you lose trust, purpose, or grounding.

Over months and years, I learned to listen to my body with an open heart. Eventually my intuition became so strong that I knew when to act, when to change course, and when to stop. And then the magic kicked in. I found my people easily, and those who weren't mine no longer stood a chance.

SPEAK YOUR TRUTH

Once you're comfortable being honest with yourself, you can start tippy-toeing your truth out into the real world. This is where you assert your boundaries, ask for what you want and deserve, and start receiving it.

Here's something I've learned from many of my mentors: people don't care as much as we think they do, if at all. They're inherently self-absorbed (as they should be!), and when you don't state what you want and need, those desires go unanswered. Sometimes the other person simply isn't aware of them. As a people-pleaser, you're geared to always think of others, so it seems natural that everyone else would too. Most people don't. And even when they do think of you, it's often colored by the role you play for them: not "How can I make Jennifer happy because she's wonderful?" but "How can I make Jennifer happy so she keeps making me happy?"

Or they might just not care. Whether maliciously, neglectfully, or simply because it isn't their job, they don't put your well-being at their center. Nor should they. That's your job. That raise you're not being offered, the praise you're not getting? Often those things aren't happening simply because you're not asking. And if you ask and still don't receive, you've learned something valuable: this isn't something they're willing to give. I find that asking for a raise, a favor, a repayment, or more connection is the fastest way to discover how people really feel about you.

The science here is the same one you just put to work on yourself. Suppressing your truth keeps the amygdala and stress hormones like cortisol running, while expressing it engages the prefrontal cortex and calms your system. And because humans are wired for co-regulation, voicing your truth to another person releases oxytocin and fires the mirror neurons that build empathy and trust. Unspoken truths lodge in the body as tension and hypervigilance. Voiced ones get integrated into a story you can actually live with. In short, speaking your truth is a biological act of alignment that frees both mind and body.

So what would you like to discuss with others? Write it down and practice saying it out loud. Notice what it activates in your body. Discomfort? Sit with it, and talk to yourself about what you're worried might happen. Now you're ready for the real conversation.

TWO WAYS TO READ YOUR BODY'S YES AND NO

Underneath all the overthinking, your body is always signaling. Every "yes," every "no," every "not yet" is already encoded in your nervous system, which, now that it's regulated, is ready to become your most trusted advisor. Here are two simple ways to start reading those signals.

Whichever you use, start small. Begin with low-stakes questions, like which lunch you actually want or whether an outfit feels like you today, and build up. Practicing on small choices is how you build fluency in your body's language, so that yes and no are clear when the stakes are high. And one heads-up: these work best when you're calm and grounded. Anxiety, fear, and stress distort the signal, so don't reach for them mid-panic.

METHOD ONE: SENSATION TRACKING

Ask your body a question, and notice how it answers.

Try it now. Close your eyes and bring the word "yes" to mind. Say it silently, then softly aloud. Notice what happens. Does your chest open? Does your jaw unclench? Do you feel a subtle lift, like your cells leaning forward? That's your embodied yes.

Now do the same with "no." For many people, no feels like contraction: the gut pulling back, the breath catching, the shoulders curling in. Sometimes it shows up as a sudden heaviness or fatigue.

Then try "I don't know yet." This one is subtler, and may feel like fog, stillness, or a muted neutrality. (For me, my eyes always roll upward.) That's your body asking for a moment.

This isn't magic, it's biology. Your vagus nerve, which connects brain, heart, lungs, and gut, is central to this dialogue. When you're safe, it supports openness, and your body signals yes. When something feels off, it shifts you toward protection, tightening muscles and quickening the heart, and whispers no.

What I love about this practice is that it holds nuance. Sometimes your yes feels expansive but a little scary. Sometimes your no feels like relief, even when your mind says you "should" go along. And sometimes "not yet" is the wisest answer of all, sparing you from a decision your nervous system isn't ready to embody. You don't have to obey every signal instantly, but you do have to respect it. Treat each response as valuable data. Sometimes the body forecasts what the mind only understands later.

METHOD TWO: MUSCLE TESTING

Muscle testing is another easy, and weirdly powerful, way to check in. Let me be straight with you about what it is and what it isn't. When muscle testing has been put through controlled

studies as a way to detect things outside of you, like which foods or supplements your body "needs," it hasn't held up, so I won't ask you to use it that way. But as a self-awareness tool, it has real value, and the reason is more beautiful than any mystery: your body responds to questions with tiny, unconscious movements before your thinking mind has weighed in. Muscle testing simply makes those micro-responses big enough to notice. It's not a hotline to the universe. It's a megaphone for your own inner signals, one more way of practicing interoception. Here are two ways to start.

The Sway Test. Stand upright, feet hip-width apart, relaxed. Close your eyes and take a few grounding breaths. State: "My name is [your name]," and notice your body's response. You should gently sway forward for yes. Now try: "My name is Beyoncé," and notice the difference. You'll likely sway back for no. Once you get the hang of it, ask deeper questions, like "Is it in my best interest to take this job?" or "Does my body need rest today?"

The Finger Ring Test. Sit or stand upright and settle into your body. Close your eyes and take a few grounding breaths. Touch your thumb and index finger together on one hand to form a ring, then link a ring from your other hand through it. Say a true statement and try to pull the rings apart, noting the resistance. A solid yes keeps your fingers locked. Say a false statement and notice the weakness or release. As always, start with obvious yes and no questions so your mind learns to trust the process, then move on to real ones.

And because I promised you honesty on this journey, here's a story I can't fully explain. I once booked a session with an Emotion Code practitioner and gave her permission to muscle test on my behalf, as a proxy. There is no science behind proxy testing, and I'm not asking you to believe in it. All I can tell you is that the session gave me language for things I'd been carrying wordlessly for years, and it moved something in me that talking never had. Was it her gift, or my own readiness finally finding a doorway? I don't know, and I've made peace with not knowing. Take what resonates, leave the rest, and trust that any wisdom uncovered was yours all along.

So try them out. It certainly can't hurt to check in with your body and get to know yourself a little better.

START AN INTUITION JOURNAL

Chances are, you've always known what you needed to know, but you chose to ignore it. Not because you were foolish, but because you were trained to second-guess yourself, to defer to parents, partners, bosses, and experts. And yet, if you're honest, there were dozens of moments when your body whispered the truth long before your mind could make sense of it.

Now it's time to gather the receipts. Write down every time you knew something before it happened: the sudden chill before the phone rang with bad news, the strange calm before the perfect opportunity arrived, the funny feeling about a person who later let you down, the breakup you saw coming but didn't want to accept. Write down every time you ignored your gut and paid for it, and every time you had a feeling something good was about to unfold. You're not reminiscing. You're collecting evidence that your intuition is real, and reliable.

As you write, patterns emerge. Modern neuroscience confirms that your body perceives and processes far more information than your conscious mind can handle. What we call a gut feeling is the fast, automatic processing of thousands of tiny cues.

Reflecting on the times you ignored that signal can bring a knot of regret. You may grieve the wealth, energy, love, or years lost when you didn't follow your hunches. Don't. Those experiences weren't wasted. They were the tuition you paid toward this new life.

This practice also trains your prefrontal cortex to recognize and trust your body's signals, and activates your reticular activating system, your brain's attention filter, to start scanning for the opportunities that support your thriving. To reinforce it, end each session with a simple ritual. At the bottom of the page, write: "Thank you, intuition, for always looking out for me." Even if you don't fully believe it yet, repetition matters. Gratitude strengthens neural pathways, and over time this phrase becomes an anchor, reminding you that you have an inner compass that's been working tirelessly, waiting for you to notice.

DO AN INTUITION DETOX

It's hard to hear your own truth through everyone else's noise, especially if you don't yet know what your own voice sounds like. When faced with choices, most of us became experts at outsourcing: asking friends, Googling, polling the group chat, or waiting until someone else decided for us. This isn't a moral failing, it's conditioning, and conditioning can be undone.

So let's try an experiment. For 72 hours, tune everyone else out. No asking others for advice. No blogs, no ChatGPT, no Googling your way to the right answer, no polls in the group chat. No input at all. Just you. For three days, you become your own north star.

Each time a decision arises, big or small, serious or silly, pause and ask: what does my intuition say? If you can, write the answer down before you do anything else. The act of writing makes the invisible visible.

At first this may feel uncomfortable, even a little panicky. That's normal. The nervous system equates approval with safety, so removing outside validation can make your body hum with anxiety. But remember: discomfort is not danger. It's growth.

At the end, review your notes and look for patterns. Does your gut consistently say no to overcommitment? Light up around creative projects but contract around obligations? Feel uncertain in certain relationships but clear in others? These patterns are gold. They show you where your alignment lives, and where you've been betraying yourself to fit in or keep the peace.

This doesn't mean never asking for advice again. Outside perspectives are valuable. But they're far more valuable once you're clear on your own needs first. When you clarify your gut instinct before you ask, advice becomes a tool instead of a crutch, and you stay the decision-maker. So give yourself this gift: three days of no input, listening inward, practicing the radical act of trusting yourself. Once you taste that clarity, it's hard to go back.

LIVING WITH YOUR INTUITION UNLEASHED

When you live with your intuition unleashed, you become magnetic. Calm. Certain. Unapologetic. You stop asking if you're crazy and start asking if you're called to something greater. Life doesn't necessarily get easier, but it feels easier, because you're no longer betraying yourself to belong.

You walk away from things that don't feel right, even when they look good on paper. You stop saying yes to what drains you. You change careers, end friendships, speak up in rooms where you once stayed silent, and every negative thing you release gets replaced with something better.

There's a deep steadiness in this. So much anxiety comes from the war between what you know and what you allow yourself to admit. When that war ends, calm emerges, not because the world stopped being chaotic, but because you're no longer at war with yourself. You stop rushing toward the next milestone and start inhabiting the present, and your path unfolds less like something you chase and more like something you live in.

At its core, unleashed intuition is radical self-trust. It's remembering that you are not broken, not clueless, not waiting for someone to hand you a map. You are the map. You are the compass. You are the one you've been waiting for. This isn't a theory. It's a practice, one you renew with every choice, every moment you pause to ask: what feels true right now? Each time you honor the answer, you strengthen the bridge back to yourself, and discover the truth that's been whispering all along: living with your intuition unleashed isn't about becoming someone new. It's about finally becoming who you already are.

CALL A BOARD MEETING

During your intuition detox you likely realized just how much you rely on the opinions of others to guide you. But you might also find yourself at odds with yourself. There's your fearful self, your dreamer self, your survival self, your fit-in self… so who do you listen to?

Luckily someone brilliant already thought this process through. Psychiatrist Carl Jung, whose works delved into and shed light on the deepest parts of the human mind and soul, called this the process of individuation: the journey of becoming one with all of your parts.

In his works, these parts were the ego (the center of consciousness, your personal identity), the persona (the mask you wear in public to fit in), the shadow (the disowned, hidden parts of your personality), the anima and animus (the unconscious inner feminine for men, and inner masculine for women) and the complexes (the emotional, sometimes irrational patterns of thought). Together, they form the inner council.

You can call these parts of yourself whatever you want, and you can also call a meeting of different versions of yourself, whether it be by age, by experience, or anything else that resonates with you.

When you call your board meeting, whether in your mind or on paper, give each part a seat at the table, and let them share their thoughts, their fears, and their worries. By doing this work, you acknowledge and begin to integrate and align all of your parts. You reduce inner dissonance, and slowly shift gears to understand that all of your parts have played or play an important role.

This achieves wholeness, and when you're in a state of wholeness, you'll find yourself living life with much more ease and alignment. Not hiding from parts of yourself or being driven by them, but deeply understanding that all of them make up an important part of your storyline.

USE SYMBOLS AND SYNCHRONICITIES AS CONFIRMATION

I'm going to make an exception to my own rule that we work from the body to the mind to the soul, in that order, because I think we can all use more magic in our lives, and because in this case, the magic actually activates our mind in a powerful way.

Symbols and synchronicities have inspired and guided us throughout history, and this is the perfect part to deploy them on your own *Me First!* journey. Whether you choose to believe in the magic of symbols and synchronicities is up to you. But believing in their power is not optional. Allow me to explain.

Remember your brain's amazing attention filter, the reticular activating system? The one that highlights whatever you've taught it to treat as important? If you're expecting bad things to happen, you will notice bad things happening. If you expect good things to happen, you will notice good things happening. And if you're obsessed with gemstones (like yours truly), you will find things that sparkle everywhere you go.

Think of it as your brain's social media algorithm!

Symbols and synchronicities are a beautiful way to put this power to work, tuning your attention toward a more magical, supported, and Me First! life.

So decide, on purpose, what signs you would like to start noticing. Whether you believe you're placing an order with the universe or simply programming your own attention, the effect on your daily life is the same: you start seeing them.

You can try things like:

- Repeating numbers (111, 222, 555), favorite numbers, or your birthday
- Animals, feathers, flowers, cars
- Uncanny conversations
- Dreams with meaning
- Colors or scents
- Songs or quotes that inspire you

One thing you don't know about me yet is that I am a pattern person. My brain loves patterns. It helped me learn Chinese (including the writing) in record time, made me find things others missed as an intelligence analyst, and it makes me a little obsessed with license plates. A few years ago I moved overseas to be closer to my dad. He's lived there for 25 years, and never really noticed the absolutely mind-blowing quantity of repeating numbers on license plates. I noticed it immediately!

When I started to deploy this superpower to look for signs of healthy relationships, beautiful things, and even acts of kindness, I began to see them everywhere, and the constant internal

chatter happening in my brain shifted from stress and worry to gratitude for the magical world that we live in.

If you're so inclined, attach a message to them. For me, finding a large feather or seeing an eagle is always a symbol of protection. I may have no physical evidence that this protection is granted other than sitting here and writing this book in excellent health, but my body responds with an increased sense of security and joy every time I spot one. My brain releases a flood of happy chemicals, and my world becomes a brighter place. I feel more aligned, more empowered to pursue my happiness, and in short, more *Me First!*

REMEMBER THIS

You already know.
You don't need more advice.
You need to be honest with yourself.

You don't need another opinion.
You need to feel what you already feel.

You don't need to be told what to do.
You already know.
You always have.
You just forgot.

But now you remember.

So breathe.
Listen.
Choose.

You were born with truth in your body.
Your intuition is your birthright.
Your sensitivity is your compass.

So go ahead. Close your eyes.
Ask.
Listen.
Trust.

You already know.

ME FIRST! PERMISSION SLIP

I am allowed to be the safest place I know.
I am allowed to stop performing.
I am allowed to come back to my body.
I am allowed to rest, rage, feel, and choose.
I am allowed to create, explore, and find my purpose and passions.
My nervous system is not my enemy, it is my compass.
My intuition is real and ever-present.
It is my greatest source of power.
I can design my own life.
I can live my own life.
Unapologetically.
Me First!

REWRITING YOUR INNER CODE

Nervous system: regulated. Intuition: activated.

Congratulations! You've done the hard work of getting your body back into alignment. You understand, in your bones, that you can trust yourself, your senses, and your gut. That amazing machine that is your human body finally feels like it's your very own, customized, supercharged luxury car. You've set the GPS to where you want to go: your dream life.

Now it's time to set up the dashboard. Gone are the days of poor interfaces, scrolling through options, glitches, and frustrations. You know, the software designed and installed over the years by others, like your parents, teachers, bosses, church, community, friends, and exes. Over the years, their words became your programming. Somewhere along the way, you forgot that you could delete the crap code and install something better. By the end of this section, your body, your intuition, and your mind will be yours, and yours alone, optimized for your dream life.

Code can be rewritten. Neuroplasticity, the brain's built-in ability to rewire itself, is about to become your new best friend. This isn't wishful thinking. It's biology. Your brain has eighty-six billion neurons talking to one another through trillions of connections, and every thought you think strengthens a neural pathway. Repeat a thought often enough and it becomes a highway at sunrise: smooth, fast, automatic. (Long-term meditators, to name one well-studied example, show thicker gray matter in regions linked to compassion, memory, and creativity. Mental practice changes physical structure.) That's the same reason the old programming feels so hard to change. You've been driving that route for years. You can do it without thinking. But here's the breakthrough: your brain doesn't care what content it wires. It only cares about repetition. And yes, there is a process to accelerate this!

Building new pathways is a process of deliberate choice. Every time you challenge an old thought (such as "security matters more than happiness") and replace it with a new one (such as "happiness is security" and "no matter what happens, I am all right"), you begin carving an alternate road. At first it feels slow and awkward. The old highway still exists, and you'll find yourself slipping back into it without thinking. Your muscle memory takes you back to the old route.

But the more you return to the new way of thinking, the clearer and stronger it becomes. Over time, the brain naturally favors the new pathway, and the old one begins to wither from disuse. What once felt impossible starts to feel natural, and like the obvious choice.

This is how you reprogram yourself: not through a single lightning bolt of insight, but through repeated thought, belief, and action. Every choice becomes a line of code. Every new belief is another upgrade. Eventually, you're no longer just patching the old system. You're running a whole new operating system.

You can think yourself into a new life. Not through wishful fantasy, but by understanding how the machine works and writing code that serves your future instead of your past.

Let's kick this off by identifying the bad code that glitches whenever you try to upgrade, and replacing it with something better. The automatic negative thoughts, the internalized fears, and the cognitive distortions.

Over the years I've found that you can't install a new program without first fixing or deleting the old one. It's like putting a new case on a bad phone with low memory and a cracked screen. It may look good, but does it actually improve your life? No. You have to go a little deeper than that.

Uncovering your limiting beliefs is the essential first step to rewriting them, because you can't change what you can't see. These old scripts often run silently in the background, shaping your choices and emotions without you realizing it, like invisible lines of malicious code directing your life.

When you name them, you drag them from the shadows of the subconscious into the light of awareness. There, they can be examined, questioned, and challenged. Only then can you replace them with beliefs that actually serve you.

This process is not about shaming yourself for having them, but rather about recognizing the outdated programming you've been running so you can rewrite or delete it, and consciously install a new set of instructions rooted in truth, possibility, and self-trust.

Now it's time for an upgrade! This process walks you through five simple steps: identifying the bad code, writing new code, guarding your operating system, testing and debugging, and reinforcing it all with action as you go about living your *Me First!* life.

The first time you do this it will be hard. You likely have a lot to clean up. But the more you practice this, the easier it becomes. And as your code improves, it starts making these corrections on its own. So take your time with this process. Trust me, it's worth it!

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE BAD CODE

Before you install anything new, you need to find out what's currently running your system. Ask yourself:

- What beliefs do I hold that don't serve me anymore?
- Where did they come from?
- What purpose did they serve in the past? Are those aligned with my goals?
- If I erased this belief today, what would I do differently tomorrow?

For example:

Belief: *"I'm terrible with money."*

Origin: *My parents struggled with money, and looking at my account, I do too. I haven't made the best choices, and I am paying the price.*

Purpose: *By believing that I am bad with money, I am making excuses so I don't have to take full responsibility for my money, such as making hard choices, looking for additional income, or learning difficult finance topics.*

Without it: *I would practice radical accountability. Debts would be paid off. I'd start investing, take a finance course, or ask for a raise. It would be uncomfortable at first, but soon it would be second nature.*

Remember, this isn't about blame. It's about radical honesty. Every thought had a purpose, even if it was a bad one, like fitting in or avoiding a topic. This step is about recognizing the bugs in your mental code so you can decide if they still deserve admin access.

STEP 2: WRITE NEW CODE

Once you've found the outdated code, replace it with something that actually moves you toward your goals. But here's the trick! Your new code has to be believable enough that your brain doesn't immediately reject it. You will get to your perfect code, but it's a process, not a magic pill.

Your new code can fully honor who you were in the past. So let's continue with the previous example.

- "I used to mismanage my money, but now I take full responsibility for creating abundance and security, and I know that I will get there."
- "Every day I'm building a stronger skill set."
- "I am so proud of organizing my finances."
- "Learning to invest is a little scary, and it's O.K. to start small. I know it will grow over time."

When you first get started, ladder up to the beliefs you can reach and feel good about now. It may start with "I can learn how to invest" and ladder up to "I am comfortable investing $200 a month." Then, before you know it, you'll feel fully in control of your stock picks and your finances.

Code upgraded! Each time you repeat these thoughts and back them up with action, the code sticks.

STEP 3: GUARD YOUR OPERATING SYSTEM

Your environment is constantly trying to install spyware on your mind. Social media algorithms feed you comparison and fear. People try to slip their insecurities into your code. Even your own inner critic loves to pop up asking who you think you are. That's why you need a firewall.

Here are some practical ways to install a firewall that protects your new code:

- Curating who and what you listen to and watch.
- Changing your phone screen to something inspiring.

- Saying no to conversations that drag you down.
- Throwing out the things that keep you backsliding.
- Reducing or cutting off contact with those no longer compatible with your new code.
- Feeding your mind a steady diet of what inspires you.

In coding, we know that garbage in creates garbage out. The same is true for your brain!

STEP 4: TEST AND DEBUG

Upgrading your mental software is messy at first. You'll hit glitches: days when you accidentally revert to the old code without realizing it. That's normal. The key is to notice it, stop, and switch back to the new script.

Here's a powerful debugging tool:

- Catch the thought, like "Ugh, I'm so behind!"
- Pause and name it. "Oh wait! That's my old scarcity code."
- Choose again. "I'm building at my own pace, and my timing is perfect."

This little three-beat tool is the core move of this entire part of the book, so let's give it a name: **Catch it. Name it. Choose again.** Everything in the next two chapters is this same move, practiced at deeper and deeper levels. Master it here, and the rest is upgrades.

And if you find yourself unable to upgrade, evaluate whether this belief is what you really want, and if it isn't, rewrite the code. The more you do it, the more natural the process becomes.

Every time you do this, you weaken the old program and strengthen the new one.

STEP 5: REINFORCE WITH ACTION

Thinking new thoughts is only half the battle. Now you've got to back them up with action. Otherwise, your brain will call BS and declare the new system useless. If you want to invest money but haven't even opened the account, no amount of affirmations will save you. Your action has to match your beliefs!

If you've rewritten "I'm bad at money" into "I'm learning to manage money well," prove it by opening a savings account and an investment account, and tracking your spending. These were the simple actions that bought me two years of freedom and set my future self up to retire comfortably.

Action is the installation step that makes the new code run flawlessly.

THE THREE KEYS THAT MAKE IT STICK

Five steps, one new operating system. But before you run off to install it, you should know the three conditions your brain demands before it takes any new code seriously: focus, repetition,

and emotion. Miss one, and the upgrade won't hold. Use all three, and the change goes deep, through your whole body and your whole life.

FOCUS

Your brain changes in response to what you give your attention to. Random thoughts don't stick, but focused attention does. That's why intentional practice beats strong, inconsistent attempts every time.

If you want to build more self-trust, for example, you don't just hope for it. You focus every day on thoughts, actions, and proof that you are trustworthy to yourself.

For example, rather than punishing yourself for not doing things perfectly, you can thank yourself every day for showing up. This reinforces a sense of achievement, of dedication. On my health journey, this attitude kept me from quitting on the days when comparison got the better of me. I may not have ever ranked in the top ten in a fitness competition, but I live in a body that looks and feels good. That's more than good enough. It's what I actually wanted.

REPETITION

Your neurons need to fire together repeatedly before they decide to make a new habit permanent. One-off bursts of motivation don't cut it. You have to rehearse the new thought or behavior until it becomes automatic.

For instance, the first time you set a boundary, you'll probably shake. The tenth time, you'll still feel awkward. But the twentieth time? You'll wonder why it ever felt hard and why you didn't start sooner.

The more you practice the actions your new you would take, the more they become the actions your new you does take.

EMOTION

Emotion is the glue that makes neural change stick.

Your brain prioritizes anything connected to strong feelings, whether joy, pride, love, or even fear and anger. That's why visualization works best when you feel the future you want, not just imagine it like a slideshow.

This is also great news for people with limited visualization abilities. I was a decade into trying, and failing at, eyes-closed visualization when I learned that I have a condition called aphantasia. The ability to visualize runs on a spectrum, so be creative. If you can't do it with your eyes closed, do it with images, feelings, and reminders. It works just as well!

What's so great about this is that you can pair feelings to really get the whole of your being working towards something. If anger at something motivates you to take action, take the action, and then feel the relief, the pride, and the sense of peace that comes from it.

If your goal is to have a relationship where you are heard but are afraid to speak up, use that fear to motivate you. Feel it, then act. And when you're done, thank yourself for having done it, regardless of the outcome. Imagine yourself radiating with confidence, peace, or a sense of "no matter what, I am going to be O.K." and watch your body, and your reality, start following suit.

CONTROL YOUR ANT PROBLEM

You know that constant commentary in your head? The one that insists on running a 24/7 news channel about everything you've done wrong, might do wrong, or should be worried about going wrong? Many of those news flashes are what psychologists call ANTs: automatic negative thoughts.

Automatic negative thoughts are instant, reflexive mental reactions that tend toward the worst-case scenario, designed, once again, to protect you, even if they are misguided. And like their insect namesakes, they're small, persistent, and take some work to get rid of. Dr. Aaron Beck, the father of cognitive therapy, first identified automatic negative thoughts as a core driver of anxiety and depression, and psychiatrist Dr. Daniel Amen gave them their unforgettable nickname, along with the pest-control attitude we're about to borrow. ANTs often come from deeply ingrained beliefs, past experiences, or just your brain's built-in bias toward noticing threats over opportunities.

From an evolutionary perspective, ANTs made sense. Your ancestors didn't need to be optimistic about rustling in the bushes, they needed to assume danger and survive. But in a world where the rustling is a performance review or a first date, that constant negativity no longer serves a purpose.

Lucky for you, your pest control specialist has arrived, and here is the full treatment plan. First, we'll drag the pests into the light and give them names. Then, we'll learn to identify the species you'll meet most often. And finally, we'll set the trap that catches them for good. You already know the core move: **catch it, name it, choose again.** Now we put it to work.

PERSONIFYING ANTS TAKES AWAY THEIR POWER

Here's the thing: as long as you think every thought in your head is you, you'll heed its advice. But the moment you start treating those thoughts as outsiders, you gain distance and perspective, and that is where you reclaim your power.

So let's turn your mental pests into actual personalities.

- That voice that says: "You'll fail, so don't even try!" Meet Negative Nancy.
- The one that says: "Wow, you really embarrassed yourself just now!" That's Judgy Judy.
- The one that catastrophizes every small hiccup into a five-alarm fire? Hello, Calamity Carl.

Figure out who the actors are in your life and give them a name so you can talk back to

them. Try drawing a picture of them, or using software to mock one up so you can visualize them. And then, when a painful thought arises, call it out!

Here are some phrases you can try.

- "Really, that's how you're going to talk to me? How rude!"
- "That's bleak. Don't you think?"
- "What the f*** was that?!"

It might feel silly, but this works for a reason: you're engaging your prefrontal cortex (the rational part of your brain) instead of letting your limbic system (the emotion center) run wild. That small act of questioning interrupts the automatic thought pattern.

It's also a really great way to practice the person you are becoming. Would your *Me First!* persona take this kind of crap from anyone? I don't think so!

And if you're having fun with this, you can even assemble a cast of positive superheroes who back you up! If Negative Nancy is dominating the conversation, bring in Positive Polly. Polly is the voice that says:

- "You've handled harder things before! You've got this."
- "Imagine how good you'll feel when you nail this."
- "Sure, it's a risk. But you're resourceful and you'll figure it out."

This is not about toxic positivity. Polly isn't pretending everything is sunshine and rainbows. She's giving you a balanced, encouraging perspective grounded in possibility rather than fear.

And yes, there is research behind the silliness. One study found that self-distancing, or viewing your thoughts from a third-person perspective, reduces emotional reactivity and increases problem-solving ability. When you name a thought and talk to it like an outsider, you are practicing self-distancing. Another study showed that replacing habitual negative thoughts with positive, constructive ones significantly boosted well-being over just two weeks.

KNOW YOUR SPECIES: THE MOST COMMON ANTS

Naming your ANTs gets you distance. But any pest-control specialist will tell you the real skill is identifying the species, because different pests call for different treatments. Psychiatrist Dr. David Burns cataloged the ones you'll meet most often, known in therapy circles as cognitive distortions: the sneaky tricks your mind plays to twist reality and keep you stuck in fear, doubt, or self-sabotage. Learn their names and you'll start spotting them everywhere. In your head, in your group chat, in your mother. You're welcome, and I'm sorry.

In a way, these distortions are a lot like funhouse mirrors: you're looking at life, but the reflection is bent and twisted. Instead of clarity, you see exaggeration and distortion. The good news is that once you learn to recognize them, you can challenge them, recalibrate, and bring your perception closer to truth and in line with your dreams.

All-or-Nothing Thinking. If it isn't perfect, it's worthless. This distortion paints life in black and white, with no shades of gray. One slip in your diet means it's ruined. One mistake at work makes you a failure. But in reality, progress is built in the gray zones, in the middle ground where growth actually happens.

Overgeneralization. Something goes wrong once, and your brain declares it will always go wrong. A breakup becomes "I'll never find love." A career setback becomes "nothing ever works out for me." This distortion convinces you that one event is a lifelong sentence, when in reality it was just one moment in time, or perhaps, a redirection.

Catastrophizing. Your brain takes one bad moment and fast-forwards straight to disaster. A missed text becomes a breakup. A tough quarter becomes bankruptcy. An odd look from your boss becomes a firing. This distortion writes the horror-movie ending before the opening credits are finished, and your body reacts as if the disaster were already here. The way out is to pause the film and ask: what is actually most likely to happen? And if the worst did happen, could I handle it? (You could. You have.)

The Mental Filter. Ten compliments and one critique? Guess which one your brain obsessively replays. This distortion magnifies the negative until it blocks out all the positive, as if one drop of ink could turn a whole glass of water black. It robs you of balance and perspective, and is the worst possible use of your reticular activating system.

Discounting the Positive. Even when something goes right, you dismiss it. The praise doesn't count, the win was luck, the achievement wasn't a big deal. This distortion keeps you from letting good moments land, so joy can never accumulate.

Jumping to Conclusions. You don't have evidence, but you decide it's bad news anyway. Sometimes it's mind reading: assuming someone is upset with you without asking. Other times it's fortune telling: predicting failure before you've even tried. Either way, you're punishing yourself for outcomes that haven't even happened.

Magnification and Minimization. This is the brain's binocular trick. You zoom in on your flaws until they look enormous, and you shrink your strengths until they barely register. The result is a distorted self-image that feels real but isn't accurate.

Emotional Reasoning. Here, feelings masquerade as facts. "I feel guilty, so I must be a bad person." "I feel afraid, so this must be dangerous." Emotions are valid, but they are not proof. They're data, signals worth listening to, but not the whole truth. This one is particularly important on this journey, as you eliminate your past programming.

Should Statements. The word "should" is a tyrant. "I should be further along." "I shouldn't

make mistakes." "They should treat me better." These statements create pressure, guilt, and resentment. They reflect rigid rules rather than reality, and they suffocate joy by turning life into an endless list of obligations.

Labeling. Instead of noticing a mistake, you call yourself the mistake. "I'm a loser. I'm a failure. I'm an idiot. I'm a coward." Labels reduce you to one moment and erase your humanity. And when you slap labels on others, you strip away their complexity too, making growth and connection more difficult.

Personalization and Blame. This distortion takes everything personally. If your child struggles, it's because you're a bad parent. If your partner lashes out, it must be your fault. On the flip side, blame externalizes everything. "It's all their fault, not mine." Both extremes keep you from looking clearly at the situation, when responsibility, and therefore power, almost always lies somewhere in the middle.

THE ANT TRAP: THE NEGATIVE THOUGHT CONVERTER

Once you can name the species, you can trap it. The negative thought converter is an exercise I adapted from Dr. Burns's classic *The Feeling Good Handbook*, and it's the same core move you learned in the last chapter (**catch it, name it, choose again**), now with a scorecard. The process is simple: you write down a negative thought and how strongly you believe it to be true right now, identify the distortion, write an alternate explanation, and score that as well.

Here's an example:

- **What's the problem?** *My partner is not paying attention to me. I think this relationship might be over.*
- **How true do I believe this to be?** *60%*
- **What's a possible negative distortion?** *Catastrophizing*
- **What's an alternate explanation?** *He's busy at work, and tired after. He's more attentive when he's rested and relaxed.*
- **How true do I believe this to be?** *90%*
- **Now, based on that, how true do I believe my original thought to be now?** *5%*

You may have to repeat the exercise to get to a place where you feel better about this situation. You may not get to a low number, but you will definitely arrive at clarity. If the final number refuses to budge, it's time to go deeper into what's really happening here and have some conversations.

TUNING YOUR INNER VOICE

Much like our body, our inner voice has been picking up clues from our surroundings, copying what it's seen, heard, and felt in our environment. Over the years, your environment has created a soundtrack of outdated, misguided, and generally unhelpful tracks that are running the show, even though you're supposed to be the director and the star.

A harsh, critical inner dialogue keeps your nervous system on high alert, flooding your body with cortisol and adrenaline. Over time, this constant stress response weakens your immune system, disrupts digestion, impairs sleep, and has even been linked to changes in brain regions tied to learning and memory. Living with a negative voice inside is like living with a bully who follows you into every room.

Your inner voice is not just background chatter, but one of the most powerful forces shaping your biology. If you don't take the time to retrain it, you're basically letting an unqualified, over-protective, anxiety-prone assistant run your life. The antithesis of living *Me First!*

Neuroscience backs this up. The amygdala, the brain's threat detector, doesn't differentiate between a tiger in the grass and a risky career move. It flags both as potential threats. This is why "Don't do it!" from your inner voice could mean "I sense mortal danger!" or it could just mean "I'm unfamiliar with this, so let's avoid it. It could be dangerous."

But when you flip the script? That's where true magic begins to happen. Research shows that affirming, compassionate self-talk lowers stress hormones, steadies the heart, and activates the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that brings clarity, perspective, and choice. In simple terms: you begin to think your way toward a healthier body and a stronger mind.

The shift doesn't happen overnight, of course. Can you imagine if our brains were that malleable in this world? We'd all have lost our minds by now!

But it is very doable. When you replace "I can't handle this" with "I can take this one step at a time," your nervous system interprets it as safety. Muscles unclench, breath deepens, energy steadies. When you meet mistakes with "I'm learning" instead of "I'm a failure," the brain begins to release dopamine, a neurochemical that motivates growth and makes new habits stick. Each kind word you give yourself is a microdose of safety, confidence, and repair.

Your inner voice evolved as part of your survival system. It's not there to make you happy; it's there to keep you alive. Back in the wild, that was helpful. Hearing "don't walk toward the big scary cat" probably saved your ancestors' lives. But we are not our ancestors, and it's time we make the most of all of the incredible capabilities we've acquired since the days of cave living.

HOW THE PROS TUNE THEIRS

So how do people with world-class inner voices actually train them? Not by having less self-doubt. High achievers simply have a different relationship with their inner voice, and that is what makes the difference in how they perform under even the most strenuous of circumstances.

Serena Williams has spoken openly about her use of affirmations and reframing self-talk before matches. Olympic skier Mikaela Shiffrin has described training her inner dialogue to focus on what's in her control rather than spiraling about potential outcomes. Swimmer Michael Phelps rehearsed everything that could go wrong, not out of anxiety, but so that he'd be prepared and know that he could trust himself in every situation.

Even in business, leaders like Sara Blakely, the founder of Spanx, credit their success to consciously redirecting their self-talk. Blakely says her father trained her to see failure not as shame, but as evidence she was trying, completely altering her internal commentary on risk.

Decades of research back them up: self-talk interventions improve performance under pressure, increase persistence, and boost problem-solving. The pros aren't doing something mystical. They're doing something trainable, and now, so are you.

SMALL WORDS, BIG UPGRADES

One way to train this skill is by deliberately choosing a better thought each time you catch yourself in a negative one. The key isn't to paste on blind positivity but to find a thought that feels both true and kinder than the one you're in. For example, instead of "I'll never figure this out," try "I haven't figured it out yet." That one word creates a shift from hopelessness to possibility. Over time, these micro-adjustments rewire your brain to default toward hope rather than despair. This is why "yet" is one of my favorite words.

Another phrase I like to slip into my mental dialogue is "right now." No, not the kind that came from our parents or bosses, but the one that replaces "do the best you can!" with "do the best you can, right now." Much like "yet," it changes the bar against which we measure ourselves. I may not be able to run like my amazing friend Digna, but I can run as far as I can at this moment. Remember, messy progress beats unrealistic perfection!

My daily practice of showing myself gratitude is another one that has made a major impact, and it started quite simply. I hate walking into a messy kitchen first thing in the morning, so I always clean up before going to bed. The rest of the house? Doesn't matter. But when the kitchen is messy I'm instantly stressed. I used to take the clean kitchen for granted. Then I started saying "Thank you, Yesterday Jen!" every time I walked into the kitchen. It gives me an immediate dopamine boost. My first win of the day!

Having this kind of practice builds a feedback loop where your inner voice learns to recognize and celebrate your efforts, instead of overlooking them. Gratitude is not only good for your mood. It's been linked to lower blood pressure, better sleep, and more motivation to keep making choices that support you.

Finally, borrow the eyes of the people who love you. Ask a few close friends what they admire most about you, or what they would say to you if you were doubting yourself. What do they say about you when you're not in the room? Write their answers down, and read them on the days your inner critic is loudest. This isn't about outsourcing your worth, but about strengthening neural pathways of self-recognition by temporarily borrowing their perspective. Eventually, you'll notice those affirming voices becoming part of your own inner dialogue.

ACTIVATE YOUR PERSONAL MAGNETISM

You know those people that light up a room? That draw attention to themselves, seemingly without trying? These people have mastered personal magnetism, a quality that is so intriguing and elusive to many people.

But not us, because one of the many benefits of living *Me First!* is that you will automatically develop that personal magnetism.

You see, magnetism is nothing more than the living language of biology, chemistry, and emotion that radiates from a regulated, self-trusting nervous system. While others describe it as an aura or "it" factor, science has shown us that it is actually coherence between your thoughts, emotions, and body. This broadcasts a powerful, stable signal that others can unconsciously feel.

We've talked about emotional contagion in this book, our bodies' tendency to pick up on thousands of cues about what's going on, and when you're in alignment, you start sending the right information about your state through hormones, micro-expressions, the rhythm of your breath and voice, and (if the heart researchers are right) even subtler channels we're only beginning to measure.

Your body is a bioelectrical organism. Each heartbeat generates a small electromagnetic field that instruments can measure from outside your body, and the heart's field is the strongest rhythmic field you produce, far stronger than the brain's. This much is measurable fact. It's also fact that your heart rhythms change with your emotional state: when you're anxious or resentful, the intervals between heartbeats become erratic and disordered, and when you're calm, grateful, or loving, they become smooth and coherent.

Researchers at the HeartMath Institute go a step further and believe that this field carries your emotional state out into the room, where other nervous systems can read it. Mainstream science hasn't confirmed that part yet, and honestly? It doesn't need to. Because here is what is confirmed: human beings sync up. Studies have watched the heart rhythms of choir singers align as they breathe together, and the heartbeats of lovers, therapists, and clients, even whole audiences, fall into step. Whether your state travels by invisible field or by your face, your breath, and your voice, it travels. People feel you before you say a word.

And that's just the heart. Your nervous system also plays its part. When you're feeling misaligned, out of place, or threatened, your body will instantly give you away. Your pupils dilate, voice tightens, gestures close off. Your body says "Stay away!" But when you're feeling comfortable in your own skin, the opposite happens. Your tone softens, breathing deepens, and your eyes sparkle. Your body says "It's safe to come closer."

Our hormones play their part in magnetism as well. When you make eye contact, smile genuinely, or touch someone with warmth, oxytocin releases in both your systems. It lowers everyone's stress hormones, enhances empathy, and creates feelings of trust. People who exude

safety and connection naturally trigger this response in others. That's why kindness and authenticity are scientifically magnetic.

Dopamine, the brain's reward messenger, is released when someone feels novel, exciting, or meaningful. People who are curious, passionate, or purpose-driven are particularly adept at lighting up dopamine pathways in those around them. Their enthusiasm becomes contagious, like an emotional stimulant that others want more of.

And finally, serotonin, the hormone that regulates your mood and gives the steady confidence that magnetism depends on, rises when we feel competent, respected, and aligned. When we live in alignment with ourselves, and send signals of safety and welcome to others, their serotonin rises, making them feel like their best version around you.

When you activate all of these factors your magnetism fires up, and so do the other person's mirror neurons, which fire off when they perceive your actions and emotions, making your state even more magnetic. It quickly becomes an upward spiral of positive energy (or negative, if you're not regulated) that can light up a room and move people towards action.

You've already taken the first steps of becoming the most magnetic person in the room. You've regulated your nervous system, clarified your vision, and owned your conviction.

Here are some additional practices you can do to fire up your personal magnetism!

Be Present. Learn to be present in the moment and give your full attention to the task or the person at hand. This is basically like aiming a laser beam of all the right energy directly at them, and as you now know, they can feel and sense that your presence and your energy are flowing their way. Meditation is a great place to start practicing, given its positive effects in making you calmer, more creative, and more appreciative, and for turning off your lesser emotions. When you find yourself getting distracted, remind your brain that it can wait and refocus.

Hold Your Purpose. Purpose generates one of the strongest biological signals of magnetism because it organizes the entire system, body, mind, and soul, around a clear vector. Purpose directs dopamine's fire, steadies serotonin's calm, and fuels oxytocin's warmth. It creates coherence and resonance across levels, chemical, emotional, and energetic, and people feel it.

Slow Down. In a world of constant rush, nothing signals safety and belonging more than slowing down. Breathe, listen, and leave space for ideas and feelings to unfold. This may throw people off at first, but eventually, they'll be drawn to the energetic presence you create.

Cultivate Gratitude. Gratitude and awe smooth your heart's rhythms and soften everything about you: your face, your voice, your posture, the quality of your attention. Find even small things to appreciate about the other person, or when that's not possible, try radiating love toward them anyway. Call it energy or call it biology, the result is the same: gratitude changes the signal you're sending, people sense the shift, and they're drawn to it.

Live in Integrity. Living in integrity means being at peace with yourself, doing what you say you are going to do, and staying true to yourself. When you drop out of integrity, your magnetic energy scatters. But when you live your life aligned to your truth, your whole biology hums in harmony, and everyone around you feels it.

CHANGE YOUR STORY, CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Human beings are storytelling creatures. Long before we wrote laws and equations, we told stories. They helped us remember dangers, pass down wisdom, and give meaning to experiences that otherwise would have felt chaotic. It's so deeply ingrained in our DNA that even if we tried we couldn't go without them. Now here's the catch: if we don't consciously shape our story, our story will shape us.

Most of us inherit our first narrative from childhood. Whether positive or negative, it becomes the lens through which we interpret every new experience. But just because you started with one story doesn't mean you have to end with it. You are a living, breathing story, and you, as the author, have the power to rewrite it: the past, the present, and the future. Just think of how many underdogs end up as heroes. This theme is so widespread in stories that I wonder whether or not overcoming hardship and being victorious is part of our DNA.

If you haven't studied literature, let me introduce you to the hero's journey, a timeless narrative arc. It always begins with struggle. The hero faces trials, setbacks, and losses. They leave the comfort of the familiar, encounter challenges that test them, and often feel broken or lost along the way. But through those very struggles, they grow into who they were meant to become. The pain isn't erased, but rather becomes the raw material that fuels transformation.

Wait a minute! Does that sound familiar? Did you just get goosebumps, too?

That is exactly what we are doing here!

Perhaps your parents couldn't give you what you needed. Maybe they didn't know how, or they were too wounded themselves. That does not mean your story is ruined. Just as you've learned to be grateful to the past versions of yourself who got you this far, even if they stumbled, you can extend that same grace to the people who came before you. Gratitude doesn't excuse harm, but it loosens resentment's grip and allows you to keep moving forward. It reframes the story from "I was abandoned" to "I learned how to create belonging." From "I was silenced" to "I found my voice." From "I was broken" to "I became whole in my own way." And ultimately, it brings in forgiveness by putting into words the uncomfortable truths: some people are villains in our story, some are just minor characters. The important thing is that now you're deciding what role they played in your life.

You can apply this reframing everywhere. A failed relationship becomes the training ground where you discovered your boundaries. A lost job becomes the crossroads where you finally pursue something aligned. A period of illness becomes the teacher that shows you how to slow down and listen to your body. These are not empty platitudes. They are rewrites. Conscious choices to tell your story in a way that empowers growth instead of chaining you to pain.

When you rewrite your story, you take your power back. You become the hero of your own story, rather than a supporting character.

The impact of rewriting your story may be immediate, or it may take some time to crystallize into your being. As James Clear writes in *Atomic Habits*, change is often a matter of course correction. A plane leaving Los Angeles and heading to New York that adjusts its flight path by just a few degrees will end up in Washington, D.C. instead. Small changes in your daily narrative, such as the words you choose or the meaning you give to events, shift your trajectory in powerful ways over time. Every time you write a new line or rewrite a character, you create the potential for a new story, and a new ending.

This is also the key to quantum leaping, which we'll talk about a little later in this book.

The psychological benefits of rewriting your narrative are profound. Studies show that people who create growth-oriented life stories experience higher resilience, greater emotional well-being, and stronger self-identity. They recover from trauma faster and are more likely to find meaning in adversity. Physiologically, positive reframing is linked to lower stress hormone levels, less inflammation, and more time in the parasympathetic nervous system: your body's rest-and-repair mode. In simple terms: when you change your story, you change your life, and your biology, too.

So consider this: what story are you telling right now? Is it one of defeat, or one of becoming? The truth is, you are writing your story every single day, whether you realize it or not. The choice is not whether you tell a story. We are always telling stories. The choice is what story you tell. And when you decide to make yourself the hero, your past no longer defines you, but fuels you. That is the power of narrative. That is the gift of rewriting your life.

LIVE AS YOUR BEST POSSIBLE SELF

There are countless ways to optimize your day-to-day life. Countless. And this is precisely why this book does not cover how to structure your day or plan your goals. These systems are highly personal and need to align with your goals and work with your personality, resources, environment, and nervous system.

I myself have tried a number of systems for each area of my life, and figured out what worked for me. But there is one thing that all of these systems have in common, and which, when applied, becomes the ultimate productivity hack. Can you guess what it is?

Living your life as your best possible self.

This means living with an unwavering commitment to your highest good, based on the resources you have right now. Living your best day with the amount of energy you have to give to it. Living in alignment with your vision, your dreams, your passions, and yourself. In short, living *Me First!*

I started this process by sitting down and defining what good looks like in all of my roles.

As a mother, I made my priorities having good food on the table, quality time with my kids, and helping them grow into the best possible versions of themselves. On a good day, this looks like an amazing meal, family play time, and actually finishing our daily checklist of things we want to work on. When I have less energy to give to them, it might be a take-out burger meal on the sofa, cuddles, and a TV show. Either way, I am present, connected, and teaching them the valuable lesson that sometimes, you need to order take-out and go to bed early.

As a healthy human, I do my best to eat well, hydrate, hit the gym, and wear clean clothes. Some days I hit all those goals. Other days, it's an energy drink, a nap and some stretching on the vibration plate. Or if I'm lucky enough to score an appointment for a massage, it's that, and I celebrate and enjoy it as much as I do hitting the "stop" button after a 5-mile sprint.

The point is that you define (*Me First!*, of course!) what's important to you, and you do the best you can at the time to make that happen. On rough days, I like to check in with myself to ask: "Is this really how you want to live your life? Do these problems really deserve this much space?" And then I adjust from there.

Just today, riddled with a nasty cold and hair that looked like it was styled with a pitchfork, I asked myself this question and decided that I could stretch, comb my hair, and throw on some concealer, mascara, and lip gloss. In six minutes I looked, and felt, a bit more human.

As you put this system into practice, you will figure out what that means for you, and before you know it, your day will automatically optimize around you. As you create new ways for your energy and passions to flow, they will begin to flow more and more smoothly. Sure, you'll hit snags and you'll have bad days, and you might have to summon some discipline to stay committed to yourself, but as a wise gym bro told me once, "it's only discipline until it becomes routine."

So rather than telling you how to live your life, I want to take this moment to share my approach to living as my best self. Perhaps it'll inspire you.

I start by having a vision of what I'd like my life to look like, to feel like, in all of my roles. This is the place I come back to in order to recharge. It involves me being in good health, surrounded by bright colors, a tidy home, good relationships, and fun times with my family.

And then I do the best I can.

I stay optimistic by regularly tuning back into joy. I started this while working perhaps the most miserable office job of my life. You know, the one where my boss's bathroom was right in front of my desk and I had zero space to let my creative energy roam, even though every time I did, it brought big money and impact. Every time my boss went to the bathroom to take his calls (yes, I know: Ewwww!) I would say, half sincerely and half sarcastically: "Boy, I appreciate that he always polishes his shoes." It was the only thing I could appreciate about him at the time, and it made me laugh every time.

So ask yourself: how can you tune back into optimism when everything seems gray?

I also try to make as much of this routine as possible, and, of course, I fall out of those routines at times. For exercise, I drop my kids off at school and drive straight to the gym. When they were younger I'd do "Just Dance" challenges with them. On days where I forget my gym bag, I'll squeeze in some counter push-ups while making more coffee. And on days where I'm too tired to do any of that, I nap. Regardless of what the day brings, I choose to live as the best version of myself that I can, given the amount of energy and resources I have.

MAKE BETTER, MORE FULFILLING DECISIONS

I'd like to give you a sneak preview of another book I am working on: *The Three Choices*.

The concept is simple and yet profound: in life, we have but three choices to make: peace, joy, and inspiration.

You see, the average person makes thousands of conscious and unconscious decisions a day. Modern humans are inundated with more abundance, and therefore more choices, than our ancestors could have ever imagined. But happiness and contentment? Those have been shrinking in what feels like direct correlation. The more choices we have, the sicker and more unhappy we've become, and it's my theory that this is due to both disconnection and overwhelm.

When my life started blowing up, first in the bad way and then in the really, really good way, I often found myself freezing, overwhelmed by all the choices I had to make. Stay in the relationship or leave? Pay off the mortgage or invest? Promotion or freedom? Sushi out or cook at home? Pink flowers or purple flowers this week?

Most of these were problems of abundance, but they still wore me down. My brain was stuck in a constant loop of perfecting and optimizing, so I started simplifying everything: my finances, my work, my home life. And still the nagging persisted. Was this the best decision? Should I research more?

Then one day, in meditation, a thought popped into my head: there are only three choices.

- I can choose to be O.K. with how it is and let it go. Peace.
- I can choose to relish the current moment and not worry about the past or future. Joy.
- I can choose to invest in the future, even if it means effort in the present, so I can grow. Inspiration.

And in that moment, the book was born, as was a new sense of comfort and contentment in my everyday life.

Here are some examples of how they changed everything for me:

I decided to make peace with the father of my children. The truth is that despite my best efforts, I would never be able to change him into the husband and father I wanted him to be, which I resented. When I chose peace and accepted him for who he is, I made space for the positive things. The children now know that daddy loves them in his own way, and I learned to appreciate what he did contribute to their lives: a sense of freedom and adventure. Daring. Learning from mistakes. I no longer feel guilt for not trying even harder, or sadness for my kids. Instead I feel acceptance, and when they come home with sugar highs and jet lag, joy that they

get to dip their toes into that adventure so young, and learn that just because a relationship didn't work out doesn't make it anyone's failure.

I decided to find joy in my financial situation. Being a single mom comes with a lot of financial pressure: the need to save, cover expenses, and always be prepared. I also yearned to create incredible memories for my children, and for a long time I was just constantly worried about work, money, and time. Then I decided to tap into joy. Yes, I can save for the future and emergencies and still enjoy the present moment. I shifted my investment strategy to free up a little extra cash flow for things like visiting Bubble World with the kids, creating experiences rather than perfect college savings portfolios. I did the same with my time. Sure, I may have to work an extra year or two after they leave home, but tapping into joy gave me so much perspective, energy, and clarity that being a single mom started to feel more like a blessing than a hardship.

And then there is inspiration. Do I choose to invest in something greater, even if it means pushing through some challenges? The most immediate example that comes to mind is this very book. Leaving a well-paying job to pursue this dream was, according to anyone outside my closest friends, a really terrible idea. I gave up my career, my paycheck, my benefits, and other people's approval. But it brought me so much inspiration. The world lit up and buzzed with excitement. And yes, it was hard. I had to learn new levels of discipline, face my worst inner critics, and cash in my savings. But living in alignment with inspiration makes the journey worthwhile.

If these choices sound familiar, you might recognize them from the emotional vibration chart as high-vibration energies. This is the space I longed to exist in, so I made the decision to actually live there, as a daily practice rather than an abstract concept. It took some adjustment, but once I got used to it, facing any decision with the question "Do I want peace, joy, or inspiration?" became one of the simplest, most profound, and most fulfilling exercises there is.

So what lingering or complex decisions are bouncing around in your head? And how do they make you feel? Sad, stressed, anxious? If so, I invite you to try this for yourself. Take each situation and ask what peace, joy, and inspiration would look like in it. And once you find the one that makes the most sense for you, start living as though it's been decided, because it has.

HOW TO BUILD UNSHAKABLE SELF-TRUST, SELF-LOVE, AND SELF-ESTEEM

At the heart of every confident, grounded, radiant person you have ever met lies one simple truth: they trust themselves. That trust did not fall from the sky. It was not gifted by a perfect childhood or constant success. It was built, brick by brick, promise by promise. And we've already laid the foundation of this process. Self-trust, self-love, and self-esteem are not mysterious traits that some lucky people are born with. They are earned through the quiet, daily practice of honoring yourself.

If you have ever broken your own word, said you would start tomorrow, allowed a boundary to be violated, or vowed to finally rest but didn't, you know how painful it feels. It is not the missed goal that hurts most. It is the betrayal. Every time you say you will do something and then don't, your inner self learns that your words can't be trusted. You start to second-guess your instincts. You outsource decisions. You shrink from your own potential. It's like living with a friend who constantly cancels plans; you stop relying on them. The same happens inside you.

But here's the miracle: trust can be rebuilt. Just like with another person, it begins with small, consistent proof that you mean what you say. When you tell yourself you will take care of you and then actually do it, something powerful happens. A quiet voice inside, one you may not have heard in years, starts whispering that maybe it's safe to believe in you again.

STEP ONE: START SMALL, START NOW

The ego loves grand declarations: I'll reinvent my life by Monday. But that's not how trust works. Trust doesn't come from big gestures. It comes from reliability. If you say you'll drink a glass of water when you wake up, and you do, your brain logs a win. One small act of self-honoring plants a seed. The more often you water it, the deeper the roots grow, and before you know it, your self-trust, self-love, and self-esteem are blooming.

Keeping promises to yourself is a sacred practice because it shifts the power dynamic within you. You stop being your own manipulator: guilting, bribing, or bullying yourself into change. Instead, you become your own guardian. You start acting like someone you can depend on.

STEP TWO: MAKE INTEGRITY YOUR COMPASS

Integrity isn't about perfection; it's about alignment. It's doing what you said you would do, even when no one's watching. Each time you choose integrity over impulse, you reinforce your inner strength. Say you promised yourself you would stop checking your ex's profile, or stop

overworking on weekends. The moment of temptation is the moment of alchemy. When you keep that promise, your nervous system learns safety: I can trust myself not to abandon me.

And when you stumble, and you will, know that your integrity doesn't disappear. It deepens. The person who never falls down hasn't learned much about love. The person who falls and returns with gentleness learns everything about it. Self-love isn't the absence of mistakes; it's the presence of compassion when you make them.

STEP THREE: RECLAIM THE VOICE OF YOUR INNER GUARDIAN

Most of us have an inner critic that never shuts up. It keeps a running tally of every failure, every unkept promise, every time you should have known better. But self-trust isn't built through punishment. You don't heal by scolding yourself into shape; you heal by listening to the part of you that's been begging for consistency, respect, and care.

When you notice the critic roaring, pause and ask: "What is this voice trying to protect?" Usually, it's fear, fear that you'll disappoint yourself again, fear that you'll get hurt. The antidote is not more control, it's honesty. Say to yourself: "I hear you. I know we've dropped the ball before. But this time, we're doing it differently." That moment of internal truth-telling is self-respect in action.

STEP FOUR: MAKE PROMISES THAT HONOR YOU

Don't promise yourself perfection. Promise yourself presence, joy, and growth. Don't swear you'll never falter again. Swear you'll show up, no matter what. When your goals are built on self-punishment, failure becomes proof of your unworthiness. When your goals are built on self-honor, every attempt, even the messy ones, becomes proof of your growth.

Try reframing your commitments:

- Instead of "I'll never skip the gym again!" say "I'll move my body today in a way that feels like love."
- Instead of "I'll stop procrastinating and push through," say "I'll take one small action now to honor my future self."
- Instead of "I'll finally stop being so emotional," say "I'll allow myself to feel without shame."
- And instead of pushing yourself beyond the limits of your strength, say "I allow myself to rest without shame. I honor my needs."

These statements are not loopholes. They are lifelines. They keep you anchored in compassion rather than control.

STEP FIVE: TURN SELF-LOVE INTO A PRACTICE, NOT A FEELING

Self-love isn't a mood you wait for. It's a muscle you build through repetition. Each time you choose to honor your needs, you strengthen that muscle. Each time you treat yourself with gentleness instead of judgment, it grows stronger. Love is built through doing, not just thinking.

Take a moment to remember how you show love to someone else, your child, your pet, your closest friend. You feed them. You speak kindly. You protect them from harm. You give them rest, fun, freedom. Now turn that same devotion inward. If you're tired, let yourself rest. If you're hurting, comfort yourself. If you're inspired, give yourself permission to act on it. That's love in motion.

STEP SIX: CELEBRATE EVIDENCE OF TRUST

Every time you keep a promise to yourself, notice it. Say it out loud if you have to: I said I would, and I did. This rewires your brain's reward system, teaching it that self-trust feels good. Over time, that good feeling becomes your compass. You'll crave integrity the way you once craved approval.

I have gotten into the habit of thanking myself for doing the things I said I'd do. "Thank you, Jen, for doing the dishes last night." "Thank you, Jen, for showing up to the gym." "Thank you, Jen, for finishing the book." Don't get me wrong. There's still a part of me that thinks I could do more, or do what I do better, but I know that no matter what, I will show up for myself. Even if it's in leggings and a hoodie, with my third double espresso with lemon and honey.

And when you slip, don't make it mean you've failed. Make it another place to practice grace. The most trustworthy people aren't the ones who never break promises. They're the ones who own up, forgive themselves, and make it right.

When you keep your word to yourself, you stop living in fragments. You start feeling whole. The woman who used to overcommit learns to say no without guilt. The man who used to procrastinate begins to act with quiet confidence. The child inside who once felt unsafe finally relaxes because someone reliable is in charge now: you.

That's the true essence of self-love: it's not bubble baths and affirmations, though those can help. It's the moment you realize that you are your own safe place. That you can count on you. That no matter who leaves, what fails, or how long it takes, you won't abandon yourself again.

Self-trust is the root. Self-love is the flower. Self-esteem is the fragrance that follows. And it all begins with one small, sacred act: keeping your promises to yourself.

BE YOUR OWN BIGGEST FAN

Friends, we are in the endgame. Our nervous system is reset. Our minds are clear. Our inner voices tamed and reprogrammed. Our dreams, articulated and ready to be realized. And now it's time to have some fun. We are going to become our own biggest fans!

Having a positive image doesn't just make you feel good, it actually changes your brain chemistry and physiology. When you see yourself as capable and worthy, your nervous system relaxes out of constant fight-or-flight and shifts into a state of balance. Cortisol levels drop, dopamine rises, and suddenly you have more focus, stamina, and joy to bring into the day. Challenges no longer look like cliffs you'll tumble off. No, they look like mountains you can climb! That shift in story rewires the brain itself, making confidence less of a mood and more of a default setting.

The studies of positive self-image and high self-esteem just make this topic all the more delightful. People with high self-esteem bounce back faster from stress and rejection, tend to show lower inflammation and better immune function, are more likely to set ambitious goals and persist through setbacks, and they have healthier boundaries, meaning they keep the idiots who doubt them at bay, automatically.

So do me a favor and forget everything you've ever been told about not being too proud, not showing off, and not showing your true colors like a peacock. Or, as the lovely Chinese saying goes: "People ought to fear fame as a pig fears getting fat." All of that is bad advice. Notice how it's called high "self" esteem? It really doesn't matter what anyone else thinks about you. You're the one deciding that you are actually incredible in your own, unique way. And if you ever doubt yourself, ask me. I'll confirm it!

The effects ripple outward in subtle but profound ways. People with a strong self-image take more creative risks, voice their ideas, and recover faster when things don't go as planned. Relationships feel easier, too, because you're not constantly scanning for proof of your worth in someone else's reaction. Instead, you show up more present, playful, and real, and others start being drawn to that energy.

Even your biology reflects the change: research links positive self-perception to stronger immune function, steadier blood pressure, and even a longer lifespan. In other words, seeing yourself in a positive way doesn't just change your mood, it changes your health, your opportunities, and the gravity you carry into every room.

LIST ALL OF THE REASONS YOU ARE AMAZING!

So go ahead. Make a list of all the reasons that you are amazing.

I won't prescribe a number, but try to fill at least one page. Even better, pick your age and write one undeniable reason for every year you've been on this planet.

Sure, it might feel ridiculous at first, but that's only because the system told us not to be too proud.

If negative thoughts bubble up, flip them. Did I give up six figures in my divorce? You betcha. Did that feel like a big sucky failure? Absolutely. But did it avoid a custody battle and make me really good at fixing other people's disastrous finances and did it motivate me to write a book about being selfish? YES! There's the magic answer!

CREATE A MAGAZINE COVER SHOWCASING YOUR AWESOME

There is some truth to the old adage that we believe what we see. Your brain is wired to respond to visuals. They bypass logic and go straight to your emotions. That's why vision boards and inspiring art are so incredibly powerful. You've already created a story where you're the hero and a dream that fills you with excitement. Now we're going to bring that to life, so that you have a daily reminder to live your new reality. We are going to put you on the cover of a magazine!

When you create a cover that celebrates your wins and place it where you'll see it every day, you're sending your nervous system the powerful, undeniable message: "This is who I am." When you remember a failure or your inner critic pipes up after a tough meeting, one glance at this image reminds you not just of who you are, but all that made you who you are. It reminds you that all of your experiences are just the stored potential for something great. It's not unlike the mental rehearsal we talked about earlier. The more often you see yourself as the hero of your story, as having success, and as reaching your goals, the more your brain begins to believe it, and the more naturally you start living it.

And let's face it: you spend so much time admiring other people in images, isn't it time you start doing it for yourself?

Start by picking three to five experiences you're genuinely proud of. They don't have to be huge, public achievements. They could be personal wins, professional milestones, or even quiet moments when you loved who you were being. You can also pick a goal that you're actively pursuing right now.

Next, choose a theme. Every magazine has one. Maybe yours is about courage, creativity, resilience, or joy. Pick something that ties your stories together and feels like the thread of your life. When you start to notice the patterns, you realize your story already has a headline. You're just finally choosing to print it.

Now for the fun part: design your cover.

Hop over to Canva or Photoshop, or go old-school with scissors and a glue stick. Put your name or your mission in bold at the top like you're the headline act, because you are.

Add a feature story: "Jennifer: The Woman Who Built a Life She Loves." Then line the sides with smaller headlines for your wins: "From Self-Doubt to Bestseller," "How She Turned Setbacks Into Fuel," "Why Rest Became Her Superpower." Layer on photos, words, or even symbols that capture the essence of these moments. This isn't about impressing anyone else. It's about curating proof of your own greatness in a way you can't ignore.

Don't have a photo you love? Go take one! Or use an image generator. Or paint one! Do what feels right to you.

Once you've made your cover, display it. Tape it to the bathroom mirror, pin it on the fridge, or make it the background of your laptop. Let it catch your eye every day. This isn't vanity, it's training. It's a visual reminder that you are worthy of applause, and that your story is already one worth being told.

At first, this might feel goofy and self-indulgent. Well, that's because it is! But it's also powerful and fun. Who said we're not allowed to be a little goofy and self-indulgent anyways? That narrative where we're not supposed to take up too much space, be too proud, or claim our wins is done with. Now. Forever.

Being your own biggest fan isn't about ego. It's about self-awareness, and recognizing all of the incredible aspects of you that have been buried under societal expectations, waiting for the right time to sprout and bloom. This self-awareness is the soil self-esteem grows in.

The more you practice celebrating yourself, the more natural it feels. Something shifts. You stop waiting for permission, validation, or applause from others. You start showing up for yourself first. And when you live that way, unapologetically rooted in your own worth, the world notices. It starts clapping along.

You can even get your friends involved in this by hosting an admiration party, where you sip bubbly, and simply go around the room sharing how incredible you think every single person in the room is.

So go ahead and make yourself the cover story. Not someday, not when you've "earned it." Right now. Because in your story, you already are the cover story.

LUCKY ON PURPOSE

Let's talk about luck for a moment, shall we?

Because I'm so tired of hearing people say things like "I'm just not a lucky person" or "Good things never happen to me." That's garbage, and I'm here to tell you why.

Luck isn't some magical fairy dust that the universe sprinkles on a chosen few. It's not about karma points or vision boards with better lighting (though I do love a good vision board!).

Luck is attention plus action. That's it.

And here's the best part: you can train yourself to be lucky. I know this sounds wild, but stay with me.

THE £250 EXPERIMENT

British psychologist Richard Wiseman ran a fascinating experiment that completely changed how I think about luck. He gave people a newspaper and asked them to count the photographs. Simple, right? But here's the twist: partway through, there was a giant message that said, "Stop counting. Tell the experimenter you've seen this and win £250." Most people never saw it. They were too busy counting photographs to notice the money sitting right there in plain sight. Their focus became a tunnel, and in that tunnel, opportunities simply don't exist.

Wiseman also loved to demonstrate this in the real world. In one setup he staged for a television program, he placed a five-pound note on the pavement outside a café and sat a successful businessman inside. His "lucky" volunteer spotted the money, picked it up, went in, struck up a conversation with the stranger, and left with both the cash and a new contact. His "unlucky" volunteer stepped right over the note, sat down alone, and said nothing. Same café. Same money. Same businessman. Same potential. Different perception.

And that's the secret.

WHY YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM IS THE KEY TO LUCK

Remember all that work we did on regulating your nervous system? This is where it pays off in ways you might not have expected.

When you're tense, anxious, or hyper-focused on one rigid outcome, your vision narrows. I'm not just being poetic here! This is *actual* biology. Stress activates your sympathetic nervous system, throwing you into fight-or-flight mode. Your pupils dilate and your gaze locks onto the threat. Your peripheral awareness drops. Your brain prioritizes survival over possibility. You become efficient at one thing: missing opportunities.

But when you're relaxed, curious, and feeling internally safe? Your field of perception

widens. You notice side doors. You catch comments that weren't meant for you. You overhear the sentence that changes your career. You see the £250 message in the newspaper.

Lucky people aren't magicians. They're just relaxed enough to see what's actually there.

So ask yourself: How many times have you been so fixated on one specific dream that you missed the better one waving at you from the corner? How many times have you insisted that your opportunity must arrive wearing one particular outfit?

"I'll be happy when I get the promotion." "I'll feel secure when I hit this income number." "I'll start living when this person chooses me."

That's counting photographs, my friend. You're missing the point!

And while you're counting, there might be a giant sign screaming at you to pivot, to leave, to ask, to risk, to walk across the room and introduce yourself.

LUCK LOVES MOVEMENT

One of the most consistent findings in Wiseman's research was this: people who describe themselves as lucky talk to strangers more often. Elevators. Planes. Coffee shops. Conferences. They initiate those little micro-interactions. They ask questions. They follow curiosity threads.

Every conversation is a lottery ticket. You just have to tolerate a little awkwardness to collect those tickets.

Talking to strangers means risking feeling stupid. Starting something new means admitting you don't have all the answers. Following a curiosity means you don't have a perfect plan.

Unlucky people crave certainty. They want guarantees before movement. They want proof before participation. They build emotional walls in the name of staying safe. Lucky people build bridges.

This isn't about becoming extroverted if that's not who you are. It's about becoming porous.

Porous to ideas. Porous to people. Porous to beautiful detours.

Luckily, luck can be trained!

Here's what blew my mind: Wiseman had people who identified as unlucky adopt "lucky behaviors" for just 30 days. Look around more. Talk to new people. Notice unusual details. Trust your gut on small choices.

At the end of the month, most of them reported significant increases in luck, happiness, and opportunity. Not because the universe changed. Because their lens did.

Remember our friend the reticular activating system? When you buy a red car, you suddenly see red cars everywhere. They were always there. Your filter just shifted.

If you believe the world is scarce and closed, your brain will faithfully highlight evidence to confirm it.

If you decide that opportunities are abundant and you're capable of spotting them, your brain will start scanning differently.

Belief calibrates perception. Perception shapes action. Action produces outcomes. That's the loop, and you're in control of it.

WHERE *ME FIRST!* MEETS LUCKY

When you're chronically people-pleasing and self-abandoning, you operate from contraction. You're trying to manage everyone else's reactions. You're hypervigilant. You're not scanning for possibility. You're scanning for threats. And threat scanning makes you miss opportunities.

But when you anchor into your own values and desires, something beautiful shifts. You relax. You widen. You start asking the right questions: What do I actually want? Who feels interesting to me? What conversation would energize me? What invitation feels aligned?

Alignment increases luck because alignment increases clarity. And clarity frees up your brain to actually notice what's happening around you.

So let's get started in making you the luckiest version of yourself you can be!

Widen Your Gaze. When you walk into a room, pause for two seconds and soften your eyes. Notice three things you wouldn't normally notice. A painting. A snippet of conversation. Someone reading a book you love. This trains your peripheral awareness, and peripheral awareness is where luck lives.

Start Small Conversations. Initiate one tiny conversation per day. Ask the barista how long they've worked there. Compliment someone's jacket. Comment on the weather in an elevator. The point isn't networking. The point is breaking your own pattern of tunnel vision.

Leave White Space. Luck hates overpacked calendars. When every minute is optimized, there's no room for serendipity. Schedule unstructured time. Take the long way home. Wander a little. Magic happens in the margins.

Trust Your Hunches. If you feel like taking a different route home, do it. If you feel curious about a workshop, sign up. Your intuition is pattern recognition running below conscious awareness. The more you follow it on small things, the sharper it gets for big things.

Reframe Rejection. Lucky people experience rejection, they just interpret it differently. Instead of "This means I'm doomed," they think, "This clears space for something better." This isn't toxic positivity. It's strategic resilience, and it keeps you moving instead of stuck. Personally, I have taught myself to blow off every setback by joyously saying the words "Plot Twist! Bring it on, universe!" Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't (or hasn't yet!), but I certainly feel better about the unexpected bill I have to pay no matter what!

Now, none of this guarantees instant miracles, and I'm not going to promise you that. But it radically increases your exposure to possibility.

If you talk to 200 people instead of 20, your probability shifts. If you try ten ideas instead of clinging to one, your probability shifts. If you apply to five opportunities instead of waiting for perfect alignment, your probability shifts.

The universe may be mysterious, but probability isn't.

And here's another piece of good news for you, with your regulated nervous system ready to go: the more regulated your nervous system is, the luckier you become.

An anxious brain narrows vision. A regulated brain expands it. That means all that work you did on sleep, breath work, boundaries, and nervous system regulation? This is just another area where it really pays off.

Calm equals vision. Vision equals options. Options equal leverage.

And then, before you know it, it becomes a habit. Luck stops being this dramatic lightning strike and starts being part of your day-to-day life. A habit of looking around. A habit of connecting with people. A habit of trying things. A habit of interpreting setbacks as redirection rather than rejection.

You don't need to chant affirmations about being lucky (though you can if you want!). You just need to behave like someone who expects good things to happen.

When you walk into a room, assume there's something there for you. A lesson. A contact. A laugh. A clue. This assumption changes everything: your posture, your eye contact, your tone. And people respond to that energy. Doors open to that energy. Not because the universe is being sentimental, but because humans respond to confidence, and confidence is just a regulated nervous system in action.

You see, luck increases when you stop shrinking.

When you stop making yourself small, silent, and invisible.

When you stop obsessing over not bothering anyone.

When you stop waiting for permission to fully participate in your own life.

You weren't designed to count photographs forever, my friend.

There are messages in bold font all over your life right now. Some of them are offering you £250. Some of them are offering you complete reinvention.

So become lucky on purpose, because you deserve it. And because you can.

BECOME BIG IN A WORLD THAT WANTS YOU SMALL

Putting yourself out there can feel like standing under the brightest lights in the room, every flaw magnified, every silence loaded with meaning.

Whether it's speaking up in a meeting, sharing your art online, asking for a raise, or showing up as yourself on a first date, visibility stirs something ancient in your body. And here's the truth: that reaction isn't weakness, it is, once again, your biological wiring. Thousands of years ago, belonging to the tribe meant survival. Rejection didn't just sting, it could mean starvation or death. Being seen was hardly an advantage when out hunting. Oh, and then the widespread narrative around impostor syndrome, fear of public speaking… society keeps on telling us that being seen is hard. No wonder your chest tightens and your hands shake before you speak up. Your nervous system is still running old code.

But here's the twist! Visibility today is no longer a threat, it's a doorway. Every time you let yourself be seen, you're retraining your brain, teaching it that the spotlight is not a danger zone but a safe zone, a growth zone. What used to send your amygdala into red alert gradually becomes neutral, even exhilarating. This is how leaders, performers, and entrepreneurs build presence. They don't magically erase fear. They show up anyway until their body learns a new story.

The world benefits when you stay small. Companies save money when you don't ask for the raise. Institutions keep control when you don't voice your ideas. Cultures steeped in "be humble" and "don't rock the boat" stay intact when you shrink yourself to fit them.

But you? You get crumbs. Staying quiet may feel safe in the moment, but over time it erodes self-trust, and deprives you of the chance to seize opportunities. You stop believing your ideas matter, you stop seeing yourself as someone worth noticing, and eventually you start mistaking invisibility for your natural state.

Visibility is not about being loud, flashy, or extroverted. It's about alignment. It's choosing to let your presence, your ideas, your perspective take up the space they deserve without apology. And you don't have to dive into the deep end right away. Small, steady acts of expansion, such as asking one question in a meeting, wearing something that makes you feel bold, introducing yourself to one new person, will retrain your nervous system. Each step whispers to your brain, We survived. We can do more.

Your body is part of the message too. The way you stand, breathe, and move tells the world how much space you believe you deserve. Shrinking postures signal submission. Open shoulders, steady breath, and grounded stance signal presence: not arrogance, but calm confidence. Athletes and performers use visualization and body cues for this very reason: the brain responds to imagined success almost the same way it responds to lived success. Picture yourself

standing tall, speaking clearly, and being received with respect. Rehearse it often enough and your body starts to believe it's true.

And here's the secret: the more you step into visibility, the less it becomes about other people's approval. Redefine success not by how many nods or claps you get, but by whether you showed up the way you wanted to. If your goal is simply to embody your truth, to speak, to create, to share, then every attempt is a win, no matter the response. That shift keeps you moving forward and way beyond the point where your old fears would have held you back.

Visibility isn't just about big moments on big stages. It's in the quiet, daily choices: telling the truth in a relationship, pitching an idea that matters, sharing a part of yourself you once hid. Each act adds another layer of evidence that says: "I can be seen and still be safe." Fear may never vanish completely, but it stops running the show. What takes its place is a steady sense of self, a voice that no longer trembles, and a presence that expands naturally into the space you were always meant to fill.

The world will never hand you permission to be big. It profits from your smallness. Which is why visibility is rebellion of the most beautiful kind. It's you deciding, every day, to stand at your full height and let the world adjust around you.

Here are some exercises to help you take up more space!

Micro-visibility moments. Pick one small act of visibility each day. It could be as simple as asking a question in a meeting, posting a thought online without over-editing, or introducing yourself at a gathering. Keep it small enough that your body says, "All right, I can handle this." The goal isn't perfection, it's repetition.

Ask yourself: Is this who I want to be? I ask this question of myself throughout the day, when I feel like quitting, shrinking, or not showing up. Oftentimes, the answer comes in loud and clear with the next step I need to take to feel more empowered, even if it's just putting on a face before heading out in public.

Dress for expansion. Clothes send signals to your brain as much as they do to those around you. Wear something that feels like you turned up to eleven. It might be a bold color, a statement accessory, or simply the outfit you usually save for special occasions. Every time you catch your reflection, let it remind you: I am someone who deserves to be seen.

Practice your power stance. Before walking into a room or situation where you want to be visible, take two minutes to stand tall with your feet grounded, shoulders back, chin level, and breath steady. This isn't about faking confidence, but rather about letting your nerves know that it's time to feel powerful.

Rehearse in your mind. Close your eyes and visualize yourself showing up. Picture the room, hear your voice steady and clear, feel the moment landing well. The more vivid you make the rehearsal, the more your brain codes the experience as familiar. When the real moment comes, it feels like you've already been there.

Redefine success. At the end of each day, reflect on one moment where you chose to show up. Write it down. Don't measure whether it was well received. Measure whether you followed through. Over time, these daily check-ins train your brain to link visibility with pride instead of fear.

Ask for reflection. Visibility isn't just about being seen, it's about letting yourself feel seen. Ask a trusted friend or colleague to share what they noticed about your presence in a situation. Often, they'll reflect back a strength you didn't realize you were showing.

PHRASES THAT WILL SET YOU FREE

So much of becoming the most authentic, self-fulfilled, self-loving version of yourself is about learning new ways to express yourself. Your desires. Your feelings. Your dreams. Our words are the vehicle in which we bring our new life into existence, and the more you upgrade your verbal skills, the faster and more brilliantly your dream life will start manifesting.

So here are some phrases I want to gift you that will set you free faster than you can imagine.

These are not scripts or affirmations. No, they are phrases guaranteed to make you uncomfortable at first, but truth comes before comfort when you're building an authentic life.

Here they are:

- I don't like this.
- I need more than this.
- This doesn't work for me.
- I'm not available for that.
- This isn't enough for me.
- I'm not O.K. with this.

Read them out loud. Then read them again. Notice what your body does. Most likely, you tensed up in fear before you felt the tingle of empowerment.

Since you're here with me, I'm going to assume you've spent the better part of your life accommodating other people, saying that things are fine when they are not in order to make things good for everyone involved. But this peacekeeping strategy has been costing you dearly.

When you swallow your truth, you lose self-respect. Not in some vague, abstract, future-consequence kind of way. Right then. At that moment. The part of you that knows watches you fold, and accepts that this is how things are done. Your bar sinks in real time.

And this is uncomfortable, so you start replaying the situation. You start editing yourself retroactively: what you should have said, how you could have said it better, whether you were being too sensitive, whether maybe they had a point. You start doubting yourself. Not them. You. And that self-doubt is expensive. It costs you your fire, your magnetism, the quality of aliveness that makes you you.

But here's the piece that matters most for understanding why the patterns persist: every time you negotiate your truth, your nervous system learns something. It learns that your truth is negotiable. It internalizes the lesson that what you feel is not quite safe enough to say out loud. That your knowing needs to be approved before it's allowed to exist.

And that lesson, held in the body long enough, becomes a blueprint. It starts selecting for relationships that confirm it. It mistakes familiarity for compatibility. It finds comfort in

dynamics where you are perpetually translating yourself, perpetually softening, perpetually waiting to be allowed to simply be what you already are.

This is not a personality flaw. This is a nervous system strategy. It kept you safe, but at a price.

And it's also the reason why speaking up for yourself, your truths, and your desires seems to get harder and harder, and why no affirmation really seems to resonate as deeply as you want it to.

When you stop performing for approval and start living and speaking from self-trust, the quality of your relationships transforms.

When people finally encounter the real you, the unedited, un-softened, fully-formed version, instead of the careful translation you've been offering, they will either rise to the occasion or fall away.

The ones who rise will show you that what you feared was too much is actually exactly right.

And the ones who can't? They will fade away, and you will let them go without a heartbreak because you realize that they were never fully aligned, but comfortable.

How often this happens will depend on the intensity of your transformation, and while it may be uncomfortable at first, I can assure you that when the dust has settled, even if you are standing by yourself, you will feel relieved because for the first time ever, you will be there for yourself.

Once you stop bonding through self-betrayal, performance, flexibility, and niceness, you'll start attracting relationships built on the thing that was missing all along: reciprocity. Mutual joy. Partnerships where your needs, your wants, your dreams are not inconveniences to be managed but the source of energy, joy, and fulfillment.

And most importantly, you'll stop circling the same lessons. Because the lesson was never about finding the right person. It was about becoming the person who attracts the relationships that are just right for them.

HAVE REAL, AUTHENTIC CONVERSATIONS

"The single biggest problem in communication
is the illusion that it has taken place."

Back when I had an office, I kept a framed copy of this quote hanging over my desk. It's usually credited to George Bernard Shaw, though nobody can actually prove he said it. (The idea traces back to a 1950 article by a writer named William H. Whyte.) Which, honestly, makes it the perfect quote about communication: even the quote about how we mishear each other has been misattributed for decades. So when people came to me with a problem that was clearly one of miscommunication, I'd point to it, ask them to read it and sit with it, and then reflect before asking for my time.

You see, as people-pleasers, we excel at solving other people's problems, and since we feel validated when we do so, we are always ready and willing to help, even if that means leaving our own passions and work on the back burner. We likely already know how to have difficult conversations, just not on our behalf. So let's start using those skills to actually realize the kind of life we want to live.

We talked about how, from a scientific perspective, holding back unspoken truths costs us. That suppression activates the amygdala and keeps stress hormones like cortisol circulating in the body. When you have a difficult conversation, the act of doing so engages the prefrontal cortex, the part of your brain responsible for planning and regulation. You bring the experience out of the raw survival brain and into higher-order processing, which calms the nervous system and creates a sense of control.

Sure, there is the fear and anxiety about what those conversations may turn into, but those are things we need to deal with, and you and your regulated nervous system have what it takes to do that.

And don't be fooled: initially, the words won't roll easily off your tongue. Thanks to your ancestral DNA and social wiring, your body may still balk and remind you that it's your job to keep the tribe happy at all costs. That reaction is completely normal. But modern relationships are not ancient hunting tribes, and avoiding conflict at all costs is no longer a great survival mechanism. It's maladaptive.

Before you broach the topic, regulate your body. The calmer you are, the less the other person's biology will be triggered by your signals. Research on co-regulation shows that conversations are not just verbal, they are nervous-system-to-nervous-system exchanges. If you enter the dialogue flooded with adrenaline, the other person's mirror neurons will pick up on that energy, and their defenses will go up. Take three slow breaths. Ground your feet. Remind your-

self: "I can survive this conversation." When you approach with relative calm, you help the other person stay calm too, even before a word is spoken.

And sure, they may still get upset. They probably will. You're fundamentally changing the nature of a relationship that has not served you. Let them react in the way that they are going to react, let them grow from it, and allow yourself to live your truth. Trust me, while it may hurt at first, what follows is always in everyone's highest good.

The next step is clarity. Vague complaints are not only ineffective, but detrimental. Remember how we talked about how stressful lack of information is? Don't do that to other people. Be clear. "I need to talk to you about how I find your lack of communication very stressful, and I hope we can come up with a solution that works for both of us."

Do you see what I did there? Here's another practical tip. Rather than pointing out someone's wrongdoing, which puts them on the defensive, start by putting your feelings or thoughts first. Compare the two statements and see how you feel.

"I'm really mad at you for being so disrespectful in that meeting."

"I felt very upset when you disrespected me in that meeting, and I'd like to discuss how we can better communicate moving forward."

One is an attack, one is a statement of facts followed by a response. The latter draws the problem into the open without lighting a fire of blame. And restating the facts of the matter in concrete statements is also easier for the brain to process than abstract ones, which reduces misunderstanding and keeps the prefrontal cortex, not the amygdala, in charge of the conversation.

It's also crucial to frame the purpose of the talk. Difficult subjects often trigger fear of rejection, so begin by affirming the relationship: "I want to bring this up because our connection matters to me." That reassurance acts like a safety cue to the nervous system, signaling that the conversation is about repair, not rupture. Studies on attachment confirm that people are more open to feedback when they feel fundamentally secure in the bond. By anchoring the conversation in care, you soften the fear response on both sides.

Listening is as important as speaking. If you come in with your script and bulldoze through, you replicate the very dynamic you're trying to change. Give space. Let silence sit without rushing to fill it. When the other person responds, reflect back what you hear: "It sounds like you felt pressured when I asked for that." This technique, drawn from active listening research, calms defensiveness by showing the other person their perspective has landed in your brain, not bounced off it. The brain registers this mirroring as validation, lowering cortisol and fostering connection.

Now, not everyone is a reasonable human being. The world is full of people who learned sh*tty habits and have poor coping mechanisms. This is where you may run into some nasty tricks that they deploy to keep you compliant in their reality of things, and protect their fragile ego.

Gaslighting denies or distorts your reality ("That never happened!"), leaving you doubting your own memory and perception. Projection flips their flaws onto you, casting you as the selfish or ungrateful one. Whataboutism derails the issue by dredging up your past mistakes,

turning dialogue into scorekeeping. Minimization dismisses your feelings as "no big deal," eroding your self-trust over time. And false victimhood makes you the aggressor for daring to bring up the problem, forcing you into soothing them instead of being heard.

All of these tactics destabilize you by shifting focus away from their behavior, but once you recognize them as patterns, not truths, you reclaim clarity, stop defending yourself, and anchor back into your own lived reality.

And if you're living with or working with a perpetual gaslighter, start keeping a journal of what happened and how it made you feel. They often have such distorted views of events that we can easily fall into questioning ourselves, but the journal will help you remember.

And then, there's the final step: release the fantasy that a difficult conversation will always end with agreement. Sometimes the gift is simply that the truth was spoken aloud. Even if the other person resists or rejects your words, your body registers that you honored yourself. You processed the unsaid. That act alone shifts energy from repression to expression, from hiding to owning, from being a prisoner of your bottled-up emotions to freedom.

Over time, repeated truth-telling rewires the nervous system: what once felt terrifying becomes tolerable, then natural. And once that's natural, you'll have an intuitive sense of what's really happening in conversations.

Talking about difficult subjects is not about winning arguments or forcing outcomes. It's about alignment. Hopefully between both parties, but at the very least between you and your values. The goal is making sure your inner reality matches your outer expression. Every time you choose to speak rather than swallow, you are re-teaching your body that your truth is safe in the world. And that, ultimately, is the deepest kind of freedom.

THE PING-PONG METHOD

As a former people-pleaser, the thing I struggled with most was knowing what to say. Despite speaking three languages and being a writer, I had a painfully small vocabulary, limited almost entirely to variations of *"whatever makes you comfortable."*

The word "no"? I didn't know how to say it directly.

*"What the f*** was that?!"* I wouldn't have dreamed of saying that. I didn't even know I could.

Even in my early days of *Me First!* living, the tough, honest conversations I was having were extremely padded. I just wanted everyone to be O.K., even when they were being complete idiots. And when someone sent something my way? I absorbed it. Turned it over. Tried to make all the pieces fit together. As you know by now, that doesn't ever work.

Then, one day, I met Piao.

We clicked instantly. Not over boundaries or inner work, but over our shared languages and cultural experiences. That alone was enough to make us close friends. When she realized I was a complete pushover, it sparked something in her: a fierce, genuine desire to help me level up. And her unapologetic drive sparked something in me: a hunger to learn everything I could from her. Talking about each other's lives was like watching the best TV show you've ever stumbled across. I was the lovable main character who was just beginning to realize her true power. She was the fierce baddie who already ruled her queendom. Needless to say, we became the best of friends.

It's from her that I learned what I now call the Ping-Pong Method.

In it, we stop internalizing, accepting, or taking any kind of ownership of other people's bad behavior. Instead, we flick it away! Either back to them or out into the ether, where it can dissolve into nothingness.

The method has three simple moves:

Notice. Something lands on you: a comment, a behavior, an energy. Before you do anything else, just notice it. Don't analyze it. Don't justify it. Don't immediately reach for a reason. Just feel the impact and recognize: *something just came my way and I didn't like it.*

Don't absorb. This is the crucial step, and the hardest one to unlearn. Your default setting, especially as a people-pleaser, has been to take things in, turn them over, and make them yours. A rude comment becomes a flaw you need to fix. Silence becomes proof you're not enough. This is where you pause and ask: *Is this actually mine?* Nine times out of ten, it isn't.

Deflect. Now you move it. Back to them, out into the ether, or simply out of your body with a breath, a shake of your shoulders, or the words: *"That's interesting. What made you say that?" or "F*** off!" or "Are you dumb?!"* You don't have to have a perfect response. You just have to stop being the place where it lives.

Here's what that looks like in practice:

Someone makes a rude comment. The question isn't *why* they said it, or what it might say about you. The question is what it says about *them*. And if that means you need to get angry, by all means, get angry. You've already learned that anger can be your greatest ally in your worst moments.

Someone undermines you. Rather than searching for reasons or solutions, call them out. Again, this isn't about your shortcomings. It's about theirs. When you speak up for yourself, you set a verbal and energetic boundary that teaches them, sometimes for the very first time, that this is not how the world works. At least not anymore.

Someone ghosts you. Their actions are about them, not about you. Don't make it about you. That only happens in a world where you need their approval. What they've shown you *is* the answer. Let that be enough.

One of my clients was a senior manager at a tech company. She was sharp, capable, and chronically overlooked. In meetings, her ideas would land in silence, only to be repeated by a male colleague five minutes later to a round of nods and praise. Every time it happened, she'd go home and spend the evening dissecting it. *Was I unclear? Did I say it wrong? Maybe I need to speak up more, or less, or differently.* She was absorbing it all, making it her problem to solve.

When I introduced her to the Ping-Pong Method, her first reaction was pure disbelief. *"But what if I come across as aggressive?"* That's the people-pleaser's greatest fear: that setting a boundary will make us the villain. We worked on it together, and the next time a colleague repeated her idea in a meeting, she didn't go home and spiral. She looked at him calmly and said, *"Yes, exactly what I said. Glad it landed."* Small words. Enormous paddle swing. The room noticed. He noticed. And that client? For the first time, she walked out of that meeting feeling like herself. And best of all, her colleagues noticed, too.

That's the method working. Not perfectly, not dramatically, just cleanly.

One challenge I see again and again when teaching this material is that other people's behavior simply doesn't make sense to us. *"How could they do this?"* That incredulity is exactly why you're in the right place, surrounded by truly good people who are inherently kind and generous. The kind of people you want to be around, and the kind of people you want to make space for by living *Me First!*

We simply can't fathom people acting that way because we would never act that way.

Sadly, people acting poorly is part of life. Fortunately, we no longer have to tolerate it, and refusing to do so becomes second nature once we learn how.

When you grew up in an environment where keeping the peace was the norm, your brain learned to take things in and process them internally rather than bounce them back. That's the fawn response at work. Appease. Accommodate. Make it O.K., even when it isn't.

The good news? That wiring is not permanent. Every time you use the Ping-Pong Method, you're doing something powerful at the neurological level: you're interrupting the old pattern and laying down a new one. You're teaching your nervous system that deflecting is safe. That you don't have to carry what isn't yours. That you can let it pass through you instead of setting up a home inside you.

This is neuroplasticity in action. One paddle swing at a time.

And you're teaching others that you won't stand for their B.S.

So here's your practice: the next time something lands on you that doesn't belong to you, I want you to physically feel the paddle in your hand. Maybe you even mime the swing: a small flick of the wrist, a quiet *pew* under your breath. Sounds silly. Works anyway.

Start small. A passive-aggressive comment from a coworker. A guilt trip from a family member. A text that sends you spiraling. Notice it, don't absorb it, and move it along.

You are not a sponge. You are a player. And from here on out, you keep the ball moving and you start winning.

BOUNDARIES LIKE A BOSS

Here's an annoying truth: as you begin to flourish in your *Me First!* life, not everyone will cheer. Some people will celebrate your growth, but others will try to reel you back in. They're used to you being available, agreeable, always saying yes. When you start saying no, choosing differently, and protecting your own energy, they might take it personally and try to guilt you back into line. Others might worry that you're shooting yourself in the foot. This is the time when you will start setting boundaries, both spoken and energetic.

Let's clear up the biggest misconceptions about boundaries first, shall we? Boundaries are not about what others are or aren't allowed to do, they are about what you will accept. You can ask people to change, of course, but you can't force them, and when change doesn't happen, you're the one who has to decide how you want this part of your story to play out.

So how do we go about setting boundaries? By now, you should be clear enough about what you desire and regulated enough that you can get a clear yes or no from both your body and your head. If something upsets you, a boundary is needed. You are in charge of your own life, and boundaries are there to safeguard your time, your energy, your well-being, your health, and your wealth.

The first step in setting boundaries is getting clear on what you can and want to accept, about what good feels like, and what amazing could feel like. I absolutely adore my family, but when I got stuck in the middle of a years-long spat, I felt both drained and anxious whenever a phone call came in from them. Conversations were negative, and all too often, it felt like I was speaking to a robot who only knew one program. None of my people-pleasing and mediating skills had any effect, so I started setting boundaries: I would not listen to them complain about one another, I expected them to talk to one another, and if they were unhappy with me, so be it!

While there was some annoyance initially, setting my boundaries forced them to deal with their own problems, and eventually, things worked out. It was never my job to create understanding, explain actions or remind them of each other's worth. That was their job, and once I set a boundary with myself ("You're not here to fix them! You're here to chase dreams!") and with them ("If you have a problem, please discuss it with them"), they eventually did their own dirty work, took out their emotional trash, and are now getting along so well that I'm actually feeling a little left out at times.

So, as said, the first step is getting clear about how you feel. The second step is getting clear about what you want. The more clearly, certainly, and unapologetically you can articulate this, the easier it is for them to understand you. And then, you have to hold yourself to your word.

What I love most about boundaries is that they are teachable moments. To my kids I might seem mean, but I am teaching them how to stand up for themselves. With friends and colleagues, I show them that they don't have to get feedback on everything, or to drop everything to step in for a colleague.

Once you get into the habit of guarding your energy, you don't just change how others treat you, but how you see yourself. With every no you honor and every boundary you enforce, you send yourself a powerful message: "I matter. My needs are valid. My energy is precious. My time is invaluable."

Over time, this transforms your self-image. You stop being the person who gets depleted and start being the person who shows up where you want to, full and present.

So what do healthy boundaries look like?

- Saying no without explaining your entire life story.
- Protecting your downtime instead of sacrificing it to every request.
- Deciding what conversations, behaviors, and dynamics you will not participate in.
- Turning off your phone and going to bed on time.
- Telling a friend to decide for themselves because they keep on deferring the smallest decisions to you.

You can still be there, hold space, be kind and be friendly, but you are doing it in a way that keeps you energetic, and people growing alongside you, not because you keep on watering them.

And if they don't like it? Teflon it!

Years ago, I had a manager whose default communication style could best be described as weaponized snapping. At first, it rattled me. I took every sharp comment personally, as if each one was proof I wasn't good enough. Then I realized it was her problem, not mine, and I began to teflon her.

Like a non-stick pan, I decided nothing she said could stick to me. I'd let the words slide right off. Later, when the dust settled, I'd reflect on what the actual request was, minus the emotional shrapnel, and just do that. It's like the phrase "K.O." we discussed earlier, in action!

Boundaries aren't selfish. They're a declaration that you take your own life seriously. They're how you say, without apology: "I am the keeper of my own energy, my own time, my own peace."

Fill your cup first. Protect it. And only let the overflow pour into others. That's not just boundaries like a boss, that's living like one.

BE A LIGHTHOUSE

Once you start having more fun living your own life, the lives of others become less interesting. Awesome! What might not be as awesome is that with your newfound joy, energy and resources, your old habit of trying to help others might rear its head again. Since you have more, you can give more, right? Yes, but only from overflow.

If you find yourself slipping back into people-pleasing and enabling with your newfound resources (Been there! Done that! It costs a lot of time and money! I do not recommend it!), it's time to go from being a lifeboat to a lighthouse.

A lifeboat scrambles into the storm every time someone shouts for help. It rows frantically, braving waves and wind, pulling others on board whether they paddle or not. The lifeboat gets battered, waterlogged, and eventually sinks under the weight of everyone else's emergencies. It may save a few people. But don't you think you can do better?

A lighthouse, on the other hand, doesn't charge into the chaos. It stands tall, steady, shining its beam across the dark water. It guides ships to safety, but each captain still has to steer their own vessel. The lighthouse doesn't burn itself out trying to do the sailing for them. No, it stands its ground and helps hundreds get safely to shore. That's the role you're stepping into now: a guide, not a rescuer. A light, not a lifeline.

Being a lifeboat may feel good in the moment, but it doesn't work in the long run, for you, or for the other party. Rushing in to solve other people's problems usually makes things worse for them in the long run.

One such way is by learned helplessness, which is when people experience situations where they have no control over the outcome, so they eventually stop trying, even after the situation changes and control is possible again. In plain language, that means if someone is always rescued before they have to figure things out, they may start believing they can't solve problems on their own, or the thought may not even cross their minds.

Research also shows that self-efficacy, the belief in your ability to handle challenges, needs to be developed through experience. When you take away those experiences by stepping in too soon, you rob people of the very confidence they need to stand on their own.

And then, there is motivation undermining: when people feel a task has been taken over by someone else, their intrinsic motivation to work on it can evaporate. In other words: the more you do for them, the less they want and feel able to do for themselves.

This doesn't mean you should never help. It means you need to help in a way that strengthens someone's ability to solve their own problems rather than making them dependent on you to do it for them.

Rather than asking yourself: "How can I fix this for them?"

Ask yourself: "How can I help them learn to fix it themselves?"

That sibling who struggles with money? Instead of quietly covering their costs again, offer to

sit down and build a budget together, or point them toward real tools and resources so they can steady things themselves.

Let me share a powerful example with you to bring home the point. When I decided to start honoring my boundaries and change my life, I had financial hardship. Six-figure financial hardship. I sympathize deeply with people who worry about money, because I have been there. Someone dear to me had those same worries. Money had always been hard, and taboo. For years, I paid bills without mentioning it, never brought up money, and took on the lion's share because I didn't want them to stress, but also didn't share how much I knew and could do because I didn't want them to feel bad.

Until I started living *Me First!* and decided to show them how to fix their financial challenge. It started small, helping them with taxes, but that cracked the topic wide open. They confided in me (my honesty and trust were met with theirs) and let me help them revamp their finances. Well, it turns out this person was doing far better than they'd ever dreamed of. Together, we organized their finances, got an overview, and built a solid portfolio that's going to keep them in millionaire status for the rest of their lives. It was incredible! They went from fearful to empowered. Our only regret is that neither of us was ready to be open and honest much sooner.

By doing less to save people, you are actually doing more to help them in the long run. The friend who stays in a toxic relationship? Don't just let them bring that garbage to you every Saturday. Instead, let them vent, and then direct them to a great Instagram account, a psychologist, or maybe hand them a copy of this book.

The shift from doing to guiding isn't about withdrawing love or support. It's about changing the way you offer it. You believe in the power that you have to transform your life, right? Why would you deprive someone else of having that very same experience?

PART FIVE
REIGNITE YOUR SOUL

You've regulated your body. You've reprogrammed your mind. You're standing in a version of yourself that's more aligned, more powerful, and more YOU than you've ever been.

And now? Now you're ready for the magic.

If words like "magic," "Divine," or "quantum leaping" make you want to roll your eyes or slam this book shut, take a breath. You don't have to believe in angels, energy, or parallel timelines to get something out of this part. You can read every mention of the Divine as "my deeper self," "my subconscious," or simply "the part of me that sees more than my daily panic." The practices still work.

What matters is that you stop living as if you are just a productivity machine with a nervous system attached, and start treating yourself as a whole person whose desires, instincts, and yes, sense of wonder, deserve a say in the life you're building. Whether you call that soul or systems, I don't care. I care that you start listening.

Because this is where everything you've built comes together. Where the body's wisdom and the mind's clarity merge into something bigger, deeper, and infinitely more expansive. This is where you stop living from survival and strategy alone, and start living in resonance with something greater.

Call it the universe. Call it God. Call it source, divine intelligence, or the quantum field. The name doesn't matter. What matters is this: you are not alone in this work. You are part of something vast, interconnected, and conspiring in your favor.

And when you tap into that connection? When you learn to dance with the divine instead of white-knuckling your way through life? Everything becomes possible.

This part isn't about abandoning logic or bypassing the real work you've done. It's about adding the final layer. The one that turns effort into flow. The one that transforms manifestation

from wishful thinking into magnetic alignment. The one that makes life feel less like a battle and more like a collaboration.

I chose the word "reignite" for this part because once I tapped into this state of being, it felt like everything was "on fire" in the best possible way.

You'll learn how to get quiet enough to hear the whispers of your soul. How to recognize the signs and synchronicities that have always been there, waiting for you to notice. How to manifest not from desperation, but from deep, embodied certainty. How to trust the timing, surrender the outcome, and quantum leap into timelines you couldn't have imagined from where you started.

But here's what makes this different from every other spiritual teaching you've encountered: you're doing this work from a regulated nervous system and a rewired mind. You're not bypassing your trauma with toxic positivity. You're not using manifestation to avoid taking action. You're not spiritual bypassing your way around the hard stuff.

You've done the foundational work. And now, the divine has something solid to work with. A real base to build on.

When your body feels safe and your mind is clear, your soul can finally speak. And when your soul speaks, your entire reality begins to reorganize around your truth. And with your body being free of stress and your mind free of clutter, you can finally hear it, loud and clear!

This is where luck becomes intentional. Where opportunities multiply. Where doors open that you didn't even know existed. Where the life you've been building starts to build itself, because you're finally in alignment with the force that's been guiding you all along.

You've come home to your body. You've reclaimed your mind.

Now, let's reconnect you to your soul.

Because this is where the real miracles happen.

RECONNECTING TO MAGIC

Can we just pause here for a moment, take a deep breath, and celebrate how far you've come?

Seriously! In just a few short chapters, you've rewired your nervous system, aligned with your body, learned how to live *Me First!* in a world of participation trophies and codependent relationships, and you've mapped out a clear vision of what living your dream will look and feel like.

Wow! I am so incredibly proud of you! You now know your worth, demand it, and follow your big, juicy dreams with an open heart! You are the person who dared to pick up a book that promised to help you build a new life, and you've done it. I was proud of you when you decided to take a chance on yourself, and I am even more proud of the person you have become over the past days and weeks. I bet you are too!

Remember how in the beginning I told you that manifesting won't work unless you have the nerves to bring those 5D dreams into the 3D world? Well, I think you're ready now. You've proven to yourself that you are the person who can make anything happen, you've super-charged your entire being with feel-good, high-vibrational energy, and now, you're ready to receive magic.

So, take a deep breath with me and let's activate it, shall we?

Repeat after me:

"WOW! I AM SO LUCKY TO BE ALIVE!
I AM SO LUCKY TO BE ME!"

Feel the energy of these words course through your veins like a hot cup of coffee or tea. Let it sink into every cell of your body and light you up from the inside.

This is the state we want to be living in. The state of magic moments where you're wrapped up in a warm sweater, the air is slightly cool and soft against your skin. Where the light streaming through the curtains feels like it was sent there just for you. And before your mind has a chance to rush into the day, you remember, and feel, the magic that it is to be alive.

This energetic practice is not about toxic positivity or pretending that life never throws you a curveball. It's about living in alignment. Remembering how amazing it is that you are here. That there is a hum of something bigger, better, and benevolent coursing through it all. It's about knowing, deep down, that you are part of something wondrous.

That's the state we're talking about here. That's the state we are going to activate now.

WHEN YOU LIVE YOUR DREAM LIFE, THE WORLD CHANGES SHAPE

The funny thing about building a life you love is that it doesn't just change you, but it changes your reality. You start noticing possibilities that were invisible before, like stepping into a room whose door you've walked past a hundred times without noticing. Space opens up. Time feels different. Your capacity to imagine and receive expands.

Opportunities seem to arrive from unexpected corners. A conversation at the grocery store turns into a new friendship. An idea pops into your head that solves a problem you've been stuck on for months. You stumble across the exact book you didn't know you needed.

And yes, new challenges show up, too. Bigger dreams mean bigger puzzles. But here's the magic: when you're connected to something greater, you can meet those challenges with an elevated perspective and divine support. You start to trust that even the difficult things might have something beautiful folded inside.

This "something greater" is different for everyone. For some, it's God. For others, it's the universe, nature, love, evolution, or the quiet power of mindfulness. It doesn't have to be mystical if you don't want it to be. It can be the awe you feel looking at the stars, realizing just how immensely unlikely and wonderful your existence is, the gratitude that floods you after a deep breath, the wonder of remembering that you are made of stardust.

Remember, this is your dream life, and you get to decide what magic means to you!

The point is that it's something outside of your individual self, while also being the very essence of the self. As my friend Laura says, it's "the Divine Intelligence that beats our heart, that grows our babies, that heals our wounds, the knower who knows, the intuitions, the inner whispers and guidance." To me, it's a force that feels pure, benevolent, and somehow rooting for me. A force that wants the best not only for me, but for all of existence.

I personally go back and forth between being deeply spiritual and deeply in awe of the physical world. There are times where I feel a deep sense of connection to magic, to the divine. Then there are times that I don't, and that's ok. Because in those moments I choose to reflect on just how amazing the human experience is.

Humans, you see, are an impractical species. Furless, with few natural abilities other than our big old brain and manual dexterity. Our bodies bruise easily, and even the very act of giving life in the past cost many mothers their own. We have relatively specialized diets, can drive ourselves into depression and madness, and diseases and wars have wiped out large swathes of the population. And yet, we rise. Every single time. Improbably, humans have a knack for surviving all that we encounter, rebuilding everything we lose, inventing new wonders, and loving more deeply with each setback we suffer… and that keeps me in constant awe.

If you've never given a lot of thought to your something greater before, try this:

- Think about a time you felt deeply at peace, as if the world had wrapped you in a warm blanket.
- Remember a time you felt deeply loved. Pure love is the perfect space to witness the divine.
- Recall a moment when you were in awe: at nature, art, music, or a human act of kindness.
- Ask yourself: what did I feel connected to at that moment?

Whatever name or form it takes for you, let it be personal. Let it be yours. All you have to do is give it a name (for easy reference) and lock into the feeling it gives you. Personally, I choose to call it the divine.

LIVING IN THE RESONANCE

When you're connected to something greater, life starts to resonate. You start to notice the beauty in everything: the steam curling from a coffee cup, sunlight catching in a puddle, the perfect lyric in a song, or the way the dew sparkles on flowers and clean cars. The love, kindness, and tenderness of people and creatures that cross your path. They all hit you like little miracles.

When you're connected to something greater, you start moving through your days with a kind of quiet anticipation, wondering: "What beautiful thing will happen next?" That's our reticular activating system working in the most wonderful way, picking up on and tuning into the magic that has always been there.

Sometimes that magic shows up in the big, obvious ways: a long-awaited dream coming true, a chance encounter that changes your life. Other times it's subtler: the way your cat curls into the exact shape of your lap, the smell of bread baking, the comfort of a friend's voice on the phone.

When you practice noticing it, you realize the magic was never missing. You just haven't been living in the right frequency to notice it.

The Emotional Guidance Scale of low- and high-vibration feelings comes from the Abraham-Hicks teachings of Esther and Jerry Hicks, who suggest that the more we resonate with high-vibration emotions, the more we attract. It's like charging up a magnet to attract more of its kind.

At the bottom of their chart are the low vibrations: anger, revenge, hatred, rage, jealousy, insecurity, guilt, unworthiness, fear, grief, depression, despair, powerlessness.

Do those sound familiar? Those are the very emotions we worked through in the first part of this book!

In the middle are the vibrational energies of: boredom, pessimism, frustration, irritation, impatience, overwhelm, disappointment, doubt, worry, blame, discouragement.

Those should sound familiar to you, too! You know, in the sense that we've created a life that minimizes these feelings, because we already know how to process them.

And then, there are the high-vibration feelings: joy, appreciation, empowerment, freedom, love, passion, enthusiasm, eagerness, happiness, positive expectation, belief, optimism, hopefulness, satisfaction, contentment, and fulfillment.

These we've worked on as well, and they are the ones we want to continue to tap into on a daily basis to supercharge us emotionally, but also vibrationally.

Personally, I believe that all of these emotions have a place in our lives, whether it is to guide us or inspire us. By working through the lower-vibration feelings, often given to us by our environment, we can fully claim the high-vibration feelings that let magic, love, and joy flow into our lives if we stay attuned to them.

With that in mind, it's time to set your days up for magic! Here are some rituals that you can practice every single day in order to stay in a receptive, magical, and joyous state.

Create Rituals of Connection

When we think of rituals, we often think about witchcraft and spells, but rituals are basically just our habits that we've infused with our own sense of magic. So think about what lights you up. Is it connecting with a friend or colleague? A moment of peace to yourself in the morning? Choosing the perfect gemstone earrings to supercharge your day?

Whatever it may be, create a small ritual you can practice every day to keep you in high vibration.

Here are some examples:

Indulge in small pleasures. Buy yourself the perfect coffee cup and have it ready for your morning brew. I love cacao ceremonies, so I always drink my morning coffee with raw cacao and local honey, give gratitude to the flowers and the bees, and just enjoy the moment of peace and possibility before the day hits.

Practice positive gratitude. Of all these rituals, this is the one I'd never skip. Gratitude gets dismissed as a greeting-card word, but done deliberately it genuinely reshapes how you experience your life, and in energetic terms it sets the frequency for receiving more of what you're grateful for. Two rules make the difference. First, actually feel it, don't just list it; let the warmth land in your body before you move on. Second, be specific: not "I'm grateful for my family," but "I'm grateful for the way my son laughed so hard at dinner that he snorted."

Each night, write three specific things and why, then close your eyes, breathe, and let the gratitude radiate through you and out into the world. My friends Rebecca and Laura started trading daily gratitudes during a brutal stretch at work, and it grounded them and reminded them the world is full of good people and good things. Simple, and over time it magnetizes more of exactly this.

Ask for signs from the universe, and watch your spirit guides (and/or reticular activating system!) get to work. Whether it's an angel number or a feather, asking your something greater is a wonderful way to welcome magic and miracles into your everyday life. For me, a feather means that my godmother Ingrid is watching over me, and makes me feel loved and protected whenever I spot one.

Talk to the universe about everything. Get still or grab a journal and ask your questions. Share your concerns and ask for help. When we sit in stillness and allow the noise of the day to fade into the background, we often receive the very answer that we were looking for.

Ask your future or higher self. Hypnotist Dolores Cannon taught her students a winning formula, wherein you get still, ask your higher or future self for one precise instruction to help you reach your goal. Write it down in exact words. Act on it within 24 hours. Try it, and you'll be amazed at what you already know!

Start a wow practice. Set a timer three times a day (or pair it with your meals or commute) and look for something that makes you say wow. Even if you're stuck in traffic, or down with a cold, this practice will keep you in a high vibration and with magic in your heart.

These small practices not only fill your day with magic, but can also be a reset button on

those mornings when you wake up cranky, tired, and doubtful. They remind us that the magic hasn't disappeared, but that we just needed to tune back into it.

DANCING WITH THE DIVINE

Living in connection with something greater doesn't mean you're outsourcing your life, and your luck, to fate. In most cases, you can't just speak a dream into the world and have it appear overnight. How cool, and how utterly boring would that be?

No, living in connection is more like dancing with the infinite. Infinite opportunity, infinite potential, infinite surprises.

Like a dance, there are two of you. The you who shows up and makes a request. You have taken the first step. The universe responds by taking its own step. Perhaps it sends you an inspired idea, a nudge, or a chance encounter. Then, it's your turn to act on it. Do you take a step backwards, afraid of trusting, or do you try to change the dance from a salsa to a foxtrot? Or, perhaps, do you lean gently on the universe's shoulder, feel its arms supporting you, and go in for the dip, knowing that you are fully supported?

When we come to look at our relationship with the divine as a dance, rather than a next-day delivery service, we open ourselves up to all that it has to offer. This is why we always talk about trust and surrender in the spiritual communities, and this one is particularly hard to grasp for those of us who have spent our lives in anticipation and people-pleasing manipulations to avoid being disappointed and hurt.

So let's break those two concepts down.

Trust is the promise that the universe has our back and is acting in our highest good. That means that the challenges we've met weren't punishments, but opportunities to grow. That the scary idea we have is not meant to hone us into sharp weapons, but is a chance for us to grow and blossom into the highest version of ourselves, living in the most joyous and abundant timeline we can.

If you have trust issues, don't despair! First, go back and revisit the work you did on rewriting your story, where you realized that every experience can serve a higher purpose. Remind yourself that doubt is perfectly normal, and that great things happen almost automatically when we choose to act with trust and positivity. Optimism is linked to a stronger immune system, a lower risk of heart disease, and even a longer lifespan, likely because it dials down stress hormones. It acts as a buffer against anxiety and depression, elevates your mood, and fosters calmness. It also boosts creativity, problem-solving, motivation, and productivity.

And that's just the impact of trust on our bodies, but it reaches beyond that. Socially, a positive attitude deepens relationships, attracts supportive connections, and creates a ripple effect of encouragement that elevates everyone involved.

When looking at it that way, being trusting of the universe, even if you're still learning to do so, seems like the most logical way to exist.

Surrender, to me, is the second part of trusting. If we go back to our dance metaphor, trust is

the act of allowing the dip, surrender is relaxing into it, knowing that what comes next is going to be just as amazing.

You see, many people have a vision of what they want when first tapping into the magic. The universe will not always deliver on it, especially if you are not ready for it. If, for instance, you are trying to manifest money from fear, the universe may deliver another challenge to help you move past that fear, or deliver in small doses. You pray for a jackpot, and you win three dollars.

Instead of trying to manifest one thing, learn to dance with the universe. Learn to lead the direction and to be led when the dance shifts. Bring your energy into what you want to feel, because feelings and vibrations are the language that the universe speaks.

If you want to manifest money, focus on what you would feel like if you had that money. Would you feel peaceful? Ecstatic? Take that feeling and let it channel through your body. Get excited. And then, surrender. Surrender the image of how it has to come to you, what form it will take. Focus on the feeling, and enjoy the dance with the universe. Maybe it will nudge you to buy that lottery ticket, or maybe it will gently lead you back to a long-lost dream, such as a book you were always meant to write.

You will know in your bones where it's leading you when everything begins to buzz and you start getting excited. You know that phrase "follow your bliss"? I suspect that this feeling is what author Joseph Campbell was talking about.

So surrender. Surrender the shape and form of the object, surrender to the dance, and follow the lead. Every step you take will lead you closer to the thing you're trying to manifest, and the bolder the step, the faster the universe will lead you there.

YOUR BURDEN WAS NEVER YOURS TO CARRY ALONE

You were never meant to carry everything alone. When you reflect back on your life from the perspective that you've always been supported, you likely find yourself noticing that something or someone has always been there to protect, encourage, and love you. A teacher who noticed your gifts, an aunt who believed in your magic, a twist of fate that landed you in the right place at the right time, or kept you out of harm's way.

Never have I felt this more than on a crisp November afternoon when my life was falling apart. My marriage was on its deathbed. My partner was angry. I was angry. We'd been trying to fix it but we'd reached the point where it was unsalvageable. I was managing a spiraling husband, two small kids, and a hyper-toxic (but very lucrative) work situation, and I was broken, looking for answers in everything and everyone.

That day my husband called me out of the blue and asked to meet up for a coffee. We sat outside and he let loose, drowning me in shame and anger. It was one of the worst moments of my life. When he left, I sat outside, fighting back the tears, utterly destroyed and humiliated. A car had just pulled out, but pulled back into its parking spot and a woman emerged. She was fabulous! Stylish, composed, powerful… everything I thought I'd be at this point in my life. She walked straight up to me and said: "Do you need a hug? You look like you really need a hug." I sheepishly admitted that I did and this angel held me as I wept, then looked into my eyes and told me that this was the hard part, and that no matter what it was, it would turn out O.K. Better than O.K. I knew that she knew, and I believed her wholeheartedly. It was also in that moment that I understood that everyone had it in them to transform their lives.

From that moment forward, I borrowed her strength and kindness, and took the steps I needed to unravel my mess of a life, because those few minutes convinced me that I was always protected and guided. I bought a small bracelet to remind me of her, and only stopped wearing it when my niece stopped to admire it. The message had been seeded in my heart, so I was happy to pass it on to her.

When you look at your life through the lens of universal resonance and divine punctuality, with an open heart, things just start making sense. The blessings and the challenges all line up into a beautiful narrative, a path of learning, growth, and experience so intricate that you yourself could never have thought it up.

And the something greater would never send you on such an adventure if it wasn't able to support you. When you begin to trust it and do the work (believe, feel, act and surrender) you begin to trust life, and more importantly, your own capacity to meet it. It's not just thinking, "I can do hard things." It's knowing it, in your bones. You've been through challenges and come out the other side. You've followed through on promises you made to yourself. You've made decisions based not on fear or people-pleasing, but on what actually serves you.

That kind of self-trust is rare. It's precious. It's the foundation of a life you don't have to escape from. One you love waking up to every single morning.

And then, things start to expand. Your life doesn't necessarily get easier, but your capability expands, and you also begin to realize that while you can create the life of your dreams there are big things that you cannot change. When you trust yourself *and* you trust something bigger, that's when your relationship to life and yourself fundamentally changes. In fact, I'd argue that everything changes.

It's not that challenges vanish. It's that they feel different. The immovable rock in your path is no longer a personal failure, it's just a bend in the road. The massive decision in front of you isn't a minefield, but a hallway full of doors, and you only need to choose the next one.

And opportunities? They start multiplying. You stop seeing them as rare, one-shot miracles, and start seeing them as a natural part of life's rhythm, like waves on the shore, arriving endlessly.

On a practical level, trusting something bigger interrupts the mental loop of over-responsibility. You stop believing you must control every variable, and that frees up space for creative thinking and problem-solving. It's the same relief you feel when you finally write the to-do list down and your brain stops rehearsing it all night: when part of the load gets to rest somewhere outside your head, your mind has more capacity for clarity and innovation.

Neuroscience also tells us that feeling supported, whether by other people or by a greater power, lowers stress hormones and increases resilience. This is the same principle behind why people in close, trusting relationships tend to recover from setbacks faster. That sense of "I'm not alone in this" has a measurable impact on your physical and emotional well-being.

Spiritually it's like sharing a backpack with a giant. You still carry the essentials, but the greater thing lifts the heaviest load. And because you're lighter, you can notice more along the way, the view, the breeze, the surprising beauty you'd have missed if you were only staring at your feet under the strain, wondering when you'll finally arrive.

Your relationship with the divine is a partnership, not a handoff. You can't just hand your work and your desires to the universe, because the universe created you to create miracles on earth. It has no physical form and can only act through our human form. When you look at it through that perspective, you realize that your *Me First!* life, in which you realize your dreams and make your impact, is in fact the greatest way to honor the divine.

Here are some ways in which you can live in resonance with the universe every single day.

Each morning, ask yourself: *What's mine to carry today?*

Then ask: *What can I hand over?*

My dear friend and coach Laura Wallof keeps a dual to-do list. Every morning when she sits down to plan her day, she writes a to-do list for herself, and one for the universe. She'll work on the tangible, real world things, like the phone call, the research, and the boundary-setting. The universe is called in to work on the outcome and the timing, and sometimes even the miracles that she is calling in. She then goes through the day knowing that the universe is supporting her and working on the impossible on her behalf.

Another exercise you can do is to close your eyes, and imagine handing the difficult or

impossible things over to the universe. Imagine placing the things into large, loving hands, and hearing someone tell you: "Don't worry, I'll take care of this." Exhale and feel the relief, and trust that something with immeasurable power is handling it on your behalf.

Then, write down the moments where things worked out better than you could have planned, or where unexpected help arrived. This is how you train your mind to notice that the greater thing is already in motion with you.

Finally, when something goes right, thank yourself for showing up and the divine for the assist. That acknowledgement keeps the partnership alive.

When you really let yourself trust something bigger, you start noticing little winks from the world. A friend texts just when you're thinking of them. The exact solution you needed pops up in a random article. A delay turns out to save you from a bigger problem.

Some will call it coincidence. Others will call it divine punctuality. You don't need to decide which is right. You only need to stay open enough to recognize when it's happening, and to let those moments reinforce your trust.

YOU ARE PART OF SOMETHING GREATER

There's a kind of peace that comes when you realize you're not floating alone in a cold, indifferent universe. You are a thread of the divine fabric that weaves the miracle of our existence. You are part of something vast and interconnected, something that existed before you arrived and will keep expanding long after you're gone. It's the difference between standing on a shoreline feeling small and standing there realizing you are the tide, the moon, the salt, and the wind all at once.

Feeling part of something greater quiets the part of you that thinks you have to hold up the entire sky by yourself. It replaces "What's the point?" with "I'm part of the point." It gives context to your efforts, meaning to your choices, and comfort in the messy parts of life.

You stop feeling like a single note and start feeling like part of the song. And no, this isn't about erasing your individuality or loading you up with responsibility to care for everything that happens around you. It's about recognizing the symphony you're contributing to. That recognition comes with a surge of belonging, purpose, and possibility.

Every action you take sends out ripples, and those ripples travel farther than you will ever know. Have you ever heard of the butterfly effect? It's a concept taken from chaos theory (and yes, I appreciate the irony) describing how a small change in one part of a system can create big differences elsewhere. The metaphor says that a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil could set off a chain of events that changes the weather in Texas.

In real life, your wing flaps might be:

- A conversation that inspires someone to take a leap.
- A kind word that keeps a stranger from giving up on a hard day.
- A boundary that models self-respect for someone watching from the sidelines.
- Standing tall in a situation or a room where your strength changes the tone.
- Eye contact and a smile that acknowledges that you see someone's presence and value.

You may never see the results. But they're there, unfolding in ways that connect to thousands of other lives, like threads in an infinite tapestry.

On a biological level, you are connected to everything around you. The carbon in your bones came from ancient stars. The oxygen you inhale is released by trees and phytoplankton. The microbiome in your body shares DNA with life forms that predate humans by billions of years.

Neuroscience adds another layer: mirror neurons in your brain fire when you witness someone else's experience, which is why emotions like joy, compassion, and even courage are

contagious. Your internal state affects the people around you, which in turn affects the people around them.

This isn't just poetic, it's measurable. Studies on emotional contagion show that happiness, kindness, and even acts of cooperation spread through social networks in patterns similar to viruses.

And yes, this chapter is about spirituality and soul, but what could give you more trust in the divine and your own powers than knowing that we are all connected, and vibrating together? To me, this is the sign that no matter where we came from, we are designed for connectivity and happiness. The sign that pursuing the happiest, most aligned, and most powerful version of yourself is nothing short of a divine mission. That is our real purpose.

So how do we start tapping into this amazing sense of connectivity for elevating our soul and becoming the best version of ourselves?

For me, I make a conscious effort to fill every problem, every room I walk into, and every interaction I have with love.

For the rooms and the conversations, I imagine filling my heart with love and then beaming it out to the people in the room. I may think to myself: "You deserve happiness. You deserve love." If the room is a little tense I might imagine myself zapping the love right into them, like the Pokémon Pikachu or Harry Potter.

For more challenging situations, I call upon Ho'oponopono, the ancient Hawaiian practice of reconciliation and forgiveness that centers on restoring harmony within oneself and with others. The word roughly translates to "to make right," and its philosophy holds that healing the world begins by healing what is inside you.

Unlike traditional apology or therapy, Ho'oponopono views every conflict as a reflection of internal imbalance, so the act of forgiveness becomes an inner cleansing rather than an external correction. At its heart, it's a simple yet profound reminder that peace isn't something we receive from others; it's something we create by taking radical responsibility for our own thoughts and energy.

To practice it, I simply visualize the person or situation that is challenging me and repeat the four key phrases: "I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you. I love you."

Now, to quote a dear friend of mine: "Why should I forgive them?!" (I'm paraphrasing. She actually used much more colorful language!)

Well, first and foremost, unprocessed anger and resentment are like poison. Poison that someone gave us and we choose to keep drinking. Once we've deployed anger to get out of a bad situation, it's time to empty that vessel and fill it with love. Second, this process is about taking the entire healing process into your own hands. There are people who are not ready to change, no matter how ready you are. People who swear they did nothing wrong will never apologize. They'd rather be struck by lightning than apologize. By practicing Ho'oponopono, you take the entire process into your own hands and release it. The petty part of me loves that I can just do it all on my own, without permission, without input. I have the power to wipe out karmic ties whether they like it or not.

I was skeptical at first, but desperate. The perfect fertile soil for the unfamiliar concept to

grow roots, and so I began practicing it every night on my challenges. It took a moment for the change to happen, and it started from within. I grew softer and more forgiving, which released the energy and made the problems fade. My ex-husband mellowed out and became a good dad again, my finances improved, and even my terror of a neighbor, who had shown up on my doorstep at 8 a.m. to yell at me on a number of occasions, came over one day to make peace. Other people simply faded from my life. So as challenging as it seems to try and release that energy, this is one practice I recommend to everyone struggling with impossible problems.

CONNECT TO THE DIVINE

If you want to connect to the divine, the first thing you need to learn isn't numerology, how to place crystals, or how to pray. No, the first thing you need to learn is to become silent.

We live in a world where silence is treated like an empty space to be filled. Elevators have music. Waiting rooms have TVs. The moment we feel a gap in our attention, we reach for our phone. This constant noise, both external and internal, makes it challenging to notice and hear the subtle messages from the universe, which is why tapping into stillness is the fastest way to reconnect with it.

When you strip away the noise, something fascinating happens:

- Your breathing slows.
- Your thoughts begin to space out.
- You notice details you usually miss.

This isn't just sensory awareness. It's the mind's version of clearing a cluttered desk so something new can be placed there, or so that you might find a sticky note the divine left there a few months back.

Neuroscience tells us that in moments of quiet, the brain's default mode network activates. This is the same network involved in self-reflection, memory integration, and creative insight. In other words, when you get quiet, you open the channel not just to yourself, but to the bigger something that can speak through your intuition and signs.

At first, when you sit in silence, you'll mostly hear you. Your worries. Your mental grocery list. That awkward conversation from three days ago. The noise isn't the message. It's the static clearing from the frequency. Beneath it is a steady undercurrent that's been there all along, waiting for enough quiet to be heard. It's the space where you shift from an externally-focused being to an internally-focused soul. This is normal, it's your soul clearing its throat.

When you stay with it, you notice a shift. Thoughts feel less frantic. Insights start to drop in that you didn't consciously think up. Ideas come fully formed, like they've been delivered. You might feel a presence, a warmth, or just a deep knowing.

And when you master it, you'll start to get the downloads. The clear, neon-lit messages from the universe and your higher self or your guardian angels telling you exactly what you need to know. Some people get healing visions, some get blueprints for their business. Whatever it is, you'll know it's arrived when you feel a full-bodied rush of excitement that leaves you buzzing and tingling all over.

When you're ready to connect to the divine, here is how you can get started, even if you dislike meditation.

Practice micro moments. If silence feels uncomfortable at first, you're not doing it wrong.

You're simply not used to it, like a muscle that hasn't been worked in a while, if ever. The trick is to stay a little longer than you want to, just enough to stretch your tolerance. Start with one or two minutes before you check your phone in the morning, or before getting out of the car.

You can also practice sound fading, where you sit with eyes closed and listen to all of the noises around you. Start noticing the moments of quiet in between and allow them to expand until the other noises begin to fade from your awareness.

You can also take moments of silence in your daily routine, like taking your headphones out on your walk and just being present in nature for a few minutes. Breathe in the air, admire the trees, and just be with the silence.

When you feel connected to the divine, time feels like it's slowing down. Like a bubble has opened up where you're connected to something greater. That is the space where you can hear and speak to the divine. This is the space where you can ask for and begin to welcome miracles into your life.

You see, connecting to spirit isn't about learning a new language, it's about remembering how to listen. Tuning back into the silence that speaks volumes. This silence is not empty. It's full of answers. Full of nudges. Full of the next breadcrumb on your path. And the more you choose it, the more you'll hear, not just yourself, but the greater thing that's been speaking to you all along.

BLOW YOUR POSSIBILITIES WIDE OPEN

Remember the reticular activating system? Your brain's little gatekeeper that decides which of the millions of sensory inputs you get each second are worth noticing? We talked about how it filters for what you've trained it to find: the car you're thinking of buying, the song you suddenly hear everywhere, the opportunities you've primed yourself to look for. Now here's the part that gets really exciting.

Believing in something bigger, whatever "bigger" is for you, doesn't just nudge you to look for more good things. It blows the possibilities wide open!

If your reticular activating system is like a keyhole, most people spend their lives peeking through a narrow slit. They only see what their past experiences, current mood, and daily habits tell them to expect. You've already tuned it to see the positive things in life. That's an amazing start! Now we're ready to expand this superpower from a keyhole into a panoramic view!

You see, you can also train your reticular activating system to sense great things, which starts to pull you into the right place at the right time. In a way, it's like giving the divine permission to tap into all of your senses to show you where the magic is.

So start prompting your higher self to show you things. You can use phrases like:

- "Universe, show me something magical today!"
- "Universe, connect me to new opportunities!"
- "Universe, show me true love in everything so it starts flowing into my life!"
- "Universe, why is everything working together for my good?" (a question borrowed from Reverend Michael Beckwith, whose books are life changing!)

And then wait for the magic to manifest, knowing it's already done, eyes (and reticular activating system) wide open!

You may feel the pull toward the conversation you randomly strike up at the café. You notice the urge to pick up the book you've never heard of before, only to find the sentence that feels written just for you. You pay attention when someone's name comes to mind for no reason, and reaching out leads to the perfect connection.

And then, the real magic happens. You stop seeing the world as a series of random events and start seeing it as a living conversation. A dance. You show up curious instead of anxious. You feel supported instead of alone.

In infinite energy, anything feels possible, not because you can control everything, but because you're willing to meet whatever comes with openness and creativity. You start to trust the unfolding, even when you don't know the next step.

MANIFEST ANYTHING YOU DESIRE

A quick note before we begin, because I promised you honesty back at the start of this part. This chapter speaks the language of energy, frequency, and vibration. If that's your dialect, wonderful. If it isn't, translate as you go: "vibration" is the mood and nervous-system state you carry into a room, and "alignment" is what happens when your beliefs, your feelings, and your actions finally point the same direction. Read it whichever way keeps you leaning in. The practice underneath is the same.

Manifestation isn't about wishing for what you want and waiting for the universe to deliver it. It's about aligning the frequency of your energy and your actions with those of what you desire. You see, manifestation isn't about control, but rather about coherence. It's the art of becoming a vibrational match to the life you want to live.

That is why we started our journey by getting you out of survival mode. You cannot manifest from fear. You cannot consciously create when your nervous system believes you're in danger. When your body is locked in fight, flight, freeze, or fawn, every ounce of energy is devoted to protection, not expansion. Your subconscious is busy scanning for threats, not miracles. Trying to manifest from that state is like trying to broadcast music through a radio wrapped in tin foil. The signal barely gets through, and when it does, you'll likely get a scrambled or fragmented version of what you want.

So the first step to becoming a deliberate creator was regulation. You made your body feel safe again, you cleared your mind, you made space, and then you created a vision. When you did this, both the parts of your brain and your being that are responsible for creating and receiving turned back on. You have activated the mechanics of manifestation.

Dolores Cannon described human beings as multidimensional souls having a temporary human experience. In her work, she found that we hold the blueprint for infinite potential within our subconscious mind, but only when we quiet the noise of fear can we access it.

Esther Hicks says it differently: "You are a vibrational being in a vibrational universe." Think of it this way: when you're resentful, anxious, or self-doubting, you act smaller, notice less, and push opportunities away without meaning to. When you feel gratitude, joy, and certainty, you show up open, awake, and someone people want to be around. Call it magnetism or call it biology. Either way, your state shapes what comes toward you.

The language of the universe isn't words or math, it's vibration. Your emotions are the translator. If you want to know what you're manifesting, don't look at your vision board. Look at how you feel. Emotions are data, not decoration. When you feel tightness in your chest or heaviness in your gut, your body is saying, "This thought is out of alignment with your higher frequency." When you feel excitement, peace, or love, that's your internal tuning fork humming in resonance with your desire.

So, how do you actually manifest?

It begins with clarity. You already did the core work when you decided what you want. When you are clear on this one piece, your soul and subconscious begin to reorganize around that truth.

Next, feel it. This is the step most people skip. You cannot think your way into manifestation. You must feel your way there. The way you feel is your point of attraction. So close your eyes and ask: what does it feel like to already have it? Where in your body can you sense that vibration? Is it small? Send more energy into it. You might have to stretch your capability a little bit to make your dreams fit. Is it in your chest, your belly, your hands? Amplify that feeling until it fills your whole being. Whatever frequency you hold most often is the one that starts to shape your choices, your presence, and what you reach for. The more you practice the feeling of abundance, love, freedom, or success, the more naturally you move toward it, and it toward you.

But remember: feeling good is not the same as avoidance. Challenges are part of the curriculum of the soul and are designed to refine your vibration and to help you expand and grow into the person your soul wants to become.

When something doesn't manifest right away, it's not failure. It's feedback. The universe might be saying, "There's still some static in your frequency." Or "I have something better in mind for you." Instead of collapsing into frustration, get curious. Where are you still holding fear? Where are you still grasping instead of allowing? Is there an alternative solution you might be missing? Is the divine asking you to realize something? To create something?

The paradox of manifestation is that you must want it deeply, and simultaneously let go of needing it. Needing creates resistance. It says, "I don't have it yet," and that signal keeps you stuck in lack.

Allowing, on the other hand, says, "I know it's mine; I'm just aligning with it." This is why people often manifest easily when they stop obsessing. The moment you relax, the signal clears. That's when synchronicity begins to unfold: the right person calls, the opportunity lands, the idea appears out of nowhere.

Your job is not to force the how. Your job is to hold the vibration. Every time you doubt, you dim your signal. Every time you worry, you distort it. Every time you anxiously demand a result, you're digging up a seed that's been planted and needs to sprout in its own time. Every time you come back to gratitude, joy, or peace, you brighten it again. Think of your vibration as a magnet: it doesn't chase, it attracts.

The easiest way to do this is to make it part of your routine. This could be a morning ritual, a sticky note, a bracelet, a favorite perfume, or a bookmark. Place small reminders throughout your life that the miracle of creation is all around you.

The most powerful manifestors are those who have learned to regulate their state. They know that their body is the instrument through which energy flows. They nourish it, rest it, and listen to it. They don't ignore pain; they transmute it. They don't suppress emotion; they alchemize it into clarity. They understand that their physical and energetic systems are one and the same.

Once you master this part, you are ready for the final step: the so-called quantum leap.

YOUR QUANTUM LEAP

If you've been online in the past few years, you've likely heard about a quantum leap, that magic moment where life changes completely and for the better, in a way you could have never predicted. And then, if you were curious like me, you dug a little deeper into the matter and realized that it's not just something that happens, but rather the explosive transition that happens when your energy, your focus, your faith, and your actions are so closely aligned and so powerfully magnified that your existence can't help but shift, quickly and dramatically.

Imagine! You wake up and boom! You are living in that *Me First!* life you started creating the moment you picked up this book. Whether you're spiritually inclined or not, this is a true possibility.

Fair warning: I'm borrowing the word "quantum" the way the whole internet does, as a metaphor for a sudden, dramatic leap, not as a claim about particle physics. The physicists can keep their equations. We're after the leap.

Now there are two ways to achieve a quantum leap: the practical way or the spiritual way. Let's look at both of them.

In the practical way, the quantum leap happens when you've become the person you set out to be, and, due to the actions you take and the thoughts you think that empower those actions, your life shifts. The things holding you back fall away, and the things you desire come within your reach.

My friend, as we're coming to the end of this book and the beginning of your *Me First!* journey, you are 100% ready for a quantum leap. You are ready to speak up, take action, and seize your moment, and doing those things with your full being is exactly what makes a quantum leap happen. The world abides by the laws of nature, and when you take that aligned action, the world can't help but follow suit and give you what you ask for. You have become the person who is the vibrational and real life match for that quantum leap, and therefore, it, or something else, will have no choice but to materialize.

In the spiritual way, a quantum leap works much in the same way. You become the very person, body, mind, and soul that matches the reality you desire. Some spiritual traditions, including Kabbalah, teach that we live among parallel realities, and that when we tap into higher states of being, we shift onto a higher timeline. I love David Ghiyam's metaphor of the movie: we are still in the movie of our life, but as we elevate, the cast, setting, and the script writers improve.

Regardless of which version you prefer, quantum leaps involve the same steps: belief, feeling, inspired action, and surrender.

- **Belief:** This one is simple. You have to believe that a quantum leap is possible. This opens up your behavior and your energy field. Simple, right?

- **Feeling:** You have to feel into the new version of your life. Being happy, ecstatic, confident, and fearless will fuel the inspired action you're about to take so that you can show up fully.
- **Inspired Action:** Take action towards your vision. Inspired, aligned actions change the trajectory, and your momentum will be fueled by them. The way I like to think of it is that we're playing a game of chess. Neither you nor the universe knows how it will play out until you make a move. Then it makes a move, and you respond to that move. And that is when the magic unfolds. So take that first step!
- **Surrender:** Surrender doesn't mean that you don't care whether it happens or not, it means that you trust that amazing things will happen, feeding back into step 1, belief, and fueling an upward spiral of quantum momentum.

So, why not give it a try? That ideal, *Me First!* life you're longing to live? Start living it now. Believe that it's possible, feel how good it can feel, take consistent action towards it, and surrender and trust that it is happening, because it is.

Now, a word of caution: your quantum leap may not be what you asked for… at first! I've spent years exploring this topic, in workshops, in courses, and in community with coaches, teachers, and fellow seekers, and I've seen incredible results in the groups I've been part of. What do they all have in common? Well, first, they all follow the above framework. But the other surprising thing is that few quantum leaps looked like the original intention, but were always so much better, and that's because in our starting states, we often lack the capability to see just how good it can get.

In multiple instances, I've seen people wake up with newfound abilities, whether the ability to express themselves or psychic gifts. Those psychic gifts were rarely on the list of what people thought they desired, but ended up paving the way to the things they did desire, such as abundant income, or a new house. In more than one instance, I have also seen people get fired. Sometimes suddenly and unexpectedly, sometimes because they leaned too hard into their self-worth. And you know what happened then? Dream offers, inspired ideas, and momentous change.

The same goes for toxic relationships that suddenly vanished or blew up, but unlocked deep self-love and incredible new relationships.

Now, I won't pretend those moments felt like blessings while they were happening. A lost job and a blown-up relationship are genuinely frightening, and if you're in the thick of one right now, the fear is real and it deserves your compassion, not a bypass. What I'm describing is the view from further down the road, once the dust settled and people could see where the ground had shifted them. The gift is often only visible in hindsight.

Regardless of where you land on this spectrum, go back to the process. Believe, feel, take action, and surrender. Allow things to change, and you'll find your reality shifting faster than you ever thought possible.

THE ME FIRST! METHOD AT A GLANCE

You just lived it, but transformation loves a map. Here is a summary of the whole journey. Come back to this page whenever life gets loud.

STEP ONE: WAKE UP.

See what people-pleasing is really costing you, in health, time, money, and dreams. Know your people-pleasing type, and remember that your type is your gift pointed in the wrong direction. Selfish stops being a dirty word here.

STEP TWO: RECLAIM YOUR DREAM.

Run your Life Audit, make peace with your past, and dream selfishly. You can't chase what you can't name. Name it, then claim it.

STEP THREE: RECALIBRATE YOUR BODY.

You cannot think your way into a new life while your body is stuck in survival mode. Regulate your nervous system, make friends with your worst feelings, name them, release them, and tie up your loose ends.

STEP FOUR: REPROGRAM YOUR MIND.

Find the old code, rewrite it, and reinforce it with action. Feed your intuition, starve your ANTs, keep your promises to yourself, and speak the phrases that set you free. Boundaries like a boss, always.

STEP FIVE: REIGNITE YOUR SOUL.

With a calm body and a clear mind, reconnect to your magic. Gratitude, resonance, surrender, and the courage to believe, act, and leap. Feedback, not failure.

READY, SET, PARKING BRAKE OFF!

Before you go, one last truth, because it's the one that decides whether any of this sticks. Transformation isn't a single lightning-bolt moment. It's a handful of small steps, taken again and again, even on the days you're walking through mud. That's why it's called a practice, not a program and not a solution. There's no finish line where you've "mastered" it, because you're always growing, and repetition, not perfection, is the whole path.

Here's where most people get stuck: a practice can feel boring, and right when it does, the ego whispers, "If it hasn't worked yet, maybe it never will." That whisper shows up right before the breakthrough. So when boredom creeps in, don't quit. That's just your brain making the new way automatic, which is exactly what you want. Keep going.

My friends, we've done it, and you are now ready to join me in living your best, *Me First!* life!

Before I set you loose on the world, I want to impart to you some final words of wisdom: Remember to take your parking brake off!

Have you ever driven a car with the parking brake on?

Sure, it moves, but every acceleration feels like a struggle. Your engine whines, the wheels drag, and before you know it, you start to feel and smell the problem. You're going somewhere, but you're making it much harder than it should be.

When we step into a new life, we often approach some areas with our parking brake on. We take baby steps, we doubt ourselves, we fill our minds with what-ifs and backup plans. We postpone reaching our goal and end up at the mechanic's more than we want to. Oh, and did I mention it ruins the ride?

If there is any ounce of you that's feeling hesitant to take the leap, check to see if your parking brake is pulled, and remember that body, mind, and soul, you are ready to live the life of your dreams.

If you're giving life a maybe, life will give you a maybe.

But when you release the parking brake and shift into yes, life and the universe will flash their biggest smile and meet you with YES! energy in return.

Remember, you have everything within you to live your dream life. You have every tool you need, and you've even tapped into the divine to back you up in your plans. Now, there is only one thing holding you back, and that's you.

So if and when you feel that pull of hesitation, remind yourself:

I put myself first. Always.
Not because I don't care about you.
But because I care about me.

I don't set myself on fire to keep anyone warm.
I don't wear exhaustion as a badge of honor.
I don't perform for approval.

I take rest without guilt.
Pleasure without apology.
Success without permission.

I say no when it's a no.
I say yes only when it feeds me.
I say nothing when silence serves me.
And I speak loud when truth demands it.

I am not your fixer, your cushion, or your clean-up crew.
I will not shrink so you can take up more space.
I will not carry your burdens because you can't or won't.

I was not born to be nice.
I was born to be real.
To be whole.
To be free.

I don't ask for space. I take it.
I don't wait to be chosen. I choose myself.
I don't dim my light because it blinds you. Put on shades or turn away.

Call it selfish.
Call it too much.
Call it whatever you want.
I call it mine.
I call it my birthright.
I call it my one shot at living the life that I know is mine.

The world needs your greatness, so go! Live your *Me First!* life!
Fully and unapologetically.
I can't wait to see what you make of it!

ONE LAST ME FIRST! MOVE

Before you go set your world on fire (the good kind), I'm going to model the very thing this book taught: I'm going to ask for what I want. No apology, no shrinking. Watch how easy it looks.

PASS THE LIGHT

Somewhere out there is a woman searching for answers at 2 a.m. Your honest review is how she finds this book. It takes two minutes, and it's the purest lighthouse move there is: you shine, she finds her way. Please leave one wherever you bought this book.

GET YOUR FREE WORKBOOK

The *Me First!* Workbook and the people-pleasing type quiz are waiting for you at www.JenniferThome.com. Every exercise in this book, printable and in one place, plus bonus materials I couldn't fit between these covers. It's free, because your transformation shouldn't wait for a budget line.

DON'T DO THIS ALONE

If this book lit something in you and you want it to stay lit, this is exactly what I do. Come find me at www.JenniferThome.com for coaching, courses, and a community of recovering people-pleasers who are done living on the sidelines, or come say hi on Instagram at instagram.com/jenniferthome. Tell me which chapter cracked you open. I read everything.

Now go. Your life is waiting, and it has excellent taste. It picked you!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As a former people-pleaser, I immediately wanted to start this section by thanking everyone who has helped me create this work. But then, a little voice rang in my ears that said: "Jen, you need to start by thanking yourself."

So let's start there. I'd like to thank every past version of myself for agreeing to sign up for this adventure. The wild child who allowed herself to be tamed so she could break free and show others how to do the same. The worn-down woman who decided to believe that her best life was still possible. The lonely woman sitting in the sauna who dared to consider that maybe life *could* be good. The burnt-out mom who worked overtime to buy our freedom. The scared writer who fought tidal waves of self-doubt and what-ifs to get to the calm waters of confidence. And the version of me that I am today. The promise keeper. The optimist. The caffeinated.

As you may have guessed, I am grateful for pretty much everyone who crossed my path on this adventure, as in hindsight, I can see the role that even the villains of my life played in creating this movement.

There are, however, a few incredible people who deserve a special thank you, in print.

Laura. My soul sister. Thank you for your energy, your passion, your compassion, and for seeing the true potential of this project and its author.

Piao. The living, breathing incarnation of this book. Thank you for appearing at the very moment I needed you to.

Rebecca. Thank you for your keen eye, your precious time, and your gentle cradle of support in the creation of this book.

Julie. This is the first book you haven't held my hand through, but that doesn't mean you didn't play a role in it. Your voice always rings in my ears, encourages me, nudges me to consider the practical solution, and reminds me how to be the best version of myself. Thank you for being my outside brain.

And of course, I want to thank you, the reader, for daring to take a chance on this adventure. I can't wait to see what fires you start with your newly discovered *Me First!* attitude.

RESEARCH MATERIAL

Throughout this book, I chose to keep the research in the background so the reading would feel like a conversation rather than a textbook. For anyone who wants to go deeper, this section gathers the key findings and the work behind them.

The entries follow the journey of the book: the cost of playing small, the power of vision, and then the body, the mind, and the soul.

Where a claim rests on a single landmark study, I have named it. Where it rests on a larger body of work, I have pointed you to a clear starting place. A few entries note where a claim comes from a popular source or a tradition rather than peer-reviewed science, so you can weigh it for yourself.

THE COST OF PLAYING SMALL

The odds of any one person being born are almost unimaginably small, often estimated at about 1 in 10 to the power of 2,685,000.
Binazir, A. (2011). Are You a Miracle? On the Probability of Your Being Born. *Huffington Post.*

People who do not negotiate their pay can lose roughly $500,000 to over $1,000,000 across a career, and women negotiate far less often than men, in part because they are judged more harshly when they do.
Babcock, L., and Laschever, S. (2003). Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide. Princeton University Press.

Chronic work stress, specifically high job strain, is linked to about a 23 percent higher risk of coronary heart disease and related deaths.
Kivimäki, M., et al. (2012). Work stress and coronary heart disease: meta-analytic and systematic reviews of the job-strain model.

The brain processes social rejection in many of the same regions it uses to process physical pain, which is why being left out can genuinely hurt.
Eisenberger, N. I., Lieberman, M. D., and Williams, K. D. (2003). Does Rejection Hurt? An fMRI Study of Social Exclusion. Science, 302, 290 to 292.

A meta-analysis of 148 studies found that weak social connection raises the risk of early death to a degree comparable with well-established risks such as smoking about 15 cigarettes a day.
Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., and Layton, J. B. (2010). Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review. PLoS Medicine, 7(7), e1000316.

Across more than eight decades of research, the quality of a person's close relationships is the strongest single predictor of long-term health and happiness, ahead of wealth, fame, or status.
Harvard Study of Adult Development. See Waldinger, R., and Schulz, M. (2023). The Good Life. Simon and Schuster.

Hiding your true self to fit in, sometimes called masking or camouflaging, is associated with higher rates of burnout and, in autistic adults, with suicidal thoughts, because concealing who you are is exhausting for anyone.
Cassidy, S., et al. (2020). Is Camouflaging Autistic Traits Associated with Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviours? Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 50, 3638 to 3648.

Emotions spread from person to person. We unconsciously pick up the moods and stress of those around us, a process known as emotional contagion.
Hatfield, E., Cacioppo, J. T., and Rapson, R. L. (1993). Emotional Contagion. Cambridge University Press.

DREAMS, VISION, AND IDENTITY

Having a clear sense of purpose predicts living longer. In a large national sample followed for many years, people with greater purpose had a lower risk of death.
Hill, P. L., and Turiano, N. A. (2014). Purpose in Life as a Predictor of Mortality Across Adulthood. Psychological Science, 25(7), 1482 to 1486.

Vividly imagining an action activates many of the same neural pathways as performing it, and mental rehearsal can measurably improve performance, which is why elite athletes train in the mind as well as the body.
Ranganathan, V. K., et al. (2004). From mental power to muscle power: gaining strength by using the mind. Neuropsychologia, 42(7), 944 to 956.

Affirmations phrased in the present tense engage brain regions tied to self-processing and reward, which helps explain why I am statements land differently than I will statements.
Cascio, C. N., et al. (2016). Self-affirmation activates brain systems associated with self-related processing and reward. Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, 11(4), 621 to 629.

Reframing your past in terms of growth rather than regret, known as cognitive reappraisal, is linked to higher life satisfaction, greater resilience, and better emotional health.
Gross, J. J., and John, O. P. (2003). Individual differences in two emotion regulation processes. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85(2), 348 to 362.

Deep engagement in a meaningful activity can produce a state of effortless absorption in which time seems to disappear, commonly called flow.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience. Harper and Row.

THE BODY

Putting a feeling into words reduces activity in the amygdala, the brain's alarm center, and engages the prefrontal cortex. Naming an emotion can calm it within seconds.
Lieberman, M. D., et al. (2007). Putting Feelings Into Words: Affect Labeling Disrupts Amygdala Activity in Response to Affective Stimuli. Psychological Science, 18(5), 421 to 428.

The body's internal signals guide good decision-making. People with stronger interoceptive awareness, the ability to sense internal states, tend to make choices better aligned with their needs.
Damasio, A. (1994). Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain. Putnam. See also research on the somatic marker hypothesis.

Most of the fibers in the vagus nerve carry information upward, from the body to the brain, rather than the other way around, which is part of why the body so often knows before the mind does.
Berthoud, H. R., and Neuhuber, W. L. (2000). Functional and chemical anatomy of the afferent vagal system. Autonomic Neuroscience, 85, 1 to 17.

The nervous system constantly shifts between states of safety, mobilization, and shutdown, and these states are felt in the body as much as the mind. This framework is known as polyvagal theory.
Porges, S. W. (2011). The Polyvagal Theory. W. W. Norton.

Unfinished tasks and open loops stay active in the mind, drawing attention and energy until they are resolved or deliberately closed. This is known as the Zeigarnik effect.
Zeigarnik, B. (1927). Das Behalten erledigter und unerledigter Handlungen. Psychologische Forschung, 9, 1 to 85.

Slow breathing, especially with a longer exhale, increases heart rate variability and shifts the body toward calm within a few minutes.
Lehrer, P. M., and Gevirtz, R. (2014). Heart rate variability biofeedback: how and why does it work? Frontiers in Psychology, 5, 756.

Dance and movement-based therapies have been shown to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety and to improve well-being.
Koch, S. C., et al. (2019). Effects of Dance Movement Therapy and Dance on Health-Related Psychological Outcomes: An Updated Meta-Analysis. Frontiers in Psychology, 10, 1806.

Chronically suppressed anger and hostility are associated with higher rates of coronary heart disease.
Chida, Y., and Steptoe, A. (2009). The Association of Anger and Hostility with Future Coronary Heart Disease: A Meta-Analytic Review. Journal of the American College of Cardiology, 53(11), 936 to 946.

A moderate amount of arousal or anxiety can sharpen focus and performance, while too much impairs it. This relationship is captured by the Yerkes-Dodson law, and more recent work shows that how we interpret stress changes its effects.
Yerkes, R. M., and Dodson, J. D. (1908). The relation of strength of stimulus to rapidity of habit-formation. Journal of Comparative Neurology and Psychology, 18, 459 to 482. See also Crum, A. J., et al. (2013) on stress mindset.

Sadness is not purely negative. Mild sad moods can increase attention to detail, improve certain judgments, and deepen empathy.
Forgas, J. P. (2013). Don't Worry, Be Sad! On the Cognitive, Motivational, and Interpersonal Benefits of Negative Mood. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 22(3), 225 to 232.

Envy, in its benign form, can be a motivating signal that points toward what we want and drives us to pursue it.
van de Ven, N., Zeelenberg, M., and Pieters, R. (2011). Why Envy Outperforms Admiration. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 37(6), 784 to 795.

There is some evidence that people can appear more desirable to others when they are already in a relationship, a tendency known as mate choice copying.
Waynforth, D. (2007). Mate Choice Copying in Humans. Human Nature, 18, 264 to 271.

Disgust appears to have evolved as a protective system that steers us away from contamination and disease, and it still helps us recognize what is harmful.
Rozin, P., and Fallon, A. E. (1987). A perspective on disgust. Psychological Review, 94(1), 23 to 41. See also Curtis, V., et al. (2011) on disgust and disease avoidance.

Writing about a difficult experience for a short time over several sessions can reduce its emotional intensity and improve well-being. This is known as expressive writing.
Pennebaker, J. W., and Beall, S. K. (1986). Confronting a traumatic event: toward an understanding of inhibition and disease. Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 95(3), 274 to 281.

The gut contains its own extensive network of neurons, often called the second brain, with more than 100 million nerve cells, and it produces the large majority of the body's serotonin.
Gershon, M. D. (1998). The Second Brain. HarperCollins.

THE MIND

People who learn to trust well-informed gut feelings often make faster and, in complex or uncertain situations, more accurate decisions than those who overthink every choice.
Gigerenzer, G. (2007). Gut Feelings: The Intelligence of the Unconscious. Viking. See also Dijksterhuis, A., et al. (2006), Science, 311, 1005 to 1007.

Suppressing emotion tends to keep the brain's alarm system active, while expressing it in words engages the prefrontal cortex and helps the nervous system settle.
Gross, J. J. (2002). Emotion regulation: affective, cognitive, and social consequences. Psychophysiology, 39, 281 to 291.

Becoming whole means integrating the different parts of the self, including the public mask (the persona), the disowned parts (the shadow), and the inner opposite-gender aspects (anima and animus). Jung called this process individuation.
Jung, C. G. (1964). Man and His Symbols. Doubleday. See also Jung's Collected Works.

Automatic negative thoughts are reflexive, often distorted mental reactions that fuel anxiety and low mood. Recognizing and challenging them is a core principle of cognitive therapy.
Beck, A. T. (1976). Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders. International Universities Press. (The term automatic negative thoughts was later popularized by Daniel Amen.)

Viewing your own thoughts from a slight distance, as if observing them from the outside, reduces emotional reactivity and improves problem-solving. This is called self-distancing.
Kross, E., et al. (2014). Self-talk as a regulatory mechanism: how you do it matters. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 106(2), 304 to 324.

Common cognitive distortions, such as all-or-nothing thinking, overgeneralization, and emotional reasoning, can be identified and reframed to bring perception closer to reality.
Burns, D. D. (1989). The Feeling Good Handbook. William Morrow.

The brain reshapes itself in response to repeated thoughts and actions. Connections that fire together repeatedly grow stronger, a principle often summarized as neurons that fire together wire together.
Hebb, D. O. (1949). The Organization of Behavior. Wiley.

The human brain contains roughly 86 billion neurons.
Herculano-Houzel, S. (2009). The human brain in numbers: a linearly scaled-up primate brain. Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, 3, 31.

Long-term meditators show greater thickness in brain regions linked to attention, memory, and emotional processing, evidence that mental practice can change brain structure.

Lazar, S. W., et al. (2005). Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness. NeuroReport, 16(17), 1893 to 1897.

The ability to form mental images runs along a spectrum, and some people cannot create them at all, a condition known as aphantasia. Visualization practices can be adapted using words, feelings, and reminders instead.
Zeman, A., Dewar, M., and Della Sala, S. (2015). Lives without imagery: congenital aphantasia. Cortex, 73, 378 to 380.

Mirror neurons fire both when we act and when we watch someone else act or feel, which helps explain why emotions like enthusiasm, calm, and courage can be contagious.
Rizzolatti, G., and Craighero, L. (2004). The mirror-neuron system. Annual Review of Neuroscience, 27, 169 to 192.

Rewriting your life story toward growth and meaning, sometimes studied as narrative identity, is linked to greater resilience and emotional well-being.
McAdams, D. P., and McLean, K. C. (2013). Narrative Identity. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 22(3), 233 to 238.

How we talk to ourselves shapes performance and stress. Constructive, distanced self-talk improves how people handle pressure.
Kross, E. (2021). Chatter: The Voice in Our Head, Why It Matters, and How to Harness It. Crown.

Keeping a regular gratitude practice, such as a weekly gratitude journal, is associated with greater optimism, fewer physical complaints, and better well-being.
Emmons, R. A., and McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting Blessings Versus Burdens. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84(2), 377 to 389.

Luck is less about chance than about attention and behavior. People who consider themselves lucky notice more, talk to more people, and stay open to opportunity, and people trained in these behaviors report becoming luckier.
Wiseman, R. (2003). The Luck Factor. Miramax Books.

The heart generates a measurable electromagnetic field that some researchers say reflects emotional state and can be detected outside the body.
McCraty, R. (2015). Science of the Heart, Volume 2. HeartMath Institute.

People in close contact really do sync up physically. The heart rhythms of choir singers align as they sing and breathe together, and similar synchrony has been measured between romantic partners, parents and infants, and therapists and their clients. Whatever the channel turns out to

be, your inner state reaches the people around you through your face, your voice, your breath, and your presence.
Vickhoff, B., et al. (2013). Music structure determines heart rate variability of singers. Frontiers in Psychology, 4, 334. See also Palumbo, R. V., et al. (2017). Interpersonal Autonomic Physiology: A Systematic Review of the Literature. Personality and Social Psychology Review, 21(2), 99 to 141.

THE SOUL

In moments of quiet and rest, the brain's default mode network becomes active. This network is involved in self-reflection, memory, and creative insight.
Raichle, M. E., et al. (2001). A default mode of brain function. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 98(2), 676 to 682.

Optimism and a sense of trust in the future are linked to better physical health, faster recovery from setbacks, and longer life.
Scheier, M. F., and Carver, C. S. (1985). Optimism, coping, and health. Health Psychology, 4(3), 219 to 247.

Happiness, kindness, and cooperation spread through social networks in patterns similar to contagion, reaching well beyond the people we interact with directly.
Christakis, N. A., and Fowler, J. H. (2008). Dynamic spread of happiness in a large social network. BMJ, 337, a2338.

Repetition physically strengthens the connections between neurons through a process called long-term potentiation, which is why a practice repeated over time becomes more automatic.
Bliss, T. V. P., and Lomo, T. (1973). Long-lasting potentiation of synaptic transmission. Journal of Physiology, 232(2), 331 to 356.

The carbon, oxygen, and other elements that make up the human body were forged inside stars, so we are quite literally made of stardust.
Burbidge, E. M., Burbidge, G. R., Fowler, W. A., and Hoyle, F. (1957). Synthesis of the Elements in Stars. Reviews of Modern Physics, 29, 547. Popularized by Carl Sagan, Cosmos (1980).

In complex systems, a very small change in one place can lead to large differences elsewhere, an idea from chaos theory often called the butterfly effect.
Lorenz, E. N. (1963). Deterministic Nonperiodic Flow. Journal of the Atmospheric Sciences, 20(2), 130 to 141.

Ho'oponopono is a traditional Hawaiian practice of reconciliation and forgiveness centered on taking responsibility for one's own thoughts and restoring inner harmony.

Traditional Hawaiian practice. See Pukui, M. K., Haertig, E. W., and Lee, C. A. (1972). Nana i ke Kumu (Look to the Source).

BOOKS, TEACHERS, AND TRADITIONS REFERENCED

On how trauma is held in the body and how the nervous system shapes healing.
van der Kolk, B. (2014). The Body Keeps the Score. Viking.

On the link between chronic stress, emotional suppression, and illness.
Maté, G. (2003). When the Body Says No. Knopf Canada.

On knowing yourself as the foundation of meeting any challenge.
Sun Tzu. The Art of War.

On the upward spiral and the threshold between struggle and momentum.
Chamine, S. (2012). Positive Intelligence. Greenleaf Book Group.

On small changes and course correction compounding over time.
Clear, J. (2018). Atomic Habits. Avery.

On letting others react as they will while you stay true to yourself.
Robbins, M. (2024). The Let Them Theory. Hay House.

On the hero's journey as a narrative arc of struggle and transformation.
Campbell, J. (1949). The Hero with a Thousand Faces. Pantheon Books.

On the Emotional Guidance Scale and emotions as vibration. (A New Thought teaching rather than a scientific source.)
Hicks, E., and Hicks, J. (2004). Ask and It Is Given. Hay House.

On connecting with the higher self and acting on inner guidance.
Cannon, D. Quantum Healing Hypnosis Technique. Ozark Mountain Publishing.

On the question, why is everything working together for my good?
Beckwith, M. B. Life Visioning. Sounds True.

On the metaphor of elevating into a better version of your life's movie.
Ghiyam, D. Kabbalah Centre teachings.

On the intuitive mind as a gift and the rational mind as a servant. (This quotation is widely attributed to Einstein but its origin is not firmly documented.)

Attributed to Albert Einstein.

On the illusion that communication has taken place. (Widely attributed to Shaw, though the attribution is disputed.)
Attributed to George Bernard Shaw.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hello again, dear friend! As you know by now, it's me, Jennifer, and while you know a lot about me, you may have some lingering questions that can best be answered in an author bio. So here we go!

Jennifer Thomé (that's me!) is a transformation coach and the creator of the *Me First!* Method, a groundbreaking approach that combines nervous system regulation, cognitive reprogramming, and spiritual connection to help people-pleasers create and live a life they are really excited about.

The *Me First!* Method was born from her own experience as a highly successful, multiple-six-figure-earning people-pleaser who woke up one day realizing that the nagging sense of depression wasn't her problem, but her higher self asking Jennifer to choose a different path. Not one that would make everyone else happy and proud, but one that would make her feel alive.

And so, with a mission but without a plan, she carefully tipped over that perfectly balanced house of cards she called her life, called it quits, and set out to heal herself, find herself, and to build a version of herself that lit her up from the inside. She started seeking out the help of psychologists, hypnotists, and functional medicine doctors, while also looking for deeper answers in mysticism and natural healing arts, such as Reiki, energy healing, and plant medicine.

Her work has helped hundreds of people stop shrinking, set boundaries without guilt, and build lives they genuinely love. When she's not coaching or writing, Jennifer is raising two incredible kids, barreling through the forest with her dog Mochi, and repeatedly proving that choosing yourself isn't selfish, it's sacred.

You can reach Jennifer and learn more about what she does at www.JenniferThome.com.

You were not put on this planet to be agreeable.

To fit in. To shrink. To live a picture-perfect life for the sake of everyone else's approval. And yet, somewhere along the way, that's exactly who you became.

That changes today.

Me First! The Unapologetically Selfish Guide to Building and Living a Life You Actually Love is a rebellious call to action that puts you, your desires, your dreams, and your happiness back at the center of your own existence. Fully. Fiercely. Without apology.

You'll dismantle the conditioning that taught you to shrink, and rebuild your body, mind, and soul from the inside out. You'll rewire a nervous system trained to prioritize belonging over authenticity. You'll stop gaslighting your intuition, set boundaries without guilt, make decisions without second-guessing, and pursue your dreams without waiting for permission.

The Me First! philosophy is simple: when you are deeply rooted in your own truth, you become more generous, not less. More powerful, not aggressive. More magnetic, not manipulative.

You get one shot at this life. If you're ready to stop living a version that no longer fits and start building the one you've been dreaming about, this book will show you how.



JENNIFER THOMÉ doesn't do small. She built an international career spanning China, the US, and Germany, raised two kids on her own terms, and spent years studying a question that wouldn't leave her alone: Why do some people transform their lives while others stay stuck?

The answer became the *Me First!* Method, a body-mind-soul system that fuses neuroscience, somatic regulation, psychology, and ancient spiritual wisdom to create rapid, lasting transformation.

Over the past decade, Jennifer has built the **Me First! Method**—a body-mind-soul approach that fuses neuroscience, somatic regulation, psychology, and ancient spiritual wisdom to create rapid, lasting transformation.

She knows the people-pleasing trap from the inside, because she escaped it. Then she turned around and started breaking others out. As a transformation coach, author, and speaker, Jennifer teaches exhausted people-pleasers to reclaim their lives with an approach that's equal parts tough love and deep compassion.

She lives loudly between three countries
with her two children and her dog, Mochi.

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