

the

ABC'S

of self-love



I BELIEVE IN THE TRANSFORMATIONAL POWER OF ADORING OURSELVES.

And the gorgeous women who contributed to this guide do to! Over two weeks in February 2012, I hosted a Fierce Love Blog Crawl to start a lively conversation across the internet about the meaning and practice of self-love. You hold in your hands the aftermath of this experiment...

26 inspiring posts written by 26 inspiring women exploring self-love in its many iterations, sharing personal stories, and empowering ***YOU*** to practice Fierce Self-Love in your own world.

Why?

Fierce Love is the first step to an authentically joyful life.

Your journey to live life on your own terms demands a lot from you, dear one. You've got to be courageous. You need to stand up for your own desires in the face of others' expectations. You must be dedicated to sharing your gifts and finding your voice in the world. Sometimes, you've got to cut your losses and move on, to leave outgrown friendships, demand more from your work, and realize you're deserving of true love. You may need to recommit to your health, your dreams, your creativity, or your own happiness.

All of this? It starts with Fierce Love.

You are the voice, the heart, and the one who brings this conversation to life. Without ***YOU***, this guide languishes in the recesses of the internet, a lonely PDF experiment without life, without spark, without consideration.

Thank you for reading and using the wisdom within as juicy fuel to spark Fierce Love in your world, on your terms.

XOXO,

Molly Mahar

WWW.STRATEJOY.COM

Dig this guide? Find out more about Molly's Fierce Love Course!

www.stratejoy.com/fierce-love-course



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A

IS FOR ACCEPTANCE

by Molly Mahar at www.stratejoy.com

"What if the question is not why am I so infrequently the person I really want to be, but why do I so infrequently want to be the person I really am?" -Oriah Mountain Dreamer

The very base of my self-love, of my willingness to adore myself, starts with acceptance. It starts with truly being, loving, and accepting the person I really am.

It's a work in progress, of course.

Some days I don't want to accept my struggles as I interact with the world — those times when I'm caught up in busy-ness at the neglect of self-care, when I fail to follow through on commitments, when I lose patience with my husband. Some days I'd like to ignore my personal weaknesses — my need for privacy, the fine line I toe between emotional IQ and manipulation, my dramatic sensitivity — and only show you the toned down shades of my shadow self. Some days I fight wildly against the present — the hardships, the unknowns, the quest for freedom.

BUT CAN WE PRACTICE SELF-LOVE WITHOUT ACCEPTING WHO WE ARE?

The simple answer is no. Our self-love would be built on false ideals of who we'd like to be in the future, of who we imagine we might be if the world didn't know our secrets. We would dole out our self-love if only we made more money, lost more weight, made a bigger difference.

We would move forward in life trying to win our own approval with affirmations, awards, achievements.

Without acceptance, it wouldn't be fierce self-love. We'd be licking the whipped cream off the top and thinking we were tasting the entire key lime pie.

Navigating the balance between healthily striving to become the best version of myself and loving myself exactly as I am isn't easy.

It's fucking hard sometimes.



But I want to be the person I really am. And that desire starts with acceptance.

Luckily, accepting who I am is more than embracing my (gorgeous, quirky, messy) imperfections. It's also about celebrating my strengths, admiring my awesome, appreciating my honor.

I can adore my infectious smile, my work ethic, my overflowing affection, my laser sharp memory for others' stories and situations. I can accept my shining glimpses of glory — having a breakthrough conversation, summiting a new mountain, simply getting to the magical inbox zero. I can be grateful for my desire to make a difference and my belief that people are good. I can revel in the present — the richness of love and support, the gifts of a growing family, the health of my body.

ACCEPTANCE ISN'T HANDING THE REIGNS OF YOUR LIFE OVER TO FATE, BUT RELISHING THE PRESENT MOMENT.

"When we put down ideas of what life should be like, we are free to wholeheartedly say yes to our life as it is." -Tara Brach

Acceptance is both a call to respect the entire range of emotions we experience and a reminder that we are all doing the best we can in the moment. We can open our eyes to the present, without worrying so much about the past and without so much anxiety about the future.

It doesn't mean that we can't grow, change, bloom or reinvent. Acceptance, as requisite for self-love, is a call for compassion, not an excuse for apathy. Embracing our whole self allows us to unfurl and feed our true desires from a steady base of honesty, clarity and self-love.

Self-love needs acceptance to put down roots.

When we embrace the fullness of who we are — quirks, gifts, idiosyncrasies, strengths and all — we give ourselves permission to relax into our own lives. A state of fierce, radical love for ourselves cannot be built with a pick and choose mentality. We cannot celebrate pieces of our lives, while denying others. There's no eating the marshmallows and leaving the charms swimming in the milky bowl.

I think the question should be, "In how many ways can I be myself?"

And the answer? The good, the bad, the pretty, and the ugly...

A

I can accept responsibility for my actions. I can accept that I am still discovering how to be the truest version of me in a world of pressure and hunger and strife. I can accept that I'm whip-smart and ambitious. I can accept my desire to be validated. I can accept the cellulite on my thighs, our undecorated bedroom, the sorry collection of bras that actually fit right now, the state of my garage, and the fact that I'm incredibly behind on emails. I can accept my amazing book collection, my loyalty, my craving for adrenaline, my strong beliefs in equality, and my love for my unborn son.

The answer I'm working up to?

I accept my life and myself, without shame, guilt or doubt, but with an open heart and joyful celebration.

All in the name of self-love, baby.

IN HOW MANY WAYS CAN YOU BE YOURSELF?

Molly Mahar is a coach, speaker, writer, fierce love advocate and joy enthusiast. She is the founder of [Stratejoy](#), a positive corner of the Internet that provides thousands of women the tools, strategies and camaraderie to lead authentically joyful lives. She empowers women to live life on their own terms, celebrate their worth, and change the world through individual fulfillment.

Molly's work is delivered through several [live](#) and [digital group programs](#), focused on creating YOUR joyful world. She works [one-on-one](#) with clients who are ready for soul-level personal alignment and big transitions.

She also laughs loudly, swims naked, and wears a lot of costumes. And she's expecting a tiny boy person on June 2, which will give her loads of opportunity to practice fierce lovin'.

She'd love to connect with you on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).

B

IS FOR BEAUTY

by Rebecca Bass-Ching at www.potentialtherapy.com

Beauty. It is a tricky word and hard to define. Defining beauty is very subjective, personal, intimate.

There is also a narrow standard of beauty, dispensed by the multi-billion dollar advertising industry, which has left those who believe this definition with intense body hatred, low sense of worth, depression, depleted bank accounts, anxiety, fear of intimacy and dangerous food and body issues.

Some of the many lies perpetuated by this narrow definition of beauty state that you will be lovable, feel more confident, life will be more tolerable: if you weigh a certain amount, your body looks a certain way, you dress a certain way, you play by everyone's rules and act a certain way, your (fill in the blank) is (fill in the blank). It is time to stop the crazy-making, take back the power that has been externalized to the opinions of the "collective other" and (re)claim how you define beauty.



HOW DO YOU DEFINE BEAUTY?

I must confess, I spent years believing a flawed definition of beauty. I was a slave to what other people thought of me. I worked my body hard and rested little. I hated what I saw in the mirror and was an approval junkie. I was unsatisfied, frustrated, disconnected from God and my own values and dreams. I was lost. And really tired. All because I wanted to be beautiful in the eyes of others with the hopes I would then in fact be beautiful.

I thought the world's definition of beauty = being enough. I was just drinking the Kool-aid.

But thankfully, I healed some infected wounds, fought some battles, had a gun held to my head (twice — that is another story) and experienced some fierce love from myself, God and some incredible people. I woke up to the lies I was telling myself about my worth and value and regularly fought back the desire to play the lose—lose game of comparing myself to others.

I NOW REVEL IN THE AWE-INSPIRING BEAUTY OF COURAGE, GENEROSITY, GENTLENESS, KINDNESS, SACRIFICIAL LOVE, COMPASSION, VULNERABILITY, MOTHERHOOD AND RESPECT.

B

I discovered confidence, the power and importance of surrounding myself with safe people. I say, "No thank you," a lot and "Yes," to my calling on this planet, therefore putting the "should's" and "have-to's" in permanent time out.

I regularly push back on the lies shame tells me and now know that being perfectly imperfect is a whole lot more life-giving than striving for perfection. (This one can be tough on some days...)

I believe the state of my heart, character, integrity are more powerful indicators of beauty verses my outside image.

How do you define beauty? Is your definition keeping you stuck, in pain and shame, or is it life-giving and freeing?

What changes are you going to make in how you talk about beauty so you do not inadvertently collude with the world's definition of beauty?

Rebecca Bass-Ching is a writer and regularly speaks at schools, churches, businesses and organizations on topics related to food and body issues, culture & media, trauma, identity, relationships and shame. She is a founding board member and the immediate Past- President of the San Diego chapter of the International Association of Eating Disorder Professionals and also serves as an expert panelist for FINDINGbalance.com. She also teaches as an adjunct professor at Azusa Pacific University's San Diego Regional Center for their Marriage and Family Therapy program. She utilizes her previous professional experiences and stays connected to local, state and federal advocacy groups to help improve the quality of care for those suffering from eating disorders and related issues. Rebecca established Potentia to merge all of her passions while providing resources and outpatient services to those in need of specialized support.

When she's not working, dreaming and strategizing at Potentia, you can find her and her sweet husband chasing after their two kids, hiking, biking, at the beach, exploring local farmers markets, cooking & baking, taking pictures of whatever inspires her or working out in the park with her beloved boot camp buddies.



IS FOR CELEBRATE

by Dani at www.positivelypresent.com

*"...choose to believe in / your own myth / your own glamour /
your own spell / a young woman who does this /
(even if she is just pretending) / has everything..."*

-Francesca Lia Block | How to (Un)cage a Girl

February is often dedicated to celebrating our love for others — which is a wonderful thing, don't get me wrong — but what about loving ourselves a little bit this month too? What about a little celebration for just being you? I say, let's do it! Let's take a day — or, hey, why not take the rest of the month? — and celebrate who you are. There's plenty of love to go around this month and it's the perfect time of year for embracing a little self-love.

Below are 10 ways you can get started on loving yourself today. But don't let these limit you! There are countless ways to celebrate who you are and I'd highly recommend focusing on those this month. Love is in the air — why not direct a little of it back at yourself?

10 WAYS TO CELEBRATE YOURSELF

1. **GIVE YOURSELF A PAT ON THE BACK.** Go on, do it! You know you did something awesome recently. Yes, you! Take a moment and think back on the past week or so. Did you do something great at work or school? Were you extra-kind to a friend in need? Super patient with someone driving you crazy? Pat yourself on the back for a job well done. You deserve it!
2. **MAKE A LIST OF LOVELY THINGS ABOUT YOU.** I know this can be hard for some people, but it's important. Pull out a pen and notebook and get scribbling. There are a million things that are awesome about you and I'm pretty sure you can identify at least 10-20 of them. Let your mind wander and write the truth. No one else has to see the list so don't be shy. Embrace self love!
3. **TAKE (AND REMEMBER) A COMPLIMENT.** You know how we always dwell on the negative things people say about us? It's hard not to, but try instead to dwell on the last compliment you received. If you find it hard to do, write it down somewhere you'll see it often to remind yourself. And keep doing that every single time you get a compliment.





4. **DO SOMETHING YOU'RE GREAT AT.** Want to give yourself a self-love boost? Do something you're good at. Nothing makes you feel better about yourself, and fall more in love with who you are, than doing something you do well. Even if it's something small, do it. And do it as often as you can because, hey, we would all be doing the things we're good at as often as we can!
5. **THROW YOURSELF A PARTY.** Maybe it's not the bash of the year, but you can throw yourself a little shindig and spend some quality time with the people who love you. No need to tell them it's a party to celebrate you (though you could if you wanted to!), but take some time to literally celebrate yourself. Partying not your speed? Do something that makes you feel festive!
6. **GET FANCY — FOR NO GOOD REASON.** And speaking of festive, why not dress up in some fancy clothes for no good reason? Everyone feels better about themselves when they put some effort into their appearance, but sometimes it's hard to find a good reason to get fancy. I'm hear to tell you that no good reason is necessary; every day is a good day to dress to impress (yourself).
7. **CUT YOURSELF SOME SLACK.** You know how you're hard on yourself sometimes? You think you're too lazy/boring/bad/unhealthy/etc.? Take a few moments this month to cut yourself some slack. Sure, we all have bad habits we need to break (and we can do it too!), but don't be so hard on yourself. We're only human after all, so give yourself a break.
8. **LOOK IN THE MIRROR + PINPOINT WHAT YOU LOVE.** Unless you're a picture-perfect supermodel (and probably even if you are), this is tough. It's hard for almost anyone to look in the mirror and not see the flaws. We've been trained to do that, but try to switch your focus to the positive. Stand in front of the mirror and point out all the things you love about yourself. Instant self-love!
9. **TAKE NOTE OF YOUR GOOD CHOICES.** We all love to go over and over what we did wrong to see what we could do differently. That's okay — lessons learned and all that — but what about spending some time on the good choices you've made. Don't let those slide by unnoticed. Focus on them; remember them. And remind yourself that you do, in fact, have a good head on your shoulders.
10. **READ THE ABCS OF SELF LOVE.** Loving yourself can be tough and it always helps to have some tricks up your sleeve. These 26 little ideas will help you get started and will remind you of all the reasons you have to love yourself. You are awesome (even if you don't always realize it!) and you should love who you are. Trying these 26 tips will help you stay focused on what's great about you.

Dani launched PositivelyPresent.com in 2009 when she decided to turn her life around and start focusing on the positive while living in the present moment. Positively Present focuses on living positively in the present moment, and since its launch Dani's personal development site has grown and it continues to touch lives around the world. You can also find Dani on [Twitter](#), [Pinterest](#), [Tumblr](#), and [Flickr](#).

D

IS FOR DETERMINATION

by Ash Ambirge at www.themiddlefingerproject.org

YOU KNOW YOU CAN CHOOSE, RIGHT?

I'm not sure if we've forgotten this, or if it's just too scary. Or maybe, just maybe, because it's too scary, we prefer to forget.

CHOICE.

It's scary because it implies pressure—the pressure to make the right choice.

It's scary because it implies consequence—the consequences that will happen if you don't.

But most of all, it's scary because it implies control—control over our lives and what the hell happens next.

BUT DESPITE WHAT THEY TELL YOU, IN GENERAL, PEOPLE DON'T WANT CONTROL.

They don't want control, because they don't want the responsibility of control.

More choice = more control = more responsibility.

We'll get back to that in a minute.

First, there's something you should know.

This is a blog post that isn't about determination.

Here's why:

After I thought about it for a few days, I decided that the concept of determination is too abstract and feel-good to wax on about, or tell some bullshit inspirational story about how I was soooooooooo determined, and—look, ma—determination worked for me!

insert grinning, 8 year old red-head with freckles and missing front teeth



D

Because I don't think that's true.

I don't think determination is the answer.

I don't think that "if you're just determined enough, you can accomplish anything."

If I had to guess, I'd guess a marketer came up with that.

Frankly, there are just too many variables involved in creating success, and determination is only one small fraction of those.

Yet, people still like to believe that with enough determination, you can produce success, as if there were a straight line from point A to point B.

They like the idea of determination = success because it's deceptively simple.

They like the idea of determination = success because it's hopeful.

They like the idea of determination = success because it allows them to believe that they've got a fighting chance against those who are better positioned than them, better equipped than them, or with more useful skill sets than them (among others).

And there's comfort in that.

Because, at the very least—independent of the actual outcome—we can always say we tried.

SO I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT DETERMINATION, BECAUSE YOU'RE BETTER THAN THAT.

(Says she who just wrote a bunch of paragraphs all about determination.)

I'm not saying that determination isn't necessary, or that it isn't useful—I just don't think it applies as much to success as we'd like it to, nor do I think it applies to self-love as much as we'd like it to, either. (Since that's what this post is really suppose to be about.)

In neither case is determination the hero many hope it'll be.

That's the bad news.

D

The good news, on the other hand, is that there is a hero involved, and guess what? That's right. It's you, my friend. And not in a fluffy, self-help way, either.

IT. IS. YOU.

WHICH BRINGS ME BACK TO MY INITIAL DISCUSSION AROUND CHOICE + RESPONSIBILITY.

Want success? Make more decisions, choose more often, gain more control, and then take responsibility over your success. Period.

Want to care for yourself better? Make more decisions, choose more often, gain more control, and then take responsibility over yourself. Period.

Here, when I say make more decisions and choose more often, I'm referring to the fact that we *do* have a choice. We have choices every day. Choices that many of us seem to forget ever existed.

We let society choose for us.
We let our family choose for us.
We let our spouse choose for us.
We let our circumstances choose for us.
We let our beliefs choose for us.
We let our faith choose for us.
We let our past experiences choose for us.
We let the present moment choose for us.

Hell, we even let the bald guy selling us a pizza and a Mountain Dew choose for us.

We let anyone and everyone choose for us—so long as that person isn't actually US.

No wonder we feel unsuccessful. No wonder we lack self-love.

We put our destiny in the hands of anyone who'll take it.

But on the other hand, when you knock off the bullshit, and choose to choose—when you take responsibility for WHO YOU ARE and WHAT YOU WANT and WHERE YOU'RE GOING and ON WHOSE TERMS—you can't help but be successful, and you can't help but love yourself just a little bit more.

D

I suppose one might define that as being determined.

But here's the thing: When that happens, you aren't just being determined.

You're being deliberate.

And it may be worth noting the difference.

Ashley Ambirge is the founder of The Middle Finger Project, a marketing education company that teaches sassy small business owners, solopreneurs + freelancers how to effectively leverage the web to get more clients, make a big splash, make mo' money, and have fun while doing it.

Ashley is an online marketing expert with a corporate background in the email marketing industry, as well as a seasoned copywriter specializing in helping companies go from mega bland to major brand, and she's passionate about creating small businesses that feel good for your soul...and your pocket.

She's also infatuated with Latin dance, strongly believes that coffee tastes better through a straw and is disturbingly terrified of purple velour.



IS FOR ENOUGH

by Amy Kessel at www.amykessel.com

IT'S FEBRUARY, THE MONTH O' LOVE.

(Cue songbirds and Marvin Gaye). In addition to the love you give and receive this month, I want to invite you to do something revolutionary. Something you may find a bit, shall we say, more challenging. I want you to direct some of the juiciest love you've got where it matters most—right back at yourself.

I know. Despite all the work you've been doing, there's a big hunk of resistance in the way of your own self-love. And as much as you crave it and hunger for it, finding a way around the resistance is really hard. Your resistance is the thing that throws itself in front of the door to loving yourself just when you've got your hand on the doorknob.

What's it made of, this persistent creature? **It's the deep doubt that we are Enough.**

And how do we convince it to back away from the door? Believe it or not, it disappears when we realize we are the only thing keeping it there. When we clear a path through the years and years of heaped-on mis-truths we have layered upon ourselves, and get a good look at our shiny goodness. Which is, of course, supremely lovable.

The resistance to loving ourselves disappears when we know, really know, that we are Enough.

The realization I am enough is precious and game-changing. It's the beginning of truth telling, of settling into our skin. It's the self-love that mirrors the way we love others, yet have kept from ourselves.

For me, I am enough is a long exhale. A full-body relax. The hint of a smile and a slight nod. A different way of living into the outlines of my life.

MY ENOUGHNESS STORY

My story is probably similar to yours. I spent many years striving and perfecting and rehearsing and anxiously peeking over my shoulder to see if I got the nod of approval. Looking for proof of my enoughness in the grades on my report card, the shape of my body, the words spoken by my parents. Then the diplomas, the stamps in my passport, the performance reviews.



E

(Sound familiar? Thought so.)

I was constantly on the move to gather proof that I was enough. I figured I'd know it when I found my soulmate. Nope. When I fit into those great jeans. No again. Got the plum job. Definitely not. Okay, then, finally I'll be enough when I'm living my childhood dream: husband, kids, house, career—the whole package.

Still, no. Even when I hustled and achieved and put the pieces in place, I still didn't feel I was enough. Not down deep.

Then something happened while my children were very young. **Enoughness came crashing down on me.** I felt clueless about how to be a mama, and the books seemed all wrong. So I gave the babes the things I instinctively summoned to love them: my attention, my body, my adoration. I was not a perfect mother. No, far from it.

And it occurred to me that I was enough.

I realized that in the times of not knowing what to do, when I didn't rehearse or strive or prepare, I was enough. And when I failed to find proof of this enoughness in the world around me, I found it by looking inside—where it was intact, eager, fresh, and alive.

I fell in love with this new knowledge.

Once the floodgates were opened, I found I could reclaim enoughness again and again. As a recovering perfectionist, enoughness is a balm for my old wounds. I discovered a new delight in messiness and imperfection. Amazingly, I found I am enough even when things go sideways. When I underestimate, or overcompensate. When I misstep, or say something awkward, or embarrass my kids. Or myself. Once I let myself off the hook, I could relax and appreciate the pieces of my life in a whole new way.

I wish I could say it's a permanent change, but it's not. **Knowing enoughness is a practice for me,** and I still have moments of profound disappointment, self-doubt and shame. The balance between doing things well and being enough is a delicate one, and I am always aware of it.

I know I am not alone in my struggle to know enoughness. What about you? Do you hear yourself in my story? What holds you back from knowing that you are enough?

PS - YOU ARE. OH YES, YOU ARE.

E

Amy Kessel is unfurled again and again. Today she is firmly rooted, an upright version of the woman who yearned to be of service through connecting deeply with others. In her coaching she bears witness as her clients rediscover and reclaim the truth of who they are, and helps them see how to live that truth more fully. She's grateful for the life experiences that enabled her unfurling, the joyful as well as the painful. Without this street cred, Amy would not be coaching, she would not be available to deep-dive with courageous women who want more. And she brings her hard-won insight, clarity and wisdom along to every encounter she has.

Amy's unfurling continues. She continues her own training and personal development through workshops and course. She has a great life coach. She collaborates with other coaches, she does speaking gigs, she facilitates groups. Her coaching practice is built on client referrals, which tells her she's doing something right. When she's not coaching she can be found dancing, hiking, practicing yoga, drinking wine with dear friends, getting dirt under her fingernails, playing with her kids and traveling. She lives on a magical isle in the Pacific Northwest and is learning to love the nuances of grey.

F

IS FOR FREEDOM

by Jenny Blake at www.lifeaftercollege.org

ON FREEDOM: THE COUNTERINTUITIVE WAY TO FLY

I'm a dream junkie.

There's nothing I love more than remembering a crazy dream and analyzing it the next day with my trusty [Element Encyclopedia of 20,000 Dreams](#), discussing all the possible meanings with friends.

The other night after returning from Mexico during a series of otherwise scattered dreams, I remembered seeing an extremely vivid, three-dimensional Avatar-style cobalt blue butterfly flying straight toward my face. It was crystal clear and extremely memorable.

According to my dream book:

"To see a butterfly in your dream denotes creativity, romance, joy and spirituality. You may be undergoing a transformation or rebirth in your way of thinking. To see a beautiful colorful butterfly in your dream denotes the positive impression you hope to make at a future social gathering or in some aspect of your life. **It may also indicate your love of freedom and a refusal to be tied down.** For Jung, the butterfly was a symbol of the whole psyche — as it was for the Greeks, to whom the word "psyche" meant both butterfly and soul."

WHAT DOES FREEDOM MEAN TO YOU?

Freedom is defined as "the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint."

It is no small coincidence that my words of 2011 were Freedom and [Fly](#). Hello dream! Freedom is one of my core values, and is a driving force behind almost every decision I make.

But freedom does not have to mean that you are self-employed, single, or a stuff-eschewing minimalist; freedom can mean many things:

- Freedom from shackles of the mind: self-doubt, fear, limiting beliefs
- [Freedom from financial worry](#)
- Freedom from shoulds and [social-self constructions](#)



F

- Freedom to think, speak and act with truth, integrity and authenticity
- Freedom to make decisions that serve your highest good, and that of those around you

IN COMMITMENT WE FIND FREEDOM

"The irony of commitment is that it's deeply liberating – in work, in play, in love. The act frees you from the tyranny of your internal critic, from the fear that likes to dress itself up and parade around as rational hesitation. To commit is to remove your head as the barrier to your life." –Anne Morriss

A fallacy of freedom is that we must not allow ourselves to be tied-down, lest we lock the cage on our ability to fly.

However, as the quote states, oftentimes it is in those very commitments that we truly find freedom:

- Commitment to a giant goal gives us the freedom to pursue it even on our worst days
- Commitment to our friends and romantic partners allows us the space to speak hard truths in service of strengthening the bond
- Commitment to our values grounds us and roots our decisions in what really matters
- Commitment to living in the moment, gratitude and forgiveness gives us freedom from mental suffocation, as we learn to let go of worry, stress and regret and focus on the gifts in front of us instead
- Commitment to ourselves allows us to play big in the world, to create and serve others in our highest form

Freedom is the exhilaration that comes from our ability to fly, made possible by the commitments we make to what really matters in our lives.

WHAT DOES FREEDOM MEAN TO YOU?

WHAT COMMITMENTS ALLOW YOU TO FIND THAT FREEDOM?

Jenny Blake is an author, blogger, life coach and sought-after speaker who helps others "Wake up, live big! and love the journey." She has been featured on Forbes.com, US News & World Report and CNN.com and is nationally recognized as a leader among Gen Y. Jenny started her blog, LifeAfterCollege.org, in 2005 and translated it into a popular book, [Life After College: The Complete Guide to Getting What You Want](#) (Running Press, 2011), which serves as a portable life coach for 20-somethings. Jenny recently took her own great leap by [leaving Google](#) after five and a half years at the company (on the Training, Career Development and Authors@Google teams) to move to New York City and pursue her passions full-time. Follow her on twitter [@Jenny_Blake](#).



IS FOR GROWTH

by Justine Musk at www.justinemusk.com

1

So there's this thing called a 'growth mindset' and this other thing called a 'fixed mindset.'

If you have the former, you believe that things like talent and intelligence are not fixed at birth; that with work and effort, you can improve. You can invent and reinvent yourself.

You can grow.

If you have the latter, you believe that growth is not possible. You are who you are, and that's the end of it. Instead of expanding to become more of what you want to be, you contract around those frozen beliefs about yourself.

You protect your self-image at all costs.

You avoid challenge. You look for the easy A. You don't work hard when you don't see the point. You sidestep anything that might show you up as quote-unquote inferior – because then you'll be stuck with that inferiority, with no way out of it.

Life is more interesting with a growth mindset.

2

Most of us tend to have a mix of the two; in some areas we believe we can grow, and in others we believe we are stuck in permanent positions.

Those beliefs shape our actions which shape our life.

They serve as a prism through which we filter the world.

Our subconscious draws our attention to the things that our beliefs have primed us to notice, so that we are constantly interpreting the world in a way that supports those beliefs. Between you and 'objective reality' is your own



G

personal paradigm, to sift that reality and serve it up to you.

It aligns your reality with what you want to see—and blocks out what you don't.

Change your beliefs, change your paradigm, change your world.

The question is how?

In the book CREATIVE THINKING, Michael Michalko observes

Habits, thinking patterns, and routines with which we approach life gradually accumulate until they significantly reduce our awareness of other possibilities. It's as if a cataract develops over our imagination over time, and its effects only slowly become obvious...

You cannot will yourself to change your thinking patterns any more than you can stop your foot from changing direction...You need some means of producing variation in your ideas.

One powerful “means of producing variation” is: an antagonist.

A struggle.

3

I write fiction (when I'm not writing blog posts). Fiction concerns imaginary people who undergo a series of events and revelations that changes their paradigms and alters those characters forever.

This kind of change doesn't come easily; an old sense of identity has to die, so a new one can rise from the ashes.

It's that shift in identity—and how it enables the protagonist to overcome obstacles and face down antagonistic forces and achieve her heart's desire (or not)—that shapes the ultimate meaning of the story.

4

Sometimes you seek growth; sometimes growth comes at you and for you like a heat-seeking missile.

Growth can announce itself with mess, discomfort, increasing pain. As children we learn our strategies of survival:

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our paradigm. Then one day we enter a place where those strategies no longer work for us. They hold us back or threaten us, they turn from angels to inner demons; we have to separate ourselves from them so that we can adopt new ones.

If we don't, we stagnate.

We get caught in the repeating loop of our own history.

We sabotage ourselves and get preyed on by others.

Growth can announce itself with unease, with desire. There's something (or someone) you want to have—or something you want to escape. There's someone you want to become—and someone you need to stop being.

That desire is strong enough to push you out of your comfort zone and into a new act.

You struggle and you fight and you fail. Difficulty mounts. Your antagonist breaks you down, pushes you to the edge, strips you of everything you thought you knew—but it's in that death, that moment of surrender, when you release the old beliefs and turn toward the new.

Your actions change accordingly.

You can do what you couldn't do before—and the world finally offers up the prize.

5

One way to plan a novel is to reverse-engineer it. You look at the climax, the final showdown between your protagonist and your antagonist: exactly how does the protagonist prevail? What kind of person must she become, in order to prevail? What quality, what way of seeing the world, does she need to possess at the end of the novel and lacks in the beginning? How does she achieve that quality?

Then you can backtrack your way to the beginning, finding the moments to demonstrate that growth, that change, in your character.

One way to plan your life is to reverse-engineer it. You dream up a vision for your future. You imagine yourself having already achieved your goals.

The nature of goals is to force us to stretch: we need to acquire new skills and develop new aspects of our character.

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In the beginning you may doubt yourself, think that the person you know yourself to be couldn't reach such a lofty destination. And you're right.

But what you need to remember is that the journey changes you.

The journey finds ways to turn you into what you need to be.

Which is why it's important to ask yourself not only, What do I want out of life?

But also, Who do I want to become?

In that transformation—from who you are into who you need to be – you just might find the meaning of your life.

6

You can always fake it 'til you make it. We have a funny way of growing into what we only think we're pretending to be. Thought and feeling may generate behavior, but it turns out that behavior can generate thought and feeling.

As Michael Michalko observes:

Every time we pretend to have an attitude and go through the motions, we trigger the emotions we pretend to have and strengthen the attitude we wish to cultivate.

You can change the way you see yourself, and the way others see you, by your intention and by going through the motions.

Your pretense can change your psychology.

7

Growth can announce itself with little, seemingly superficial changes that audition a much larger change.

You can bring this about yourself: change your hair, change your dress. Fashion can serve as the thin end of a wedge that separates you from your past.

The makeover is a popular staple of television: when the woman (usually it's a woman) changes her look, it's understood that her life also changes. A new identity is cut and trimmed and styled into being. Growth happens from the



outside in. And it's not very threatening: if you don't like it, you can always go back to your previous hair color.

But now that you look different, how are you received? Now that people receive you that way, who can you meet and what can you take part in? Now that you can engage with new people and events, how do you feel about the person you are becoming?

In his book TRANSFORMATIONS, Grant McCracken muses on how a generation forced the growth of an entire counterculture (bold italics are mine):

They were growing their hair a little longer in the back, going to the occasional rally, listening to new music. And even as each of them was trying on novelty, the response of the world, and the meaning of the novelty, were changing. Working en masse, millions of Oscars created a more receptive, less risky environment for one another...[They] reset the tolerances and moved a culture toward change. The great change of the counter-culture came from millions of little gestures, tiny departures, modest risks brought together into a magnificent aggregate.

8

McCracken also writes about people he calls “playwrights” (we would call them “change agents”) who get “under” culture to rewrite its beliefs, its very rules of perception. He uses Ani DeFranco and the way she subverts traditionally feminine notions of delicacy and beauty as an example of someone who “is not only working on her persona, but on the culture that defines the persona.”

[Change agents] may be driven by inklings of cultural developments in the works, but they are traveling alone, driven by their own initiative and inclinations, haunted possibly by their own demons, writing from their own needs to their own specifications. Playwrights like DiFranco are inventing themselves, but in the culture of commotion their creations sometimes recruit avant-garde followers and even mainstream enthusiasts. From their efforts to invent themselves can come substantial changes in the global culture.

McCracken calls these followers and enthusiasts “off-Broadway players” who use the playwright’s work to “take their leave from the traditional order of things” and create lives according to the playwright’s innovations.

They “inhabit worlds that the playwright has opened up.”

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The playwright becomes a light to steer by.

Her followers change their music, speech, clothing, residence and “invite and suffer the disapproval and sometimes the hostility, even violence, of the mainstream world.” But they are better protected than the playwright, because they travel in a group. They are not, as DiFranco is, reconstructing cultural categories and cultural rules. They grow and transform in ways that make them members of this group. (In contrast, the playwright stretches, grows and transforms to rebel against a group.)

McCracken observes:

Their collective effort, their community, can begin to move a culture's center of gravity.

But this [change in the culture] is not the achievement of an individual. The off-Broadway player is engaged in a personal transformation. Only the playwright accomplishes cultural transformation.

9

DiFranco would be what Michael Michalko calls a “self-created individual”, who seems “more alive and creative than others.”

In the world of humanity, a person who is talking, walking and working can be alive and self-creating or lifeless and drab. This is something we all know, yet never talk about.

What makes some people seem especially alive and others seem lifeless and drab?

He compares these individuals to the emperor moth, with its wide and magnificent wingspan.

But first, the moth must be a pupa in a cocoon.

One day a small opening appears in the bottom and the moth struggles to force its body through it. The struggle takes hours. The moth often seems stuck.

But this struggle is how the pupa forces fluid from its body and into its wings; it prepares those wings for flight.

You could help the pupa by enlarging the hole with a knife or scissors so that the pupa simply slips out:

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But it will have a swollen body and small, shriveled wings. In fact, the little moth will spend the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It will never fly.

In a novel, the antagonist serves a similar function. The antagonist is whoever or whatever traps, restricts, and opposes the protagonist; what the protagonist must struggle against to escape.

As Martha Alderson points out in her book THE PLOT WHISPERER:

External antagonists challenge [the protagonist] throughout the story and especially in the middle. They know how to push her, to ignite her flaws, to create gaps of imbalance, and become what she must overcome for ultimate success.

10

It's the struggle that makes us strong, and readies us for flight.

It's how you grow through and out of it—the meaning you make of it—that can not only shape yourself and your creative work (and your life)—but inspire others.

They see themselves in you and your struggle. Your meaning becomes their meaning.

They might seize on that meaning and create communities around it. They might even create a movement.

They might shift the center of the culture.

Justine Musk grew up in Ontario, Canada and started writing at age eight when her parents refused to buy her a dog. She entered her self-conscious and perilous adolescence planning to be either an actress, a vet, or a writer of fine literature like the Sweet Valley High novels. Then she discovered Stephen King. Thanks partly to a less-than-stellar social life, Justine wrote her first few novels before graduating high school. She is the author of the dark-fantasy novels Bloodangel and Lord of Bones, about a race of men and women descended from fallen angels who go to war against demons, and sometimes each other, as well as the YA supernatural thriller Uninvited.

Justine lives and writes in Los Angeles, where she blogs about living and writing in Los Angeles. She is building out the life of a creative badass. She also likes to Twitter.

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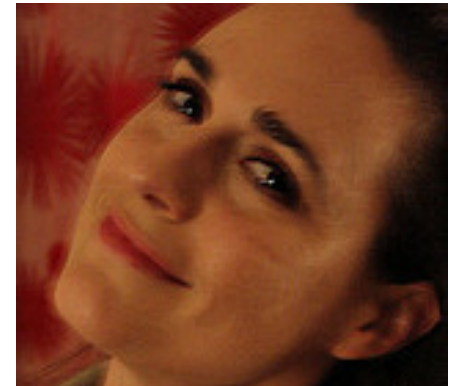
H IS FOR HONORING

by Randi Buckley at www.randibuckley.com

Your heart knows your song, but you have to be willing to listen to the words. ~ Sue Rock

By my calculations, there are about 39 different ways I could write this; honoring comes in many forms. But since this is in the spirit of Fierce Love I'm going to honor my most fierce wish for you: **honoring the whispers of your heart.**

To me, honoring is to shine a light and acknowledge. It's a light shone outward and a light we can shine internally. Sometimes, it's making the unseen visible and offering up a moment of reverence, if not gratitude. Honoring is listening for and naming your truth.



The deepest honor in the name of self-love shines light onto the whispers in the heart. Like a smoke signal we can't see in the dark, the light we shine illuminates desire. This longing could be a calling, a caution, a message, intuition. Unseen, it smolders until it becomes a burning that is either ignored, self-anesthetized or an ache. It's the signal that we are no longer fully living our truth.

To date, the greatest whisper in my heart was ignored for decades. I never thought it could exist and when it started to evidence itself I ran from it. The mere suggestion did not lend itself to who I thought I was but my heart was starting to say maybe to motherhood. My Maybe Baby question was smoldering. **I was not cool with this.** But I knew that until you really honor the questions and whispers of the heart, you cannot be fully at peace. You have to know your truth before you can be at peace with it. So I listened, and I explored and I gave myself permission to change my mind. **I honored the question and by doing so, honored my truth.**

The soul speaks by whispering into our heart. It leaves a message, suspended in time, waiting to be heard and yearning to be honored.

Whispers into the heart come when they are ready and they don't mean we were not clear in our actions, identity or know who we were before them. We evolve and peel back our layers. New layers reveal aspects closer to our core. We weren't wrong before them, but the whispers inform who we are to become.

Every child wants to be heard and shines when they are acknowledged. Children thrive when they are honored. Most of us would listen to a child tugging at our leg wanting to tell us something. We'd crouch down, look into



their eyes and let their words settle into who we are. We'd listen and they would feel heard. Honoring your whispers is no different. They long for your attention.

How do we honor the whispers in our heart?

We listen to them. We recognize they are there. We create space for them in our lives. We live their questions without committing to an outcome before we crack open their truth. Honoring the heart reveals our song.

Honoring the whispers may not mean your life will radically change. Honoring the messages means you are listening and are willing to look at their meaning, their hope for you. It may be that listening is enough.

WHAT WANTS TO BE HONORED IN YOU? WHAT DESIRE, NEXT MOVE, NEW PATH, COURSE CORRECTION, BUDDING LOVE, EXTINGUISHED FLAME OR TRUTH NEED TO BE HONORED IN YOUR HEART?

Randi Buckley is a storm tamer. She coaches Gen X and Y women and partnerships through inner and interpersonal conflict resolution while moving them towards peace with their truth. She's a sorceress of radical empathy sans BS, and lover of double entendres and framboise lambic. She's the creator of Maybe Baby. Randi has a trove of certifications and a cadre of degrees but favors her trinity of intuition, wisdom and playful mischief. And yes, she is a mama.

IS FOR INTEGRITY

by Sarah Peck at www.itstartswith.com

"Integrity is not achieved, attained, or accomplished. Integrity, like character, is built through quiet persistence, a structural consistency in all that you say, do, and believe."

"To have integrity is to believe fully in your soul, and your being. It is to act in accordance with yourself, and accept nothing less."

CONTINUAL MOTION.

I'm sweating. Breathing hard. I've got my leg over my shoulder, and my knee is creaking. My hand is slipping, slowly, against the rubbery mat surface and I can hear seventeen other students also breathing hard. I'm trying to get into a new space, move towards a new pose in my yoga class, and I can't figure out if I'm going to be able to get there today. Leftover alcohol and chlorine equally permeate my sweat, and I curse having spent a week and a half doing nothing—why didn't I say in shape?—I mutter. I forget it, letting the thought slide out of my brain easily. I'm here now. This is good. This feels good. But bad. Good lord, does this feel bad. Awful in a stretching, pulling kind of way. Unglamorous.

I drop my head, lifting my left hand quickly off the mat to wipe sweat from my face. Drops fall from my face to the mat, making it more slippery, less sticky. Damn.

And my leg slides, centimeters, stretching again, and all of a sudden I can point my toes. I feel it, a balanced, taught centeredness, muscles working together. My hands are aligned below me, my chest is centered squarely above me, my bones stacking neatly, my legs pointing towards opposite walls.

It's graceful, but exertion doesn't stop. Sweat keeps dripping. I'm still moving. I'm either working towards the pose or relaxing, dropping from it.

Movement, the teacher intones. It's all about movement. You're constantly moving, constantly shifting, always re-aligning and re-centering.

Yes.





"Change is inevitable. Growth is optional."

COMMITMENT.

We made a commitment at the beginning of class, a small devotion to ourselves and our practice, and we chose a phrase or a word to stick to for the night. A set of words to recall when our brains freeze in mindless chatter, when our thoughts dart outside of the room and into the future or past, worrying needlessly about all things could-have and should-have and might-have and would-have. The words bring our loose cannons back to alignment, briefly, like five-year-olds in a small class, restlessly bopping about while waiting for lunchtime.

My commitment, my word, my phrase—how do I pick a word? I mused over independence, over writing, over being, over gratitude. Over blessings, over health, over kindness, of being kind and grateful for everything, of releasing the relentless pressure I build up in myself to achieve and to do and to be. And then I stumbled on a phrase that settled, a gentle kindness that pulled towards a longer form of being, an integrity. "Move towards," the voice told me: Move towards your goals. Move towards **integrity**.

Movement, this idea, resonates: there's no need to place a valiant, chest-puffing stake in the ground, a moment in time that says, I WILL DO THIS! As though now that I have shouted it, it is and it will be! (Insert multiple exclamation points). It is quieter, more peaceful, more consistent. It's a set of actions, a layered being, a nuanced commitment to yourself over time.

Moving towards integrity.

"Character is not what you say, it is not what you boast. It is what you do when no one is watching."

WHAT IS INTEGRITY?

Integrity is knowing what you stand for. It is showing consistency in your actions and having a soundness of moral character. Integrity is doing what you say you're going to do, even when no one is watching.

Integrity is being accountable to yourself.

In buildings, structural integrity means that the building will stand up—that the components, the joints, the system at play is sound and built well; that it won't deteriorate or break down over time. It is a consistency and standard of excellence in engineering.



Some definitions include “the state of being unimpaired; soundness,” or another: “the quality or condition of being whole or undivided; completeness.”

“ You can't build a reputation on what you're going to do” - Henry Ford

For me, integrity is living up to my expectations of myself. It's behaving my best, even during the worst situations. It's going to the gym, even if I don't want to, because I made a commitment to myself. It's planning ahead, giving another grace when it's due, it's standing up for myself, it's for chasing after your dreams even if no one else knows what you are up to.

THE OPPOSITE IS ALSO TRUE.

We've all screwed up. Royally, beautifully, messily, fantastically. If we were perfect already, I suppose that would be boring. We mess up. We're human. The difference is in how you decide to behave. What you choose to do before, during, afterwards. Whether or not you are capable of repairing a situation.

Integrity is not a stake in the ground. It's not a goal that's achieved. **It's a consistency of action, over time, that builds in what you say, believe, and do.**

You've probably encountered situations where someone or something lacked integrity. Perhaps it was you.

I've been there.

Last year, in Paris, traveling with my sister, I found one (of many) weaknesses in my character; in my ability to make decisions, in what I thought was true about myself. I got beautifully, horribly conned in Monte Martre, duped into doing something, and I was rattled by the change in my behavior in the given context. More alarming than losing dozens of Euros was the red glaring flag hitting itself loudly against my conscience:

Do I really make good decisions? Am I what I think I am? Or am I actually just all talk? I babbled as such to my sister as we walked up to the top of the Sacre Coure, wondering how I could have wandered down a spiral of decision points that led to very silly—and alarming—behaviors.

Yet all is not lost: dissonance is good. Dissonance reminds us when our behaviors and actions aren't in line with what we believe to be true about ourselves. Moments of discomfort tell us when we're not behaving in accordance with who we truly are.



You're not perfect. You'll mess up. I've found that time and again, I test my integrity and sometimes fall short. Each time, I have to stop and analyze, wondering: what am I? Is this what I want to be? Do I like this?

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Does it matter? You can brush it under the rug, sweep it away, think, "Oh Sarah, who cares!"—but it matters. It's not about what other people think, say or believe about you.

At the end of the day, you're the one that has to live with you. You're there when you wake up, when you breathe, when you think, when you act.

I'm the one who has to sleep with myself at night; I'm the one who wakes up when I can't stand how I've behaved; I'm the one who runs away from my emotions at times. It's all just me.

And at the end of the day, if you don't stand up for yourself, who will?

If you don't do what you say you will—not for anyone else, but for yourself—then you lose trust in yourself.

If you can't keep your own word to yourself, and do what it is that you say you're going to do, then what good is your word?

"Wisdom is knowing what to do next; virtue is doing it." -David Star Jordan

WHAT DOES INTEGRITY LOOK LIKE? WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE?

"I never had a policy. I have just tried to do my very best each and every day." - Abraham Lincoln

The things I'm proudest of aren't the big goals, the declarations, the accomplishments. **They are perpetual works of art, things I'm continuing to move towards.** A quiet integrity, the knowledge that each action is cumulative, and that with each effort, exertion, breathe and stance, I'm working towards becoming what I say I want to become.

And from yoga, standing next, upright with my leg straight out, foot held in my hand, my upper thigh quivering with tension, my hamstrings stretched to their maximum, my opposite leg shaking silently in exertion. This is the act of standing, of balancing, an act of perpetual motion. Of persistent strain. Of forces, acting in opposition, continually moving back and forth against each other.



Tracy Chapman plays in the background: "... All you have is your soul," she sings, deep and rich. She's right. You're all you've got. You know what you are capable of. And you know when you don't live up to what you could be.

The most beautiful poses in yoga, in life, in being—are actually those of endless motion, of shifting and moving and realigning. Even in the long stretches, the folds and the bends, the fibers in our muscular systems shift and lengthen, releasing millimeters, day by day, until one day we wake up with our face against our knees and wonder,

Well, shit.

How did I get here?

Sarah Peck is a writer, designer, swimmer and dreamer based in San Francisco, California. She is the brain behind itstartswith.com and landscapeurbanism.com and during the day, works at the intersection of communication, technology, architecture and design for a landscape architecture company in Sausalito, CA. In her free time, she runs barefoot, dances on city streets and does hand-stands in unusual places. Find her on [twitter](#).

J

IS FOR JOY

by Hannah Marcotti at www.hannahmarcotti.com

Joy is a sparkle inside. It tickles, it tingles, it plays. It is like the breeze blowing through your hair, and the sun shining down on you.

It is dancing or a calm breath.

JOY IS ADAPTING, FLOWING, ALLOWING.

It is found after a long cry or inside of releasing.

Joy is the feather you watch fall from the sky, speckled and blue.

Joy wants you to see her depth and understand that she is always wanting to be with you. Joy believes in you and will lift you up when you start to make a practice of rituals that feed your spirit.

Joy can live inside of you, at all times. It is your option. Joy draws others to you, they are attracted to your sparkle. Joy does not mean you do not feel sadness or fear or pain or disappointment. Joy means that you feel extra, joy cushions you through the tough times.

It's time. For whatever you want. How are you going to get there?

By choosing.

Really that simple? Oh yes, darling, it is.

The Universe is responding, but it takes doing the work and feeling the stuff and choosing to move into the joy.

Learning to sparkle.

This shift into joy isn't a declaration that we will never be sad or pissed off again. It is a message to the wondrous Universe that we know what we want. The Universe feels your passion for more joy and shoots it back at you with a crystal-clear sparkle. Sort of sha-zam like or **fairy dust or bad-ass tattoo on the spirit.**





BE CLEAR. SURPRISE YOURSELF. TAKE A CHANCE. DREAM BIG. LOVE YOU.

Don't know what you want? Great, start there. Think about what you don't want and let it be the mirror you look into to see what is really inside of you. I love a good don't-know, so many surprises lie inside. Joy is waiting just there for you.

Let the thoughts of what you don't want lead your way to the thought that feels better, and then as quickly as you can, grab it, look at it, play with it a bit. You can do this, this is the path to the gorgeous, joyful life.

You want it to be a more difficult journey, and you'll try to make it that way. I know. We all do that. We get used to focusing on the things that feel worse, on our frustrations or the ways in which we've screwed up or been wronged. Few sparkles are found in that world.

Let's try another path. You, gorgeous, you get to spin around and in this very moment make a decision that you are going to choose joy. Then you get to watch joys appear abundantly in your every day, simple moments.

Joy is so beautiful inside of simple pleasures.

You are worth this. I am too.

Claiming our joy.
Calming our minds.
Sizzling in our passions.

Jumping up and waving our arms to wake up our tired bodies.

Smooching our loves when the moment feels so right. Or when they need us most.

Clearing the corners of our homes, filling our lives with beauty.

THIS IS THE BUTTERFLIES FLUTTERING ON YOUR HEAD LIFE.

Possibility.
Choice.
Love.
Joy.



5 RITUALS TO FEED YOUR SPIRIT AND CULTIVATE JOY

1. Start each day with a large glass of lemon water. It is liver-loving, cleansing-detoxifying, nightly-fast-breaking and just pure body loving.
2. Make your bed, it should look and feel beautiful to you. Start with clean sheets and fluff your pillows each day, to clear space and create a sanctuary for rest and supporting your sleep. This is your number one sacred space.
3. Do a 5 minute meditation each and every day. This is one of the most important steps. You'll be tempted to skip it. Don't. This is the sparkle maker.
4. Quickly pick up the house before starting any projects or making any decisions. A clear space is a clear mind. A clear mind allows for more joy. More joy is what we are after.
5. Move your body: a dance, a walk or other creative movements! Just move baby. Dancing strongly encouraged.

Feeling the love? xo

Hannah Marcotti is a writer and coach whose soulwork is guiding you to the gorgeous life. She motivates you to love yourself to the point of making your dreams come true and igniting a life and business full of passion and joy. Stepping into the gorgeous life you'll find sparkles, magical moments and purpose driven desires. You'll dance inside of space and intuition. Magic is about to happen!

K

K IS FOR KINDNESS

by Erin Haslag at www.wellinla.com

I thought it would be a fun exercise to give myself a kindness grade, if you will. Would I get an "A-" or "C+" (or worse!) based on the number acts of kindness I show myself in a day? I closed my eyes and began to recount the activities that comprise my day, quantifying the moments I take time to show myself kindness, love and compassion. I wake up, I move, I make myself tea, take time to reflect and get outside to breathe fresh air before touching my phone or computer. Throughout the day I make healthy choices to show my body and mind love by picking the stairs over the elevator, stretching, choosing a healthy lunch, making time for a workout in the evening. I give myself time to re-charge and be a supportive spouse, co-worker, friend, daughter and human being each day. These are obviously very personal acts of kindness for me and may not apply to you, but you begin to get the picture. What would your "grade" be if you assessed your day start to finish? Acts of kindness and self-love are comprised of the conscious choices we make throughout our day and our life.



I wasn't always this kind to myself. There used to be days filled with unrealistic expectations, self-doubt and harsh inner monologues for 'failing' to be something I was never intended to be in this life. Growing older is pretty magical in the sense that you really stop giving a sh*t about what everyone else thinks and begin to love the amazing person that you are and all the gifts you bring to this world. That's kindness and an incredible dose of self-love. When you feel internalize all those amazing things about yourself, it makes a world of difference in how you interact with the world around you. A big, big shift for a better you and a better world.

Celebrate you. Love you. Be kind to you.

Erin Haslag's passion has always been helping people find ways to live a healthy life, from finding more time in their day to simply selecting seasonal, fresh ingredients when cooking a meal. Erin offers wellness and lifestyle coaching, helping you squeeze the most from every minute of life. Additionally, she writes on the topic of health, creates wellness-based programs and develops branding for health-based initiatives. Her goal is to help people pursue their passions with all the love and energy that comes from living a healthy life.



L IS FOR LUCKY

by Susan Hyatt at www.ideal lifedesign.com

*"For it was not into my ear you whispered, but into my heart.
It was not my lips you kissed, but my soul."
- Judy Garland*

Last week, I was on a morning radio show to chat about Create Your Own Luck, 7 Steps to Get Your Lucky On, as it relates to love. Romantic love. I think I shocked the sugar out of the hosts, when I suggested that **instead of worrying about wooing the perfect mate, you need to woo yourself.**

I know you think you want your honey to surprise you with something shiny. Or, maybe you are dying to have a honey. Regardless, I'm here to tell you, that **you ARE the shiny. YOU are the honey.** The sooner you align with that basic truth, the luckier you are going to get. Romantically and otherwise.

Self -love is the fertilizer of luck. And luck, my friends, is the way to become your very own soul whisperer.

When I wrote my book to teach peeps how to "get their lucky on," I wanted to create a shift in how we think about luck and life. **I've created 7 basic lucky commandments**, that I challenge you to journal about one at a time. Pick one a day.

My love affair with myself, and the notion of luck, over the past two years, has led me to understand that your very cell level goodness generates more luck that you can imagine.

You are a luck factory. If you are ready to embrace that, you will, in fact, have a love affair with yourself.





THE LUCKY 7

❶ LIFE DOES NOT HAVE TO BE HARD. Or grueling, or constricting, or sluggish, or cruel. Right now. Or ever. You can think yourself free. **❷ WORK DOES NOT HAVE TO FEEL LIKE A PRISON.** It can feel like connection, exploration, divination... play. Like when you were a kid. And you can still pay your mortgage. **❸ LUCK DOES NOT HAVE TO BE A MYSTERY.** It can be something you create, with intention — not a passive occurrence. You can actually invite it into your life — for good. **❹ YOUR FREAK FLAG IS EVERYONE'S FAVORITE PART (OF YOU).** Seriously. We're waiting (with bated breath) for you to whip it out + wave it proud. Just you wait for the thunderous applause. **❺ YOU CAN HAVE WHATEVER YOU WANT.** Or some delicious flavor of it. And you don't have to wait until you're retired to rent an RV and travel the world. In fact, please don't. I'm begging you. **❻ YOUR DREAM IS AS VALUABLE AS ANYONE ELSE'S.** Whether you're designing the world's biggest cupcake or the world's most efficient vacuum cleaner, it's your CALLING, babe! Let it howl! **❼ ASKING FOR WHAT YOU WANT IS WILD!** Whether it's a massive raise, or just a sprinkle of cocoa on your cappuccino, clear requests garner rapid results. And the ripple effects are beyond imagining.

www.shyatt.com

*Susan Hyatt is an author, public speaker, retreat facilitator, and Master Certified Martha Beck Life Coach. Trained and certified by Dr. Martha Beck—a monthly columnist to O, The Oprah Magazine and guest on The Oprah Show—Susan uses innovative techniques to help clients identify goals, remove obstacles, and design their ideal lives. She currently leads classes and teaches the Beck curriculum to life coaches in training. Susan's widely recognized for her non-diet approach to permanent weight loss, and her work helping women lose the diet mentality while achieving their natural weight. She's also passionate about helping Entrepreneurs create businesses that change the world. A published writer and author of two books, *Create Your Own Luck: 7 Steps to get Your Lucky On*, and *Jacked Up On Greens*, Susan is crazy-in-the-eyes serious about helping clients create a life they love through individual and group coaching, retreats, and writing.*

Susan is the mother of two hilarious kids, Ryan age 13, and Emily age 11, and a wife of 18 years to a very patient husband, Scott. She lovingly refers to her family as "The Hyatt Riot." When she isn't having a ridiculous amount of fun working with clients, you can find her running, cycling, hanging out with her family, writing, or reading. To learn more about her coaching programs, visit her website.

M

IS FOR MOXIE

by Alexia Vernon at www.alexiavernon.com

I'm often asked about the first moment I recall "Stepping Into My Moxie." And that's a tricky one. Sometimes I'll share that it was when I decided to start my high school newspaper.

Or several years before, when I launched my first "start-up" teaching ballet classes to fellow girls in my neighborhood in exchange for Reese's peanut butter cups! (Oh, biz was so much easier when operating with a barter system!)

And if I really want to go there, I'll share that it was even earlier, at four-years old when I gave voice to the unspeakable—that I had been molested.

But what is most troubling to me about the question is how easily my mind turns to all of those moments when I was not so moxilicious. When I knew I had a brilliant idea and didn't share it for fear of being seen as too geeky.

Those times when someone else in my class was being bullied and I stayed mum, relieved that for a change I wasn't being picked on.

Or the many chapters in my early professional life where I wanted so much to be liked that I didn't uphold boundaries and allowed myself to be overworked.

Or even in the last few years. I'm somewhat ashamed that there have still been times (although, fortunately, they are now few and far in between) when I have had a big idea for a new program or project and simply jotted it down in a notebook, too scared that if I really took the time to tease it out I'd have to do something with it. And I consciously chose to forget my gem of potential genius than risk the possibility of failure.

But the truth is, whenever we step into our moxie the possibility of failure is right there. No matter how educated or experienced we are, we can get it wrong; be dismissed; or alienate the people we care about. But we do it anyway. We step into that unknown—prepared (in belief system, mindset, behaviors, and skills) and at peace with the outcome. We let the fear simply be, and as a result it more quickly moves through us. In many cases, we actually say, "thank you" to the fear. We look to it as an "aha" that we're doing something that matters. Hence the stakes. And the sweaty palms and belly unrest.



M

The more we recognize and embrace our moxie, the more we shift into seeing fear as a reminder to listen to our inner voices, speak our ideas, propose new courses of action, challenge unjust belief systems and practices, and put our vision forward for how to build businesses, families, and communities we can be proud of. For despite all the voices of our ego striving to silence us day after day, when we choose to honor our moxie, we assert to ourselves and to the people in our corner of the world that what we know, believe, and seek is so important that we MUST open our mouths and speak it. The challenge, I know, is moving from embracing the philosophy of moxie to knowing how to develop the competencies to deliver on it.

*Alexia Vernon is a communication and leadership author, speaker, coach, trainer and the creator of Step Into Your Moxie. Taking the form of solo public speaking bootcamps, seminars, an Influencer Academy, and a weekend Moxie Camp for female change-makers, Moxie programs grow women's confidence and skill in heart-centered and high-impact communication, negotiation, and presentation skills. Alexia is the author of the book, *Awaken Your CAREERpreneur: A Holistic Road Map to Climb from Your Calling to Your Career* (Joshua Tree, 2010) and will soon release *90 Days, 90 Ways: Onboard Young Professionals to Peak Performance* (ASTD Press, April 2012). Alexia has shared her advice with media such as CNN, NBC, the Wall Street Journal, Forbes.com, Mint.com, CBS MoneyWatch, FOX Business News, and ABCNews.com. Alexia is active in the sexual abuse prevention and rehabilitation movement, lets go in yoga class, and loves scarfing down cupcakes! You can learn more about Alexia at <http://www.AlexiaVernon.com>, connect on [Facebook](#), and follow her on [Twitter @AlexiaVernon](#).*

N

IS FOR NATURAL

by Michelle Ward at www.whenigrowupcoach.com

A few weeks ago, I breathed deep, freaked out, made my husband and great friend read and re-read what I spent hours writing, breathed again, and hit the button to schedule Yup. 3 Sign-Ups. (aka How I Screwed Up Majorly, and What I'm Doing To Fix It). While I felt it was important to do, and I hoped it would start a much-needed discussion on how everyone doesn't make a million dollars when they launch a product/service (as well as revealing The (Wo)Man Behind The Curtain as opposed to The Great Oz herself), I was scared to death of outing myself and my "failed" launch. I heard my Dad in the back of my head, who chastised me as a very, very early blog writer for writing how many clients I was working with, as it disclosed how much money I was making. I heard my Vampire (that's what I call the voices in our heads that suck the good stuff outta us) saying that it would make lots of people run away from my Clubhouse, never allowing it to grow and not allowing that community to blossom. But the more I heard those voices and the more I wrote and re-wrote that post (it literally took hours), the more I felt excited and scared.



Excited and Scared is what I live for. When my clients describe feeling it in almost-equal doses, I start doing the happy dance. It always means that you're on the right track, which is not synonymous for Things Working Out or Being Wildly Successful. But it does mean that you care about whatever it is that's giving you that feeling, and that's something's at stake. More excited than scared probably means you're about to have fun, and that's great, but there's nothing to care about there. More scared than exciting is what I call The Uh-Oh Feeling, and you should probably get outta that situation and how. But equally scared and excited? It means you're guaranteed to learn, to grow, to take away—and that is always The Right Track.

If you go back to my veeeeeeeeery first post (all the back in May 2008!) and follow the arrows to the next post and the next and the next, you might recognize my voice but not my vulnerability, not my honesty, not my uniqueness. That's 'cause when I first started blogging, I wore The Mask of a life coach.

"I can't tell people I have a corporate job and I'm not coaching full-time!"

"I can't tell people that I don't have things all figured out and that my life is less than perfect!"

"I can't tell people that I don't have all the answers!"

N

Yup. I thought all those things and then some, and set about writing my early posts to Showcase My Expertise and Perfect Life....until I realized that my blog was so boring that I wouldn't even read it. I took off The Mask then, fell back on everything I learned as a struggling actor, and decided to no longer keep things to myself unless they were deeply personal or involved others whose feelings would be compromised by sharing whatever I wanted to say. It led me to, almost 3 years later, share my boob cancer with you guys, even. I mean, once that's on the table, you can talk about pretty much anything.

And what have I gotten in return? Thank Yous. Virtual hugs. Lots of new friends. Appreciation. More Clubhouse members (we're at 34 now!). Joy. A fulfilling, passionate business that has a strong foundation and the most amazing clients a lil' ole creative career coach could ask for. A whole network of people who understand me, who support me, who cheer me on. The feeling that I'm doing The Right Thing, that anything less would be cheating myself and everyone who's now come to know me, to read what I have to write, to buy what I'm selling or work with me as a client.

So, N is for Natural. For being Vulnerable. For Sharing. For being Unique. For Owning Your Story. For Trust. For Connection. For Showing and Telling. For Excitement and Fear In Equal Measure. For Removing The Mask.

Really, my ABC's of Self-Love are more like NVSUOYSTCSATEAFIEMRTM, but we'll just call it Natural for short.

Michelle Ward, aka The When I Grow Up Coach, helps creative people devise the career they think they can't have—or discover it to begin with! A certified life coach by the International Coach Academy, a musical theater actress with her BFA from NYU/Tisch, and a Corporate America escapee, Michelle has served as an expert source and contributor for Newsweek, Forbes, Psychology Today, Yahoo! and AOL Jobs as well as leading workshops and seminars at SXSW and the sold-out Etsy Success Symposium. She encourages everyone to claim their uniqueness via The Declaration of You and could be found coachin', bloggin' & givin' away free stuff at whenigrowupcoach.com.



IS FOR OWNERSHIP

by Tiffany Moore at www.tiffanymoore.net

"If only I could..."

"I just wish it wasn't this way."

"I just wish everything was different."

"I just wish that circumstances were better."

I am DONE with all of these statements. It's time that we all put down our magic bottles and start doing.

MAKING MAGIC IN YOUR LIFE IS ABOUT TAKING OWNERSHIP. OWNERSHIP OF WHAT YOU WANT, WHAT YOU DO, AND WHO YOU WANT TO BECOME.

TAKING OWNERSHIP OF YOUR LIFE IS THE ULTIMATE STEP IN SELF-CARE.

Nobody else is going to do it for you.

You are THE ONLY ONE who can make any changes for yourself. Instead of spending your entire life waiting for a genie to come along and fix it, ask yourself what you can do today. Right now. And then go do it.

Take all that energy that you expend thinking of how things could be different, of wishing, and angsting and point it towards something that might actually make a change. Take a risk.

Don't get an idea and then spend all of your time on facebook and twitter and blogs trying to gauge if it's going to be successful. If an idea lights you up and you can't help but get caught in the momentum, jump in, do it, then figure out how to get the word out to the right people.

Life, living your dreams, effective business, all of it: it's not about selling what you love to the people in your life. It's not about being one more person in your circle doing the same thing. It's not about using your creative product to seek validation from a club that you don't really feel like you fit into.

It's about saying "fuck 'em all" and going after it for yourself, because you can't not do it, and letting that make you become alive.





It's about living. It's about breathing. It's about being.

It's about owning who you are and what you bring to the world. Your voice. Your point of view. Your magic.

Tiffany Moore is a life coach, change agent and magic maker who helps creative women live their happiest, most sparkly lives (starting NOW) by taking charge of their lives and lighting a fire under their dreams.

Tiffany lives in the San Francisco Bay Area where she also is the co-founder of Teahouse Studio, a creative workshop space committed to building community around joyful living and conversation. Tiffany thinks that everyone in the world is beautiful, including you.

You can also find her on twitter at [@tiffanycmoore](#).

P

IS FOR PLEASURE

by Rachel Cole at www.rachelwcole.com

Pleasure is a food group.

We need servings of it every single day.

And most of us aren't getting it. We're malnourished of Vitamin P.

We're actually starving for pleasure.

By taking care of everyone else. By striving to be loved, liked, approved of, to be the 'good' girl, to be the 'bad' girl. By seeking to numb ourselves and distract from what's here. It's exhausting, we're exhausted, and all this clouds out pleasure.

We don't receive pleasure when we do 'shoulds', have 'to do's,' or when we try to fit in, suck it up, suck it in.

Dry bread and low-fat cheese. Shoes so uncomfortable they make you want to cut your big toe off. The job that looks good on paper. Faking it in all the many ways we do. Denying our self what we truly hunger for.

This is where so many of us live and **this is a pleasure desert.**

What we need is to feel good. To feel delicious. To feed our five senses.

For me it's cashmere that's just for wearing at home. lounging in bed. turning my face to the sunrise. a steaming mug of chai. skilled massage. amber oil dabbed on my neck. seeing beauty in the young and the old. food made with love. laugh attacks. clean sheets. ranunculus. Concrete Wall by Zee Avi. bearded wirey dogs. the smell of Tassajara incense. days where I do absolutely nothing.

My five senses and your five senses require pleasure.

Pleasure is quite simply a daily medicine needed for living well and being full.

And we need to be intentional about it. Not just taking what crumbs of pleasure come our way.

We need to live has sensualists. We must treat pleasure like we do drinking water—essential and something we don't apologize for needing.



P

Think of how your life might be different if you got a mega-dose of pleasure every day? Would you have more bounce in your step? More radiant energy? Less tension in your muscles?

What if you asked yourself each night before you go to sleep: "What will please me tomorrow?"

What if you started each day by asking yourself: "What would please me right now?" Or "How can what I wear today bring me pleasure", "How can what I eat today be a full-on pleasurable experience", and "Is the music I'm listening to releasing my endorphins?"

Ask yourself: "How can the everyday moments in my life, the ones that string together to form what we call 'busy' be pleasurable?" Moments like taking a shower. Like getting dressed or eating breakfast. Moments like driving in the car.

Start small (or big). Eat pleasure. Listen to pleasure. Feel pleasure. Smell pleasure. Look at pleasure. Surround yourself and infuse your life with pleasure. This is a life with luster and this is a big part of what makes life worth living.

Pleasure teaches us that life doesn't have to feel like swimming up stream or hiking Mt. Everest barefoot. I used to think it did. I used to think that toxic levels of stress, a wildly abusive inner critic, and days spent striving for perfection were normal and what life was all about.

No. More.

WITH PLEASURE AS MY CARROT, I DON'T NEED A STICK.

And neither do you.

Rachel Cole is a certified life coach, retreat hostess, instigator of ease, and hunger-satisfier. Based in the San Francisco Bay Area, she spent years steeped in the vibrant Bay Area food community while earning her MA in Holistic Health Education. Rachel is on a mission to guide women towards understanding and feeding their truest hungers. Through all her varied endeavors, Rachel is an inimitable inspiration for each of us to feast on our lives.



IS FOR QUESTIONING

by Tara Sophia Mohr at www.taramohr.com

I started consciously working on my personal growth early in life, and along the way was often frustrated when people remarked to me that inner work is for the second half of life. That you only get interested in it or ready for it when you are older.

I believe that is so not true, that many children, adolescents and young adults are seeking tools to live aligned with their values and help them go after their dreams.

Of course, one way we can love ourselves is to question the limiting stories or inner critic narratives that live in our heads. But I want to write about something else here: the importance of asking ourselves powerful questions.

It's sometimes said that the quality of our lives is determined by the quality of our questions. I think that's true.

Here are seven of the most loving questions I think we can ask ourselves

1. What do I really want?
2. What is my heart's desire?
3. What is this teaching me?
4. What is the gift in this?
5. What am I ready to let go of?
6. What am I avoiding?
7. What would love do in this situation?

Notice what these questions have in common:

1. They are about the present—not the future or the past.
2. They are short, under seven words. Simple.
3. They begin with the word “what.”





There are exceptions to every rule, but for the most part, I believe the most helpful questions we can ask ourselves meet these three criteria.

They don't try to predict the future or figure out the past. (Sorry, Freud!)

They are simple, simple enough that our hearts and souls can hear and understand them. Once a question gets too complex and weighty, only the frontal cortex can understand it—and when it comes to the questions that matter most in our lives, the frontal cortex probably doesn't have the answers. We need to speak to ourselves in language simple enough that our hearts and souls can understand — and then reply.

These questions also begin with “what.” “What” questions open up a space for naming what is happening, for creating possibilities, for generating ideas. They don't demand an answer about “how” (“how” comes later, after a gorgeous and rich and wise “what” is uncovered) or try to figure out “why.” The “what” leads the way.

So try it this week. Set aside the why questions, the complex questions, the either/or questions. When you are reflecting, or journaling, or talking with a friend, think in terms of questions like these: big, open-ended, simple, short, “what” questions.

See what gifts show up in the answer.

Tara Mohr is a writer, coach and personal growth teacher. A regular blogger for [The Huffington Post](#), her writing about personal growth has also been featured in [USA Today](#), [Forbes](#), [International Business Times](#), [Ode Magazine](#), and numerous other publications. She is the author of the blog [Wise Living](#).

Tara received her MBA from Stanford University, where her studies focused on leadership and innovation. At Stanford she led the Women in Management organization. Tara received her BA cum laude in English literature from Yale, where her studies focused on Shakespeare. Tara received her coaching certification from The Coaches Training Institute and has also been trained by The Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership.

Tara is the co-creator of two anthologies of women's writings, [The Women's Passover Companion](#) and [The Women's Seder Sourcebook](#), published by Jewish Lights in 2003. She is currently at work on a third book about living an authentic life.

Tara lives in San Francisco, California with her husband, and enjoys poetry, modern dance, cooking for friends, and walking by the bay.

R

IS FOR RELEASE

by Julie Daley at www.unabashedlyfemale.com

FIRST, A STORY...

Over the first ten days of February, I attended a silent retreat with Adyashanti, an American-born teacher of awakening. For each full day, along with 231 other people, I was silent. We meditated much of each day. This isn't the first time I've done a silent retreat, but it is the longest one I've done...and it was the most profound.

Adya shared with us that the Divine is constantly and continually revealing itself to us in every moment. And everything it reveals to us is exactly what we need, when we need it, for our liberation...liberation from our own minds.

There were many ups and downs during these days. Just like in life, there were moments when I was confused as hell, moments when profound insights would come, and moments when nothing much seemed to be happening at all.

One moment in particular, though, speaks to the word release. I was sitting in the dining room drinking my chai, nibbling on my breakfast, and staring out a window that overlooked a green meadow and the Pacific Ocean. It was a beautiful morning. I'd just finished the morning meditation, but nothing in particular was up for me. I was feeling very open.

Suddenly soft tears began to fall as I felt what seemed to be gentle waves begin to wash over me. At first, I felt some resistance to what was happening, but then my eyes instinctively closed as these waves grew stronger and caused me to turn within. The waves became deeper, and so I drew even more deeply inside, letting go into the waves. These were waves of love....sweet, silent, pulsing waves of love. It was as if an ocean of love was rhythmically washing over me, just as waves kiss the shore.

I've never been loved so deeply, so softly, so generously, so undeniably. Love washed over me, into me, around me and through me. I was immersed in an ocean of love...all in the midst of a silent yet bustling dining hall. This beautiful moment lasted close to 45 minutes, and at the end I knew I had been released into love.

It was a two-way love affair. The more I trusted what was being offered, the more I began to open to this love. The beloved loving the lover. The lover basking in the beloved's love.





WHAT KEEPS US BOUND UP FROM THIS LOVE?

Now, I imagine many of you have experienced what I did in some form. You don't have to be silent or at a retreat or even thinking of love to experience such love. There is not necessarily any rhyme or reason to how, why or when such experiences show up.

We are always being loved. The divine is always offering itself up to you. Always. Always showing itself. Always revealing itself.

Which brings me to release, and you, and the Divine.

If this is so, what keeps us from knowing this love?

What keeps us from releasing ourselves into this great love?

While on the surface our reasons may seem different and unique, I imagine at the root they are pretty much the same. I know for me, what kept me from knowing this love as an experience were my deepest fears that who and what I am was somehow other than this divine love...that my basic nature was not love, that it was somehow broken, dark and not worthy of this divine love.

I imagine somewhere deep inside, you have similar fears.

Just for a moment, imagine this...

Imagine being set free, completely and utterly free to be you: the you you know you really are; the you you hear calling to you, the you your rational mind can't begin to fathom exists.

When I ask you this, does it cause tears to fall and your heart to quiver? Or, perhaps there is an immediate response inside that this doesn't pertain to you?

I know that so many of us are kept in bondage by beliefs and fears that who and what we really are is somehow not enough or okay or ... fill in the blank. I also know that there is a deep instinctive drive to wake up to who we are. As the years of our lives pass by, this drive to wake up becomes stronger, while the bondage becomes more painful.

The drive you feel inside to reveal and release yourself is a natural, sacred, organic drive to heal into wholeness, to be the soul you truly are, to live a life of truth. The drive you feel inside is to know this Love, this sacred Love, as who and what you are.

R

NO MATTER WHAT, YOU ARE LOVED

No matter what has happened to you in your life, **your innocence and basic goodness have not been, and cannot be, diminished.**

No matter how your body has been treated, by you or by others, you are loved.

You are beautiful because the core of who you are is beauty itself.

All of you is loved, even those parts of yourself you've told yourself could never be loved. You are loved in your softness and your hardness. You are loved in your shyness and your ferocity. You are loved in all the ways you are.

Even if it feels like it will, your heart will not break if you feel all that you've feared feeling. The bindings that have grown around your heart will break, causing your heart to break open...and that is a good, good thing. This love that abides in all that is will open your heart. All you have to do is say, "Yes."

What keeps the real you bound? Whatever it is, it is no match for Love.

What would it take to release you? Again, it is Love.

Love such as this is always, always being given to you. You need not fear it, because that's what the real you is... you are love. You are fierce love. You are soft love. You are the truth at the heart of love.

LONGING

I'm not saying it will be easy. It has not been easy for me. Not one bit. It takes a burning desire to know this love. It takes a willingness to feel all that you have not wanted to feel.

The thing is, we are wired for this. It is only our minds, and the products of all of our minds, that constantly tell us differently. **But, we are wired for this.**

You don't have to believe in God. You don't have to believe in a doctrine. **In fact, let go of any beliefs you have. Let go of how you think it should and will be.**

Your doorway in is your longing...the longing to know love, to be loved, to be love; a longing to return home, a longing to no longer hide yourself.

R

Touch into your longing. Touch into your knowing. Touch into your own heart.

Reach out to the Divine and ask for what you long for.

Open to the realization that you can trust... in life, in love, in yourself so that you may receive what the Divine is offering.

This is self love: Self loving self.

Release is just a 'Yes' away.

Julie Daley, PCC, CPCC is a business creativity coach, a writer and a teacher. Since 2003 she has guided hundreds of people from all walks of life to take an inward journey of one's creative nature—the source within each of us that guides us to insights, healing, and the realization of this nature. With a degree from Stanford University and certifications as both an ICF Coach and a Creativity in Business teacher, Julie brings a wealth of knowledge, creativity and insight to her work.

S

IS FOR STRENGTHS

by Pam Slim at www.escapefromcubiclenation.com

I waited a long time to have my first child, which according to many of the doctors I saw meant my age was counted in dog years.

"Mrs. Slim," they said, "because you are of advanced maternal age we need to do some special tests."

"Good lord," I thought, "I am 38, not 76."

Despite my ancient status, I had a relatively healthy pregnancy. I endured the 9-month morning sickness that was legendary for the women in my family. I even flew back and forth between the Bay Area and Phoenix every single week of my pregnancy when I was finishing up a big consulting project. I waddled through the airport like a trooper, determined to not let a little thing like a gigantic stomach ache deter me from my work.



I wanted to have a natural birth. I was convinced that Mother Nature knew what she was doing when she wired us up to have babies. I also felt kind of cocky about my ability to handle pain and challenge.

I had been a hard-core martial artist for over ten years. I had my face smashed into the floor during a sparring session by large Brazilian men and had come up swinging. I had been knocked out by a kick to the face. I had traveled alone in dangerous places.

Childbirth, I decided, would leverage my warrior tendencies.

When the time came, labor started relatively gently, with contractions that felt like small pressure. We headed to the hospital.

I was slightly worried when the doula I had hired to help decided to take the night off. My husband and I bravely looked each other in the eyes and decided that the Lamaze classes we had dutifully taken would do the trick. I would grasp his hand as he wiped my brow lovingly with a wet washcloth. We would do that cute breathing thing that they show in the movies. How hard could it be, really?

And then, transition labor hit.

S

All quaint ideas about being a warrior were pushed aside as a freight train began to rush through my body. The force was incomprehensible. It was so far beyond my ability to manage or control that I was stunned.

In the fight for my life between breaths, all I could think of was “Are you telling me that billions of women have gone through this and survived?” I could not believe that no one had told me that within the quiet throngs of mothers the world over, since the beginning of time, they had demonstrated Herculean strength. I was in awe.

Thankfully, transition labor did its job and my son Josh made his way into the world quickly.

The movies were right on this part — as soon as he was in the doctor’s arms, I felt elated, a gigantic rush of love and joy.

I had just run a triathlon, fought a war and created a masterpiece, all in a matter of hours.

All of that strength was inside, but it was totally different than I thought it would be. Instead of carefully controlling the situation and believing I could power through it, I gave up in glorious surrender to the much larger heartbeat of Mother Nature. Surrender and trust were my pathway to doing the hardest thing I have ever done in my life.

We are all capable of so many things. We can endure challenge, tragedy and heartbreak and come out clearer, stronger and more loving on the other end.

Trust yourself.

Pamela Slim is a seasoned business coach, author and professional speaker who helps frustrated employees in corporate jobs break out and start their own business. Her blog, [Escape from Cubicle Nation](#), is one of the top career and marketing blogs on the web. A former corporate manager and entrepreneur herself for more than a decade, she deeply understands the questions and concerns faced by first-time entrepreneurs. Her expertise in personal and business change was developed through many years consulting inside corporations such as Cisco Systems, Hewlett-Packard and Charles Schwab, where she coached thousands of executives, managers and employees.

Pam’s book [Escape from Cubicle Nation: From Corporate Prisoner to Thriving Entrepreneur](#) was named Best Small Business/Entrepreneur Book of 2009 by 800CEORead and Editor’s Choice and Reader’s Choice for Best Small Business Books of 2009 from Small Business Trends. Pam is frequently quoted as an expert on entrepreneurship in publications such as The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, BusinessWeek, Forbes, Entrepreneur, Money Magazine and Psychology Today. Pam is certified as a master life coach. She is married with three kids and lives in Mesa, Arizona.

T

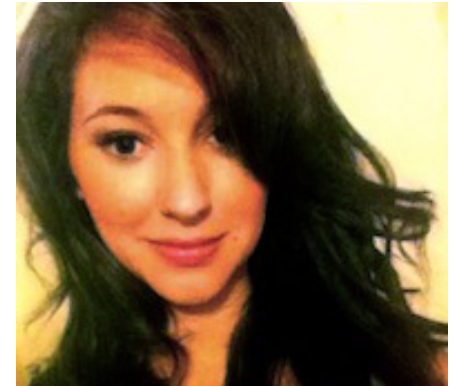
IS FOR TRUTH

by Amber Rae at www.tumblr.heyamberrae.com

"Do I need to lose weight?" I asked my Mom last September.

"You are in no way 'overweight,' but I think you could probably lose fifteen pounds," she told me. "I think you'll be happier if you tone up, cut back on wine, and stop eating out every night."

At first, that hurt. But I knew my Mom was right. And deep down, I appreciated her honesty and clear direction. I felt like I could trust her more. She could have said, out of a desire to reassure me, "No baby, you're beautiful just the way you are." Instead, she told me the truth. Since then, I've improved my diet, begun working with a personal trainer, and I'm no longer drinking. Now, I feel healthier and happier. Her truth was a catalyst for positive change in my life.



Truth can also be a catalyst for growth.

A few years ago, I learned that a guy friend was in love with me. I told him that I didn't feel the same way and just wanted to be friends. But that was a lie. The truth was that I was afraid of damaging our connection and losing him if the romance didn't work out. Apparently, I wasn't ready to confront this fact about myself—and my willingness to lie allowed me to continue this pattern for a few years. If I would have told the truth—that I was afraid of losing him—it may have sparked a conversation that brought us closer together.

A few years later, I was given the chance to find out what happens when you live your truth, no matter how scary it feels.

After I moved to Boulder last November, I started developing feelings for someone I was spending a lot of time with. He was in a long-distance relationship and so I repressed my feelings and continued to explore the friendship and our incredible working dynamic. For a while, I lied to myself and others about my true feelings because I didn't want to create awkwardness or conflict. I was afraid of how being honest might change things. It got to a point, however, when I began feeling a moral dilemma. He also started noticing a distance between us. This created an internal battle. I wondered, "Should I openly share with him the truth and risk damaging our connection? Or, will sharing with him actually provide an opportunity for greater depth?" I decided to tell him everything. Even though he wasn't on the same page with his feelings for me, it provoked an incredibly powerful conversation, one that I will remember for the rest of my life. I felt immense happiness for facing my fear and we made a pact to always be "radically honest"

T

with each other. This has had a tremendous impact on our friendship.

With honesty, there is unlimited potential for growth. You do not question whether or not someone is saying what they mean. You know they will say the same thing to your face as they will behind your back. And even when it's challenging, you know they'll tell you when something you've said or done has rubbed them the wrong way. Knowing you'll tell the truth, no matter the circumstances, makes life more simple. There is nothing to prepare for. We can simply be ourselves.

By following a single mantra in life—Do not lie—we avoid embarrassment, wasted time, and social awkwardness. We create stronger relationships founded on trust. We uphold our authenticity and our integrity. We grow and help others grow too.

The next time you're confronted with the opportunity to tell a white lie, think about the point of view of the other person. Would you feel betrayed if the roles were reversed? Will telling them the truth provide an opportunity for greater depth in your relationship? Will it help you and them grow?

Amber Rae is a passion catalyst, authority challenger, and motivational muse. She imagines a world without a speed limit, where human potential is not governed by what we're told to be, the only fear is not giving enough, and the urge to share your gift cannot be restricted. This is the world she's creating, one person and story at a time. In the last 365 days, Amber worked with Seth Godin to launch the Domino Project, helped Derek Sivers turn his book into a best-seller, created the revolution.is site, and launched a program where she helps people give their dreams direction. She's been seen in Fast Company, The New York Times, Inc., Forbes, The Huffington Post, BBC, and on ABC World News.

U

IS FOR UNDERSTANDING

by Andrea Owen at www.yourkickasslife.com

How many times has someone asked you, "Do you understand?" and you nod and say yes, but really you have no freaking clue what they're talking about?

Me too.

There are a lot of complicated things in life. I don't understand taxes, html, blatant ignorance, violence and many other things.

But, there's one thing I know for sure and that I understand 100 percent.

SELF LOVE IS THE NUMBER ONE THING YOU NEED IN ORDER TO BE HAPPY AND TO FEEL GOOD.

The end.

You can love others with all your heart. You can volunteer your time and your money. You can buy all the designer shoes, handbags and jeans you ever wanted. And it will all probably make you feel good and happy. For a few minutes. But, without self-love, sister, you'll be staring at all of it wondering what the hell is still wrong.

Now, don't get me wrong. I love all the "stuff" too. But, I'll tell you something from my personal experience. There was a time where I went to the ends of the earth to make my outside appearance fill up my heart. It was to my understanding that if I had "it all"—the perfect hair (or lack of it in certain places), the tan, the perfect body, the perfect clothes, that my life would be perfect. That I would be loved. That I would then be happy. And when I wasn't, I asked, "What is wrong with me? I don't understand."

There wasn't anything to understand. It was so simple, yet so foggy in all the "stuff" I was trying to get and have. I would try harder, buy more stuff, work out more and wonder.....why?

Thousands of dollars in credit card bills later, I understood.

I understood it wasn't the new boobs that would make me happy. It wasn't the closet full of clothes or the hot boyfriend.

It was me.



U

And trust me when I tell you, the sooner you understand this, the sooner your life will begin. You will begin to see life with new eyes. You'll start to "get it." It's like a door is unlocked to some secret society. A society where there is acceptance, self-awareness, growth, purpose and aliveness. Permission to be you. The person you were made to be. The person you are best at being.

This is a place where no one is broken. We are human and messy. We have bad days, but we don't live there. We learn from our mistakes, we don't dwell on them. And we have compassion for others who aren't here yet and spread the word.

I understand this because I have been on both sides. And if you're on the side of not understanding, I invite you to come over. There's plenty of room for you.

Andrea Owen is a professional life coach and speaker. She is passionate about empowering women and girls to value their character and feel beautiful by manifesting respect and love for themselves first and foremost. She has helped hundreds of people manage their inner-critic to break through and live their most kick-ass life.

W: <http://yourkickasslife.com>

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IS FOR VALUES

by Tanya Geisler at www.tanyageisler.com

[As] juicy as values are, they are so foundational to self-love that it's almost impossible for me to uncollapse the two. And values form the most basic level of the work I get to do as a coach. I could write a book about values. Two books. Maybe three. And self love? Yikes...don't even get me started.

So, as I do when I feel overwhelmed, I went rooting through the closet of my values to see which one could help me out of this pickle.

There it was: **simplicity**.

(Knowing your values allows you to cut through the vines of your thought with machete-like discernment.)

And it really is JUST this simple: **to know you IS to love you.**

It's rare that you can love that which you do not know.

So, let's get to know you.

SPELUNKING FOR VALUES

Values, by the way, aren't necessarily what you VALUE. Nor are they necessarily morals, ethics, or principles.

To be sure, when you are living from your values, there is a sense of "rightness" for YOU, but that's not to say that values are intrinsically virtuous.

They are your own unique thumbprint of who you are. At your core. From the inside out.

Now, that innate "rightness" (also known as "resonance") is a pretty powerful metric in learning what your values are. You can uncover some of your core values by thinking back to a time when you felt at your best. Like everything was right with the world and time could stand still. Conjure that moment and jot down what was going on, who was there, how you were feeling. That's called "Peak Experience" and it's a doozy for getting clarity.

Also notice what you're always insisting upon, who you admire, and what makes you crazy (the flip of that emotion is likely a value).





At this point, you've got yourself a pretty robust sense of what makes you tick.

In the spirit of [this theme], here are some values that my clients tend to own (this list is by no means exhaustive... nor is it a shopping list from which to load up your cart).

- A – Adventure, authenticity, achievement
- B – Beauty, bodaciousness
- C – compassion, caring, community, connection, congregation, creativity, courage
- D – Determination, duty, delight, diversity, discovery
- E – Ease, excitement, energy, elation, efficiency, excellence, equality
- F – Fun, freedom, flow, faith
- G – Generosity, gratitude
- H – Health, happiness, hope, humility, honesty
- I – Innovation, intimacy, independence, integrity
- J – Joy, justice
- K – Kindness, knowledge
- L – Love, luminosity, leadership, luxury
- M – Mastery, meaning
- N – Nature
- O – Optimism
- P – Power, peace, pleasure, performance
- Q – Questioning, quality, quiet
- R – Resourcefulness, respect, responsibility
- S – Sharing, sensuality, success, simplicity
- T – Trust, truth, transparency
- U – Understanding, unity



V – Vision

W – Worthiness, wholeness, wisdom

X – Excitement (erm...)

Y – Yummy factor

Z – Zen, zest

See which ones show up in your work, and claim them as your own.

RATING YOUR VALUES

Now that you have your list of say, 10 or 15 top values, rate each of your values on a scale of 1-10. How alive and well is that value in your life right now (one being the lowest and ten being the highest)?

Given that you are human and have a pulse, I'm gonna guess that some values are rated pretty high and some have been taking a beating of late. And, if you feel any discontent in your life right now, it will become pretty clear why when you see which values have been ignored.

Let me be clear. This is not about you doing something wrong. Living fully from your values isn't always comfortable. Just ask anyone with a core value of authenticity. Often, they must make choices to honour that value at the risk of saying some hard truths.

But selling out on your values is the quickest way to selling out on your self. A most inelegant act of self-loathing.

And we're about self-love, right?

Onward.

ACTION

If you've identified that some of your top values have been a bit unloved as of late, make note of which ones need the attention and make a plan of action.

Also notice that you're always moving towards, or away from a value.

Say you decide that you need to ramp up the yummy factor in your life (a common value my clients are desiring



more of). You can ask in a moment:

"Will this decision move me towards or away from the yummy factor?"

Or if you've identified that you're missing ease, ask yourself:

"How can this (task, project, decision) be easier?"

Electric truth in the form of elegant simplicity.

Now, tap into that creative value of yours. What actions can you take to shine the love on your value of beauty, freedom, adventure, gratitude, pleasure?

Beauty? Adorn your night table with trinkets of gorgeousness. Freedom? Commit to clearing a day for white space, by lovingly saying no to dissonant obligations. Adventure? Lose the city map and go for a stroll in a new part of town. Gratitude? Journal your gifts. Pleasure? Well, I'll leave that one up to you.

Love up those values. And in doing so, you're loving yourself up.

Purely, resonantly and honestly.

Hallelujah.

Clarity. Action. Achievement. Joy. Tanya Geisler is a CTI-certified coach (a.k.a. "catalyst, not a therapist") and speaker who believes that life is a grand production...and it's time for you to step into your starring role.

W IS FOR WORTH

by Tara Gentile at www.taragentile.com

I like making money. Even more, I like helping others make money.

I've been accused of equating net worth with self-worth. But I don't.

Your self-worth isn't a number. Your earning potential doesn't indicate your living potential.

But since transforming my minimum wage mindset into a 6-figure business, **I've learned one thing: it's impossible to "earn what you're worth" until you know your own self-worth.** Not in terms of numbers, naturally, but in terms of the value you bring to your inner & outer world.



Yes, I believe that we're born with inherent worth as human beings. But there is also something to be said for identifying the unique traits and talents that make up your ability to contribute to something larger than yourself, your immanent value.

Before I started my business, my own self-worth had been beaten down. The corporation I worked for didn't value my contribution. I had very few meaningful personal relationships. I was disconnected from my creativity and my own genius.

Intellectually, I knew I was worth something. Practically, I didn't have the foggiest clue why.

When it came to understanding how I could contribute to society – and my own bottom line – through a business, it was rough. **When you lack self-worth, it's near impossible to name the value you can deliver to a customer, client, or employer.**

Little by little, project by project, job by job, I started to see my contribution for what it was. Valuable. Extremely valuable.

But it was the work—not the price tag—that told me that. It was the results I created. It was the ease & relief I brought to my clients.

It was my unique contribution to each relationship that reinforced a growing self-worth. It was the investment of energy, time, and risk that allowed me to get back in touch with my own value as an individual.

W

As time went on, I could easily name those traits and talents. I became in tune with my immanent value.

And that—and only that—was what allowed me to catapult my earnings well past the my own self-imagined ceiling. Knowing my self-worth made earning more, taking risks, and asking for the true value of the work that I delivered the default.

No, your self-worth is not a number. The number on your paycheck or your hourly rate doesn't determine how important you are.

BUT UNCOVERING & RECONNECTING WITH THE VALUE YOU ALREADY POSSESS—AND EXERCISING THAT VALUE—IS THE QUICKEST ROUTE TO EARNING MORE THAN YOU'VE EVER DREAMED.

Tara Gentile is a thought leader & creative business coach redefining commerce as the creation & distribution of meaning, connection, and experience. She brings creative thinking to branding, product development, and marketing that incorporates both strategy and high touch design. Her approach to business in the You Economy resonates with MBAs, PhDs, and graduates of the school of life.

*She writes frequently for the Daily Worth, Design*Sponge, and Etsy. Bestselling author, Jonathan Fields, named her blog a Top 22 Single-Voice Business Blog 2012. She's the author of several popular digital guides including her latest on the relationship between personal art and money, The Art of Earning.*

X

IS FOR X-RATED

by Kelly Diels at www.kellydiels.com

X is the mark of a man signing a contract he hasn't read because he can't read. X is a surname you choose when you refuse to name Him 'sir.' X is the choice—hard-won by your sisters—you're free to make on a ballot. X is the choice of the select few who are eligible and allowed in...to watch that naughty skin-flick.

X is yes. X is no. X is decision. X is selection.

And the most loving, powerful and pleasurable thing you can do for yourself is to **select who and what you'll love**. Select your responsibilities. Restrict your allegiances and your audience. **Be an X-rated woman.**

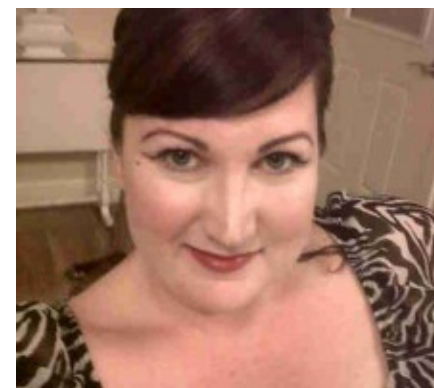
Being an X-rated woman doesn't mean you're striving to transform yourself into a pliable, plastic starlet or a cock-approved media-manufactured sex-bomb. (It doesn't mean you're not those things, either.) Being an X-rated woman doesn't mean you're accomplishing bedroom feats that would give a porn star pause. (No one has porn star sex unless the camera's on, because that kind of sex is more about docking than gratification. Make love, not porn.) Being an X-rated woman doesn't even mean you're rocking the heels and flaunting your gams and your girls on a daily basis although I wish it did because I'm so tired of swimming in a sea of yoga pants and ponytails. Sportswear is not day-wear, people!

I digress.

Being an X-rated woman doesn't have to mean any of those things. **Being an X-rated woman means deliberately choosing who you will please.** It means restricting your audience.

And that changes everything.

I mean, we know that intuitively, right? We know that trying to please everyone is a harbinger of disaster. Saying yes to every volunteer activity foisted on parents will swamp your family life and poach time from the actual objects of your parental affection. You know, your kids. Saying yes to every family obligation—organizing reunions, weddings, interventions, jail-house breaks, clandestine flights to countries without extradition treaties—will compromise the relationship with the person you've claimed as family. You know, your partner. Saying yes to every office responsibility, work task, request for collaboration, request will overturn your lifeboat. You know, your dream career.





And often you say yes because the request is inoffensive and you want to be inoffensive. You say yes because you want to please people who aren't necessarily invested in pleasing you. You want to please everyone. You want to be excellent and known to be excellent and so you spread your excellence everywhere.

But excellence is an investment, not a jam. Excellence is the way you walk in the world. It's the way you love in the world. It's who you love in this world.

Imagine a feminist cosmos. Picture a self-help planet. Now envision a lustrous black hole where these two gorgeous galaxies collide. In that space swirls the disease to please and despite the best efforts of our warrior woman cosmonauts—advocates, mentors, mothers, coaches, columnists, your best girlfriend—it infects unwary women everywhere. We see it, we study it, we acknowledge it and we wish to cure it.

And because we wish to extinguish the rampant need to please everyone around us in order to escape critique, ward off judgement, be beyond reproach, be respectable (and perhaps earn accolades for our perfect performance of inoffensiveness?), we hurl the pendulum in the other direction: Don't worry about anyone else. Don't pander to the audience (they're not watching, anyway). Don't try to please anyone except yourself. Be suspicious of other creatures—especially female ones—who seem too other-identified. Counsel them on appropriate treatments for The Please Disease. Advocate. Evangelize. Eradicate. Stop people-pleasing. Please.

But.

In the name of avoiding namby-pamby pandering to an unforgiving audience, it's not realistic to please only yourself. It's not realistic, and it's not desirable. The antidote to The Please Disease is not categorically refusing to please anyone.

Instead, declare who you will please and then really, trulymadlydeeply devote yourself to pleasing them.

Because that's power. That's excellence. To choose to love and love well is an act of profound self-love.

It's the act of an X-rated woman, a woman who selects her path and her people and then walks it with them.

And they get somewhere.

So, good news: you can please yourself while in remaining in the business of pleasing others. I'm a people-pleaser from way back but I've discovered that the difference between aiming for maximum inoffensiveness versus empowerment is choosing who you will please. Self-love—and accomplishment and pleasure—rely on restricting your audience.



Only please the people who will be pleased. Only please the people who deserve it. Only please the people who need it. Only please the people who need you.

And so the list of people who get my X is short: my loverloverman. My children. My God. My muse. The woman curled up on a bathroom floor in Boise, Idaho. The one who believes she's all alone but needs to believe she's not. Because she's not alone. I write for her.

I don't write for my mother. She doesn't need what I write and please trust and believe that although she's highly pleased by my additions to the family tree she's not pleased by what I write. That's okay. I'm not trying to please her. (Anymore.) And as soon as I stopped trying to please her, we started enjoying each other because it meant our every interaction wasn't tainted by the fraught seeking-withholding-dispensing of approval.

Well, hallelujah and pass the popcorn. This X-rated film is gooooooooood. I vote yes, yes, YES.

That's what an X-rated woman does: in the name of self-love, in the name of pleasure, in the name of ecstasy and fulfillment, in the name of your pussy, your power, your spirit, your ancestors, your ascendancy (and hell, your dependants, too), **you mark the spot.**

And forget the g-spot (don't forget the g-spot!), **X marks the spot.**

Mark your pleasures and make your mark: for self-love. For agency. For efficacy. For excellence. For the greater good...but in a select theatre.

Restrict your audience and expand your effect. Be an X-rated woman.

Kelly Diels writes for one woman at a time. This is both a metaphor and reality: she is a wildly hire-able copywriter (bios, About Pages, blog posts, oh my!); the founder of a feisty blog called Cleavage (it's a sexy word that means more than you might think); and teaches online artists, entrepreneurs and provocateurs how to write.

Well.

Y

IS FOR YES

by Sarah Von Bergen at www.yesandyes.org

Friends, let us talk a bit about the art of self-love. About what it means to like yourself as much as your friends do. To give yourself the treats/compliments/breaks you give other people. To eat half a block of cheese because, you know what? You want to.

The language of love that I'm particularly fluent in is saying "Yes." To, um, most things.

HERE ARE A FEW OF THE THINGS THAT I SAY YES TO THAT HELP REMIND ME EXACTLY HOW AWESOME I AM.

Yes to monthly pedicures with my BFF. Even in the winter. Even when my toes are inside boots all day long.

Yes to high quality parmesan.

Yes to checking out my butt in these jeans and saying "Yup. That's pretty cute."

Yes to shouting "High five, self!" to my empty apartment when I finish something difficult.

Yes to embracing my own impossibly high standards and being pleased when I encounter people who meet them.

Yes to befriending people who make me happy.

Yes to brunch. Always.

Yes to embracing my dorky desires to get up early, go to bed early and read college textbooks for fun.

Yes to moving my body in ways that bring me joy.

Yes to knowing when I'm bored and listless and taking action about it.

Yes to respectfully, carefully culling non-awesome people from my life.

Yes to being outside for half an hour, every day, regardless of the weather.

Yes to re-reading my cheesily-titled Smile File when I'm blue.

Yes to getting dressed and looking cute every day—even if I never leave my apartment.



Y

Yes to new things. Every year. Always.

Yes to being direct, open and crazy-honest about my feelings.

HOW DO YOU SHOW YOURSELF LOVE? WHAT ARE YOU SAYING YES TO THIS YEAR?

After burning out on her jobs in marketing, advertising and event planning, Sarah Von Borgen sold her worldly belongs and moved to Taiwan to teach English. And then she moved to New Zealand. And then she traveled for ten months by herself. Somewhere along the way she earned an M.A. and started a blog that's now read by 10,000+ people every day and supports her and her traveling ways. And yes, she's just as amazed by the whole thing as you are.

Z

IS FOR ZEN

by Amanda Oaks at www.kindovermatter.com

ZEN & THE ART OF LOVING YOURSELF

How does the word Zen make you feel? What does it mean to you?

For me, Zen brings me to a place of complete truth & peace, it opens my eyes, my heart, body & soul to infinite possibility, love & the unity of all that is.

Zen cannot be explained with words, it's more of a feeling, a way of life, fleeting for some, barely unwavering for others.

It is not a thought, a religion or a philosophy, it is a truth, an experience.

Though, I am so far from being some kind of Zen guru, here's what I've learned by heart on my journey so far...

Zen is the gateway into showing you what it is to fiercely yet gently **love yourself**.

It's about seeing the essence of who you truly are.

Beyond your train of thoughts, your memories, your to-do list, your job or self-appointed title...

Zen is living inside the present moment... moment after moment after moment.

Zen is the beautiful art of noticing.

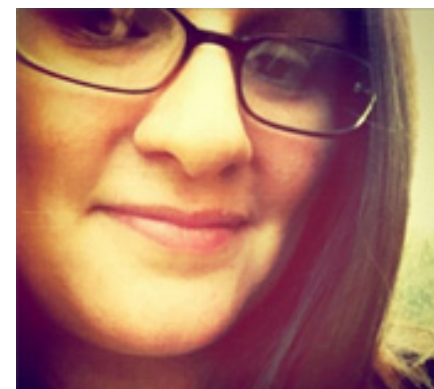
Zen is the beautiful art of creation.

Zen is surrendering to sadness.

Zen is surrendering to laughter.

Zen is the echoing of footsteps walking down a hallway. Zen is the floor, the walls & the windows. Zen is your hand reaching into your pocket to collect the key to an already unlocked door within yourself.

Zen is connecting with all that is. It's being aware of the unified whole. It's oneness. It's love.



Z

Zen is being in a state of fierce love & wonder for all that your senses come into contact with.

Zen is being empty yet full.

Zen is being awake.

Zen is being alive.

Zen is you & me & we.

Zen is the realization that the love within yourself & for yourself is not separate from all the love in the universe.

It almost goes without saying but for all you new loves hangin' out here today, Zen is also special to me because of my son, Zenin. We call him Zen sometimes. He's been my greatest teacher in this life so far. Both my children have, they are true manifestations of presence & love.

I believe in synchronicity. I believe that when you begin to notice seemingly unrelated things connecting in a meaningful way...that it's the universe whispering in your ear, saying, Yes love, you are on the right path, keep going, I've got your back.

When we really begin to investigate these occurrences, that's when the real magic starts to unfold around us—it is like breaking into jog from a slow & steady walk on your path of self-growth.

So what does all of this have to do with self-love?

For me, Zen has taught me to clear my mind of all that is untrue.

The...

I am not enough.

I am overwhelmed.

I am shy.

I am the number on the scale.

I am not a teacher.



I am not smart enough.

I am not a writer.

I don't know enough.

I can't teach what has already been taught.

...stories.

And let's not even begin to get into the victim-based "They" stories (they don't understand me, they don't care, they judge me...)

I am none of those thoughts because I just AM.

All those stories that I continued to tell myself day in & day out were just thoughts that didn't serve me. They were not the companions I wanted to travel with me on my journey. They surely were not what I wanted my children to learn from me. They blocked the inescapable truth that...

I AM LOVE & SO ARE YOU. NO MATTER WHAT.

That together if we truly live at that level openly, then we aid in the rise of human consciousness just by existing, & that, of course, would serve the whole of all of us.

In order to help the whole, you must first have love of self, you must love all that you are to put an end to your suffering, to heal yourself—

*in order to love
& heal
all
that is.*

Hi, I'm Amanda Oaks curator of connection & provisioner of benevolent beauty. Mama. Lover. Poet. Multi-Passionate Solopreneur & Kindness Advocate at KindOverMatter.com.



Inspired? Electrified? Ready to practice Self-Love in your world?

I can't wait to witness the flames of your love.

It's all about ***YOU*** and that's a damn good thing.

Molly Mahar is a coach, speaker, and writer. She is also the founder of Stratejoy, a positive corner of the Internet that provides thousands of women the tools, strategies and camaraderie to lead authentically joyful lives. She empowers women to live life on their own terms, celebrate their worth, and change the world through individual fulfillment. Molly's work is delivered through several live and digital group programs, focusing on creating YOUR joyful world. Interested?

VISIT WWW.STRATEJOY.COM

Dig this guide? Find out more about Molly's Fierce Love Course!

www.stratejoy.com/fierce-love-course