

UNF*CK YOUR ADULTING

GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION,
CARRY YOUR OWN BAGGAGE,
DON'T BE A DICK, MAKE DECISIONS,

& OTHER LIFE SKILLS



FAITH G. HARPER, PHD, LPC-S, ACS, ACN
AUTHOR OF *UNF*CK YOUR BRAIN*

"FIRE!"



"FEELING MYSELF"
MEEDOW!



"GOT MY SHIT
TOGETHER"



"OUT OF FUCKS"



"BUMMED"



"WHATEVS"



"NOT IN THE MOOD"



"AIN'T NOBODY GOT
TIME FOR THAT!"



"SWAGGER"



"DID I EVEN SHOWER?"



"TOTALLY SURE I DIDN'T
SHOWER"



"HAVENT SHOWERED
IN A WEEK"



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Part of the 5 Minute Therapy Series

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INTRODUCTION

A couple of years ago, my then-eighteen-year-old daughter walked out of her job-training program and moved herself to Los Angeles on a whim. I have multiple worry lines and gray hairs associated with her decision, y'all. But she has some serious self-preservation skills and street smarts. She found a job and people to live with and was completely on her own for the first time. Pretty brave stuff, really.

She texted me one day soon after her move because she was feeling like shit, but went to work anyway.

Yep, that's adulting.

She wanted to know how I had made her favorite cream of tomato soup when she was a little girl home sick from school.

I replied that it was just canned tomato soup made with almond milk instead of water (we're all lactose intolerant).

A couple hours later, she texted that she now totally understood why going to the grocery store after a long day at work was my least favorite thing on the planet. And then a few minutes after that sent, "*Holy fuck, almond milk is five dollars a carton!* No wonder you lost your mind when we left food sitting out on the counter!"

I replied that lactose-free moo juice would be much cheaper and wouldn't make her sick. She bought her canned soup and lactose-free milk and trudged home to make her sick-girl supper.

She had about eleventy adulting lessons that day . . . all the things that don't register when they are someone else's concern smacked her hard in the face one after another. And she toughed them all out.

I tried my best not to be smug and gleeful and dude-I-told-you-so-ish and just commiserated with her. It became a running joke whenever she bumped up against an activity or choice that required adult consideration. Pay rent or buy new boots? Pay rent. Why does my guacamole not taste right? Forgot the lime juice. Box hair dye job? Well, it'll grow out . . . eventually.

As she navigated these issues, her questions started going to a different place. How do I support a pregnant friend? How should I navigate discussions of my sexuality on social networking sites? What the fuck am I going to be when I grow up, anyway?

Adulting, adulting, adulting.

Adulting has been the word of the moment lately. As an appropriately unrepentant book hoarder, I have picked up several books on the subject, and while many of them are not at all bad, they are so heavily focused on the things thou shalt do. You know. Task-oriented.

And there is nothing wrong with task management. But I don't need a book on how to sew on a button or clean out

the dryer vent. I have YouTube. Not to mention people to whom I can pay a good living wage to do either for me if my priorities are elsewhere.

So, this book is deliberately not about tasks. It's about relationships. Our relationship with ourselves. Our relationships with others. And, OK, our relationships with our tasks. But not the tasks themselves (and wait 'til you read my *unmade bed rant!*).

Because adulting, in the end, is not just what we do, it's who we are when we are our best and most mature selves in every situation. This list started as being uniquely my ideas, and expanded through social media by suggestions from my friends. All the stuff that they figured out the hard way that helped them be the adultiest adults *they* could be as they navigated all this shit, too.

Our task as adults in the world is to experience it as fully and truly as we can. We owe the world our joy and authenticity just as much as we owe the federal government our taxes. We owe ourselves healthy boundaries, fulfilling relationships, the opportunity to care for others, and space to care for ourselves. I have

shit to do on this planet, and my adulting skills are what allow me to do those things.

Doing the important stuff is not just paying our taxes (though remaining off the IRS Shitlist is a good adulting skill). Important stuff includes taking care of others. Taking care of ourselves. Not just doing the things we need to do, but being the person we are here to be. Adulting is about claiming our space in the world.

Michelle Tea's memoir, *How to Grow Up* (Plume, 2015), is a wonderful book about how she overcame so much trauma in her life. But what really struck me was the smaller things, and the bigger messages within them. She talked about how she used to send in magazine subscription cards with fake names and her real address. That way she would get a few issues of *Vogue* in the mail before the company realized she wasn't paying the bill and stopped sending them. It was this ongoing, concerted effort to hack the system. Until she realized that a magazine subscription is like ten bucks. And she had ten bucks. And she could pay for the magazine. And get it every month. Delivered in her name. And enjoy reading it with her morning coffee at the breakfast table.

This book isn't my memoir. Because, seriously, who cares; I'm boring AF. But it is about those kinds of lessons. What are you spending energy on in your life and is it really worth it? Is it more important to game the system or spend the ten dollars and get a deep pleasure out of reading a magazine you love *every* month?

This book is for my daughter, Molly. And my son, Sam, who is entering the turning-eighteen season of his life as I write this and figuring out the what-next stuff. And the rest of my kids, family, and friends. My awesome clients who work their butts off in therapy. And anyone else who needs an affirmation of what the most important parts of being grown up really are. It's a reminder of how to get up every day, do the best we can do, and remember that it really will be OK in the end.

So, I guess that means it's for myself most of all. If something isn't OK yet, it's clearly not the end. Let's get back to the emotional work that gets us there.

DON'T BE A DICK

Growing up, my kids had two household rules: *“Don’t be a dick”* and *“If it’s not yours, don’t touch it.”*

(And honestly the second rule is really covered by the first, but a couple people I gave birth to had some struggles with the “stop fucking with other people’s stuff” portion of the program, so we had Rule Two. But I digress.)

This rule was so well known that everyone who was invested in the welfare of my kids (teachers, counselors, etc.) would invoke it: “Well, are you being a dick right now?”

Thank you, Wil Wheaton, for adding “Don’t be a dick” to our common vernacular. Because, seriously, if you are only going to have one life rule, have it be this one. You don’t need an explanation on this one. You know when you are being a dick. Don’t.

When this now-book was first released as a zine, I wondered if “Don’t be a dick” would resonate and make sense with the people who read it. Or would there be a bunch of “*Dude, what the fuck do you mean by that?*” going on. Not once has that happened. This is a rule that everyone *totally* intuits *immediately*. We know what dickitude looks like in all its shapes and forms. If we call it out in ourselves and refuse to tolerate it in others, we are already acting way more grown than most motherfuckers out there.

BE A TINY BIT NICER THAN YOU HAVE TO BE

OK, you aren't being a dick. Badass. Next step? Push yourself to put a little more *good* into the world than you are required to by the situation present. Say please and thank you. Use markers of respect (ma'am, sir, or whatever is appropriate). Be kind. Tip extra. Hold the door open. Smile sympathetically at the parent with the screaming child. Be engaged, present, and just a little bit more awesome.

Recently, someone kept breaking into our neighborhood mailboxes (because *some people haven't read Rule Number One*). This meant the mailman couldn't leave our mail and it had to be brought back to the post office for pickup. My Boo saw his truck one day and asked him

if we could get the mail from him and skip the drive. Mailman said, “I’m totally not supposed to do that, but for you I will. Your wife is always soooo nice to me.”

All I had ever done was to smile and wave when I saw the postman in the neighborhood (you know, like Mr. Rogers taught me to), thank him when he brought me packages, and if I saw him in front of the house, walk out to his truck so he didn’t have to get out. This is small, *small* stuff. And it’s stuff that most people just don’t do anymore. We aren’t talking about working in a soup kitchen every Saturday (though that is pretty badass, too). We are just talking about taking the time to recognize and respect other human beings on the planet.

Think about all the times someone being nice to you made your day bearable. Things that were pretty small for them were huge for you in that moment. We can put the same goodwill out into the world. Hell, even if it doesn’t work you totally earn serious karmic power-ups for trying harder than you have to.

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

I don't mean your f-bombs, because who am I to judge? But *do* mind the self-accountability you either own or give away when you speak.

Language has some serious fucking power, y'all. Franz Boas, when studying indigenous languages more than one hundred years ago, discovered something seriously fascinating. There is a bidirectional flow between thought and language. What we think impacts what we say. And “duh” on that one. But *also*? *What we say starts to change how we think.*

Give yourself back control with the words you use. Speak with a level of consciousness that reinforces who you are, who you want to become, and how you want

to interact in the world. Don't *demand* or *insist*, but ask for what you *desire* or *prefer*. Don't say you *can't* when really you *won't*. Don't say you *need* when really you *want*. Don't apologize for shit you have no reason to be sorry for.

Imma say that one more time for the people in the back. *Don't apologize for shit you have no reason to be sorry for.* In the past, I've apologized to others when they've bumped into me or apologized to inanimate objects when I've bumped into stuff. What kind of thought patterns was I reinforcing in myself, FFS???

You know where this also matters? OK, where this matters *most*? In your self-talk. Your internal voice is going to have a huge impact on your external voice. Minding your language in your self-talk will help you maintain honesty with yourself *and* wrangle in the negative self-talk that we all struggle with. Your relationship with yourself will do more to define your relationship with others than anything else.

IF IT'S NOT YOURS, DON'T TOUCH IT

Without permission, that is. Seriously. Respect people, their boundaries, and their property. Don't presume it's alright with them because it would be alright with you.

Like I mentioned above, this was rule number two in my household. It made sense in very concrete ways (“*Give your brother back his matchbox cars!!!*”) when my kids were little, and started to make more inherent sense as they got older.

This is also a great place to sneak in a little discussion about consent and boundaries in physical relationships. If you wouldn't grab a beer from someone's fridge

without their permission, you def shouldn't grab their ass, right? Active and enthusiastic consent doesn't have to be all weird and awkward and vibe-harshing. "I'd love to [insert dirtyness here] with you. You down?" will suffice just fine.

We aren't just talking about OPP here (and if you weren't a Naughty By Nature fan in the '90s, we're referring to other people's . . . ahem . . . *property*).

We are also talking about taking on burdens that aren't yours. Someone is in a foul-ass mood and wants to piss in your Cheerios? Don't touch it. Someone is making the same mistakes over and over and over again and is expecting some kind of bailout, whether literal or emotional? Don't touch it. "*Nie mój cyrk, nie moje małpy*" is a Polish proverb that translates literally into "Not my circus, not my monkeys." This is far superior to just saying, "Not my problem," isn't it? Because it reminds us of the ridiculousness of getting sucked into drama that doesn't belong to us. You do not have to deal with craziness that isn't yours. If you choose to buy a ticket and a tub of popcorn, that's totally on you.

This doesn't mean you should be a coldhearted asshole who never helps anyone out. It *does* mean that you aren't responsible for their shit and you don't have to take ownership of it. Respecting what belongs to others means respecting their emotional content and their decision-making authority. Not just their physical self.

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY. IT ALWAYS TELLS YOU THE TRUTH, IF YOU CAN PAY ATTENTION

We aren't often in touch with our bodies, are we? We are trained to push and go and treat our body like the enemy, rather than our wingman. Or, dare I say it? *Part of us.*

Once you start noticing what motivates your behaviors, you are halfway to really paying attention to *everything* going on in your body. Thoughts, feelings, somatic experiences (you know, bodily sensations). Once you start really listening to your body, it's going to tell you what it really needs. Hah, you may be thinking. My body is always yelling for coffee and sugar. That may be what it *wants*, but not what it *needs*. If I'm really listening, my body is saying, "You're killing me, Smalls. I'm exhausted

at the pace you are pushing me, so you better give me some temporary energy to keep going if you won't slow the fuck down."

I don't need caffeine and sugar. I need to slow the fuck down.

OK, body. I feel ya. I need to slow the fuck down. Once we start listening to the person who knows us best (*Ourselves. If we let ourselves listen.*), then we have the information we need to figure out how to best take care of ourselves. Slow the fuck down? Ain't nobody got time for that, right? Sometimes shit needs to be done.

I'm talking about taking five minutes to meditate between a long day of work and walking into the door of your home and the next part of your day. Or taking a hot bath with epsom salts. Or finding a few minutes for gentle stretching followed by a mug of cinnamon tea. Life can feel totally apocalyptic, but we can actively seek moments of peace in the chaos and do small things to better care for ourselves in the process. Hell, that's when we need it most.

PUT DOWN THE SCORECARD

Wouldn't it be nice if the world owed you something? Wouldn't it seem *fairer* if it did? Yeah, I feel ya. But it still doesn't. Even if it should? It won't. Keeping score is just going to piss you off.

We all have a tendency to do this (and if you have managed to shut it down for good, let me know your secret!).

It may happen in big things, but it also happens in a million little ways. Like you may be the person who always lets people into your lane in traffic. And when you are trying to merge yourself and no one will let you? You end up far more aggro because you are thinking of

all the times that you let other people in when clearly they didn't even *deserve* to be let in, because *they weren't paying attention to the merge sign two miles back*. So clearly you are the more evolved human being here, right? Ahem. Or maybe that's just me thinking that bullshit?

You are (OK, *I am*) just making the situation worse by tying it to a distorted thinking style that therapists call the **just world fallacy** (and I write about distorted thinking styles in more detail in my book *This Is Your Brain on Depression* if you wanna nerd out in that regard). It's this idea that all good actions will be rewarded with kittens and rainbows and easy traffic merging and all bullshit will get punished.

Of course, if this was true, the people in charge of our country would not be left in charge of more than the grease trap at a Burger King fry station. And yet here they are, fucking shit up willy-nilly *and* hogging the merge lane.

But this isn't just our grand sense of karmic balance, though. We do it with **people**, too. We have a tendency

to keep score of what we think others owe us, and what we owe others.

I was having a discussion with someone about whether or not they should offer to help out a friend that had helped them in the past. They felt a sense of obligation, that they *should* do the thing, as if it would even out some tally in their brain. So, they were guilt-tripping themselves into doing something they didn't actually want to do, didn't need to do, wasn't really expected of them, and wasn't actually a good idea for anyone involved.

I queried: If this was an entirely different friend-person who you didn't feel that you owed anything to, who asked you for this favor, would you help them? Even if what you were thinking you needed to do to help was actually hella enabling? Not even. Removing the scorecard from the equation helped her see the situation with a level of clarity that her guilt had prevented her from seeing.

CARRY YOUR OWN BAGGAGE. AND DON'T INSIST IT IS SOMEONE ELSE'S DAMN SUITCASE

We all have baggage. We are all survivors of the shit that has happened to us. The number of people I know who have had relatively trauma-free lives is like two. Fucking unicorns.

In an ideal situation, we would be shaped by all the care and love and support we received in order to become the adults we need to be. But most of us didn't get all that we needed in that domain. So, we are trying to adult despite that lack of solid grounding and despite all the shit that has gotten in the way of doing so. That shit is our *baggage*. For example, maybe you have really struggled with body image issues. This is a pretty common occurrence in a society that inundates us with unachievable standards

of physical perfection. So, if someone has body image issues, they may have internal dialogue around their bodies. And impulses and reactions when that dialogue is triggered.

And don't mistake me for saying, "Yo, hurry up and let that shit go." You are still carrying it for some reason, right? It's complicated shit to unpack. Stuff that you've had forever doesn't drop away in the moment. That's OK. Work on it. Do the best you can. But realize that no matter the reason for you having it, no matter what circumstances created it, it's *now your baggage*. No way in hell is that shit even fair.

But it also isn't fair to those around you to be turned into your personal bellhops. I've seen sooooo many people in my practice show up in a relationship danger zone because one person was foisting their baggage on the other. Body image example again. Your Boo (or the other people in your life) can't unfuck your body image issues for you. They can't convince you that you are attractive or strong or have the most fantastic hair.

Do your work. Ask for help and support, totally. But do your own work, rather than relying on others to feel better. Carry your own load. Take responsibility for what's yours. Otherwise you are not only creating resentment in others, you never have to figure out how to actually deal with what you've been handed.

I was about nineteen years old or so and was boo-hooing to my mom on the phone (back when long distance cost fucking bankage) about an epically shitty boss. Yes, she agreed. Boss-person was epically shitty. Yes, she was seriously out to get me. Yes, none of it was fair. But then she said something that sunk in for evermore. She said, "People can fuck you over, but they can't fuck you up. Only you can do that. You're fucking yourself *up* over that bitch. Stop giving her all that power."

Nobody, no way, no matter how awful they are, *makes* you feel what you feel. You can ask people for different interactions with you, but you can't hold them accountable for their impact on you. Only you have control over that.

Own your crap and own your successes. Then radiate that ownership out by being honest with the people around you. Here's the thing, though. Honesty doesn't mean dickitude (if in doubt, see Rule Number One). Someone brought you something to eat, and it turns out it is something you're allergic to? Dickitude would be "You *know* I can't have dairy! Why the *fuck* won't you pay attention enough to me to know I can't drink a damn milkshake!" Honesty would be "I appreciate you bringing me this, it makes me feel really cared for. Unfortunately, I can't have dairy, so can't drink it, though I really wish I could. It looks yummy." Honesty doesn't mean dumping every nasty or negative thought you have out there in the world. Thinking something doesn't make it true, after all. Honesty is that thoughtful, balanced, considered—and, let's be honest, *subjective*—truth about your experience, shared when it is called for to do so. This form of honesty is kinder in the long run and respects the time and energy of everyone involved.

GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION

If you are sitting around waiting for permission from the rest of the world to go do the stuff that sets your soul on fire, you may not ever get it. The world is not designed to kiss you on your forehead and send you off on your epic adventures.

You will get permission to go to work, brush your teeth, and go see the new Batman movie. But only if you are exceptionally lucky will the world tell you to sing and dance and make art and be authentic and silly and joyful. The problem is that so many people are also sitting around waiting for someone to give *them* permission, that they don't have the capacity to hook you up with the permission that *you* are seeking.

This is the grand existential problem, isn't it? What's my task here on this planet? What's the point of it all? Our purpose is to figure out our purpose. And then go do that thing. You are allowed to explore. To try things. To figure this shit out. And you are probably going to have to fight for your right to do so in a world that thinks you should just be a copyeditor because you won the third grade spelling bee when you desperately hate copyediting. Your life is meant to be far more rich and varied and interesting and unique than whatever box people have been trying to shove you in.

And you know what else is important? Giving yourself permission to *stop*, not just *start*. Did you take on something bigger than you expected? Can you simply not do what you set out to do? Did you realize that you really don't want to? As Cheryl Strayed said, "Be brave enough to break your own heart."

Resist the box. Figure out what makes your heart sing. Do as much of that as you can. That's why you're here.

FOCUS ON FINDING SOLUTIONS, NOT SOLVING PROBLEMS

What's the difference? Problem-solvers focus on what's *broken* and solution-finders focus on what's *working*. When you focus on where you are already successful, you find ways to implement those strategies elsewhere. It's also a way less depressing way to live, when you think about it.

This is what makes Ganesh a badass. You've probably seen Ganesh imagery at some point . . . He's the elephant-headed Indian god of wisdom and learning and is revered as a remover of obstacles.

Did you know that when he got his elephant head, he also got his ability to remove obstacles? But not like a "make three wishes" genie. You don't ask Ganesh to help

you make you a track star or to make a sexy person fall in love with you. I mean, you *can* ask, I suppose. But he doesn't remove obstacles in the way that we presume. Ganesh is more likely to help you figure out that pottery is more your thing than track. Or that maybe being alone is the best thing for your mental health right now. Ganesh doesn't just hand over the goodies, he helps you figure out life, if you ask him.

Invoke your own elephant-ness in life. Look outside the direct parameters of the situation you are stuck in for other options. Look at the stuff you are good at, and figure out ways to drag those skills into the situation.

CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

What is one thing you can do differently when you are tackling a problem? What's the sideways angle of attack? This totally goes with being solution-focused, rather than problem-focused.

I have a lot of really tall books. Like the big coffee table books people buy to look impressive. Except I actually adore them and read them, so I have far too many for my coffee table. (Total book hoarder, if ya feel me.) I also have this weirdly narrow bookshelf that doesn't hold much. I was organizing the space in my living room in my mind (as someone with an HGTV addiction is likely to do) and thinking about the shelves I needed to buy to hold all my big art books. Then maybe I would give the tall skinny shelf away.

Or. Oh.

I could turn it on its side. Like *literally turn it sideways* and it then it would hold all my oversized books without me buying anything new. This is a *concrete as pavement* example of getting out of our thinking ruts, but it works just as well in a metaphorical way. Humans have a tendency to get stuck in certain patterns of problem-solving that end up stifling our creativity. And, you know, our ability to actually solve problems. One of the great things about working with a therapist is they literally give you a different perspective on the problem. Creative, perceptive, and generally non-shitty family and friends may do the same thing.

One of the best things you can do for yourself is take all your old tried and true ideas off the table. Like your go-to problem-solvers are now completely unavailable. And start spit-balling the different shit it can become. You may reveal some weird and wacky-ass ideas, but just keep thinking and exploring. Turn the problem sideways and look at it again. Then upside down. You might find solutions you didn't think were possible.

FORGIVE THE PEOPLE WHO DON'T GET IT

If you are out there doing you, there are gonna be plenty of people who massively disapprove.

Now, I am not talking about the politicians that don't want you to join the military or use the same bathroom as them. They are putting lives at risk, so fuck forgiving those assholes. Fight them until hell freezes over, then fight them on the ice (as my friend, and former candidate for Texas Attorney General, David Van Os is known to say).

I'm talking about that quiet, implied disagreement with your path. People who make their disapproval known to you in some way. You turned the bookshelf sideways and it worked for you. You gave yourself permission and they have no idea how to do the same for themselves,

and that means you aren't playing by whatever rules they've created in their own heads.

There are plenty of things that other people do that I totally don't understand. But it's an action that makes sense to the person doing it. So, I don't *need* to understand it. So many people feel far more secure if they think everyone follows the same thought processes. That's about them, not about you. Understand that their insecurity is about their worldview, not your actual decision. Keep doing you, Boo.

PRETEND YOU'RE GOOD AT IT

Have you ever been summoned to do something, and your inner four-year-old wants to hide under the bed? That's OK. Feeling like hiding under the bed, that is. Not actually hiding under the bed.

Do the thing anyway. As if you have it nailed down cold.

Now I'm not saying volunteer to play a piano concerto when you can't even read the sheet music. That's how we end up with fucking halfwits running the country. I'm not talking about blowing smoke up the ass of everyone around you (or yourself, for that matter). I'm talking about shutting down your own internal grumpy asshole voice and do things you are clearly capable of doing, even if the "what-if" monster begs to differ.

I was lucky enough to attend a really fan-fucking-tastic doctoral program that taught me how to teach clinical skills as much it taught me how to be a better clinician. We studied and practiced and presented to each other for *years*. So, I knew how to do this shit, right? Except when it came time to start teaching other people, I was pretty sure I might projectile vomit on my audience in my fear not of public speaking, but of *doing it wrong*. This wasn't something that I could practice my way out of. I just had to do it. And continue doing it. And mostly do it really, really right. And learn from it when I did do it wrong. And realize the world didn't end if I did fuck up. Now I travel all around teaching about mental health. And *holyphuck* it's-the-best-job-ever-and-I-love-it. No one was gonna be able to convince me that I was good at it until I proved to myself I was.

This is called **behavioral activation**. Sometimes you can't unfuck your thinking, so you have to behave your way into new thinking. You just have to *prove your own negative attitudes wrong*. You will start to see shifts in how you tackle the task. Keep going. Then one day you will look up and realize you are no longer pretending.

EITHER WIN OR LEARN

You know what learning is? Failing epically and often, but differently each time. Failure is as much a part of our learning process as success is, it just feels un-great in the moment because it means our best efforts didn't get us the results we wanted.

We don't learn nearly as much from winning, really. When doing recovery work, the first question I would ask after relapse was "OK, so what did you learn?" If we fall off course (*and we all fall off course*), then the task is to figure out how that happened so we can approach it differently next time.

I dated a football coach a while back. A football coach in Texas, mind you. He'd had kids that went pro. So, *Friday*

Night Lights all the way. He started out hating this expression (it's a classic Dr. Faith-ism) because his motto was you either win or you win. No losing, no learning. Just winning. (Then pizza.) But something shifted in him. Because we don't always win (duh). We can't. We can turtle up or we can learn from the experience and not do that shit again. And if losing pisses us off, we missed out on a huge learning opportunity. We learn far more from failure than success. A pain in the ass but a seriously truthy truth.

Football Coach Dude found this expression coming out of his mouth one Friday night. The team took a loss . . . and he saw that loss as a mechanism to learn some new skills on the field rather than as a Taylor Swift "Shake It Off" moment. His fellow coaches said he was creeping them out and needed to break up with the therapist chick . . . but out on the field the next morning they went. And they learned. And beat the shit out of the other team next time they played each other.

So you got your shit stomped into a mudhole. What did you learn that you are going to carry forward in life? What did you learn about certain situations or certain

people? What did you learn about yourself and your badass capacity for survival?

REMINDE YOURSELF THAT FAILURES ARE EVENTS, NOT PEOPLE

Failing does not make you a failure. The task you set out to accomplish may not have been successfully accomplished, and that really sucks. Especially if you worked really damn hard to give yourself permission to do something unique, or different, or risky. It's really tough to put something out there that you feel defines who you are and not have it gain the intended effect.

Something failed there. You, though? The human being decider? You are most decidedly *not* a failure. You are fucking *not*. You are far more than the sum of your actions. And you are gonna learn from this shit (see above) and rock out your sparkly unicorn self trying a new task.

We could totally talk about all the people who failed in big, epic literal bankrupt ways like Henry Ford, Walt Disney, and even freakin' Abraham Lincoln. I could tell you about my own failures and how they didn't define me (I did so badly on my math GREs I prolly shouldn't have been admitted into a doctoral program. Now I'm a researcher and a statistician so *boom*.) But when it comes down to it, you have seen time and again *already* in your life where you set out to do something and didn't kill it for whatever reason. And you learned from it and killed it the next time. Or found other cool shit to do instead. But this shit didn't define you. And you probably also remember how fucking difficult it was in that moment to remember that life wasn't over. And whatever is going on now may make you feel like *this* time you're totally done and *this* time it's over. But it's still not. You are not a failure. You are still a human being with as much right to space on this planet as everyone else. And you have amazing things to contribute back to the world.

CONSIDER THE REAL DEFINITION OF CRAZY

You know what the definition of insanity is? Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. The same thoughts and feelings and behaviors that created our problems are sure as hell not going to solve them.

I was known for invoking this definition on the regular when working in community mental health. Being bipolar didn't make you crazy. Neither did hearing voices. Those are some serious fucking diseases that require enormous bravery to navigate on a daily basis. Schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression, and the like have as much to do with the definition of crazy

as cancer, AIDS, or multiple sclerosis, and fuck anyone who says otherwise.

Unless you are on the same well-worn path doing the same thing over and over and then are supremely butthurt about the outcome, you really are still moving forward (and learning from your failures) and are *not* crazy. Crazy is a behavior pattern you are stuck in. Not a diagnosis.

Failure happens. *And it doesn't define you.*

But . . . if you catch yourself in the groove of stupid shit while somehow holding an expectation of success, you soooooo gotta *stop that*. Staying in the same shitty relationship with someone who isn't doing anything to change? Drinking 'til 3 a.m. all the damn time, then wondering why you're not functional at work? That's crazy, Boo.

One day I was fighting the DVD player, mashing the same buttons over and over when a client said "Faith, definition of crazy?" Yup, they totally got the message (and schooled me on my own bullshit).

How do you get out of the crazy groove? By paying attention to yourself, your actions, and how others respond to you. If remembering all that stuff is difficult, start tracking it on paper. What happened, what you tried, what the results were. What things were different (if any) this time. If it was the same old shit, what were you telling yourself about your action plan. You know, call yourself on your own bullshit.

REMEMBER THAT PEOPLE'S OPINIONS OF YOU ARE NONE OF YOUR CONCERN

You will not make everyone happy all the time.
Take a deep breath. Read that again.

You will not make everyone happy all the time.

But if you get up every morning and do the best that you can do that day, everything will come out the best that it can.

There are very few people in my life who really get a say in my life. Whose opinion of me matters. Like I can count them on one hand. Most people haven't had the years and depth of relationship investment to get a say

in my life. So, have they made the investment? Are they on the homestead? If not, fuck them and their opinions. They are none of your concern and they definitely don't get to cast a ballot on your behavior.

My go-to answer for vocal opinion-havers who I think should keep that shit to themselves? "I appreciate that you feel comfortable enough with me to share your thoughts on that." And that is a full-stop statement. No discussion, no rebuttal, no taking it under advisement or telling them to fuck off. And it very nicely says, "Wow, you feel like you have the right to say that to me? That's kinda ballsy" without actually being shitty about it. Heh. It works every time.

***IF YOU KEEP GETTING
THE SAME COMPLAINTS,
LOOK AT IT A BIT MORE
CLOSELY***

A lot of the time other people's opinions of you are about their shit, not yours. But not always. Own your own fucking mistakes. We're all assholes sometimes. If you're being a dick, it's generally unintentional. But that doesn't mean that shit didn't hurt. Be sorry. Say it. Mean it. Fix what you can.

The big difference here is whether or not what you are doing has a real impact on them. Is your behavior actually hurting someone or is it just not in alignment with their values or the goals they have for you? Someone thinking you shouldn't drop out of school is not emotionally burdened by your decision. And presumably not supporting your ass . . . and if they are,

they can either stop doing so or insist on conditions for support. But if your actions are causing emotional pain to others? That's the shit to pay attention to.

I have a pretty snarky sense of humor. And I also think the word “fuck” is a completely cromulent sentence modifier. These are things that may make others uncomfortable. If they are in my living room, they are clearly invited to leave. If we are working together, it's not out of the realm of reasonableness to modify how I talk so everyone can feel respected and comfortable.

If you are hearing from multiple people that your chronic lateness is a dick move, or what you think is funny as fuck is actually kinda mean? Listen to that shit. Acting in a way that you *know* makes other people feel bad? Refer to Rule Number One.

LOVE PEOPLE BUT NOT THEIR BULLSHIT

Sometimes the only power we have lies in not responding in kind. By that, I mean not hating on the people who hate on us. We're talking some Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Viktor Frankl shit right here. People are going to be awful. Like, *a lot*. This almost always has everything to do with them and nothing to do with you. The best response is to love them anyway.

This doesn't mean let them walk all over you. Love means being as gentle and kind as possible, while holding firm to your boundaries and own moral center. It's easier to disengage from the harmful behaviors of others if you do it in a way that is empathic and conscious, rather than reactionary and angry. It protects you more in the

long run, because it means there is nothing for them to continue to push *against*.

My husband said recently, “Stop explaining other people’s dickitude to me like a trauma therapist! It’s making me feel sorry for them!” Getting your rage on ‘cause someone is being a dick in the middle of the grocery store resolves nothing and only gets your adrenaline and cortisol pumping, and then you are just as dickish as they are. Saying, “Wow, you’re sure having a bad day” and then going on your way is a far better response. It *may* de-escalate them, but it will sure as hell de-escalate you.

My son was pissy as fuck about school one day, and tried to start a text message fight with me over it. I responded to his content instead of his emotions, and he got super snarky. I replied back with “Dude. I’m not fighting, you’re fighting.” Within a few seconds, he said “Oh. Shit. Yeah. Sorry.” I coulda just grounded his ass or something. After all, I’m the parent. Instead, I chose to set a boundary but not get upset and fight back.

When working with couples, I term the fight-picking “lobbing a grenade over the wall.” If someone does that to you, stick the pin back in and hand it back to them. Try to understand where they’re coming from; however, don’t respond to the fight-picking. But also? Don’t lie down on that grenade, either, OK?

Love means disengagement from the behavior, not letting people blow past all your boundaries.

Loving people starts with loving yourself. You don’t have to let other people treat you poorly. Ever. Seriously. That doesn’t mean you get to be a demanding diva who expects people to cater to your whims. But it does mean that their boundaries, their wants, their needs, and their no’s are given to you with the same respect you treat them with (because you do treat them with respect, right?).

This means figuring out what your boundaries truly should be. Which can be ridiculously difficult if they were previously stomped all over. But you define those fuckers and stand by them.

DON'T EMOTIONALLY VOMIT ALL OVER EVERYTHING ALL THE DAMN TIME

I don't need to share everything that's going on with everybody. I can't unsay stuff later, and they can't unknow it. You've seen the extreme version of that, right? The emotional vampire bullshit from people seeking attention and validation by dropping verbal bombs on social media. Most of us are not all that Desperately Seeking Attention all the time. But we've all been guilty of too much oversharing.

In my office, I have the framed acronym: WAIT?. It stands for Why Am I Talking? It's a great reminder as a therapist to let people have their own experience and their own processing before jumping in with my perspective.

Think before you share. Is this an appropriate person to share with? Is this the appropriate venue? Is this person in your inner trust circle? And is there a decent possibility of getting fucked over by them if they aren't? Are you using other people as your therapist when you really just need to go to a therapist?

I have had more than one client start therapy because they realized they were dumping too much on their friends. They had shit to work through (don't we *all*?) and they weren't letting their friends just be their friends, and that's a surefire way to get ghosted by your favorite people.

STOP COMPARING YOUR INSIDES TO OTHER PEOPLE'S OUTSIDES

I was having a conversation with a coworker some years ago and something I said about general life bullshit (honestly don't remember the specifics, because life is always full of bullshittery) gave her pause.

She said, "Oh, wow . . . you've got a shitty life just like the rest of us!"

She had some idea that rose petals were scattered before my feet wherever I went. I don't believe in bitching loudly and repeatedly about The Bad Shit™ (see rule above), but that somehow translated into my life being composed of golden tickets. She was comparing my outsides (looking like I have my shit together) with her insides (not having her shit together . . . which, in reality, is far more like me).

Those glorious pictures of your peeps on Facebook with their perfect lives? You are getting the scripted images, not the reality.

We're comparative creatures, I realize. When you catch yourself in that thinking trap, remind yourself of these two things:

- 1) You don't know the full story. Like not even close.
- 2) Your biggest rival isn't other people . . . it is whatever thoughts and feelings *you* are experiencing that are getting in the way of you being the kind of human you want to be. Deal with your shit. Their shit is on them.

***THE IDEA THAT HEALTHIER
CHOICES ARE GLAMOROUS
AND PAIN-FREE IS UTTER
BULLSHIT. DO IT ANYWAY.***

Instagram is a sneaky bastard in that way. All these gorgeous #fitspo pictures make you think that an acai bowl is somehow going to make you feel amazingly happy and healthier and life will be glorious.

It doesn't.

I recently did a huge dietary reset/cleanse thingy. I was eating cleaner than ever before. I wasn't bloated and OMFG my skin looked amazing. All the great results pissed me off because it was so damn hard. I wanted sugar! *So much sugar!* I didn't have a gorgeous breakthrough moment while silhouetted by the setting sun on distant shores. After the 30 days, I still wanted

sugar. But taking care of myself was worth it, anyway. Even if I didn't achieve enlightenment out of the deal, taking care of my body in a mindful way was worth the effort.

And if the payoff doesn't feel worth it, the work feels pointless and overwhelming. Even when it isn't that shitty in the grand scheme of things. Whole30 did not end my life, y'all. I'm just a bitchy, bratty detoxer. Add some perspective to the mix. One of the best hacks I've read on dealing with chore aversion will work as brilliantly on good habits as it will on chores. Time the project. Like literally. Floss your teeth and time that shit. It took all of a couple of minutes, right? Two minutes of flossing is soooo totally doable, even if the results aren't Insta-worthy. Though if you decide to post your flossed teethies on Instagram, totally tag me and I'll give you all the mad props.

**DON'T MAKE YOUR BED.
UNLESS YOU ARE
REALLY INTO THAT SHIT**

Focus on the tasks that give you the best sense of mastery and accomplishment, not what *other* people think defines your adulthood.

Y'all, I was a 22-year-old single mom sharing a one-bedroom apartment with my special needs infant daughter. Her daycare cost so much I lived on my WIC supplemental food. I was also holding down a full-time job at a child abuse prevention program. We had some damn guest speaker come into our weekly meeting (and *seriously*, how much did *that* cost?) talking about organizing our lives and jobs better. She had us all stand up as she went through a list of tasks that define a well-organized person. If you didn't do a task on her list every day, you were supposed to sit down as she read it.

I sat down on the very first item because it was “Make your bed when you get up in the morning.” I felt like a *failure*. But you know what? I didn’t give a *fuck* about making my bed in the morning back then and I *still don’t*. And I now know that does *not* make me a failure at adulting. It means I’m in charge of my own priorities. Back then, I should have been proud of the fact that I got my daughter and her medicine and her special food to daycare on time, got the tear in my polyester Kmart sundress stitched up and the baby vomit cleaned off the shoulder, and *then* got to work for this ridiculous waste-of-time meeting. I was adulting like the damn boss I was going to become, and did not need to feel embarrassed by sitting down in a room full of people who had no idea about my life and what it took to be there.

Twenty years later, my bed still sits unmade. My cats like to burrow in the covers, make forts, and hide their toys, so they are thrilled. I don’t make that damn bed unless I’m changing the sheets or wanna snap a picture for Instagram.

But you know what makes me feel totally settled and in charge? Having all my clothes folded and put away. I

can find shit, I'm not irritated by the basket of wrinkled shirts with a cat sleeping on them, etc., etc. Getting the laundry sorted makes me feel accomplished, so it's on my adulting task list. *And fuck the unmade bed.*

Adulting means setting your own priorities. What tasks are important to *you*? Maybe it *is* the bed, and fuck the laundry. Maybe it's both or none of the above. Figure out what tasks make you feel you have a handle on life, and don't stress the rest.

INVEST IN SMALL COMFORTS

Thou cannot thrive on abject misery, no matter how dark your personality. You seriously need to find ways to Treat. Yo. Self. I'm not saying cruise to the Bahamas, if you can't afford that shit (and if you can, bring me!!). But most of us have a few dollars of wiggle room in our budget. Think about the ways that spending those few dollars can impact your life in the biggest way. Maybe being able to go out for a beer is your favorite thing to do in an evening, or maybe you're just doing it because everyone else is.

I like to invest in making my daily routine as comfortable as possible, especially since I get sooo damn busy. I realized a few years ago that I was using these old,

smushed pillows that hurt my neck when I had the epiphany of: *I am a grown ass woman and pillows are, like, five bucks.* I was being really dumb and penny foolish. So that's the kind of stuff I watch for now on a conscious level. I started keeping throw blankets wherever I might sit because I don't like to be cold. I have extra phone chargers in every bag I might carry. Lighters in every room I keep candles. Fingernail clippers *everywhere* because ragged cuticles are the hobgoblins of destruction. A long day that might have knocked me sideways in the past is totally manageable because adulting Faith stocked the office with snacks and bottled water the week before.

I don't care that my clothes are thrifted and I'm driving a beater car (that runs brilliantly, so, hey!). I far prefer to use my extras to take care of people I love, donate to charity, spend money on travel, good books, and good coffee. As much as the tasks that I commit to align with my values, so too does how I spend my money.

DO YOU ACTUALLY LIKE THE SHIT YOU SAY YOU LIKE?

So, you are out and about. Doing all the little things. But stop and ask yourself: *Is This Even FUN?*

So much of what we end up doing is more about the *idea* of fun than actual fun. So much of life becomes about presentation rather than experience. I'm all for social media selfies, y'all. There isn't a damn thing wrong with giving your own damn self a little self-confidence boost. But keep shit *real*. What makes something fun? Other people saying it is? Photos on Snapchat? Having a rep to keep on Instagram? Seriously, tho. Is the stuff you are doing that is supposed to be fun *actually fun*? If not? Stop that shit.

Shut up the Heathers in your life. Whether they're literal people you are trying to keep up with, or the internal-voice Heather that is challenging your worthiness. Find new and real fun. If fun for you is Netflix with a bestie in your slankets instead of clubbing 'til dawn, then find a slanket buddy and order a pizza and dig in. There's enough shit out there that isn't meant to be fun and won't ever be fun. So, your fun should be *fun*, FFS.

**FIGURE OUT YOUR DEFENSE
MECHANISMS AND COPING
SKILLS. WHICH ARE
HEALTHY FOR YOU?
WHICH ARE TOXIC?**

You've heard of Sigmund Freud, right? The cocaine addict who got shamed for calling out incest in polite circles, so he recanted his theory (which was pretty spot-on) and labeled all of these women as "hysterical," instead thus creating a whole movement of mental illness based on women being crazy? Yeah, that guy.

(Hey, I wonder if this description is why I'm never allowed to teach "history of counseling" classes?)

One thing he came up with that we still use to this day is the idea of defense mechanisms.

That was some seriously dead-on understanding of how humans manage shit that's unpleasant. You've totally

seen people that project their shit onto you, right? That's a Freudian defense mechanism.

If it's positive we call it a coping skill, but anything we do to manage our shit is a defense mechanism. Really, it's all the same. It's just the tools we use to manage the bullshit life throws at us.

One of my favorites is a sense of humor. Humor is a fucking *healthy* defense mechanism. There is no healthier way to acknowledge that you are feeling awkward and shitty than by saying "damn, self . . . this is so fucked up it's pretty fucking funny." Plenty of people have this on the "defense mechanism" list, but I think it's the thing that I can most ascribe to keeping me alive, giving me perspective, and keeping my empathy in place. So, it's healthy for me. If my sense of humor was fucked up and dark and mean, that would be less healthy, right?

Another example. People who exercise so they have a better handle on their depression and anxiety and general wellness versus people who exercise as an addiction or to an exhaustion that keeps them from engaging in real life.

So, what are your defense mechanisms-slash-coping skills? Do they help you face reality or are you using them to avoid reality? Keep the coping skills. And keep adding to that list, until the need for the defense mechanisms starts to fade away.

WHO YOU ARE SHOULD NOT BE CIRCUMSTANTIAL

There is this grand idea out there that we are somehow different depending on the circumstances. I'm not talking about code-switching, in that you communicate differently with different groups of people. This is about operating from *your core value system*.

This sounds all Oprah Super-Soul-Sunday, I know. But please don't roll your eyes and toss this book. Whether your morality is spiritual, secular, or some mix, you have developed an idea of who you are in the world. What if we brush away the pain and the damage and the hurt inflicted upon you? There is this singular entity of you-ness that is what makes *your life worth living for you*.

That core self shouldn't change. Though we all struggle to remember that in intense situations. And realigning to our core self isn't that hard.

In these intense situations? Ask yourself: *What's the best, worst, and most likely thing that will happen?*

This is a cognitive behavioral therapy strategy. It helps you think through an issue that you are having a strong emotional response to. When you find yourself spinning with anticipatory distress, step back for a minute and lay it all down for yourself. What's the best possible outcome? What's the worst (because let's face it, that's what you are most worried about)? And, be honest with yourself, what's the most likely thing to happen? If it's actually the worst, now you can start creating a game plan. If it isn't the worst, at least you named that fear but can plan for a more reasonable outcome. Balanced thinking can really head off out-of-control thinking.

So, here's the next part of that equation. You have a good idea of your best-case scenario and worst-case outcome. You hopefully have a good idea of what's the most likely thing to happen. Now think about how you want to carry

yourself through any of these scenarios. I'm not talking so much about the logistics, but the actual person you want to be. How you want to respond to those around you. How you want to comport yourself.

You're gonna notice something interesting here. There's not gonna be much difference in who your best self is. *Because your core value system isn't circumstantial.* And that's the most important thing to remember.

How you handle yourself when dealing with intense situations is a far bigger indicator of who you are than anything else.

Most of the time we act from fear. Or hurt. Or shame. We don't move from within. From knowing what is right for us and the world around us. And it feels inauthentic. And we are perpetually exhausted because nothing we are doing is genuinely fulfilling.

When you do things, stop to consider: why? Am I doing this because the expectation is there? Because I've been trained by others that this is what I am supposed to do? Am I doing this as a means to an end? Am I doing

this because it's important and right for me? What is motivating my movement?

BE OPEN TO CHANGE. BE WILLING TO CHANGE.

The most badass people I know are the people who are always growing, shifting, seeking, and sitting with this discomfort of continued self-awareness of where they are, and how that falls short of where they want to be.

The Sanskrit word *samskara* refers to our worn grooves of behavior. Our conditioning. Doing the thing we have been trained to do, even when it no longer serves us. If we recognize who we want to be, our next step is the continued work of becoming that person. It's uncomfortable to be vulnerable to our own failings. But change starts with awareness and willingness.

So here is the even tougher thing. Are you willing to change? You are actively engaged in this process, right? The other people around you may also be doing their work and growth, too. I've seen so many stuck relationships where one person is actively doing their work to change and the other person just doesn't believe them, and there can be lots of totally legit reasons for that. Maybe it's been years of no change. Maybe you've been hurt too badly to be vulnerable one more time. But you have to make a choice. Being in a continued dance of suspicion and mistrust with them is hurting you both. You have to either believe in their growth and change or let them go. Suspiciously sitting around waiting for some magical sign that things are better? You probably aren't gonna get one of those clouds-parting moments.

Change is slow and wonky and decidedly nonlinear. It's totally fine (and *smart*) to set boundaries regarding what you will allow, but you have to either fundamentally be on board, or be out.

BEING OPEN TO REPAIRING RELATIONSHIPS IS A REALLY IMPORTANT ADULTING SKILL

We have *all* had some version of this happen. You were in a relationship that someone ended with you. Maybe in a total inferno. Maybe they just quietly ghosted you. But then all of a sudden you get a FB friend request out of the blue. Or some other “Hey, what’s up?” indicator of striking up a relationship again. And you’re thinking “#lolwhut???”

Being completely closed off to the idea that people can change and reconnection can happen is a very limiting way to go through life. Look at all the ways you have changed and grown, right?

Now some people get no second chance. They are dangerous and you can't feel safe with them.

With others? Being open to that is a good thing. The problem is . . . you need to see an indicator of that change. And you need acknowledgement that shit went south. If someone ghosted your ass and is all of a sudden acting like besties? Nope. Permit required for rebuilding that relationship. Being open to rebuilding is one thing. You aren't required to be a pushover in the process.

How do you have that convo? Honestly. "Hey, this is my perception of what happened. I missed you. I'd love to hear your perception so we can figure out the fixing-this part of the program now." It's a really nice way of saying "This isn't getting swept under the rug, yo. But I'm not gonna yell and scream either. Let's have a conversation." And it gives you space to establish or reestablish important boundaries.

DON'T PRESUME OTHER PEOPLE'S INTENT

Dude. One thing I can promise you as someone who spends my days hearing the inner workings of people's internal processes: No one is thinking about you nearly as much as you are worried they are.

We are producing our own story in creating our own lives. Because that process is the most important thing to us, we think that there must be some level of importance to those around us. So we ascribe intent to their actions, presuming there is an "about us" involved. Even if their actions affect us, they may not be nearly as much about us as we think.

My neighbor recently came running over one evening. She wanted to apologize for her leaves. They are small mobile little fuckers who scatter way beyond her yard into several other yards. Her leaves? I wondered. She was working on getting them cleaned up and felt really bad about them. LOLWHUT? I had literally never noticed her leaves. I mean, it's the ground. Leaves are there. Their original source was not on my radar. She felt like a bad neighbor. And, hey, wanting to keep a nice yard is a thoughtful action. But zero people on the street were upset at her for the leaves showing up in their yard. If I was frowny, it's because I was thinking about the cat food I forgot to buy on my way home. But she was worried I was upset with her, and had worked herself into being really anxious.

If people aren't really thinking about us nearly as much as we think they are, then the intent of their actions is also far less likely about us than we were thinking it was. Catch all that? We are all really out there starring in our own movies. We are also the only ones with the script. So our script is making us the star of the show. But the people around us aren't aware of that. They have their

own scripts and are the stars of *their* shows. They are worried about their plotlines and their narrative arc, not you. Seriously. You may not even be on their radar at all. You don't have their script in front of you, so don't worry so much about your role in it. You honestly may not even be on their cast list.

IF YOU AREN'T SURE, ASK

We all make presumptions about the intent of others. If you don't ever do this, you are a totally evolved human being who doesn't need this book. We assume and presume the motives of others and we are wired to the negative. This makes evolutionary sense, right? Presuming shit's about to get fucked is what keeps us alive. And staying alive to power up to the next level is the whole point.

So, your brain is totally going to go there on you. And this is where you do the check-in. What evidence do you have about the surety that this is about you? Enough to be super positive? Maybe it would work better just to *ask* the other person what's up with their attitude?

Yeah, Dr. Faith. But fuckers lie. True story. But that's not your responsibility. If they can't tell you the truth when you take the time to ask them what the truth is, then that shit is on *them*. This is no longer your problem. I flunked my mind reading class in therapy school. Unless you passed yours, you can only go based on what other people say. If you didn't ask a trick question, then don't presume a trick answer.

I was chatting with a couple recently who both had fucked up dating histories in the past. *Both* had been with people who would mind-game the fuck out of every convo where you were supposed to guess what the real answer was because it wasn't going to be said in an out-loud voice. And that history was fucking up their current relationship because they were always in second-guess mode. I finally said, "How old is Bae?" When she relayed the age I said, "Safe to say he's a grown-ass man, then?" Um, yeah, Doc. "So, he is responsible for what comes out of his mouth, and you aren't?" Oh. I guess so. "I promise you nothing is more freeing than letting people be responsible for what they say or do. If he doesn't want to go biking and says he does, then that shit is on him, not

you. So, go biking.” Bae was all “Yasssssss, Doc! ‘Cause this shit is wearing me out!”

Turns out, he was telling her the truth, but she wasn’t used to that happening in romantic relationships. But if he hadn’t been? If he was being all passive-aggressive with his answers? He would likely have gotten over that shit real fast when it stopped working. And if someone gets butthurt that you failed to mind-read? My go-to answer is “And how would I have been expected to know that?”

So, we are asking for the truth, presuming that what we are getting is the truth, and we are operating from that belief. And if they aren’t straight up, that’s on them, right? Which isn’t a big deal if Boo won’t tell you they want lo mein instead of sushi for dinner. They are the ones stuck with sushi and that’s on them. ‘Cause you’re happy with your sushi.

But it is a big deal if Boo says they want to stop freebasing and then they don’t and you get called to the ER because they got admitted. We all make progress, backslide, fuck up, and get shit back together again. But that doesn’t

mean that you have to keep taking hits from people who say one thing but consistently do another over and over again.

This is where you say, “You keep telling me XYZ. And I want you to mean it. But the follow through isn’t there right now. I’m not judging the reasons behind it, but I do know it’s a hard boundary that I really need to set for myself. If something changes, let me know.”

WATCH FOR ROACHES

By this, I mean negative thoughts. When you think about it, those fuckers are totally like cockroaches. What happens when you see one scurrying by? First thing I do is say, “Ew, *fuck!*” then call for my cat Iggy, who is a brilliant bug-getter. The second thing I think is “Ew, *fuck* . . . that means there are tons more in the walls, feasting on the crumbs behind the stove.” One negative thought is *not* just one negative thought. It’s the first one you see when you flip on the lights (by which, I mean being mindful of your inner dialogue). It’s the scout roach, trying to see what kind of bullshit it can pull with you before it calls in the rest of the fam for the feast.

You gotta be hardcore Orkin man with that shit. Proactively work on eradicating the destructive self-talk when you catch it. Don't blow it off as just that one roach. Tear that fucker up and leave his carcass as a warning to the others. Self-negativity will not be allowed in this *casa*, so those nasty-ass thoughts better start packing.

In other words, *don't believe all the shit your brain is telling you.*

Brains are assholes, there's legit fancy science about that. But the science of brain assholery aside, I promise you that thinking something doesn't make it true. About other people. About yourself. What keeps us alive is a healthy sense of watching for danger. The problem is, danger discrimination is pretty difficult, and the brain starts wiring every damn thing as danger. When you catch yourself in consistent patterns of negative thinking, take time to unpack if it's really true or just brain assholery. And promo alert . . . you might totally dig my book *Unfuck Your Brain* (Microcosm Publishing, 2017).

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF DOES THE WORLD A FAVOR

We all had that one aunt who was always wiping invisible crumbs off the tabletop, right? So, you know what I mean. My editor calls “busyness” the pitfall of adulting. And by that, I don’t mean literally working hard at things that have meaning and value (and her life is full of such work, which is amazing). But *dumb* busyness. The sense that you should fill time because you are supposed to.

When you are doing stuff, is it the real stuff? The important stuff? Or have you invented some busyness competition for yourself?

We (waving my arms around to mean the whole world) have a cultural mythology that says selflessness is how we earn our bona fides as a good person. Wanna be a good person? Take care of your fucking self so you have the energy and the resources to do the good things. The oxygen mask really *does* go on yourself first. That whole martyr bullshit? Fuck it. You deserve quality self-care. Trust the rest of us when we say we *want* you to be well. You are a far superior world-changing badass if you are protective of your own self-care in the process. You really wanna change shit out there? Take care of the vehicle of change. That's you, babycakes.

We all need time to think, dream, read, and meander. It's part of taking care of yourself. And you may not be used to this. And I get that. But can you start with the tiny, baby steps? Like give yourself five minutes between your commute home and walking in the door to breathe and meditate before you get slammed with the next part of your day. Like, even if you can't afford the healthiest food, you take the time to sit and dine and be mindful of the experience, rather than gorge on the run. And then consider swapping the fries for apple slices once a week,

maybe? Baby steps. Then pay attention to the difference in your energy levels. And how the people around you interact with you. You're gonna do better things and more of them, for serious.

When you were growing up, did you have an adult in your life that had a china cabinet full of the special stuff? The stuff that was only pulled out for family holidays or Sunday dinner? It was beautiful. And delicate. And worthy of special attention and care.

Guess what? So are you. Take care of yourself as gently and as reverently as that. Seriously.

This also means your *emotional* self.

I had a client recently beating herself up super hardcore. I asked her what she would tell someone she loved if they were going through the same situation. Her response cracked us both up: "*Ugh! I fucking hate the self-compassion question!*"

Word. Because *seriously* . . . we *all* hate the self-compassion question. We are great at taking care of the people we love, but forget that we are *also* supposed to

be on that list. Keep that damn self-compassion question in mind when you catch yourself beating yourself up.

We all fuck up. Congrats on being human. Whether you hurt someone you loved, or pigged out on cupcakes. How would you combine understanding and support with pragmatic advice and tough love if your best friend did the same thing? Now have that conversation with *yourself*.

PARTICIPATE MORE. OBSERVE LESS.

The age of social media has made it far easier to observe without participation. And there is nothing wrong with observing. I'm a therapist so I'm always observing other people. It gives me insights that I may not otherwise get. But more and more, I see people with a tendency to do fewer of their own things because they are so busy observing others. And I'm not talking about literal barriers to participation related to lack of access or lack of resources. I'm talking about the times that, all things being otherwise equal, you are the entity standing in your way.

You're rarely going to regret participating more. Fear of failure has a loud fucking inner voice, but generally

speaking, trying new things and being open to failing (and learning) is what makes us better, cooler, and more interesting people. (Though if your loud fucking inner voice tells you playing chicken with the train is dumb AF, listen to that voice. Playing chicken with the train is *always* dumb AF.) This doesn't mean get all up into other people's business, it means be more invested in your own.

Try more stuff. Do more stuff.

**NOT MAKING A
DECISION IS A
DECISION. SO MAKE A
FUCKING DECISION.**

How often have you been so paralyzed by making a decision that you just . . . didn't?

Opting out isn't letting you off the hook. Not even a little. Being passive is just another way of giving away your power. And giving away your power and not making a decision is still a decision. You are still responsible for the outcome. If you don't know what to do, then do your very fucking best with the information you have.

Be thoughtful about possible consequences to your decision. And *then* think about what makes your heart sing. Will not going to med school break your family's

heart? Totally, especially if you are the Great Hope of Future Doctors. But if you will be a miserable human being because of it, that has equal weight in your decision-making process. Well, there's nothing wrong with just deferring admission for a year either.

I guarantee you will have far more peace with a bad outcome if you were active in trying to do the best you could and it didn't work, than if you passively let shit all fall apart. And you will also learn far more about the process (either win or learn, right????).

DETERMINE THE COST. IS IT WORTH IT? CAN YOU AFFORD IT?

Everything has a cost. We all have a price to pay for all of our life decisions and interactions, big to small. Not just the monetary cost, but the emotional one. And TBH? Emotional labor is usually a far bigger expenditure than a monetary cost. When you are taking on a new project, relationship, or forward movement, look at all the aspects of the price being extracted from you.

I have a friend right now who is engaged to be married. His partner is demanding things that he isn't comfortable with and she won't back down from. He loves her. And, frankly, also loves the idea of not being single anymore. He's having to do the math. Which costs more?

Acquiescing to her demands? Or letting go of someone he loves and being single again?

Consider everything you spend as a form of energy, whether money, time, or anything else. Is this worth the energy? Is this what you want to do with it all?

I'm not gonna pretend that adult-y decision-making is easy. If it was, we wouldn't need to be talking about it, right? Our emotional brains are there to keep us alive by getting us to pay attention to things that might be dangerous. So that emotional information pushes us to respond in a way that is *reactive* instead of *proactive*. Stepping back and thinking it through with *all* the info, not just the emotional info, will far increase your chances of making the best decision you can with the info you have.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO UNDERSTAND OTHER PEOPLE, JUST RESPECT THEM.

I hear all the time people complaining *bitterly* about shit they don't understand from other people. Like their career choices. Or their fucking gender identity. Now, this is shit that doesn't affect them at all . . . it's neither their circus nor their monkey . . . but they are spending an awful lot of emotional labor dwelling on it. If what they are doing isn't harmful to you, themselves, or the world around them then it's time to think, "Makes no sense to me, but apparently works for them," and then move on.

Hell, I have a friend who dropped out of our doc program when all he had left to finish was his dissertation. I know how hard he had worked throughout the previous years, and him quitting at the finish line *killed me*. But he

realized that it simply didn't matter to him anymore. His life had changed dramatically, he was very content with his current path . . . and a PhD wasn't a part of that path. I was entirely freaked out about him quitting. Probably because I worked so hard to finish the same program. But I realized my response was about me, not him. So, I shut my piehole, and supported him. He was happy, and it wasn't my fucking job to determine his life path. When he was talking through his decision, I explained my decision-making process *only*. Not what I thought his should be. It helped him realize he was as done as he thought he was.

It's OK if you don't understand someone's reasoning. I don't understand skinny jeans but they are still clearly on-trend. Not understanding is totally OK. I can still totally respect your love of skinny jeans (*how do you get them on tho???*). It isn't necessary for me to picket the stores that sell them. Or refuse to sit next to you on the bus, right? If we can respect the small things, how about the big ones?

LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND, NOT RESPOND

This is one of those pieces of advice that everyone hears all the time, but most people don't really do. Because it's way harder than it seems on the surface. We are relational creatures. That is, we are hardwired for connection, so it isn't a selfish thing that we are thinking about our own responses; we view ourselves in terms of our relationship with the person talking and what is being asked of us in that moment. Then we have our own filters and histories added to that mess.

It happens so often when I'm working with couples, that I have a completely different interpretation of what someone says to their partner than they do. Several times a week, I'll have to interrupt someone and say,

“You know what? I didn’t hear the same thing you heard, based on what you’re saying now. I heard them say . . .” and listener will kinda blink, rewind tape, and go, “Oh, yeah, actually . . .”

Therapy is as much about the outside perspective as it is the therapist’s training, and this is a skill we can all learn. Really pay attention to the actual words coming out of someone’s mouth. Ask questions for clarification (“Help me understand, did you mean . . . ?”) and then only respond when you think you’ve got it. And respond to what they were really communicating, not what we think our role should be in this relationship.

It also helps to presume that other people are coming from a *good, well-intentioned* place in their communication. And if they aren’t coming from a good, well-intentioned place then they are coming from a very *hurt* place. Generally speaking, most people aren’t trying to intentionally watch the world burn, so give them that benefit of the doubt.

BE AN ALLY.

VERB-STYLE

Ally is far more a verb than a noun. Part of being an adult is standing up for what you believe in, and protecting those people with less power than we have. Every right any minority group has ever earned was fought for by the group members . . . and so often with the support of their allies. For example, the number of individuals who identify as gender non-conforming (trans or otherwise not identifying with their birth assigned sex) is under 1%. Without the vocal support of their cisgender allies, things would be far, far worse than they are right now (and they are already ridiculously bad).

My state rep is Joe Straus, who also happens to be the Texas Speaker of the House. Joe happens to be a

Republican. But a non-shitty one in that he actively fought against legislation that was discriminatory to trans Texans because he knew what the very real consequences were in terms of an increase in suicide rates. And that wasn't happening on his watch. That is using his power and allyship for the protection of what is technically a very small group of people.

Do you stand up to your racist uncle at Thanksgiving? Complicated question, right? When do you keep the peace and when do you throw down? I happen to think you can make your lack of agreement clear without throwing the gauntlet down. You don't have to flip over the dining room table in rage. A calm, conversational voice saying, "Actually, I've never felt threatened by a trans woman. Though I've had my fair share of cisgender men scare the crap out of me over the years," or even just "Oh, interesting. I haven't found that to be the case at all," clearly defines you as Team Non-Dickitude.

In this day and age, silence is acquiescence and complicity. And in this day and age, there is far too much to lose. Activism is vitally important.

DON'T FEAR WHAT YOU CAN'T CONTROL

The human body is 50% to 65% water. We are one of very few species that can experience anticipatory distress. There was a comic making the rounds on social media a couple years ago which essentially stated that we are all just cucumbers with anxiety. Anticipatory distress is how our species survived and thrived. We have the ability to look at a situation and forward-think it through. What if X happens? What about Y?

The problem with that is, there is so much that is literally out of our control, that *fearing* all of those factors costs so much time and energy, we are too depleted to work on the things we *can* control.

You've probably read about how having an internal locus of control is really important, right? That you should feel that you have control over the outcome of events. It's better for our mental health to think we have power in the world. *Except sometimes we don't have power in the world and trying to mote it be is fucking us all kinds of up.*

Maybe you are going after something great. Applying to a cool program, trying to get a job or promotion, asking out a new Boo. While you can be your best self and shake your plumage as much (but as humbly) as possible, you can't control all the other things that can come into play. Who else is vying for the same slot? Are you even what this person or this group of people is looking for? Your plumage, as fabulous as it is, may be all wrong.

When you catch yourself in anticipatory distress mode, stop, take a breath, and ask yourself the following questions: "What control do I have over this? Am I already doing those things? If there is nothing I can do about this particular situation or worry, are there other things I *can* do where I do have some power and authority? What would it take for me to do *those* things?"

COMMUNICATE WITH A LANGUAGE OF RESPONSIBILITY

You know what drives me up a wall? When people don't take responsibility. Now, there are a lot of people who don't take responsibility in terms of behavioral change, follow-through, and reparations. But there are even more people who don't take responsibility even in their communication. And I swear that if we were better at this, the whole fabric of society would work better.

You are probably wondering what the fuck I mean.

Have you ever been in another room and heard a large CRASHBOOMSHATTERSMASHBANG? And when you went rushing in, there is someone standing next to a now-broken thing and they say, "Dude. It just fell and

broke!" And dude! It is an inanimate object! You dropped it, or bumped it, or something-d it to make it fall and break. *Take responsibility!*

My son's phone screen is cracked. I asked him, "How did you break your phone?" He responded, "Oh, I didn't." "So, what happened?" "It broke in my sleep, I didn't even touch it!" "So, you had it by your bed, and not in its protective case, and you knocked it over in your sleep?" "Oh. Yeah. Guess so."

We all biff shit up. Own it. And *don't* add, "I didn't mean to!" unless the other person clearly thinks your behavior was intentional. If you break something of mine, I'm already gonna presume it was an accident. If you are being purposefully destructive, that's a whole other problem that we aren't gonna be able to solve in this book . . . since clearly you passed right over the "Don't be a dick" rule.

PLAY

Do you know why so many people hate to exercise? Because it's punitive as fuck. We treat it like punishment for our donut misdeeds or something. Fuck that. Life is punishment enough. We need more movement for joy and play. Hopefully you had the kind of childhood where that happened. Where you went outside until the streetlights came on, and came in smelling exactly like a puppy because you played so hard.

Find joy in moving your body like *that* again. The stuff that makes you feel good. Maybe it's swimming or hiking. My son loves boxing more than cupcakes. I don't love *anything* more than cupcakes, but yoga is pretty damn awesome. I engage in movement that genuinely makes

me feel happy to be in my body. And that's not exercise, y'all. That's play.

CONCLUSION

Did these seem like the simplest ideas ever? I really hope so. Maybe some of it was stuff you totally knew but needed the reminder about the importance. (Flossing, dawg. Two minutes.) Maybe some of it was stuff you never thought about before but it made complete sense in context. Maybe some of it was woo-woo bullshit that you have no intention of trying (Meditating as Roach Patrol? Ew!).

But the whole intent of everything here was just to bring a perspective on adulting as a worldview of trying our damndest to *do the right thing*. Not in a pious, holier-than-thou way . . . but just getting up and doing the best we can to navigate a fucked-up world without leaving

behind more fucked-up-ness for others to deal with. Acting in alignment with our own morality (whether it be religious, secular, or some combination of both). Being able to say, “I was the person I wanted to be in that situation, even though it wasn’t easy.”

It’s less about looking like you have your shit together, by having an organized spice cupboard. It’s about actually being put together as much as you can be, by having a life that aligns with what really matters.

My son is now almost the age my daughter was when this now-book was first sent off as a zine. He is the most badass adulter I think I’ve ever seen. All the things his sister learned the hard way, he observed and chose to learn from her mistakes.

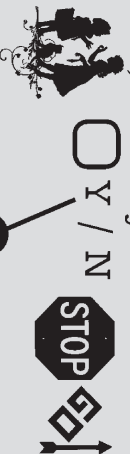
He is no angelic, golden child. He still does dumb shit on the regular. But he works hard, demonstrates decision-making skills that I wish people twice his age would demonstrate, asks for help, and does his best to right things that he does wrong. The weirdo even makes his bed. And yeah, I don’t get that either. But that’s all any of this is. Doing the best with what we have, and making

new and interesting mistakes after learning from the old ones.

We were texting the other day, checking in, and both mentioned not feeling too well but getting up for work anyway. He gets up at 4:30, which is far worse than my 7:30. When I pointed out how tough that is to do when fighting off a cold, he responded with “Yeah, well. Adulting time.” No matter what happens, this kid is gonna be OK.

And just one last thing? Because it's my book so I wanna throw this in here: *If you get out of your car and realize you are parked over the line, get back in and fix it for fuck's sake. I swear to Buddha I will cut you if I see you leave it like that.*

What are the worst, best, and likely outcomes? Can I manage them all?



Does this decision cause harm to anyone I care about and/or our relationship?



Does this decision take too much time and energy from the things I want and need to do?



Could this decision cost more money than I can afford? Is there a cheaper way?



DO IT!

How to Make a Decision

.....

What is my desired outcome?



What is the simplest solution to achieve it? Is there an easier way?



Does my idea work for everybody involved?



☐ Y / N



Are the costs & consequences acceptable?



☐ Y / N





Know it all



Blame others for failures



Feel entitled



Never set goals



Dictate others' experiences



Internalize criticism

14



Accept responsibility



Feel gratitude



Have a long-term plan
towards real goals



Learn from people with
different experiences



Embrace meaning and
purpose!

HOW TO *STARVE*

.....



Compare self to others on
Facebook every day



Punch down/Criticize



Fear change



Hold a grudge



Talk about people

HOW TO *THRIVE*

.....



Read every day



Respect/Compliment



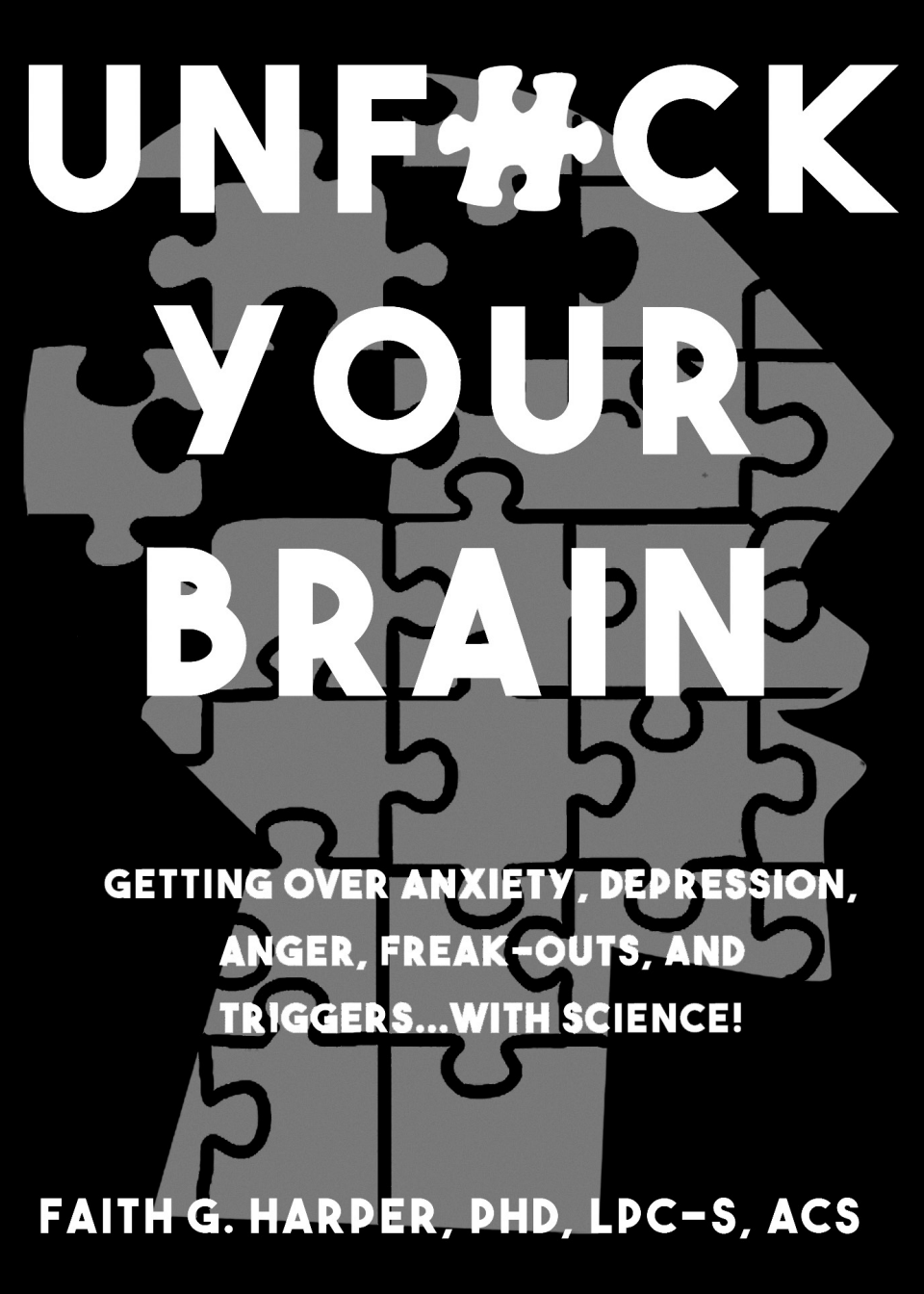
Embrace change



Forgive



Talk about ideas



UNF*CK YOUR BRAIN

**GETTING OVER ANXIETY, DEPRESSION,
ANGER, FREAK-OUTS, AND
TRIGGERS...WITH SCIENCE!**

FAITH G. HARPER, PHD, LPC-S, ACS

*I have the whole 5
MINUTE THERAPY set, but
I have to keep buying
them again because my
friends need them too!*



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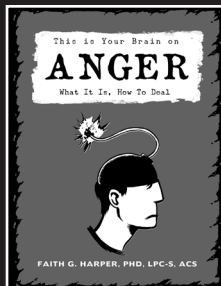
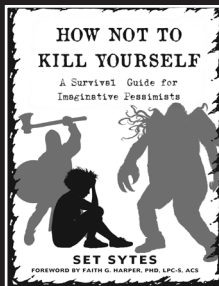
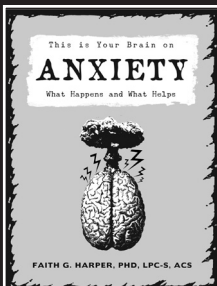
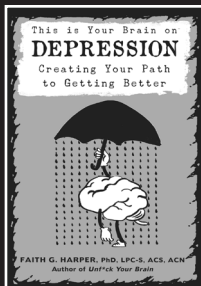


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"STUCK AS HELL"



"DONE AND MOVING ON"



"FUCKED UP"



"HORNY BABY!! RANDY!!"



"COULD USE SOME FUCK-
ING SUPPORT HERE"



"LOSING MY SHIT"



"CRAWLING UP THE WALLS"



HOW TO BE AN ADULTIER ADULT

DR. FAITH'S
FIVE MINUTE
THERAPY

Dr. Faith explains the fundamentals of adulting in this handy book. Spoiler: None of the requirements are about having certain jobs, kids, possessions and debts, or being totally bored and stressed out and hating your life. This book will not teach you to change your oil or fold fitted sheets. Instead, Dr. Faith offers wisdom from her life experience and counseling practice like, "If it's not yours, don't touch it," "Love people but not their bullshit," "Invest in small comforts," and "Either win or learn." It's hard work to do adulty stuff well, but it's the kind of work that's satisfying because it's about being good to yourself and other people and building a life that you're okay with waking up to every day. Keep these hot tips around for when you're making big decisions, dealing with difficult situations, or to give to a friend or kid who's making any kind of big life transition. The truth is, adulting is way more fun than kidding. You got this!



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