

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author of *Girl, Wash Your Face*

RACHEL HOLLIS

GIRL, STOP
APOLOGIZING

A SHAME-FREE PLAN FOR EMBRACING AND ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

PRAISE FOR RACHEL HOLLIS AND *GIRL, STOP APOLOGIZING*

“Rachel Hollis is a live-out-loud leader with a heart for helping women tenaciously chase their purpose and dreams without apology. Rachel’s ability to share stories and principles with raw honesty inspires her readers to discover and take the practical steps that will put them on a lifelong path of personal growth.”

—Dr. John C. Maxwell, author and leadership expert

“Ever felt stuck? Ever struggled to make time for your dreams—or struggled even to admit those dreams to yourself? In *Girl, Stop Apologizing*, Rachel Hollis points out the pitfalls, challenges, and excuses that stop us from achieving our aims. She speaks with refreshing (and often hilarious) candor about her own experiences and mistakes, and offers concrete advice about how to create the lives we want.”

—Gretchen Rubin, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Happiness Project*

“*Girl, Stop Apologizing* is the life-changing guide (and permission!) we’ve all needed to dump our excuses, embrace our dreams, set boundaries, and gain real confidence and momentum in life. It’s how to overcome a ‘lifetime of people pleasing’ and start crafting the vibrant, authentic life you deserve. This is a must-read for taking your destiny into your own hands. I loved every page!”

—Brendon Burchard, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Millionaire Messenger*, *The Motivation Manifesto*, and *High Performance Habits*

“Reading *Girl, Stop Apologizing* is like sitting down with a best friend who can speak deeply into the dark places you’ve been trying to hide and shines a light on them. Rachel has the ability to help you silence your inner mean girl while encouraging you to believe that you truly can change and become the woman you’ve always envisioned yourself to be. Rachel’s gift is in giving you permission to not feel alone or ashamed of where you’ve been, while also giving you hope and a plan for what’s ahead of you. Her voice in my ear has been a guiding light to pursue greatness and more for this one life I am living.”

—Jenna Kutcher, photographer, podcaster, educator, and host of *The Goal Digger Podcast*

“Rachel is the modern-day Oprah and female Tony Robbins! She provides a safe place for women to dream big and believe in themselves, while also giving the tough love all great moms give to their kids to take ownership of their life and providing the keys to succeed. Rachel is raw, real, and full of life. She combines emotion, humor, and straight-talk to make all of us believe and see how we can have the life we want if we’ve invested the time and learned how to get there. Get this book and *stop apologizing!*”

—Lewis Howes, *New York Times* bestselling author
and host of *The School of Greatness* podcast

“Though energy-evoking, motivation alone isn’t enough to actually move the needle in your life. Rachel Hollis gets this at the deepest level possible. *Girl, Stop Apologizing* is a true masterpiece that combines heartfelt inspiration with the perfect mix of tools and a framework that can allow you to effectively adopt new behaviors and skills in your life that create real and lasting change.”

—Dean Graziosi, *New York Times* bestselling
author, entrepreneur, and investor

“Rachel Hollis is a force of inspiration who is impacting the world on a massive level. Her unapologetic message of self-worth will continue to transform lives for many decades to come.”

—Trent Shelton, author, motivational speaker,
and founder and CEO of RehabTime

“Rachel is the leader in modern-day personal development for a reason. Her authenticity, vulnerability, and experience separate her from everyone else. She just knows how to ‘get real’ in a way that is unapologetically Rachel.”

—Ed Mylett, entrepreneur, personal development coach,
speaker and host of the *Ed Mylett Show* podcast

“*Girl, Stop Apologizing* is an unflinchingly relatable manifesto that is as unapologetic as it gets. Each chapter is an espresso shot that kickstarts your ‘can-do-itude’ and challenges you to reach further and higher to achieve your goals.”

—Arlan Hamilton, founder and managing director of Backstage Capital

“It’s time to truly embrace your greatness, and there is no better rally cry than *Girl, Stop Apologizing*. Unapologetic herself, Rachel is the fearless girlfriend you need to help you leap into the bold unknown and fulfill that big audacious goal you have been waiting to achieve. And that’s a movement I’m thrilled to be a part of.”

—Amy Porterfield, online marketing expert

GIRL, STOP APOLOGIZING

A SHAME-FREE PLAN FOR EMBRACING
AND ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

RACHEL HOLLIS



HARPERCOLLINS
LEADERSHIP

AN IMPRINT OF HARPERCOLLINS

© 2019 by Rachel Hollis

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published by HarperCollins Leadership, an imprint of HarperCollins Focus, LLC.

Illustrations created by Annie Ludes.

ISBN 978-1-4002-0961-3 (eBook)

ISBN 978-1-4002-0960-6 (HC)

ISBN 978-1-4002-1506-5 (IE)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018957777

Printed in the United States of America

19 20 21 22 23 LSC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For my daughter, Noah.

*May you live your life—without apology—in
celebration of who God created you to be.*

CONTENTS

Introduction: What If... ix

PART I: EXCUSES TO LET GO OF

EXCUSE 1: That's Not What Other Women Do 3

EXCUSE 2: I'm Not a Goal-Oriented Person 16

EXCUSE 3: I Don't Have Time 20

EXCUSE 4: I'm Not Enough to Succeed 29

EXCUSE 5: I Can't Pursue My Dream and Still 41
Be a Good Mom/Daughter/Employee

EXCUSE 6: I'm Terrified of Failure 52

EXCUSE 7: It's Been Done Before 59

EXCUSE 8: What Will They Think? 66

EXCUSE 9: Good Girls Don't Hustle 76

PART II: BEHAVIORS TO ADOPT

BEHAVIOR 1: Stop Asking Permission 87

BEHAVIOR 2: Choose One Dream and Go All In 95

BEHAVIOR 3: Embrace Your Ambition 108

BEHAVIOR 4: Ask for Help! 112

BEHAVIOR 5: Build Foundations for Success 121

CONTENTS

<i>BEHAVIOR 6:</i> Stop Allowing Them to Talk You Out of It . . .	138
<i>BEHAVIOR 7:</i> Learn to Say No	145

PART III: SKILLS TO ACQUIRE

<i>SKILL 1:</i> Planning	153
<i>SKILL 2:</i> Confidence	167
<i>SKILL 3:</i> Persistence	181
<i>SKILL 4:</i> Effectiveness	187
<i>SKILL 5:</i> Positivity	197
<i>SKILL 6:</i> Lead-Here-Ship	201
<i>Conclusion: Believe in Your Dang Self!</i>	207
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	211
<i>About the Author</i>	213
<i>Notes</i>	215

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IF . . .

When I originally started writing this book I fully planned on calling it *Sorry, Not Sorry*. And, yes, I was basing that title on a Demi Lovato song. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that the song was the impetus for this entire book.

Imagine, if you will, the late summer of 2017 when I first heard this jam. It was a sunny Monday morning. I know it was Monday morning because my entire staff was dancing around our conference table, pumping themselves up for our weekly kickoff meeting. And I know it was sunny because it was summertime in Los Angeles—the exorbitant property taxes ensure that the climate will never fall below a balmy seventy-three degrees.

We always dance it out before big meetings because it brings up our energy and gets us in the right headspace. Each week (to keep things fair) we rotate the role of house DJ, the person on our team who gets to pick our pump-up music. That summer, the entire staff (besides me) was under twenty-eight, so it was a millennial box of chocolates—you never knew what you were going to get. On that particular Monday I heard the song for the first time.

It was love at first listen.

If you've never rocked out to this particular piece, you should

INTRODUCTION

add it to your workout playlist immediately. It's upbeat and fun and irreverent to the point of challenge—the exact kind of inspiration you want before an intense cardio session or a first run in the local mayoral election.

Demi lets us know that she's looking great and feeling great and living her life on her own terms. And she's sorry, but she's not sorry. I live for this kind of jam. It's poppy and catchy and easily fits in the arsenal of music I use to give myself energy or alter my mood.

After that first experience, I quickly developed a song crush. I listened to it in the shower, at the gym, in the car—I even went so far as to play the Kidz Bop version when my children were around so I could keep it in rotation. I mean, that's commitment, you guys! Anyone who has ever suffered through Kidz Bop can attest that it's the seventh circle of parenting hell, but that's how much I loved this song. I listened to it all the time, and eventually a question popped into my head: *What am I not sorry about?*

See, Demi, she's not sorry about living life on her terms. She's not sorry for looking good or feeling good or making her ex-boyfriend jealous or taking a bubble bath in a Jacuzzi in the living room—if her music video is anything to go by. But what about me? What were the areas in my life that I absolutely refused to apologize for?

I wish I could tell you that every part of my life is a long list of not giving a tinker's damn what anyone else thinks, but that wouldn't be truthful no matter how much I want to set an example for you now.

As a sidenote, I spent much of my last Christmas holiday in bed sick with a horrible chest cold. I used that time to read many historical romance novels set in the Regency era with brooding dukes who were always saying things like, “Evangeline, I don't

give a tinker's damn what society thinks!" just before kissing the heroine with the passion of ten thousand suns or whatever. My New Year's resolution was to start using the term *tinker's damn* in everyday speech. I've already accomplished my dreams, and it's only January 2. Huzzah!

But, truly, like many other women, I'm still in the process of overcoming a lifetime of people-pleasing. I constantly strive to move through every part of my life unconcerned with the opinions of others, but truthfully, I don't always achieve it. Yes, even me, the professional advice-giver, even I sometimes get trapped inside the crippling weight of other people's expectations and have to talk myself down from the ledge. But you better believe there are areas where I have mastered it. There are whole segments of my life where I've worked hard to keep my eyes on my own values and not worry what other people might think of them. The biggest example of this? Big, audacious dreaming. Massive, obnoxious goal setting. Being a proud working mother instead of buying into the special brand of oppression found inside mommy guilt. Daring to believe that I can change the world by helping women like you feel brave and proud and strong.

I may occasionally get tied up in the trappings of some stranger being mean on the internet about my hair or my clothes or my writing style—but I no longer spend a single second of my life worrying about what others think of me for having dreams for myself.

Embracing the idea that you can want things for yourself even if nobody else understands the whys behind them is the most freeing and powerful feeling in the world. You want to be a third-grade teacher? Wonderful! Open a dog-grooming studio where you specialize in dyeing poodles pink? Great! You want to save up to go on a lavish vacation where you ask everyone to refer to you as Bianca when your actual name is Pam? Fantastic!

INTRODUCTION

Whatever the dream, it's yours, not mine. You don't have to give any justification, because as long you're not asking anyone to give you approval, then you don't need anyone to give you permission. In fact, when you understand that you don't have to justify your dreams to anyone else for any reason, that's the day you truly begin to step into who you're meant to be. I don't mean that you go around middle fingers up, like a Beyoncé song. I don't mean that you turn bitter and rude and shove your goals into other people's faces to prove a point. I mean that you focus in on the dream you have, you do the work, you put in the hours, and you stop feeling guilty about it!

Sadly, most people will go through their entire lives never experiencing that at all. Women especially are so brutal on themselves, and they often talk themselves out of their own dreams before they even attempt them.

This is a travesty.

There is so much untapped potential inside people who are too afraid to give themselves a chance. Right now there are women reading these lines who have ideas for nonprofits that would change the world . . . if only they had the courage to pursue their dreams. There are women reading these lines who have the potential to build a company that would alter their families' lives—and the lives of others who'd be positively affected by the business they created—if only they had the audacity to believe it would work. Right now there are women reading these lines who would invent the next great app, design the next great fashion line, write the next great bestselling book, or create the beauty products we'd all be obsessed with, if only they believed in themselves.

A dream always starts with a question, and the question is always some form of *What if*. . .

What if I went back to school?
What if I tried to build that?
What if I pushed myself to run 26.2 miles?
What if I moved to a new city?
What if I'm the one who could change the system?
What if God put this on my heart for a reason?
What if I could add some income to our bank account?
What if I could write a book that would help people?

That *what if*? That's your potential knocking on the door of your heart and begging it to find the courage to override all the fear in your head. That *what if* is there for a reason. That *what if* is your guidepost. That *what if* tells you where to focus next.

If every woman who heard that *what if* in her heart allowed it to feed the flame in her belly to pursue who she might be, not only would she shock herself with what she's capable of, but she'd astound everyone else as well. I'm convinced that if she—if we—just lived life in pursuit of answering that question, the effect on the world around us would be atomic.

Scientists estimate that we use only 10 percent of our brains. But have you ever seen one of those movies where the protagonist suddenly has access to all of it? They take a pill or get trained by a secret government agency, and all of a sudden they can bend metal with their minds and solve the world's poverty crisis in just a few hours because they're using their full potential. I'm convinced that many women in this world of ours are like Peter Parker, pre-radioactive spider bite—they're operating at a fraction of their potential because they haven't encountered a catalyst strong enough to unlock it.

Only a small part of our population is encouraged to believe in themselves and their potential from childhood on. People raised with advantages tend to see more possibilities. People who were

INTRODUCTION

taught self-worth from a young age are more likely to believe in their capabilities as adults. People with more resources usually perceive a goal as more easily achieved than those who have less. But what if you weren't raised to believe in yourself? What if you didn't have advantages or many resources? How likely would you be to believe you're capable of so much more? How likely would you be to stick with your goal when you get knocked off course?

But what if you did stick with it? What if you did believe? And not only you, but what if all sorts of women all over the world made the decision to replace other people's expectations with their own imaginations of who they might be?

Can you imagine if 25 percent more of the world, or 15 percent more or even just 5 percent more women decided to embrace their *what if*? Can you imagine if they stopped allowing the guilt or shame that comes from not being a certain way or a certain type of woman to squash their potential? Can you imagine the exponential growth we'd see in everything from art to science to technology to literature? Can you imagine how much more joyful and fulfilled those women would be? Can you imagine how their families would be affected? How about the community? How about other women who see their success and are inspired and emboldened by it and use it as a catalyst to spark change in their own lives? If that sort of revolution were to occur—a revolution of *what if*—we would change the world.

In fact, I believe we *can* change the world. But first, we've got to stop living in fear of being judged for who we are.



I've been sitting here for the last twelve minutes trying to figure out exactly how to ease us into this discussion topic, but you know

what? We're all grown-up women; we can handle it. We can handle real conversation. We can handle someone holding a mirror up to our lives, and we can admit some hard truths when it comes to what's holding us back.

So here it is: women are afraid of themselves.

No, it's true. If we weren't afraid of ourselves we wouldn't spend so much time apologizing constantly for who we are, what we want out of life, and the time required for us to pursue both.

For the average woman, the story goes something like this. When you came into the world you were totally and utterly yourself. It wasn't a conscious decision to be exactly who you were; it was instinct. Were you loud? Were you quiet? Did you crave cuddles? Were you fine on your own?

Your needs were simple, your focus was crystal clear, and you didn't ever think about being any certain way—you just were. Then something changed. Something big happened, something that would shape the rest of your life, even if you couldn't have been aware of it at the time.

You learned about expectation.

There you were, being your adorable baby self, and suddenly that didn't cut it anymore. You were expected to do things: stop throwing your sippy cup on the floor, stop screaming when you don't get your way, start using the restroom like an actual person, stop biting your brother just because you feel like it. Two really critical things happened during the period when we switched from being totally accepted as is to having to live up to some expectation.

The first is that we learned to live within societal norms. This is a good thing because, sister, if you were still using a diaper at thirty-two because nobody helped you figure out a toilet, that would not be cute.

The second thing that happened is that we learned how to get

INTRODUCTION

attention, and to a child attention equals love. In fact, if you never learn any better, you'll go through your entire life believing that to have someone's notice means you are loved. See: social media as a whole.

Listen up, because I'm about to tell you something that may help you understand literally every person you know and possibly yourself as well. When you were a newborn you needed constant care and notice to stay alive, but at some point you stopped getting that undivided attention because you didn't need it anymore. But you still liked other people's regard (you were a baby after all), and so your clever mind started to test out ways to get notice on demand. Some toddlers get attention by being affectionate, so they learn to be dependent upon it. Some toddlers get attention by doing something that makes their parents laugh, so they learn to entertain. Some toddlers learn to get attention by doing something good that everybody praises; they become an achiever. Some toddlers notice that when they fall down and hurt themselves or when they're sick, Mommy gives them extra time and care; a hypochondriac is born. Some toddlers can't get any attention no matter what they do, so they kick and scream and throw a fit. Being angry is better than being ignored. These toddler tendencies can turn into childhood habits. Childhood habits that go unaltered turn into our unconscious ways of being.

I know it sounds like one big sweeping generalization, but seriously, ask yourself if this sounds like any adults you know. Do you have anyone in your life who always has problems? No matter what day of the week it is, the sky is always falling? That's because their problems give them the attention they crave from others. Do you know anyone in your life who's an overachiever? A workaholic? Always pushing themselves? That's likely because they—like me—got attention through achievement as a child, and the habit is hard

to break. Do you know any women who seem utterly helpless? They constantly need someone else to help them, fix the problem, or counsel them through every decision? I'd bet my bottom dollar it's because they were raised in a home that fed them those lies or controlled every decision for so long that they have no confidence in their own capabilities.

My point is, we learn at a very early age that there are things we can do to hold on to attention, and even if the specifics of how we do it morph and change over time, the overarching way we're taught to gain notice as a child—from being entertaining to being an achiever, chronically sick, overly angry, or always in crisis—often remains the same and affects the way we seek attention as adults.

For me, it was always through achievement that I was able to receive notice from my parents. What this taught me at a very early age was that in order to be loved I needed to do things to earn it. Did my parents love me? Absolutely. But to a child for whom notice is the outpouring of love, the absence of any leads to a desperation to learn what she can do to receive it.

So, let's recap. You're a child and you learn that certain behaviors will get you notice. This begins to implant itself into who you're growing to become. But that's not the only hurtful thing you're learning. It's around the same age when you not only learn how to get love, but you're told *who you'll have to be* in order to keep receiving it.

Have you ever considered how much of your current life is truly made up of your choices and which areas are really just the things that were expected of you?

I was raised knowing that I would get married and have children . . . and quickly. In my small hometown, most of the girls I went to high school with had their first child by the time they were

INTRODUCTION

nineteen. When I had my first son at twenty-four I was practically ancient.

Twenty. Four.

What in the actual world? In retrospect that seems incredibly young to me. The idea of one of my kids having a baby by twenty-four makes me start to hyperventilate. There's so much life to live, so many things to see, so much you don't know about yourself yet at that age. I can't say that I'd change anything about when I got married or when I had babies, because that would mean I wouldn't have the children I have now. But the older I get the more I become aware that I was raised thinking that my real value was based on the role I would play for other people. After all, being deemed a good wife or a good mother or daughter is rarely based on how true you are to yourself.

Nobody is standing around after church on Sunday saying, "There goes Becca. You know she's devoted to self-care. What a good mama." Or, "Oh, look! Tiffany is training for her next half marathon. Look at all those hours she's putting into getting strong. What a good wife!" If those conversations are happening, it's nowhere near where I grew up. No, where I was raised women are taught that to be a good woman you need to be good for other people. If your kids are happy, then you're a good mom. If your husband is happy, you're a good wife. How about a good daughter, employee, sister, friend? All of your value is essentially wrapped up in other people's happiness. How can anyone successfully navigate that for a lifetime? How can anyone dream of more? How can anyone follow their *what if*, if they need someone else to approve of it first?

It's no wonder so many mothers send me notes telling me they've lost themselves. Of course they have! If you live your life to please everyone else, you forget what used to make you *you*. And

what if you haven't found your partner yet or don't have a desire for children? Are you just a waste of a woman because there's no one else for you to be good for?

No. Of course not. You are a being with your own hopes and desires and goals and dreams. Some are little tiny ones ("I want to write poetry") and some are massive ("I want to create a million-dollar company"), but all of them are yours and they are valuable simply because you are valuable. You are allowed to want more for yourself for no other reason than because it makes your heart happy. You don't need anyone's permission, and you certainly shouldn't have to rely on anyone's support as the catalyst to get you there.

Unfortunately, many women struggle with what others might think of the goals they have for themselves. So instead of chasing them, they let their dreams die. Or they pursue them in secret or, worse, with a nagging sense of having failed those around them because they're doing something for themselves instead of everyone else. They live under guilt and shame and fear. *What if stops being an ember of possibility in their hearts and becomes a litany of recriminations in their heads. What if I fail? What if they laugh? What if I waste my time? What if this makes them mad? What if they think I'm greedy? What if I'm losing all this time with my family for nothing?*

When we stay in this place, fear runs our lives and prevents us from moving forward, even to the smallest degree. We may live with a massive fear of failure and a major perfectionist complex. Or we may be afraid because other people have already achieved what we're considering, so, what's the point? Or maybe we're afraid of embarrassment, of falling off the wagon (again). Or we worry we're not smart enough, pretty enough, young enough, old enough . . . so many possible ways we're not enough.

INTRODUCTION

As women, we've had a lifetime of lies fueling our fears. We've had a lifetime of believing that our value lies primarily in our ability to make other people happy. We are afraid of so many things when it comes to our dreams, but the biggest fear is of being judged for having them in the first place.

I call BS.

It's about time someone did. I call BS to that lie in my own life, and I absolutely call it on your behalf as well.

At the beginning of every single year, I sit down and think of what the overarching theme will be for my work. I try to come up with a message for you, for my tribe, for this group of women that hangs out with me online. When I began writing this book, I asked myself what I wanted to say to you as women and sisters and daughters and friends and single ladies. What I wished you knew. And the answer that flowed out of my heart came from my *what if* spark.

If I could tell you anything, if I could convince you to believe it, it's that you were made for more. You were made to have the dreams you're afraid of having. You were made to do the things you don't think you're qualified for. You were made to be a leader. You were made to contribute. You were made to make changes for good, both in your local community and the world at large. You were made to be more than you are today and—this is the important part—your version of more might not look like my more, or hers.

For you, maybe *more* looks like finally signing up for the 10K. For someone else *more* might look like making strides to change the way she eats in order to be healthier. For someone else *more* might look like going back to school. For someone else *more* might look like getting out of the relationship with the person who is unkind and hurtful and cruel. *More* might look like not going back to the

toxic relationship merry-go-round again and again and again. For someone else *more* might look like being kinder to herself. Maybe *more* is more time and rest. Maybe *more* is controlling your temper by counting to ten before you scream at your kids. Maybe *more* is getting in control of your emotions or *more* therapy or *more* water or *more* believing that you are capable of greatness or *more* not worrying what someone else thinks about you.

Made for more is the definition of you, and your desire for more is not something to be ashamed of! Our potential—the potential that resides in every single one of us—is our gift from our creator. What you do with that potential is your gift back to the rest of the world. The worst thing I can imagine is that you might die with that potential still untapped inside of you. And so I wrote this book, of the former Demi Lovato title, as encouragement, as a field guide, and also as the wind that fans the flames of your *what if* spark so that it turns into a wildfire.

Why?

Because the world needs your spark. The world needs your energy. The world needs you to show up for your life and take hold of your potential! We need your ideas. We need your love and care. We need your passion. We need your business models. We need to celebrate your successes. We need to watch you rise back up after your failures. We need to see your courage. We need to hear your *what if*. We need you to stop apologizing for being who you are and become who you were meant to be.



I spent a lot of time trying to figure out exactly how I wanted to lay out this book. It's the most—I hope anyway—tactical advice I've ever written down. I wanted it to be easy to understand and

INTRODUCTION

easy to apply to any kind of goal, and so I needed to get to the core of what has made it possible for me to achieve my dreams. What I finally asked myself was, *Which elements have either helped or hurt me in my pursuit of personal goals over the last fifteen years?* After all, I'm not an expert. I'm not a specialist or a professor, and I don't know the answer for everybody else. What I do know is how to get from a little town and a childhood filled with trauma to being a successful entrepreneur who built a multimillion-dollar company with only a high school diploma under her belt. I do know how to go from being an insecure young girl drowning in the anxiety of other people's perceptions to a confident and proud woman. I do know how to go from being severely overweight and unhealthy, using food as a coping mechanism and unable to walk up the stairs without getting winded to a marathon runner who leaps out of bed each morning ready to take on the day. I do know how to go from being a desperate people-pleaser just hoping for love to being a woman who is so filled with love for others, for my passions, for my work that I no longer need to seek it out in negative ways. All of these areas of growth in my life were once goals I had for myself, and while I didn't know what I was doing when I first started on this path, I can look back and see the commonalities between each success and failure that got me from there to here.

I am not an expert. What I am is your friend Rachel, and I want to tell you what worked for me. I have tried a bit of everything, but ultimately, achieving big goals both personally and professionally came down to these three things:

1. Letting go of the excuses that kept me stuck.
2. Adopting great habits and behaviors that set me up for success.

3. Acquiring the skills necessary to make exponential growth possible.

I honestly didn't have the self-awareness to identify these steps as I was living them, but I can look back now and see that these were the main factors that led to every success I've had along the way. I have laid each part of the book out in this foundational order on purpose.

I started with **excuses to let go of**, because if you don't recognize the things that are limiting you right now, you'll never be able to move past them. You'll notice, too, that the excuse section is the longest in this book. That's not an accident. The habits and skills we need are straightforward, but the litany of excuses that stand between where we are and where we want to go is longer and more dramatic than the second half of *Hamilton*. Once you wade through them and identify them as the lies they really are, you can move on to things that make you stronger.

The second part of this book is **behaviors to adopt**, which is my fancy way of telling you that your habits matter a great deal. If you want to see traction and results, consistency is key. Meaning, you can't just do something one time or even ten times and expect it to get you where you want to go. You have to develop behaviors that are so habitual they feel grounded in your DNA. You have to make it so living as the best version of yourself becomes your new normal.

Finally, I finish with **skills to acquire**. These are universal things everyone needs when pursuing any goal. What may throw you off is that these items are rarely listed out as skills. Things like confidence or persistence are typically considered characteristics you either have or you don't, but I want to change your perception about these things. You can cultivate new positive characteristics

INTRODUCTION

in yourself, and more importantly, you must if you want to achieve your personal goals more easily.

This book has a lot of information (it took me a lifetime to acquire it), but please don't allow that to overwhelm you. You are strong and bold and capable of more. From here on out, choose to see ideas for change as possibilities in your life. A life filled with possibilities is a recipe for your kind of greatness. Let's dive in!

PART I

EXCUSES TO LET GO OF

ex·cuse¹

ik'skyōōz/

verb

1. attempt to lessen the blame attaching to (a fault or offense); seek to defend or justify.
2. release (someone) from a duty or requirement.

synonyms: justify, defend, condone, vindicate

Excuses disguise themselves as any number of things. Some people believe them with all their hearts. They really do think they're not enough or that they don't have time or that they're not a "goal kind of person." They don't realize that every time they hold on to these beliefs, not only do they rob themselves of motivation—they give up before they even start. Let's stop doing that. What are the excuses you've been believing? Chances are, one or more of these ideas has lived inside your head as justification for why you're not able to pursue and chase your dreams. I hope that by digging into what the most common excuses are and why we don't actually have to give them any power, you'll be able to break the shackles currently holding you back.

EXCUSE 1:

THAT'S NOT WHAT OTHER WOMEN DO

I used to have shark teeth.

No, truly. I was one of those unfortunate children whose baby teeth wouldn't give up the ghost. Rather than shuffle out the door like any self-respecting incisor, they held on for dear life. Simultaneously, my adult teeth were having none of it. They came barreling into town like an aggressive in-law and took up residency. I had two rows of teeth. Shark teeth.

Around this same time, I decided to cut my own bangs with my dad's mustache scissors. Now, to give myself a little credit, I *did* recognize that this wasn't the smartest course of action. I was—and still am—a stringent rule follower, and cutting my own hair at age eleven was on par with performing open-heart surgery with Mema's mismatched silverware. Not advisable. But in this instance the bangs were hanging in my eyes and driving me crazy. As much as I was a rule follower, I was also—and still am—a woman of action. I decided to handle it myself. When my dad discovered the results of my pro-action, he attempted to rectify the uneven bang line. Unfortunately, he wasn't any better at barbering than I was. And he has terrible OCD . . . which means he's

GIRL. STOP APOLOGIZING

a stickler for a straight line. He kept cutting my bangs shorter and shorter, trying to get the edge neat, until they were barely longer than an eyelash. My fifth-grade pictures were a sight to behold.

Did I mention that I shaved my eyebrows in those days too? I didn't know how to pluck them yet. I only knew that I didn't want a unibrow any longer, and sliding my big sister's razor down the middle of my forehead seemed like the right choice.

I was also chubby.

And I played fifth-chair clarinet.

I was awkward and my hair was frizzy, and I was always twice the size of the cheerleaders and dressed in Goodwill clothes that rarely fit at all. All I wanted in the whole world was to be popular and pretty and to fit in with everyone else. And I didn't stand a snowball's chance in hell.

When you're little you have no control over the way you look or what you have access to or whether you fit in with the crowd. But you're absolutely aware of what's missing, what's lacking, what *should* be there. All you have to do is look in the direction of the people who do seem to fit in, who do seem to have it all figured out, to see your lack. In a perfect world, right about the time you notice your differences, someone older and wiser comes along and teaches you to value your unique and innate weirdness. They walk with you and speak truth into your life and, maybe, show you the best way to keep your hair from looking like that one episode of *Friends* where Monica visited Barbados. In a perfect world, they'd encourage you to be yourself while also helping you figure out how to improve in the ways that grow your self-confidence.

But most of us didn't grow up in that perfect world.

Most of us grew up identifying from a very early age all the things that were wrong with us. We believed we were too fat, too ugly, too awkward to be loved and accepted without making some

big changes. Some women handle it by sinking further and further into themselves. Other women handle it by rebelling. *The world doesn't like my weird? Fine! I'll be so hugely other that I'll repel you before you get close!* Or, if you're like me, you decide right around the time of the shark teeth and the inch-long bangs that being this awkward and weird and tragic looking, frankly, sucks. So you, in all your prepubescent glory, start paying attention to what other girls are doing, and, like that scene in *The Little Mermaid* where she gets super fired up about finally having a chance to walk on dry land, you decide you, too, are going to be part of their world. You are going to do whatever it takes: act, dress, look, and speak in a way that offers you the most acceptance.

It wasn't a fast process, but eventually I got braces and learned to flat iron my hair. And by the time I was in my midtwenties, I'd gotten very good at playing a part. In fact, I'd gotten so good at being just like every other woman that it didn't even occur to me to question whether I enjoyed the choices I was making. By the time I started wondering whether I liked the road I'd put myself on, I felt too far gone to turn back.

And so I lived a double life.

Not like “paralegal by day and sleeper cell/international spy by night.” More like I used to live my life—very publicly, it's worth saying—pretending to be one kind of person when I was actually someone else entirely.

In the public eye and on every social media platform, I was a wife and a mother, an avid home cook and food lover, a DIY queen with a blog and a penchant for Facebook posts. Behind the scenes I was a working mother, an entrepreneur, and a hustler of the highest order.

I had an office.

I had a full-time staff of five.

GIRL. STOP APOLOGIZING

I worked sixty-plus hours a week.

And here's the important part—I loved every second of it.

I loved every second of it, but I never mentioned any of it. Not publicly on social media. Not privately at family parties. Not at business functions for my husband or even business meetings with potential clients. I downplayed it all. I waved the truth away like I was batting at a fly. *Oh, it's just this little thing I do.* I buried every accomplishment and didn't admit my biggest dreams even to myself. I worried about what others might think of me. I worried what *you* might think of me if you knew what was really inside my heart.

The truth was, there were so many things I was dreaming of. I had ideas to share with the world about how women could change their mind-sets, their mental health, their self-esteem, and, yes, the way they color in their eyebrows (because that matters to me almost as much as all the rest combined). I figured if I could build enough of a platform I could speak to women all over the world, and I could encourage them and lift them up and make them laugh. I believed that if other people could fill social media feeds with cat videos and latte pictures and workout posts, then I could add motivational quotes and positive affirmations into the mix. I believed I could change my whole business with the idea. I believed I could change the world.

I mean, who says that?

I do. Now, anyway.

Would I have five years ago, or ten? Absolutely not. I kept these secret dreams locked up nice and tight where nobody could consider them weird or judge me for them, and where, by the way, they'd never truly see the light of day or have a chance to manifest. Talents and skills are like any other living thing—they can't grow in the dark.

Perhaps what I did doesn't make sense to you. If it seems an odd thing to hide from your dreams, I'm going to assume you've never worked in my industry . . . or had trolls rip apart your character within the boundaries of a Facebook post. Let me tell you, it takes incredibly thick skin to ignore the mean things people say on the internet and, like a callus, that thick skin only develops when it's been ripped open a few times and healed tougher than before.

It took me years to have the courage to speak openly about my dreams.

I first began blogging when I was four years into running a successful event-planning firm in Los Angeles, producing fancy parties and elaborate weddings on my own. I was utterly burned out. Million-dollar events are glamorous to attend, but they're brutal to produce. At the end of my fourth year I was unsure whether I wanted to continue, but I had started this blog. At the time, blogging was exploding and everyone and their mother was into it, so I decided to try.

It was atrocious.

I literally wrote about what I ate for dinner the night before. My pictures looked like I had shot them in a dark room with a disposable camera—which wasn't far from the truth—and, honestly, nobody cared to read it. Like almost every part of my entrepreneurial career, I had no idea what I was doing. But, sister, let me tell you right now, in the absence of experience or knowledge, determination makes the difference between where you are and where you want to be!

As I started to narrow my focus and get more consistent with my content, a theme for my blog—and ultimately my business—began to emerge. I wanted to focus on the pursuit of a more beautiful life and a happier existence. I started to gain a small following and garner some attention. Then I received a few offers.

GIRL. STOP APOLOGIZING

Could I talk about decorating for Thanksgiving on the local morning news? Of course I could! Would I consider incorporating this brand of eggs into a recipe on my site for \$250? You're darn right, I would! Could I wear those shoes in an upcoming Instagram post in exchange for a \$100 Visa gift card? Absolutely!

The offers came in steadily, and even though they were nowhere near what I was making as an event planner, there was gold in them there hills! Brands had money to spend, and they were looking to spend it with people like me. Slowly but surely, over the next nineteen months, I grew the revenue stream for the blog and took on fewer and fewer event clients until I could make the transition completely. By then I had scaled back to a part-time intern as my only source of help, and when I decided to focus on the blog completely, I knew I needed some professionals. My goals for myself have always been lofty, even if I didn't feel comfortable telling people what they were. I have no idea how to play small at anything. An excessive imagination plus a lifelong desire to prove my worth through achievement means I'm always aiming for the sun.

You know that expression "Go big or go home"? I never go home.

If you give me a wiener dog puppy for my birthday, I'm going to . . . well, number one, I'm going to be surprised. I've never asked for a wiener dog so I'm not sure what this gift even means, but I'll embrace it wholeheartedly. I'll name him something elegant, like Reginald Wadsworth, the eighth Duke of Hartford, and it won't be long until I'm imagining building a small farm outside Phoenix where I can raise my championship dachshunds for competition.

The point is . . .

As soon as I decided to grow the blog side of the business, I knew I needed staff to help me do it. I hired editors to help me write and photographers to take gorgeous photos and an assistant

to run my office. As our content grew, so did the fan base. We worked hard and paid attention to trends, and as the audience grew so did the revenue. It was fantastic. It was a company built on my reputation and, ultimately, the ideal that these fans had created about me.

Allow me to take a side step here and explain something about celebrities or social influencers that I didn't understand at the time. Right now, while I'm writing this book, I have just over a million fans on social media. But at that earlier point in my business history I probably had ten thousand fans on Facebook, and Instagram didn't exist yet. Regardless, the deal with any sort of fame is just as true today as it was back then, and here it is: You don't know me. You only know your perception of me. The same is true for The Rock or Oprah or a Kardashian or the president. Even when someone is as transparent as possible—and I would argue that, between pictures of my stretch marks going viral and my last book where I admitted everything from abusing alcohol to being bad at sex, I lead a very transparent public life—even then you don't know the actual person. Not because they're necessarily secretive, but because you perceive them through the lens you've created.

So, for instance, if you first started following me on Instagram because of a picture of me looking extra stylish, you might think of me as stylish and on-trend. If you came on board during the aforementioned stretch-marks photo explosion, then you might identify with me as a mother or someone who has battled with body-image issues. Whatever you perceive about me (or anyone you don't truly know) has way more to do with the box you've put us in than who we actually are. This is all totally natural and fine, unless that person you admire steps outside the lane you put them into.

For me, that lane was motherhood. And here's where the whole double-life thing I mentioned earlier comes into play.

GIRL. STOP APOLOGIZING

I had a legion of fans who were moms (and I still do to this day), but at the time I hadn't publicly talked about my company. It wasn't that I was ashamed; I was simply so focused on creating content that I never stopped to explain how it had all come into the world. I assumed everyone would realize I must have had help. I was creating six intricately produced blog posts every single week, and I had two small children. Of course I had help! But for whatever reason, that wasn't apparent to most people, and when they realized the truth, some of them were pissed. And ruthless. I don't even recall what it was for, but I know it was a Facebook post where I talked about being a mom. In the comments someone asked when I had time to "do it all." It didn't even occur to me to lie.

"Oh, I don't do it all," I blithely typed back. "My husband is really involved, and we have a nanny who helps with the boys while I'm at work."

The internet exploded.

"What kind of mother lets someone else raise her children?"

"Only a selfish bitch would choose work over family!"

"Must be nice to lay around all day while some other woman raises your kids."

The vitriol was immediate and intense. Some fans were disheartened to learn that I had help in producing the content. Many women were very upset that I had a job outside the home. Others were apoplectic that I had a nanny. I can understand in retrospect that they had perceived me to be a stay-at-home mom, likely because that's who they were. We tend to see people not as they are but as we are. When I stepped outside the lane they had built for me, they felt cheated or lied to.

I was devastated.

I could not handle that people were so upset with me. Never

mind that they were absolute strangers. Never mind that it was in the comments of a Facebook post. I was gutted. Remember little girl me? Remember Shark Teeth? Well, she still desperately wanted to belong, and she hated the idea that anyone might be upset with her.

It honestly seems stupid in retrospect, because I'm so far removed from that insecure young woman (thank you, therapy!). But it made me second-guess everything I did and said publicly. There were a handful of topics I knew would make people angry, so I stopped mentioning them altogether. Working, entrepreneurialism, my team, having a nanny, having a housekeeper, business trips—it all quickly became taboo. I focused on what people loved. Pinterest-worthy photos on how to get organized, parenting advice, exercise tips, and cupcake recipes ruled the day. I worked my butt off for years to grow and scale my company, but if you asked me at the time what I did for a living, I would demurely tell you that I had “a little blog.”

That “little blog” was read by millions of people every month and had a six-figure revenue stream, but I understood that the business behind the blog was upsetting to certain people, so I never mentioned it. And it wasn't like I just kept certain aspects of my life quiet. The very nature of keeping it a secret started to reinforce the idea that what I was doing—and who I was—was something to be ashamed of. This fed my mommy guilt. This fed my insecurities about the right way to be a wife. When anyone said anything negative about my choices, either online or in person at a family function, I didn't question it. I came to believe that they were right, that I was doing all this wrong, that a good woman or wife or mother would live totally for her family.

Only I couldn't give it up. I loved my business, and I loved trying to solve the puzzle of entrepreneurship. It made me happy. It lit

GIRL. STOP APOLOGIZING

my heart on fire. It made me feel alive. But, simultaneously, I didn't want anyone to be inconvenienced by the thing that gave me joy.

How many of you do that? How many of you reading this are living half lives or, worse, are a shadow of who you were truly meant to be because someone in your life doesn't fully appreciate or understand you?

I didn't want to give up on my dream of a successful business, but I also didn't want anyone to disapprove of me. I lived this double life for nearly five years and suffered from constant anxiety attacks. It took a ton of personal work and some big realizations for me to get to the root of why I felt the need to live this way, but the gist of it is this: I cared more about being loved by others than I cared about loving myself.

So while I continued growing my business, I stopped mentioning it publicly. And when members of our family questioned why I would work rather than stay at home with our children—constantly and with increasing frustration—I learned not to mention it privately either.

Brené Brown says, “Shame is a focus on self, guilt is a focus on behavior. . . . Guilt: I'm sorry. I made a mistake. Shame: I'm sorry. I am a mistake.”¹ I didn't understand it at the time, but I felt extremely ashamed of being a working mom. And I felt ashamed for years. Years of beating myself up, years of trying to please everyone else, years of trying to be exceptional at producing family dinners and toddler birthday party designs in order to prove that my children weren't missing out on anything. So many years I wasted knotted up inside about other people's expectations for my life. So many years being distracted from my core mission to motivate and help other women, because I was so worried about everyone else's perception.

So many years I spent apologizing for who I was.

Oh, not verbally apologizing. My apologies were so much more hurtful because I didn't say I'm sorry with my words. I apologized with the way I lived my life. Every time I felt ashamed for taking a business trip. Every time I swallowed the lie of mommy guilt. Every time I dressed a certain way or spoke a certain way in order to be better received was an apology for who I really was, a lie of omission. And every single time I lied about who I was, I reinforced the belief in my own mind that there was something wrong with me. I honestly believed I was the only woman who felt this way.

Then, in 2015, I went to a conference that would change my life forever. I talked about it in detail in my last book, and I swear I won't be that author who just repeats all her old stories in the sequel, but the gist of that experience was, we were doing some work on limiting beliefs and the lies that hold us back. I began to dig into my childhood and what I might have learned or accepted back then that was still affecting me today.

Spoiler alert: most of the things you learned in childhood are still affecting you today. I was no exception.

I grew up in a home with a traditional structure. Dad worked, and Mom took care of the house . . . even when she also worked. Somehow I still found my way into being a proud feminist—which means, in its totality, that I believe men and women should be treated equally. I went into marriage believing my husband and I would equally share the load, but it was so easy to slip back into the structure I'd grown up with that told me what a woman should be like and how she should act and what her value was.

Let me step to the side for a moment and unpack the idea of living into what a “woman is supposed to be.” If I only get to give you one thought to chew on in this book, it would be this: Most of us have been raised with a massive disparity between the way women should be and the way men should be. This isn't a question

of masculine versus feminine. I'm typing this out right now while wearing full makeup—with contouring! This is a question of who little boys are raised to be versus who little girls are raised to be. Like I mentioned earlier, most women, regardless of where they grew up or what their cultural background is, have been taught essentially that to be a good woman is to be good for other people. The problem with this is that it means you're letting other people determine your worth. Is it any wonder that half the women I know suffer from anxiety and depression, drowning underneath the wave of what other people think? We've been taught that we don't have any value without the good opinions of others.

But I digress. I went to this conference and had a life-changing epiphany. I had been taught to play small, but I had been born with a heart that only dreamed big. That heart and all it encompassed had been built into me while I was still forming. My dreams weren't just a part of me; they were the core of who I was. They were a gift from God, and if my creator endowed me with something, how could it be wrong? I dug deeper and realized that my desire for growth and work only really felt wrong when I started to worry what other people might think of it. Staying at home can be a beautiful personal choice and life calling—but it wasn't mine. It was what other people wanted for my life. It was culturally what we knew, but that didn't make it right for me. So I started to wonder, *What if what was right was truly believing in myself enough to be honest about my life? What if what was right was being proud of who I was made to be? What if what was right was to find pride in my hard work and accomplishments and to stop playing small?*

I left that conference on fire! I came home a completely different woman—or actually, I should say, I came home fully living into myself for the first time in my life. The years since then have been the happiest, most fulfilled, and most rewarding of my entire

existence, and they've also made me aware of something important. I didn't corner the market on feeling ashamed because I didn't fit into the mold of the other women around me. I'm not the only one who has ever carried around those feelings. But the catalyst that propelled me into the dreams I'm so privileged to be living today is that I accepted the challenge to actively get past those feelings and, in doing so, massively changed my life.

If you've been affected by my work, if you enjoyed the last book or had a life-changing weekend at one of our conferences or found nuggets of wisdom in my podcast, remember that none of that would have happened if I hadn't stopped listening to that little voice inside my head that says, "This is not what other women are like. This is too bold, too weird, too obnoxious. Sit down. Be quiet." Fighting the instinct to listen to that voice is one of the hardest things I've ever worked through, but because I did, my life—and maybe yours too?—changed for the better.