SPRING CLEAN YOUR LIFE GUIDE
# Table of Contents

## 4
**Introduction**  
By Abbe Wright, Editor of Read it Forward

## 5
**Spring Clean Your Career**  
6 The New Rules of Work  
   By Alexandra Cavoulacos and Kathryn Minshew

## 15
**Spring Clean Your Bank Account**  
16 You Are a Badass at Making Money  
   By Jen Sincero

## 25
**Spring Clean Your Home**  
26 10 Tips to Beat Clutter—in Less than 5 Minutes  
   By Gretchen Rubin  
28 Applying Marie Kondo’s *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* to your bookshelf  
   By Brittany Goss  
30 Does Your Closet Need a Detox?  
   By Anuschka Rees

## 32
**Spring Clean Your Relationships**  
33 The Physics of Vulnerability  
   By Brené Brown  
37 Grow Your Love Savings  
   By Jason Wachob

## 42
**Spring Clean Your Mind**  
43 Ready, Set, Unplug  
   By Suze Yalof Schwartz

## 47
**Spring Clean Your Diet**  
48 Living Clean and Lean with the 4 x 4 Diet  
   By Erin Oprea

## 58
**Spring Clean Your Digital Landscape**  
59 The Art of Doing Nothing  
   By Agapi Stassinopoulos  
63 Pop the Social Media Bubble: Comparing Yourself to Other People’s Profiles Won’t Make You Happier  
   By Gianna Antolos

## 66
**Acknowledgements**
The concept of spring cleaning isn’t a new one, but what if, instead of focusing solely on decluttering your home, you applied the concept to your whole life? Whether you’re looking for a career reboot, methods to quiet your “monkey mind,” or simply a little more money in the bank, we’ve got you covered.

We’ve partnered with our friends at The Muse to bring you over 60 pages of advice from bestselling authors and brand-new books that will help you spruce up your diet, polish your relationships and enhance everything else in between. Life is messy, but experts like Gretchen Rubin, Brené Brown and The Muse founders Alexandra Cavoulacos and Kathryn Minshew will give you the tools to make it sparkle and shine.

—Abbe Wright, Read it Forward editor
Perhaps you’re a new job seeker just entering the work force, or you may be a seasoned veteran looking to change careers or turn your passion into a profitable side hustle. Either way, understanding the ever-changing working world is vital. Alexandra Cavoulacos and Kathryn Minshew, founders of The Muse and authors of *The New Rules of Work: The Modern Playbook for Navigating Your Career* give us the scoop.
We believe you should love your job. In fact, we believe that you should be thrilled with your job. And more than thrilled—fulfilled by it.

We believe that you can find a career that gives you purpose, one that lets you use a set of skills that give you pride, and enjoy a day-to-day that gives you meaning. We believe that your work can—and should—be a part of who you are, what you value, and what you want for the future of the world.

And we truly believe that you—yes, you—can achieve all of this.

Decades ago, this would have been a revolutionary, even ridiculous, idea. For the vast majority of workers, a job was at best a means to a paycheck and at worst
total drudgery. Work paid for your “real life,” the one outside of a 9-to-5: your hobbies and pastimes, your families and friendships, your weekends. Free time was where you anchored your identity. Work itself was never a source of fulfillment.

You may still feel very much like this now. But you should also know there’s another way.

We’re not the first to say it, but the world of work is changing—in profound ways. The last twenty years have seen a massive shift both in terms of what work means to us, and in what it demands from us. We are connected by our smartphones twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Gone are the days when your clients or your boss couldn’t reach you unless you were in the same room or at your desk next to a landline phone. Now not only can you take work home with you, but you’re often expected to be in constant contact, available around the clock.

This dramatic shift—this ability to be constantly connected, this blurring of our boundaries between “work” and “not work”—is exactly what makes it so crucial that your work is something that inspires and fulfills you. But luckily, these very same shifts also mean there is more opportunity for you to find a perfect fit between the things that fulfill you and how you make a living. That’s in large part because the same internet that connects you to work long after 5 p.m. has also democratized access to information and people, meaning it is easier than ever to explore and pursue new career opportunities, acquire new skills, and connect with an ever-expanding network of individuals across the globe. Today, it’s more feasible than ever to take control of your future and pave the way for change.

But there’s more. In the past, people typically chose a career path when they were young and were generally constricted to a fairly limited set of options. Their opportunities were then further narrowed for the rest of their lives. Those who decided, at age twenty-one, to go to medical school or law school became doctors or lawyers—and remained such until they retired. And while there were always people who broke through barriers, or experienced a midlife career reinvention, the obstacles to changing careers later in life proved too steep for most to overcome.

But you have options your parents never dreamed of. The traditional paths—go to medical school, become a doctor; go to law school, become a lawyer—are giving way to an increasingly broad set of choices: a menu of options
that actually \textit{expands} as we gain new experience and new skills and access to new networks over the course of our careers. For example, a med school grad today may be weighing private practice against a consulting opportunity in the healthcare space, a chief medical officer role at a healthcare start-up, or a position advising hospital staff on safety and reducing medical errors. Down the road, that same individual may write a book or speak publicly about national healthcare issues, or even run for political office.

Our menu of options has expanded in this way largely because of the explosion of new jobs and fields that didn’t even exist as recently as a decade ago. Today there are countless jobs that have only recently become viable career paths: social media manager, cybersecurity analyst, UX (user experience) designer, to name just a few.

It used to be you went to college, picked a field, found a good job at a stable company, moved up in your department, got your pension, and retired. You worked in a single industry, sometimes for a single company, and never questioned your next step.

Unlike the generation before, most professionals now change jobs—and even careers—every couple of years. They have many roles at multiple companies throughout their lifetimes, and some may even start their own businesses. What that means is that you will likely reinvent yourself many times over. This is an amazing freedom that our parents’ generation never enjoyed.

With this expanded set of options comes the opportunity to find not just a “good on paper” job, but a job that is
the perfect fit for you. Today you’re able to weigh your choices not just in terms of the work itself—though that’s important too—but also in terms of many other factors that have just as much, if not more, impact on your day-to-day job satisfaction. You can (and should), for example, factor in a company’s culture and mission, and whether that aligns with your priorities and values. You can (and should) take into account workplace culture, flexibility of hours, and opportunities for learning. For you have your own dreams, needs, and motivations, and finding a job or career path that best aligns with them will not only make you much happier getting up to go to work in the morning, but also help you thrive once you get there.

Put another way, picture a map with point A, which is where you are now, and point Z, which is where you retire after a long career. Twenty years ago, there might have been a reasonably finite number of straight lines connecting those two points. Now it’s like a UV light has been turned on, illuminating dozens of previously hidden interconnected pathways that branch and diverge in many directions. And within this maze are any number of paths that may prove deeply fulfilling for you.

This isn’t to say that you will love every job you have, or that you will love your job every day. In fact, a lot of people who love their jobs today had to go through difficult periods with terrible bosses, long hours, or unfulfilling work to get where they are now. And even those of us who love our jobs still have bad days from time to time! But we believe that, with the right tools and perspective, you can find a job that fills you with meaning and purpose more days than not, and moves you toward a goal that is resonant and rich.

To get there, though, you need to throw out all the old, traditional advice about what it takes to find, land, and thrive in the perfect job. The old rules no longer apply here. Instead, you need the New Rules—rules that will help you navigate the changing landscape of work and the unique career path you will build, not follow.

Given all the ways in which the world of work is changing, you simply can’t plan your career using the same methods and approaches that may have worked before. Instead of climbing a predetermined ladder, you will be hiking a journey with many twists, turns, and forks in the road. So the New Rules necessitate a major mindset shift; one that involves looking at your career as a series of two- to five-year steps, rather than a single choice made up front.
And just as you can’t approach career planning the same way, you can’t be searching for jobs the same way, either. This is a good thing—because, let’s be honest, the old way wasn’t so great. Most of us have had the experience of going to a job site and coming face-to-face with that big, empty search box. It stares back at you, asking: *What do you want?* And even though you may not be sure, you pick something because you have to. Depending on what you enter into that box, you may get results that are extremely broad or extremely narrow, and most of them probably don’t appeal to you in the slightest. That’s not a surprise: The professional aspirations of most people don’t fit cleanly in a search bar.

The problem with the traditional search box is that it assumes that you already know exactly what kind of job you want. If you know 100 percent that you want to be a sell-side analyst or a pediatric cardiologist or an exotic animal veterinarian—if you are one of the lucky few who have it figured out—then, sure, you can type those words into the search bar and find some great job opportunities for yourself. If, on the other hand, you’re not quite sure what you want to do next (and most of us fall into this category!), then that big empty box is not going to help you at all.

In the new world of work, what many of us need is not a tool for job search, but tools for job discovery—tools to help you figure out what you, as a unique individual, really want. You need tools to help you understand what your professional strengths, skills, and values are. You need tools to explore the countless different options that are available to you. You need resources to research positions and companies—resources that will tell you not just how many employees they have or what their yearly operating budget is, but whether their culture is a fit for your work style, whether their workspace is inspiring to you, whether their employees are happy and fulfilled, and whether those employees are the type of people with whom you’d want to work. You need methods for career experimentation, the ability to try a few things and see when you’re on the right track—and the wrong one. A lot of the rules are being rewritten as we speak, meaning that we all have the opportunity to contribute to the future of a workplace that will look remarkably different in five to seven years than it does now. We’re pretty excited by this idea, and we hope you are, too.

This is exactly why we built TheMuse.com. Yes, we wanted to provide tools to let you search for jobs, if that’s what you’re ready to do. But we also wanted
to provide tools to let you discover: to read stories of how other professionals found their paths, to watch videos that bring you inside the walls of a variety of different companies to see how they operate, to explore job opportunities based on values, skills, and interests that are unique to you.

The Muse is a different type of career site, in that we personalize the experience for you. We target and get to know specific companies and provide curated advice that helps you understand not only what a position entails in the context of a company, but also what you want from a job. We guide you through this process; we don’t simply point you in the direction of hundreds of job openings. In short, we show you how to play the career game by the New Rules.

Our book, The New Rules of Work, is not only an extension of that philosophy, but a practical playbook—one that draws on our collective experiences helping millions of people find the perfect fit—for navigating the new world of work. In it, we will walk you through everything from how to create and narrow a menu of possible job options, to how to get your foot in the door at your dream company, to how to set a goal for the next stage in your career journey—and then achieve it. And we’ll show you how to do all that by following the New Rules.

Wherever you are or whatever you’re facing in your career right now, we believe that there is a way to move forward, and a destination that is right for you. Whether you’ve just graduated or are about to graduate from college and have no idea what you want to be “when you grow up”; whether you’re midcareer with a decent job and salary but feel bored or stuck, and wondering what else could be out there for you; whether you are a parent reentering the workforce after a decade career break raising a family, only to find that the job landscape looks nothing like you remember it; whether you are nearing retirement but nowhere near ready to retire—only you’ve been “aged out” (read: replaced by someone younger) of the job you’ve had for thirty years with only a distant memory of what it even means to “look for work”—our book can help. We are here to tell you that whatever your current obstacle is, you can face it. The only thing you shouldn’t be doing if you’re feeling stuck or disillusioned or stressed out is nothing. There are always next steps to take, new strategies to try, and new skills to build, and we can tackle them together.

There isn’t anything wrong with wanting more from work. Wherever you’re
starting from, banish forever the idea that just getting paid in exchange for your forty-plus hours a week is good enough value from your career path. Instead, know that you can choose a job where you can get paid and be mentored, get paid and develop new skills, get paid and be on a fast track toward your ultimate career destination, get paid and have phenomenal co-workers or perks or flexibility for your lifestyle (or—you guessed it—many of the above). The most important thing is being curious and open to exploring the many opportunities in front of you. This is what we mean by exciting!

**RESEARCH: THE MUSE METHOD**

**FOR LAYING OUT A FULL SET OF CHOICES—INCLUDING THOSE YOU MAY NOT KNOW YOU HAVE**

**THE OLD RULE:**
Traditionally, there were very few methods of getting career information or advice. During your college years, you relied upon a guidance counselor (or some lame, generic pamphlets) to help pick a major and then get you your first job. These choices were heavily influenced by who was around you—if one of your parents was an accountant, you were more likely to consider finance as an option. Once you landed at a company, you relied upon your manager or HR department to tell you what next role would be best for you. You could only see as far as the world you knew, and so the choices were limited to those handed to you.

**THE NEW RULE:**
Now information is at our fingertips. The internet has made it easy to reach anyone and learn almost anything about a possible career. Even if no one you know is a comic book designer, for example, you can follow your favorite artists on their websites and social media platforms to learn about exactly what their job entails, and what education and career path they took to get there. Whether you’re just starting your professional life or contemplating making a pivot, the options are truly unlimited, and all it takes is a web browser and a bit of curiosity and determination to explore them.
THE NEW RULES OF BUILDING YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

THE OLD RULE:
Branding is for products. This dates back to the Industrial Revolution, when companies started enlisting the help of advertisers to build identities that communicated a distinct image for a product. Campbell’s Soup. Domino Sugar. Wheaties. Kellogg’s Corn Flakes. The old rules of branding were all about creating iconic images and clever messaging for the purpose of selling stuff.

THE NEW RULE:
Today, brands aren’t only associated with products, but with people—and your personal brand can make a big difference in helping you launch a career and land a job. Employers are looking for individuals who know who they are and are able to present themselves as attractive employees and colleagues. A strong personal brand can help you establish yourself as an expert in your field, provide hiring managers with insight into your personality, and give you that extra edge you need to snag your dream job.

THE NEW RULES OF NETWORKING

THE OLD RULE:
Networking has always been considered a part of any strong action plan to get a new job or stay updated and valuable in your current career. But it used to be an awkward affair, limited to organized job fairs, industry conferences, alumni events, and other formalized get-togethers where you were invited and expected to shamelessly self-promote—something many of us don’t enjoy doing. Cue: mental images of a used-car salesman handshake. No thanks!

THE NEW RULE:
Although some of the old rules on how to build a relationship with someone remain viable, networking has become much more nuanced, common, and expected due to social media; it’s no longer reserved primarily for the conference circuit or big industry events. From casual email or Twitter interactions, to coffee dates and informational interviews, to joining Facebook groups, you need to learn the New Rules for how to expertly build and manage a network—both online and off.
THE NEW RULES OF NAILING YOUR NEGOTIATION

**THE OLD RULE:**
When you got a job offer, you accepted it gratefully, no questions asked. Negotiating was reserved for senior hires and executives, and even then, the only element of the job offer up for discussion was salary. At any level lower than that, trying to negotiate a job offer could come across as greedy, ungrateful, or entitled. So in most cases, if you got an offer, you took it. End of story.

**THE NEW RULE:**
Companies make offers with the expectation that you’ll negotiate—so in many situations, if you don’t haggle a little, you’ll end up with less than you’re worth. You also have more to work with in today’s marketplace; these days companies are often willing to consider factors beyond salary, so you can negotiate for other benefits, such as vacation time, a flexible schedule, moving expenses, and more.

SPRING CLEAN YOUR BANK ACCOUNT

Would you like to make more money? Yeah us too. Jen Sincero, author of *You Are a Badass at Making Money: Master the Mindset of Wealth*, went from being totally broke and subsisting solely on Taco Bell to making serious dough as a motivational speaker and coach. Sincero uses hysterical anecdotes to teach readers how to get past fears and stumbling blocks, unlock earning potential and start rollin’ in the cheddah.
If you’re ready to make more money, you can. I don’t care how many times you’ve tried and failed or if you’re so broke you’re selling your bodily fluids for bus fare or how often you’ve found yourself center stage at the checkout counter, feigning shock and indignation: “Are you sure? Declined?! That’s impossible. Can you run it one more time?” No matter how out of the question it may seem for you at this moment, you can make lots of money. Even I’m-a-buy-everyone-I-love-a-house-and-a-gold-tooth kind of money, if that’s what turns you on.

I’d also like to point out that there’s nothing horribly wrong with you if you haven’t figured out how to do it yet. Money is one of the most loaded topics out there—we love money, hate money,
I’m going to touch on five different scenarios to help you maximize your income stream, but I want you to keep in mind that no matter whatcha got goin’, you have to expand your mindset beyond where you’re at if you really want to knock it out of the park. Wake up, become aware of how you’re perceiving “reality,” make new choices, get outside help for fresh perspective, believe in the unbelievable. Most people stay in financial struggle not because they suck at what they do or don’t have any prospects, but because they don’t stretch their minds.

Regardless of which of these scenarios applies to you, read them all because there’s always some overlap, and you never know where you’ll get the spark for an idea that will change your life:
1. YOU START YOUR OWN BUSINESS

I’ve been an entrepreneur for over two decades and can’t imagine living any other way, but it’s definitely not for everyone. Here are some pros and cons my tribe and I discuss on the reg:

PROS:

1. There’s no limit to how much money you can make or how big you can grow your business. Small, medium, or large, the choice is yours. The decision is yours. The oyster is yours.

1. You design your own lifestyle, work when and how you want and with whom you want. You might travel the world while running your business, run it out of your kitchen, only hire your pals, work in your robe, whatevs.

CONS:

1. You’re the boss. The responsibilities are yours, the risks are yours, the ass on the line is yours.

1. You have no structure but the structure you create yourself, so your discipline must be rock solid.

1. Oftentimes, especially at the beginning, you are alone. In front of your computer. A lot.

IF YOU DECIDE TO GO INTO BUSINESS FOR YOURSELF:

1. Notice what excites you, what comes naturally to you, what you’re excited to share with the world, whose product or service turns you on and inspires you to do or make something similar. Get as many specifics in place as you can and see if you can make a business out of it.

2. Another great way to get ideas is by noticing a complaint you often hear yourself or other people talking about: There are no cute and functional bags to carry my laptop around in. How come there are no healthy fast-food options? I’d love to go on a road trip and not eat like crap. When is someone going to write a self-help book that uses jokes and curse words? Make a list of all the things you can think of that are missing—both products and services. Once you’ve written them all down, see if there’s one that excites you that you could turn into a business filling a need that you know is there.

1. Do your numbers. Make sure your idea has profit and growth potential. I’ve seen so many people start businesses they’re superpsyched about that
either make hardly any money or wind up costing them money because they were more focused on their enthusiasm than the revenue streams. Both are obviously important, but if you want a hobby, get a hobby. If you want a business that makes money, be clear on how much you desire to make and how you’re going to make it. Do what you love and the money will follow works well on a throw pillow, but doesn’t do much for the bank account.

I’m not a big believer in business plans unless you’re going for a loan—business plans are large, daunting, and can make the most determined person be like, Screw it, maybe I’ll go back to school for art history instead—but I am big on getting clear on, and writing down, all the income possibilities, expenses, projections, target market, etc., for your business. Which you can do on one or two pages. The simpler the better.

Leverage your time as much as possible. There is only one of you and only so much time in a day, so if you’re doing a brick-and-mortar store or in-person workshops, can you sell/do them online, where you have unlimited access to an unlimited audience? Can you eventually hire people under you to do what you do? Can you provide your service to groups as well as one-on-one? Can you sell information products as well as showing up live? Leveraging your time allows you to work less and make more and all the successful kids are doing it.

Focus on one thing. Do not try to start two projects at once or fragment your focus or time in any way. Entrepreneurs are usually really creative people, which is awesome when you have to write an entire album or thirty-five marketing e-mails, but can be a menace when you’re starting a business. I guarantee you, the moment you get a great idea for a business and start working on it, you’ll get awesome ideas for several others. If you split your attention and try to pursue more than one at once, you’re screwed. They say a plane uses about 40 percent of its fuel at takeoff. You need all your energy and focus to get the sucker off the ground. Once your new business is up and running, it’s still work, of course, but you’ve gained some momentum and can then look to your other ideas. However, until you are fully up and running and profitable, you are unauthorized to start any other businesses or take on any other huge projects.

Do whatever it takes. I had a friend who I worked with back in my record com-
pany days who was hell-bent on starting her own branding firm. Her day job as a creative director at the record company was taking up all her time so she quit and decided to get a bartending job while she got her dream firm up and running. The only job she could find was at a bar right across the street from the company she’d just quit working for.

You can have your ego or you can have your dreams.

She sucked it up, served Jägermeister shots to interns who once worked under her, and went on to make many millions with her own business.

Get good at sales. Sorry, but if you’re in business, you’re in the business of sales, cuz without sales, you ain’t got no business. Take courses, discover the parts about sales that you’re good at (it goes deeper than you think), practice, get good at the skill sets, and stop saying how much you love everything about your business except the sales part.

2. YOU HAVE YOUR OWN BUSINESS AND WANT TO GROW IT

1. Hire a coach and/or get a mentor. Coaches and mentors can see those opportunities that are outside your field of vision because you’re in the forest and can’t see for the trees. Coaches and mentors are farther along than you are, they’re sitting on the top of the mountain, eating an orange, watching you stumble around down there. They can point something out in, oh, twenty-eight seconds, that might take you the next three years to figure out.

2. Get clear on which part of your business is bringing in the most revenue. Is it live events? Is it products? Is it high-priced one-on-one stuff? Figure it out and up your game in that area.

3. Delegate anything that you haven’t yet delegated. A big problem for many entrepreneurs is we get caught working in our businesses instead of on them. We’re so wrapped up in the day-to-day that taking time to develop new ideas and expand seems like a luxury. It’s
not. Growth is one of the most exciting and vital parts of your business. Stop pretending you have to do everything yourself, grab your wallet, take a big leap, and hire some more help.

4

Seek out partnerships, joint ventures, investors, and other people who can help you grow.

5

Look to see where you can create passive income streams (work once, make money forever). Can you film yourself giving a seminar and sell it as a DVD or a download? Write a book? Create other types of products? Invest in other people’s companies? Passive income = the bomb diggity because this is how money flows into your bank account while you're sipping margaritas on a beach.

3. YOU HAVE A JOB YOU HATE/ARE BORED TO DEATH BY

Because you are unauthorized to hate/be bored by the thing you spend most of your waking hours doing, you must quit. But before you quit, be grateful to this job that is supporting you and lead-ing you toward your dream job. Also, see number 5 in this section.

4. YOU HAVE A JOB YOU LIKE BUT DON’T MAKE MUCH MONEY

1

Ask for a raise. Get clear on why you believe you deserve this raise, list off all the many contributions you’ve made to the company and the reasons why you’re such an irreplaceable asset. Investigate how your participation has increased the company’s revenue, morale, image, reputation as having the most rockin’ holiday parties, etc. Do you have more skills, ideas, and strengths to offer the company that they haven’t yet taken advantage of or aren’t aware of? Maybe you can work with your boss to map out a time frame and a path to a promotion?

2

Figure out what amount of money you feel you’re worth, ask for it with confidence and gratitude, and be prepared to walk if you don’t get it. The reality is that when you work for someone else, they set the ceiling on what you can make, so if they’re not budging and you’re unhappy, it might be time to
seek out another company or organization that pays better. Staying where you are and being bitter is not an option.

3 Seek out promotions on your own. Are there opportunities within your company that interest you that pay higher salaries? If so, talk to people in those positions and find out who’s in charge, what’s entailed, and make it your mission to move up. See if you can be of help in any way to them right now, stay in touch, work for them on weekends, endear yourself to them, bake them cookies, show them that you’re not screwing around. If your company doesn’t promote from within, again, you’re at the mercy of how it does business so this may not be an option, but if it is, go for it whole hog.

4 Learn all about your industry and find out if people are making more money doing what you do somewhere else. If so, do all the things listed in number 5 below and get yourself a job at another company that pays better.

5 Design your own job. If you see things in your company that need doing that aren’t being done, create a new job for yourself. Come up with an excellent pitch about all the ways this will benefit the company and help them make craploads of money, and name your salary. You never know, stranger things have happened.

6 See if you can switch from getting paid a salary to getting paid by commission. Salary has a ceiling, commissions don’t.

7 Supplement your income. Find something else you enjoy doing that’s lucrative and do that on the side. I’m not talking about being stressed out and overworked, but if you absolutely love your job and your pay isn’t getting doubled anytime soon, you have to suck it up and stay at the income level you’re at, quit, or figure out something you can do that will bring in extra cash.
5. YOU’RE UNEMPLOYED AND LOOKING FOR A JOB

1 Write down all the specifics that are important to you about your dream job: How much money you make, what kind of people work with you and/or for you, which skills you use in your job, what you wear to work, how it feels going to work, do they have free bagel Thursdays every week, etc. Make your dream job so real you can see it and, most important, feel it. Meditate on this image and this feeling day and night, be grateful that it exists, have rock-solid faith that it’s on its way toward you, and watch your mouth. No nonsense like: It’s so hard to find work, I’m freaking out, the economy sucks, I’m too old, this is taking forever, do I look like I’m about to burst into tears? Is that why nobody is hiring me? Keep your thoughts, words, beliefs, and feelings aligned with the job you seek and do not stop until you get there.

2 Remember that what you’re seeking is also seeking you.

3 Do every single solitary thing you know to do to get your job—tell every single person you know and every person they know what you’re looking for (especially people you’re scared to talk to), put your résumé on online job-hunting sites, talk to people who work in your industry and ask for advice and leads, hire a headhunter. Do everything and then do some more—your job is here, you cannot have the desire for the job if the job doesn’t exist. Keep your faith strong, your frequency high, your gratitude endless, your mind wide open, and your efforts unceasing until it appears.

4 Seize the stepping-stones. If the job you’re looking for is taking awhile to find you, take the job that leads you closer. It may not be totally perfect, but if it gets you into the world you want to be in—e.g., being the assistant to an agent if you want to be an agent, working in an ad agency as a secretary if you want to be a copywriter, working at a restaurant in the fashion district of your city if you want to get into fashion, anything that will put you in contact with the people you want to meet and/or the skill set you need to learn—jump on it. Learn everything you can, meet as many people as you can meet, keep your eye on the prize, and do your best.
Regardless of which path you’re on, here are some critical, basic things you need to be doing if you want to get rich:

1. Treat money the way you’d like to be treated. You are having a relationship with money and in order for things to go well, you need to put time, focus, and love into this relationship. Give moola a reason to hang out with you. Take an interest in its life.

2. Get clear on how much money you have, what you’re bringing in (incomes, investments, royalties, curse jar income from your kids, everything), how much you require each month to live, and where each of your dollars goes. What you focus on you create more of. This will take approximately fifteen minutes in case you’re getting ready to reel off into overwhelm/bored-alread
dom.

3. Treat money with respect. Pay attention to your money and be grateful for all the awesomeness it brings to your life. Speak highly of it. Give and receive it with glee, gratitude, and generosity. If you see it on the ground, pick it up and give it a good home.

4. Hire professionals to help you manage your money if you’re feeling confused or overwhelmed or clueless—financial planners, accountants, bookkeepers. Do not ask your broke-ass friends for financial advice! For the love of God, turn to people who know what the hell they’re doing.

5. Be a good host, make room for your money, make it feel welcome. Nature hates a vacuum, so create space for your new money to fill up. Get a financial planner and set up a retirement fund, investment funds, or a savings account—make it a no-brainer so you have places to put your money when it starts pouring in. If you’ve never made much money before, it can feel overwhelming and confusing to know what to do with it once you have it, and your panic could cause you to psychically repel it. Prepare the nest and you’ll be more confident, and excited, to get rich. This could take fifteen minutes on the phone (and costs you nothing up front—financial planners work on percentage).

6. Don’t take failure personally. Get your ego out of it and your curiosity into it. Approach failure with an attitude of Hmm, I wonder why that happened? Was there something I could have done differently? Don’t fall into the trap of creating an award-winning drama around failure and using it as proof that you’re a moron/doomed/never gonna get what you want. If you have the desire to get rich, the way is there.

Excerpted with permission from You Are a Badass at Making Money: Master the Mindset of Wealth © 2017 by Jen Sincero. Published by Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.
Clutter accumulates when you have too much stuff, not enough space or not enough time to keep things organized. But there are detrimental effects to mess: it leaves you feeling stressed, frustrated and anxious and robs you of creative energy. Read on for tips from Gretchen Rubin’s book *Happier at Home: Kiss More, Jump More, Abandon Self-Control, and My Other Experiments in Everyday Life* and style blogger Anuschka Rees’ book *The Curated Closet*, as well as writer Brittany Goss, who attempts to organize her bookshelves according to Marie Kondo’s *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*. 
10 Tips to Beat Clutter—in Less than 5 Minutes

By Gretchen Rubin

For most people, outer order contributes to inner calm. In the context of a happy life, a crowded coat closet or a messy desk shouldn’t much matter—but it does, more than it should. These ten tips will help keep clutter under control, and none of them takes more than five minutes.

1. Make your bed.
2. Get rid of the newspaper each night, even if you haven’t read it yet. Or am I the only one still reading a paper newspaper?
3. Follow the “one-minute rule” and push yourself to do, without delay, any chore that takes less than one minute.
4. Identify a place or person to whom you can give things you no longer need. It’s much easier to get rid of things when you can envision someone else getting good use from them.

5. Be cautious about letting yourself “store” something. “Storing” means you don’t intend to use it much. Other than holiday decorations and seasonal clothes, “store” as little as possible.

6. Beware of freebies. Never accept anything free, unless you’re thrilled to get it.

7. Get rid of things if they break. Why is this so hard to do? A mystery.

8. Don’t keep any piece of paper unless you know you will actually need it.

9. Hang up your coat. I have a lot of trouble with this one, so now I use a hook instead of a hanger.

10. Before you go to bed, take five minutes to do an “evening tidy-up.”

Excerpted with permission from Happier at Home: Kiss More, Jump More, Abandon Self-Control and My Other Experiments in Everyday Life © 2013 by Gretchen Rubin. Published by Three Rivers Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.
True confessions of a book lover: one of my favorite genres is self-help. If there is a book out there on becoming more successful, happier, or healthier, I’ve probably read it. So, when Marie Kondo’s *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* hit the shelves, I was her ideal audience member. I had accumulated too much stuff, and I wanted to eliminate clutter. I followed all of her advice. I kept items of clothing that I loved and donated what I didn’t. I disposed of old hair products and unused makeup samples and successfully Kon- doed my jewelry. Easy. But the books were another story.

While other store-bought things are easily labeled as clutter, the personal library holds a special place in a book lover’s home. Print books have taken on
even more meaning in the age of the listicle, serving as statements of our literary values. In our small apartment, my boyfriend and I had three large bookshelves filled with books, with some volumes stacked on top because we had run out of room. Many of my bibliophile friends found the wall of novels charming. But I was determined to change my life by tidying up, and that included my bookshelves.

Sure, I had donated my books before, but they were usually science textbooks or books I read for class and hated (Hard Times by Charles Dickens comes to mind). I had never undertaken a project like the one Kondo proposes: take all of your books off of your shelves and put them on the floor. Then take each one in your hands and, without opening it, ask yourself if it brings you joy. If the answer is an unequivocal yes, keep it on the shelves. If the answer is no, let it go. To my surprise, when I began intuitively assessing my own feelings about each book, only a small percentage of them made my “hall of fame.” There were books I had been planning to read for years, academic books I no longer needed, and books that hadn’t wowed me enough to warrant a second reading. I was keeping most of them around for reference, simply because I felt that I should.

In the end, I donated approximately one hundred volumes to a library in Guyana, where I hope they will find many new readers.

As for what I kept, it’s limited to around eighty books, which is still much more than Kondo suggests for the average person. Among the shelves, are my absolute favorites like Zadie Smith’s On Beauty and The Interestings by Meg Wolitzer. I kept a few childhood books, including A Wrinkle in Time and a collection of Lewis Carroll’s work. I kept only a few unread books that are on my reading list for this summer.

Now, whenever I look at my bookshelf, I don’t feel guilt over what I haven’t read, but pleasure, because each spine reminds me of a story I have loved and would certainly re-read. And, in the future, when I read a new book, I will consciously consider whether I want to keep it or re-sell it.

This article originally appeared on ReaditForward.com.

Brittany Goss is a reader and writer living in Brooklyn. Her creative work has appeared in Confrontation, Vol. 1 Brooklyn, Joyland Magazine, and Bellingham Review, among other places. Follow her on Twitter at @blgoss.
Does Your Closet Need a Detox?

by Anuschka Rees

START

How often do you wear clothes you don’t really like?

MOST OF THE TIME

why?

I don’t own many clothes that I truly love. The majority of my wardrobe just feels boring, safe, and blah to me.

TRY THIS Step out of your comfort zone, get creative, and redefine your personal style from scratch. See chapter 4.

I’m not sure what I like, but I want to dress better

TRY THIS Collect a ton of inspiration to find out what looks, colors, and silhouettes you’re drawn to. See chapter 4.

I know what I like in theory, but when I try stuff on, nothing ever looks right.

TRY THIS Figure out what types of clothes you feel most confident in and practice translating your personal style into outfits you love to wear. See chapter 4.

BARELY

Do you know exactly what type of silhouettes, colors, and materials make you feel the most confident and comfortable?

YES

No, finding clothes that I like on myself is always a bit hit-or-miss.

TRY THIS Experiment with a variety of different styles to find your favorites and personal no-gos. See chapter 4.

NO

I like a bunch of different things, but I’m not sure how they all fit together.

TRY THIS Create a detailed profile of your personal style that you can use like a road map to build your best wardrobe yet. See chapter 6.

Can you describe your personal style in one sentence?

YES

NO

If someone grabbed a random piece from your closet right now, how likely is it that it would be something you love and wear regularly?

PRETTY LIKELY

NOT VERY LIKELY

Work, date night, relaxing at home: do you have enough clothes for every activity that is a part of your lifestyle? Or do you sometimes have to repeat outfits more often than you would like or struggle to find anything wearable at all?

YES

NO

my wardrobe does not really match my lifestyle at the moment.

TRY THIS Detox your wardrobe and reserve your closet space for pieces that you love and wear regularly from now on. See chapter 7.

TRY THIS Figure out what activities and occasions you need outfits for and in what quantities. See chapter 11.
ANUSCHKA REES is a writer and the creator of Into-Mind.com, the go-to online source for all things personal style and minimalism. She has a master’s in social psychology from the London School of Economics and has spent years studying the intricacies of human decision making, which she’s used to develop her unique system of personal style-defining techniques.

Excerpted with permission from The Curated Closet: A Simple System for Discovering Your Personal Style and Building Your Dream Wardrobe © 2016 by Anuschka Rees. Published by Ten Speed Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.
Whether platonic or romantic, relationships can be tricky—after all, there are all those pesky feelings involved. Luckily for us, we have some experts to show us how to navigate even the toughest situations. Brené Brown, bestselling author of *Rising Strong: How the Ability to Reset Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* urges us to be vulnerable wherever possible and Jason Wachob, founder and CEO of mindbodygreen and author of *Wellth: How I Learned to Build a Life, Not a Résumé* passes on his tips for having the best relationship of your life and how to avoid ruining a perfectly good thing.
The Physics of Vulnerability

By Brené Brown

When it comes to human behavior, emotions, and thinking, the adage “The more I learn, the less I know” is right on. I’ve learned to give up my pursuit of netting certainty and pinning it to the wall. Some days I miss pretending that certitude is within reach. My husband, Steve, always knows I’m mourning the loss of my young-researcher quest when I am holed up in my study listening to David Gray’s song “My Oh My” on repeat. My favorite lyrics are

*What on earth is going on in my head?*

*You know I used to be so sure.*

*You know I used to be so definite.*

And it’s not just the lyrics; it’s the way that he sings the word *def.in.ite*. Sometimes, it sounds to me as if he’s mocking
the arrogance of believing that we can ever know everything, and other times it sounds like he’s pissed off that we can’t. Either way, singing along makes me feel better. Music always makes me feel less alone in the mess.

While there are really no hard-and-fast absolutes in my field, there are truths about shared experiences that deeply resonate with what we believe and know. For example, the Roosevelt quote that anchors my research on vulnerability and daring gave birth to three truths for me:

I want to be in the arena. I want to be brave with my life. And when we make the choice to dare greatly, we sign up to get our asses kicked. We can choose courage or we can choose comfort, but we can’t have both. Not at the same time.

Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it’s having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome. Vulnerability is not weakness; it’s our greatest measure of courage.

A lot of cheap seats in the arena are filled with people who never venture onto the floor. They just hurl mean-spirited criticisms and put-downs from a safe distance. The problem is, when we stop caring what people think and stop feeling hurt by cruelty, we lose our ability to connect. But when we’re defined by what people think, we lose the courage to be vulnerable. Therefore, we need to be selective about the feedback we let into our lives. For me, if you’re not in the arena getting your ass kicked, I’m not interested in your feedback.

I don’t think of these as “rules,” but they have certainly become guiding principles for me. I believe there are also some basic tenets about being brave, risking vulnerability, and overcoming adversity that are useful to understand before we get started with the Rising Strong process. I think of these as the basic laws of emotional physics: simple but powerful truths that help us understand why courage is both transformational and rare. Here are four of the ten rules of engagement for rising strong.

1. **If we are brave enough often enough, we will fall; this is the physics of vulnerability.** When we commit to showing up and risking falling, we are actually committing to falling. Daring is not saying, “I’m willing to risk failure.” Daring is saying, “I know I will eventually fail and I’m still all in.” Fortune may favor the bold, but so does failure.

2. **Once we fall in the service of being brave, we can never go back.** We can
rise up from our failures, screwups, and falls, but we can never go back to where we stood before we were brave or before we fell. Courage transforms the emotional structure of our being. This change often brings a deep sense of loss. During the process of rising, we sometimes find ourselves homesick for a place that no longer exists. We want to go back to that moment before we walked into the arena, but there’s nowhere to go back to. What makes this more difficult is that now we have a new level of awareness about what it means to be brave. We can’t fake it anymore. We now know when we’re showing up and when we’re hiding out, when we are living our values and when we are not. Our new awareness can also be invigorating—it can reignite our sense of purpose and remind us of our commitment to wholeheartedness. Straddling the tension that lies between wanting to go back to the moment before we risked and fell and being pulled forward to even greater courage is an inescapable part of rising strong.

This journey belongs to no one but you; however, no one successfully goes it alone. Since the beginning of time, people have found a way to rise after falling, yet there is no well-worn path leading the way. All of us must make our own way, exploring some of the most universally shared experiences while also navigating a solitude that makes us feel as if we are the first to set foot in uncharted regions. And to add to the complexity, in lieu of the sense of safety to be found in a well-traveled path or a constant companion, we must learn to depend for brief moments on fellow travelers for sanctuary, support, and an occasional willingness to walk side by side. For those of us who fear being alone, coping with the solitude inherent in this process is a daunting challenge. For those of us who prefer to cordon ourselves off from the world and heal alone, the requirement for connection—of asking for and receiving help—becomes the challenge.

We’re wired for story. In a culture of scarcity and perfectionism, there’s a surprisingly simple reason we want to own, integrate, and share our stories of struggle. We do this because we feel the most alive when we’re connecting with others and being brave with our stories—it’s in our biology. The idea of storytelling has become ubiquitous. It’s a platform for everything from creative movements to marketing strategies. But the idea that we’re “wired for story” is more than a catchy phrase. Neuroeconomist Paul Zak has found that hearing a story—
a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end—causes our brains to release cortisol and oxytocin. These chemicals trigger the uniquely human abilities to connect, empathize, and make meaning. Story is literally in our DNA.

My hope is that the Rising Strong process gives us language and a rough map that will guide us in getting back on our feet. I’m sharing everything I know, feel, believe, and have experienced about Rising Strong. What I learned from the research participants continues to save me, and I’m deeply grateful for that. The truth is that falling hurts. The dare is to keep being brave and feel your way back up.

BRENÉ BROWN, PhD, LMSW, is a research professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. She is the author of the #1 New York Times bestsellers Daring Greatly and The Gifts of Imperfection, and I Thought It Was Just Me (but it isn’t). She is the founder and CEO of The Daring Way, an organization that brings her work on vulnerability, courage, shame, and worthiness to organizations, schools, communities, and families. Her 2010 TEDx Houston talk, “The Power of Vulnerability,” is one of the top five most-viewed TED talks in the world. Brown lives in Houston, Texas, with her husband and two children.

Reprinted with permission from Rising Strong © 2015 by Brené Brown. Published by Spiegel & Grau, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.
One of my favorite experts on the topic of relationships is my friend Dr. Sue Johnson. Here is her advice about some pitfalls to avoid with romantic soul mates as well as tips to create an incredible romantic relationship:

**FIVE WAYS TO RUIN A PERFECTLY GOOD RELATIONSHIP**

Theories that concentrate on bad behavior and lack of communication skills focus on the symptoms of a couple’s distress rather than the root cause: the overwhelming fear of being emotionally
abandoned, set adrift in the sea of life without a safe harbor.

Discord is almost always an unconscious protest against floating loose and an attempt to call, and even force, a partner back into emotional connection. Here are some of the signs of discord:

1. **The slow erosion.** When emotional starvation becomes the norm, and negative patterns of outraged criticism and defensiveness take over, our perspective changes. Our lover begins to feel like an enemy; our most familiar friend turns into a stranger. Trust dies, and grief begins in earnest.

2. **Poisonous criticism.** We never like to hear that there is something wrong with us, or that something needs changing, especially if this message is coming from a loved one. Criticism from loved ones sets off the deep-seated fear that we will be rejected and abandoned.

3. **Toxic stonewalling.** We all use withdrawal at times when we are hurt or offended, or simply worried about saying the wrong thing. It’s like a pause in the duet with our partner; it can allow us to gather our thoughts, and find our balance. But withdrawal is toxic when it becomes the habitual response to a partner’s perceived blaming. When we stonewall, we cut off our emotions; we freeze and retreat into numbness. But when one dancer completely leaves the floor, the dance is no more.

4. **Dead end.** As the cycle of hostile criticism and stonewalling occurs more often, it becomes ingrained and starts to define the relationship. These episodes are so destructive that any positive behaviors are discounted. And as a couple’s behavior narrows, so do the partners’ views of each other. They shrink in each other’s eyes: she’s a carping bitch; he’s a withholding boor. Both partners become hypervigilant for any hint of slurs and slights. They cannot give each other the benefit of the doubt, even for a moment.

5. **The sudden snap.** An affair can cripple a relationship, but other events may be just as damaging because they contradict our expectations that loved ones will be our shelter at moments of distress. If we do not understand the incredible power of attachment, we can inadvertently hurt our partner by not understanding what kind of response is required. All such disastrous events are
marked by moments of intense need and vulnerability, when a loved one is called upon to provide responsive care and does not come through. In these incidents, the answer to the key attachment questions—“Are you there for me when I need you?” and “Will you put me first?”—is a resounding no.

These failures of empathy and responsiveness create wounds that cannot be put aside. Most people recognize these wounds on a gut level when they are describing them, and many do not believe that they can be healed. But indeed they can, even when they occur in relationships that are already faltering.

HOW TO HAVE THE BEST RELATIONSHIP OF YOUR LIFE

You can create a fulfilling, safe-haven relationship, restoring the romantic love bond, beginning now.

Abandon the out-of-date idea that love is something that just happens to you. All the new science tells us that romantic love is no longer a mystery. It makes perfect sense. You can learn its laws. You have more control over this riot of emotion than you think! And what you understand, you can shape. The first step is to decide to learn about love and the new science of bonding.

Every day, try openly reaching out to someone and asking for their attention or affection. Accept that love is an ancient, wired-in survival code. You are happier, healthier, and stronger; you deal with stress better; and you live longer when you nurture your bonds with your loved ones. It is okay to need them; they are your greatest resource. We are not designed for self-sufficiency. The strongest among us accept this need for connection.

The next time you feel uncertain or worried or anxious, try just mentioning it to your partner; or notice their emotional signals and reach for their hand. The bonds of love offer us a safe haven where we can take shelter and regain our emotional balance. The latest study in our lab shows that just holding your loved one’s hand can calm your brain and shut down fear.

See if you can notice times when you find openness hard and you become defensive or distant or shut down. We know that emotional openness and responsiveness are the ground on which solid, lasting bonds stand. See if you can take the initiative and share with your partner, helping him or her under-
stand what makes it hard to be open for you.

Reflect on how you and your partner usually interact. Can each of you reach out for the other? What do you do when your partner gets upset or does not respond to you? Do you push for contact or move away? Tell your partner one thing they could do to help you reach for them rather than moving away from them.

Try to talk with your partner about how you affect each other. Both of you offer safety or danger cues that the brain takes as serious survival information; we are all vulnerable when alone. When do you arouse real joy or contentment with your partner? When do you spark distress—a sense of being rejected or alone? Our brains code this kind of hurt in the same place and in the same way as physical pain.

When you get into a fight, take a deep breath and try to see the fight as if you were a fly on the ceiling. Often underneath the discussion of problematic issues, someone is asking for more emotional connection. See if you can get curious and pinpoint the dance; maybe it’s on the floor where one pushes for contact, but the other hears criticism and steps back. See how it leaves you both feeling alone and a little scared. Talk about that.

Invite your partner into more closeness once a day by playing a simple empathy game. Each person thinks of an event in their day. Then you take turns at reading each other’s face and trying to pinpoint whether you see one of the six basic emotions: joy, surprise, sadness, anger, shame/embarrassment, or some kind of fear. See if your guess is right.

Take a quiet moment and see if you can each share with each other what you need most. Keep it simple and concrete. Do you need comfort, reassurance, support, and empathy, a clear message of how important you are to

JASON WACHOB is the Founder and CEO of mindbodygreen, the leading independent media company dedicated to health and happiness with 15 million monthly unique visitors. He has been featured in The New York Times, Entrepreneur, Fast Company, and Vogue. Jason has a BA in history from Columbia University, where he played varsity basketball for four years. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife, and loves German Shepherds, Chuck Taylors, and guacamole.

Learn More
him or her? If it’s too hard to share this, share how hard it is to open up and ask.

**Be mindful of the fact that emotional injuries derail relationships.** You can inflict great pain on your partner simply because you matter so much—you are the one he or she depends on. At a close moment, ask your lover if there are injuries that are unhealed, perhaps times when you missed their cues for support. Try to help them with this hurt. Often just telling them that you can feel how they hurt and want to help works wonders.

**Honor your connection. Create small rituals to recognize your bond.** Maybe it’s a special kind of kiss when you leave in the morning, or a special ten-minute bonding time when you first come home. This is sacred time. No business agendas, problem solving, or distractions in the form of small electronic screens are allowed.

Reprinted with permission from Wellth: How I Learned to Build a Life, Not a Résumé © 2016 by Jason Wa-chob. Published by Harmony, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.
Want the secret to being more effective and living a happier and healthier life? Studies show that you can get more done—and do it better—by doing less, by consciously unplugging for a few minutes each day. Think you can’t sit still, you have no time, or it’s not for you? Suze Yalof Schwartz, author of *Unplug: A Simple Guide to Meditation for Busy Skeptics and Modern Soul Seekers*, debunks the myths about meditation and explains the life-changing benefits it will bring into your life.
Ready, Set, Unplug

By Suze Yalof Schwartz

The minute I learned to unplug, my whole life changed.

Little did I know that nearly five years later I would be on a mission to convince you to join me. But when you discover a life hack this good, you want to share it with as many people as you can! By learning to unplug, I stepped off the crazy roller coaster of stress and into a life in which I’m calm and in control (well, most of the time). I’m getting more done and doing it so much better because I’m focused and clear, and enjoying it a million times more because I’m present. I wrote this to teach you how to unplug and meditate so you, too, can experience and enjoy your life as it’s actually happening instead of missing out on the good stuff because of worry, anxiety, and busyness.
There’s no reason to walk around with stress when getting rid of it is so simple!

Every day, I have people asking me to help them learn how to meditate. There are so many confusing resources out there, so I created the highly curated, give-it-to-me-straight, definitive guide I wish I’d had when I first started out. Having taken hundreds of hours of classes, tried every form of meditation, and launched the first drop-in meditation studio, I can say I totally get the art of meditation. The good news for you is that there isn’t much to get—it’s not complicated! I wrote this for all of you who want to learn to meditate but think it’s too complicated, too weird, that you don’t have the time, or that you couldn’t possibly sit still for even a few minutes a day. Believe me, I get it—I was the least likely person to become a meditator! But as one of my high school classmates said at our thirty-year reunion, “If Yalof can meditate, anyone can.” So even if you think it will be impossible for me to get you to do it, I’m ready to take the challenge and make it unchallenging for you.

Before I started my journey, I would have laughed if you’d told me that the key to being effective, productive, happier, and more successful isn’t to go faster, do more, try harder, but to slow down and get present. I was a classic type A personality and overachiever: insanely busy, impatient, and racing through my life at two hundred miles an hour. I thrived on the fast pace and demands of my busy life, and I attacked every opportunity that came my way with enthusiasm. Pausing to breathe and ask myself whether I should or shouldn’t do so wasn’t even on my radar, and no wasn’t in my vocabulary. If something wasn’t going right, I would still find a way to make it work. Or, more accurately, I would make my assistants find a way to make it work, which would stress them out and sometimes make them cry. It’s no surprise that when the New York Times published an article about my meditation studio, Unplug, I saw a comment on my former assistant’s Facebook feed that said, “I wish she was meditating when we worked for her” (Sorry, Lexa!).

The thought of sitting still seemed not only impossible and like torture, but a
total waste of time. How could I possibly think about unplugging for even a few minutes a day when there was so much to do and so much I needed to accomplish?

But now I know I could have gotten to the top much quicker and loved the whole process a lot more if I’d learned how to slow down and unplug. Ironic, right? Do less, accomplish more. Get calm to get ahead. All we have to do is sit still for a few minutes a day to find the holy grail of peace, happiness, and high-level life success we’re chasing.

That’s not just my opinion—there’s serious science to back me up here. Studies have proven that meditation is the secret sauce to being healthier, happier, and way more effective. It physically re-wires your brain to make you smarter and more focused, productive, and positive. It reduces anxiety, stress, panic attacks, anger, depression, overeating, and pain. It improves your memory, helps you make better and faster decisions, increases compassion, and gives you a serious edge on handling the challenges life throws your way. It helps clear away the clutter and chaos in your brain that lead to the clutter and chaos in your life, so everything just flows better.

I know this sounds like a lot of big promises, but I have seen it work on thousands of people—many of them skeptics at first. There’s a reason why thirty million Americans are meditating daily! Make that number thirty million and one if you start right now. It is the one practice that actually works for anyone willing to commit to it. After five years of doing it almost daily I still can’t believe that stopping to do nothing is so huge.

That’s why I want you to discover this life-changing secret. It changes your whole existence for the better. Not only does it make you calmer, healthier, and more productive, it also helps you answer the bigger, deeper questions like What makes me happy? and What do I want? And sometimes, as it did for me, unplugging and getting present leads you to the life you were meant to be living.

To unplug means to consciously unhook from whatever is amping you up (the perceived danger), reset, and restart from a neutral, empowered place. You consciously disconnect from the crazy current for a few minutes and recharge in a focused way to get where you want to go. It gives you the ability to consciously switch from panic to calm, anger to reason, sad to happy. Complicated problems will feel easier to solve.
You’ll be able to see clearly what you want, let go of obsessing and worrying, and quickly make decisions that are aligned with what truly matters to you. You’ll have the power to resist pigging out and to keep your cool when your kid, or spouse, or boss, is driving you over the edge.

Can meditation really do all this? Yes. All you have to do is do it for a few minutes every day. It’s just like going to the gym: If you keep doing it, you’ll see the results. If you’re skeptical, that’s great—you should be asking what’s in it for you! But I’m going to tell you exactly what you can expect to happen and prove to you how much easier and nicer your life will be when you take control of your emotions, your reactions, and your mind.

What do you want to let go of? What do you want to gain? It’ll all happen when you learn how to unplug and meditate.

THE SIMPLE FORMULA FOR STRAIGHT-UP MEDITATION

Okay, you’re sitting and comfortable.

Now what?

The act of meditation comes down to these six steps:

1. Focus on a single point (your breath, a mantra, a sound, or an object).
2. Let your focus go (this happens consciously or unconsciously).
3. Drift in the gap of peace and nothingness that arises (even if it lasts a millisecond).
4. Notice that your thoughts have snuck back in.
5. Bring your attention back to the single point of focus.
6. Repeat.

Literally, that’s all there is to it. That’s the simple formula that can change your life in a thousand ways for the better. You can take hundreds of classes in all the different disciplines, but you, too, will come to realize that the above formula is all there is.

Excerpted with permission from Unplug: A Simple Guide to Meditation for Busy Skeptics and Modern Soul Seekers © 2017 by Suze Yalof Schwartz. Published by Harmony, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.
Anyone with two eyes can see that Carrie Underwood has a smoking hot body. Want to know how she got it looking that way? With the help of Erin Oprea, celebrity trainer, former marine and author of *The 4 x 4 Diet: 4 Key Foods, 4-Minute Workouts, Four Weeks to the Body You Want*. Using Erin’s advice, even us non-celebs can work towards a lean, sculpted figure, improved endurance and revved-up metabolism.
Living Clean and Lean with the 4 x 4 Diet

By Erin Oprea

The 4 × 4 Diet was built on a simple two-part philosophy that I’ve been practicing for over a decade: **Eat clean and get lean.** It’s the key to becoming the healthiest you possible—and each part is equally important. Once you understand what it is and how it works, you can use the clean and lean philosophy to unlock the power of the 4 × 4 Diet.

So where did the name come from? For each of the two components, the magic number is—you guessed it—4: **In my program, eating clean consists of four key habits, and getting lean consists of a four-minute workout called tabata.** In my book *The 4 x 4 Diet,* I’ll explain how I came to these conclusions and show you how to gradually incorporate both parts into your daily...
life through the four-week program that I created. If you stick with it, within a month you can expect to see and feel results that include the following:

- increased muscle definition in your arms, legs, and stomach
- reduced bloating and puffiness from your cheeks to your toes
- improved cardiovascular endurance
- the breaking of sugar and sodium addictions you may have been battling your whole life (without even realizing it!)

Knowledge is power, after all, and it’s what you need to know to become your healthiest you. So let’s dive in.

**THE CLEAN PHILOSOPHY**

Eating clean boils down to one idea: consuming more whole foods, also known as “real” foods, unrefined foods, or unprocessed foods. Clean foods have had minimal interference between their origin (e.g., the tree or animal they came from) and their final destination (that’d be your mouth). If it comes in a bag, box, or can, it’s probably processed.

Clean eating is a simple idea to understand but not quite as simple to commit to completely. In fact, it can be pretty darn complicated. That’s because processed foods are everywhere you turn, from grocery store shelves to your favorite restaurant to the airport grab-and-go kiosk. It is shocking how many processed foods people consume without realizing it—in fact, one analysis estimates that highly processed foods make up more than 60 percent of the calories in the food that we buy. Even more shocking is the toll these common foods take on your body over time, whether it’s adding on pounds, screwing with your metabolism, or paving the way for heart disease. (My father’s sudden fatal heart attack is a tragic example of the worst outcome.)

Here’s where the clean lifestyle fits into the 4 × 4 Diet: the first “4” refers to four specific clean eating habits that, when practiced regularly, can translate to weight loss and lowered risk of debilitating illnesses like heart disease, diabetes, and even cancer. They’ll also steady out your blood sugar level, which in turn can increase your energy. And these habits can completely reinvigorate your mind and your overall mood by boosting production of a brain neurotransmitter called serotonin, which your body needs to maintain a certain level of in order to function properly. (It’s no coincidence that most health nuts—myself included—are constantly...
chipper!) A clean lifestyle will upgrade you from head to toe and from inside out.

I’ve been practicing a clean diet for more than a decade now, ever since I threw myself into learning about nutrition back in 2005. I’ve also coached my clients into a clean eating lifestyle and watched their bodies transform day-by-day. These are the four habits that, when combined and practiced consistently, have produced the most striking results:

**Cutting out starches at night**

**Cutting back on sugar**

**Cutting back on sodium**

**Cutting back on alcohol**

As you can see, they’re pretty straightforward. You may even occasionally practice a couple of these habits, like opting for the low-sodium version of your favorite soup or “detoxing” from booze for a couple weeks. But, as with clean eating as a whole, these are commitments that will take some getting used to—especially when all four are combined. With the 4 × 4 Diet, I’ll show you how to effectively boost your metabolism and become a clean eating pro in just one month.

As you transition into a clean eating lifestyle, it’s crucial to remember that you’re not eliminating anything fully from your diet. You’re not depriving yourself of a particular food. You’re not swearing off pizza or wine for the rest of your life. Instead, you’re retooling what you put into your body so that it can be used as efficiently as possible.

### Signs a Food Is Processed

- It’s not something you could find in nature, like on a tree, in the ocean, or in the ground.
- It comes in a box, bag, can, or other manufactured form of packaging.
- It has a noticeably long ingredients list.
- It contains additives, artificial flavorings, and/or other chemicals, especially ones that are hard to pronounce.
- It contains vegetable or seed oil.
- It’s not found on the perimeter of the grocery store.

### GETTING CLEAN STARTS HERE

One of the healthiest things you can do for your body is also one of the easiest and cheapest: keep it hydrated. This is often the first lesson I go over with all of my clients, and that’s for good reason. Water affects virtually every part of your body, inside and out. It flushes out toxins and carries essential nutrients into your cells. Your joints, spinal cord, and organs are all cushioned by fluid, and staying hydrated is vital to their well-be-
Hydration kick-starts the breaking down of every piece of food that you put into your mouth—when you are unable to produce enough saliva, your body has to play catch up while extracting the vital nutrients from your meals (plus it triggers that awful dry-mouth feeling). Finally, being hydrated becomes even more crucial when you’re working out. In addition to transporting oxygen to your brain and to your muscles, allowing you to physically get up and move, water is promptly kicked out of your body via sweat. Clearly, water is a big deal to your body—the only thing it needs more of to function properly is oxygen.

Unfortunately, though, many people become dehydrated without realizing it, and over time either they get used to, fail to recognize, or simply ignore the symptoms. The primary symptom is obvious: if you’re dehydrated, you’ll feel thirsty. Really thirsty—to the point where your mouth becomes dry and sticky, like sandpaper. Another common symptom is noticeable fatigue or sluggishness. Less common symptoms include dizziness, heart palpitations, dark yellow urine, weakness, muscle cramps, overheating, dry skin, headaches, lightheadedness, and loss of skin elasticity. If you regularly find yourself with any of these symptoms and think it may be due to dehydration, start logging and increasing your H₂O intake. (And, of course, if the symptoms are severe—like if you’re no longer urinating or you’re having difficulty breathing—you’ll want to see a doctor ASAP.)

So how much water should you be drinking? According to the Institute of Medicine, women should have about nine glasses of water every day and men should have about thirteen—at a minimum. My general rule is to drink half your body weight in ounces of water per day. That means if you weigh 140 pounds, you’d shoot for 70 ounces, or just under 9 glasses. If you weigh 170 pounds, you’d shoot for 85 ounces, or about 10.5 glasses.

Of course, there’s some fine print here. You need to drink more water before, during, and after every work-
out, since you’ll be sweating it out. You also need to drink more water if you’re eating salty foods, like marinades and packaged snacks, to counterbalance the deluge of sodium in your body. And you need to keep your surrounding environment in mind: hot and humid weather can make you sweat, and high altitudes can make you pee more. Both of these instances require extra hydration.

HERE ARE SOME SNEAKY WAYS TO DRINK MORE WATER:

- Keep a full glass or sports bottle of water on your nightstand so that it’s the first thing you see when you wake up. (And make sure you actually drink it.)
- Carry a full bottle of water with you all day long.
- Keep track of your intake by refilling your bottle as soon as you drink it completely.
- Flavor your water with a tasty natural food, like a slice of lemon, lime, or orange or a small handful of berries . . .
- . . . Or infuse it with herbs like mint or lavender.
- Eat something hot or spicy so that you’re practically diving across the table for a water refill.
- Eat water-based foods like spinach, watermelon, tomatoes, and grapes—they count toward your daily water intake, too.
- Drink one last big glass before bed while you’re brushing your teeth.

ERIN OPREA is a NESTA- and AFIA-certified personal trainer as well as a former marine who has served two tours of duty in Iraq. She has been Carrie Underwood’s personal trainer since early 2007, and has earned the title of “Trainer to the Stars.” She currently lives in Nashville with her husband and two boys.

THE LEAN PHILOSOPHY

Let’s start by going over what “lean” is not: It’s not a target number on a scale. It’s not a specific number on the body mass index (BMI) table. It’s not a single-digit number stitched into the waist of your jeans. These kinds of numbers
aren’t worth getting hung up on be-
cause they don’t tell the whole story.

Here’s what lean is: to get technical, it’s having a low percentage of body fat compared to your percentage of lean mass. (Lean body mass includes every thing that’s not considered fat, like muscles and bones.) One of the most common tools used to measure body fat, the body mass index, uses your height and weight. But since the BMI method’s reliability is increasingly under scrutiny (National Public Radio has actually called it “bogus!”), I rely on a non-numerical definition that is a combination of how you look and feel.

“Lean” means looking fit, with visible muscle tone and minimal excess body fat for your particular body type. “Lean” also means feeling strong and full of energy.

And that’s what sets “lean” apart from common diet terms like “skinny” and “thin”—because getting lean is not about simply losing weight or reducing your waist size. If a thigh gap is all you’re focusing on, you’re missing the point. You actually need some muscle mass in order to have the strength to go about your daily life, especially when you’re exercising regularly and torching the calories that you’re consuming. (In fact, the more muscle you have, the more calories you burn even at rest.) If you’re just skinny—skin and bones and very little developed muscle—not only will you struggle to complete tough workouts, but you also may end up injuring yourself.

Now that you know what “lean” is, you’re probably wondering: How do I make my body lean? I’ll let you in on my biggest fitness secret weapon—it’s the second “4” in the 4 × 4 Diet. The most effective kind of workout that I use is a form of high-intensity interval training called tabata. One tabata lasts just four minutes.

One tabata is:
20 seconds of high-intensity moves,
then 10 seconds of rest,
repeated 8 times.

A four-minute workout that actually produces a lean, healthy body? I can’t wait to show you exactly how it works—it’s based on a landmark scientific study inspired by Japanese speed skaters. I also can’t wait for you to try it yourself.
GETTING LEAN STARTS HERE

Before you learn the four-minute workout—before you throw yourself into any kind of regular exercise, really—you need to build a strong foundation. Getting lean begins with embracing an active lifestyle and moving as much as possible as you go about your day. Studies have shown that the more sedentary you are, the higher your risk of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity. On the flip side, regular physical activity can boost your energy level, sleep quality, and overall mood. It also, of course, gets you closer to becoming—and staying—lean.

If you’re starting from zero and currently leading a truly sedentary lifestyle, your regular physical activity shouldn’t consist of full on high-intensity workouts. (Those will come later!) But it must involve a healthy dose of low-impact activity—specifically, walking a certain number of steps every day. **If you’re not already physically active, you should start by taking about 5,000 steps per day.** Just get up and walk, wherever and whenever you can. As you become accustomed to this increase in activity, walk an additional few hundred or thousand steps per day, working your way toward the ultimate goal: twice that amount.

Yup, **if you’re already working out regularly, you should be taking 10,000 steps per day**—that’s the equivalent of about five miles and what’s recommended by the American Heart Association. It’s also the goal I set for myself and almost all of my clients.

Ten thousand is a lot of steps to count in your head. The easiest way to keep track is by investing in a pedometer. From the electronics aisle to online retailers, today’s available options run the gamut. Older models clip to your belt or shoe and usually have a few easy-to-use settings. These are great for the not-so-tech-savvy crowd as well as anyone who’s not into devices with bells and whistles. Then there are newer bracelet-like varieties—this is the option many of my clients and I prefer—that offer additional functions like goal setting and calorie counting, are generally more du-
rable, and can sync to your smartphone and computer. FitBit, Jawbone, and Garmin all offer solid fitness trackers.

While these tools’ exact level of accuracy is a topic of debate, I’ve found that wearing one regularly is extremely useful in terms of comparing your day-to-day activity. In that sense, they’re undeniably self-motivating: just having one on your wrist or belt loop is a constant reminder that, quite literally, every step counts.

Walking itself is easy. Think about it: you’ve been doing it almost your entire life, so you’ve had decades of practice. Walking 10,000 steps every single day, on the other hand, is not as easy. I consider myself lucky because, starting at a young age, it was ingrained in me to constantly be moving—for me, it just feels weird to sit still for more than a few minutes at a time. But I know that’s not always the case and that it’s easy to get comfortable, especially if you spend a lot of time sitting at a desk for your job. (Again, I’m lucky that my job requires me to be running from place to place.) Whether you’re new to exercise or already accustomed to being active, there are endless ways to work up to those 10,000 daily steps. A few of these may seem like common sense—but have you actually tried them?

Here are some sneaky ways to walk a little bit more every day:

- Get into a walking routine, whether it’s three short walks every day or five long ones per week.
- Start taking your dog on longer walks—it’ll improve your pet’s health, too!
- Always take the steps instead of the elevator or escalator (or at least take them on the way down).
- Set an alarm on your computer or phone reminding you to get up and walk around every hour or two.
- Initiate a walking meeting at work, if weather (and your boss) permits.
- Every time you run outside to the mailbox or to take out the trash, take a loop around the block. (And please don’t drive to your mailbox!)
- Hop off the subway or bus one or two stops early.
- At the office, use the bathroom and/or kitchen one floor above or below yours.
- Whenever possible, deliver mes-
sages in person rather than by phone or e-mail (like to your coworker or your friend who lives a few streets over).

- March in place while doing stand-still tasks like brushing your teeth, drying your hair, or talking on the phone.
- Pace the room anytime you’re stuck waiting for an appointment or lap the parking lot while your kids finish up with practice.
- Set up your alarm clock a few rooms away to add extra steps before you’re even fully awake.
- Park farther away than usual from your office or the grocery store (or park in your assigned spot and lap the building before heading inside).
- Walk around your airport gate if you arrive early for your flight or if it’s delayed—some airports have even started posting the mileage between gates, concourses, and terminals.
- Whenever you’re shopping, lap the perimeter of the store and then walk up and down every aisle.
- The point is to get into the habit of moving as much as you can, so get creative with it! Whatever you do, wherever you go, always be thinking about how you can walk just a little bit more than you did yesterday.

THE 4 × 4 DIET

Over the past ten years, through my own trial and error as well as through watching my clients overcome serious health hurdles, I’ve used the clean and lean philosophy to develop the 4 × 4 Diet. The program is one part nutrition, one part fitness—and by now, you know the basics. The rest? I explain it all over the following chapters of my book.

In Part 2, I break down the first “4” of the 4 × 4 Diet: the four clean eating habits that I mentioned above. I’ll tell you why and how to cut out starches at night and cut down on sugar, sodium, and alcohol—once you realize how much they can damage your body, you’ll be even more motivated to scale back. I’m also excited to share with you the specific techniques I use to stay on top of my nutrition game—that includes a bunch of all-star ingredients, a few handy kitchen tools, simple substitutions for certain not-so-good-for-you foods, and, of course, loads of delicious recipes for every type of meal.

In Part 3, I’ll introduce you to the second “4” of the 4 × 4 Diet: the tabata workout. Through detailed instructions and photos, I’ll show you thirty of these four-minute exercises, in Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced levels. Once
you nail those, you can mix and match them, modify them to make them easier or harder, and create entirely new tabatas altogether to form a complete, customized workout that you love. I’ll also arm you with some other important workout tools: how to warm up and cool down as well as the pieces of equipment that I use myself and with my clients. We don’t use many, but the ones we do really pack a punch.

Finally, in Part 4, I’ll show you how to combine the four clean eating habits and the four-minute tabata workouts. Together, they form the 4 × 4 Diet, and you’ll roll out all the elements over the course of one month, gradually incorporating them into your lifestyle. There’s no single “correct” way to do this—it depends on your current fitness level and diet regimen. To guide you along, I’ve put together clean and lean objectives for each week, the results you can expect as you go along, and sample workout and eating plans.

You’ll start to see and feel changes within a week. With this kind of regular exercise, your arms and legs will gain muscle definition—not just because your muscle fibers have expanded, but because you’re simultaneously reducing the layer of fat covering them and they can now actually be seen. (This happens most noticeably when you begin to reduce the amount of bloat-causing sodium in your diet.) And a huge perk of the four-minute workouts is that, due to their bursts of intensity, as you progress, they can improve your endurance better than a regular workout can.

As incredible as these changes are, they’re only the beginning. The real reward happens by maintaining this healthy lifestyle, because those results will keep evolving long after the thirty days are up. And that should be your ultimate goal: to turn these new habits into your new normal.

As the weeks, months, and years go on, you’ll continue to look and be even stronger. You’ll feel cleaner and look leaner. You’ll forget what it was like to rely on pasta dishes for dinner or to hole up in your office all day without getting up for a walk. I know the 4 × 4 Diet works because I’ve seen the results in myself and in my clients. They’re leaner, stronger, and the healthiest possible version of themselves. Are you ready to join them?
Technology is supposed to make everything faster, easier, better. But its effects can be detrimental, ranging from the physical (“texting thumb,” anyone?) to the mental (that flash of jealousy when someone’s vacation pics pop up in your feed). What you need is a little tech time-out: Agapi Stassinopoulos, speaker, author of *Wake Up to the Joy of You: 52 Meditations and Practices for a Calmer, Happier Life* prescribes doing nothing (when was the last time you waited in line without looking at your phone?), while writer Gianna Antolos urges us to stop playing the “compare and despair” game on social media.
“You must have a room, or a certain hour or so a day, where you don’t know what was in the newspapers that morning, you don’t know who your friends are, you don’t know what you owe anybody, you don’t know what anybody owes to you. This is a place where you can simply experience and bring forth what you are and what you might be. This is the place of creative incubation. At first you may find that nothing happens there. But if you have a sacred place and use it, something eventually will happen.”

—JOSEPH CAMPBELL, THE POWER OF MYTH

The Art of Doing Nothing
By Agapi Stassinopoulos

This is one of my favorite quotes of all time. When I find a quiet place at home and still myself, forgetting my own preoccupations and tapping into something deeper than my own identity, it’s incredibly freeing. If you spend five to ten minutes a day in that state of forgetting who you think you are, you will tap into who you truly are, and in this state you can experience pure bliss.

The journalist Eric Barker expressed the same message in terms that are more relevant in today’s world: “Those who can sit in a chair, undistracted for hours, mastering subjects and creating things will rule the world—while the rest of us frantically and futilely try to keep up the texts, tweets, and other incessant interruptions.”
Let’s follow this great advice right now. Take a deep breath and exhale. Relax. Now, do nothing. And I mean nothing. Nothing in your head, nothing to say. Suspend all your worries, your future pursuits, concerns about other people, as though you’re putting up a big white canvas in front of you, with nothing on it. Take time to pause and do nothing.

Do you know that one of the best ways to be creative and productive is to give yourself a break? As Michel de Montaigne said, “They have only stepped back in order to leap farther.” It’s similar to how there are white spaces, gaps, in art. Pausing is a part of music. In every symphony, there are rests between the notes—this pause is honored and treated with great reverence. Harold Pinter, the well-known English playwright, wrote pauses into his plays, in between the lines, indicating how long each actor should wait before delivering the next line. When I was studying theater, I learned how important these pauses were for dramatic effect; they were never empty, but instead filled with silence and were called “pregnant pauses.”

When I ask people, “When was the last time you did nothing?” they can’t remember and confess they’re fearful of being left behind. When we have to wait at an airport or a doctor’s office, we always fill the minutes with texting, e-mailing, reading, talking, being frustrated, making a mental to-do list of everything that needs to get done. But consider this: you could reflect on things that matter to you. You could just do nothing and give yourself time to wonder.

We are all addicted to technology. Social media demands so much of us, and we are consumed by being connected. This fills up the spaces where otherwise our creativity could flourish, where we could wonder. You have the ability to stop, let your mind wander, allow new creative thoughts and ideas to come to you, tune into your own breath, embrace your own being in a moment of quiet. This is sacred.

You can refine the art of doing nothing when you’re alone at home—in the bathtub, swinging in a hammock, sitting in a rocking chair on the front porch—or strolling through the park, walking along the beach, feeding the seagulls, just being with yourself. That’s when your intuitive inner self can emerge.

One of my favorite things to do as a little girl was to swing aimlessly. It gave me such joy and took away the pressure that I was feeling; it was my time to really wonder. As Veronique Vienne wrote in her book *The Art of Doing Noth-
“For a child doing nothing doesn’t mean being inactive. It means doing something that doesn’t have a name.” I remember a time when I went fishing with a fisherman in the Greek islands at dawn. It was enthralling to watch him so patiently waiting to catch the fish, watching the line to see if it moved. Witnessing his stillness in the calmness of the sea, I felt completely present and at peace.

Doing nothing isn’t just about feeling good. Vienne also wrote, “Some of the best thinking we do happens when the conscious mind is on sabbatical. Isaac Newton figured out the law of universal gravitation when sitting under a tree. Ben Franklin invented the lightning rod while flying a kite. Thomas Edison came up with the light-bulb filament while idly rolling kerosene residue between his fingers. Albert Einstein pondered the riddle of the universe with a cat on his lap.” What an endorsement for doing nothing! Who knows what you might discover and contribute to society!

Doing nothing is not meditation—that can become one more thing to do. I’m talking about free-falling with yourself. Staring, gazing. Did you know that gazing is a spiritual practice—you can gaze at the horizon until you expand your vision into something larger than yourself, and merge with this expansiveness. Doing nothing can open you up to the awe of your life, the mystery of who you are. It’s remarkable what happens when you slow down. No longer operating from “time famine,” you’ll feel timeless.

There are a lot of Eastern practices that involve this non-doing, this non-effort, this leaning back and surrendering. However, in the West, we train our minds in such a linear way, constantly pushing ourselves to produce. We feel guilty when we’re not producing. We are programmed to do, not to be. We tell ourselves that if we’re not accomplishing, we will fall behind. So we often feel pressured and anxious and keep moving to relieve that anxiety. But, as

AGAPI STASSINOPoulos
is a bestselling author and speaker who inspires audiences around the world. Agapi was trained in London at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and then received her master’s degree in psychology from the University of Santa Monica. She is currently conducting workshops for Thrive Global, a company founded by her sister, Arianna Huffington, to help change the way we work and live. She divides her time between New York and Los Angeles and was born and raised in Athens, Greece.
Rumi said, “You wander from room to room, hunting for the diamond necklace that’s already around your neck.”

Return to that calm place inside of you often. Build it until it becomes your way of being. Imagine how amazing life would be if you did things from that place of no effort. I encourage you to give yourself this gift of finding creative ways to do nothing.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DOING NOTHING

1

Make it a habit to watch the sun set and appreciate the slow motion transition from day to night. Take the colors in and notice how each sunset varies from day-to-day. Gaze upon the horizon and allow your eyes to soften. Fill your heart with gratitude and awe.

2

Throughout each day, make it a habit to pause and get back to your own natural breath and internal rhythm. Back away from your to-do list. Take a walk around your space, leaving your phones behind, wherever you are; just

five to ten minutes of slowing down will energize you.

3

Find a place in your home where you can “lean back,” allowing yourself to let go of “the next thing” and all the things that are preoccupying you. Stare, be, and breathe—there is no urgency.

Excerpted with permission from Wake Up to the Joy of You: 52 Meditations and Practices for a Calmer, Happier Life © 2016 by Agapi Stassinopoulos. Published by Harmony, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.
Pop the Social Media Bubble: Comparing Yourself to Other People’s Profiles Won’t Make You Happier

By Gianna Antolos

Most of us love sharing our lives on social media. We post a lovely photo, share a funny video, and watch the views, likes, and comments roll in. But let’s be totally honest with ourselves—it’s rare that we would ever choose to post something that’s unflattering. When we go out, take a vacation, or celebrate an accomplishment, we share only the most photogenic moments. Our online presence is the controlled, filtered, shiny version of everyday life.

While we all know this about social media culture, we still stalk friends (and the occasional frenemy) and feel jealous when we see someone with a better job, better house, or better vacation than our own. We know everyone else is posting the highlights of their lives, and
yet we still have feelings of inadequacy or tinges of envy when we compare ourselves to other people.

If we consciously make the decision to focus on our own happiness and stop spending hours combing through Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter—lustng over the portrayals of seemingly more fabulous lives, then we will ultimately be happier with our own. You can start with these three steps:

1. **Reality check:** Start by reiterating to yourself that everything you see on social media is a shinier and prettier version of reality and that we are all guilty of it. This isn’t a free pass to become cynical and bitter toward everything in your newsfeed, or to undermine anyone’s happiness. But just because someone is posting their latest purchase or views from an incredible trip, doesn’t mean that their life is perfect. Remember to appreciate everything you have and feel grateful for your blessings. Don’t stew on someone’s success as a comparative perception of failure in your own life.

2. **Cut it short:** Allow yourself less time to mindlessly peruse social platforms. If you’re overly invested in spending time checking and reading every post, combing through the Facebook profiles of past classmates or exes living *their* lives, then you’re not living *your* life. Use your free moments to crack open books you’ve been meaning to read, write in a journal, see a friend in person, or take a walk outside. Make a point to only check recent feeds for updates, current posts, and what’s trending, and then shut it down. Try cutting out social stalking entirely, and after a month, you’ll probably forget why you found it so worthy of your time in the first place.

3. **Focus on yourself:** What are you proud of, why are you happy, and what do you find most valuable in your life? If you’re working to be successful and trying to achieve goals you’ve set, what are your guidelines? Keep them close to your heart and remind yourself that the social media world is a great tool but it can invite negative energy if you don’t take it down to the basics: Remember summer vacation and the first day back to school when the teacher asked everyone to share what they did that summer? In the days before social media, there weren’t daily play-by-plays of sleepaway camp or selfies at the family trip to Disney World. You spent your summer doing what you wanted to, and when you got to school, you proudly
shared what you had done. Try to re-
member what it felt like to be out of
touch with social circles, as you were
during those summers. There’s a lesson
in the simplicity; when there’s no one
watching, when there’s no one to im-
press, impress yourself. And that is all
you need to live fully.

This article originally appeared
on BooksforBetterLiving.com. All
rights reserved.
Read it Forward is a community of book lovers and avid readers who all share the same healthy obsession with stories and the authors who write them. Through our site content, weekly giveaways, podcast and YouTube channel, we’re always guiding our readers to their next great book and the loves of their literary lives. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter: @ReaditForward and on Instagram: @bookbento.

The Muse is the only online career resource that offers a behind-the-scenes look at job opportunities with hundreds of companies, original career advice from prominent experts, and access to the best coaches to get personalized and private career help. They believe that you can and should love your job—and be successful at it—and they want to help you make that happen.

Edited by Abbe Wright, Editor of Read it Forward

Designed by Elsa Jenna and Ryan Deshon

Illustration by Alessandro Cripsta