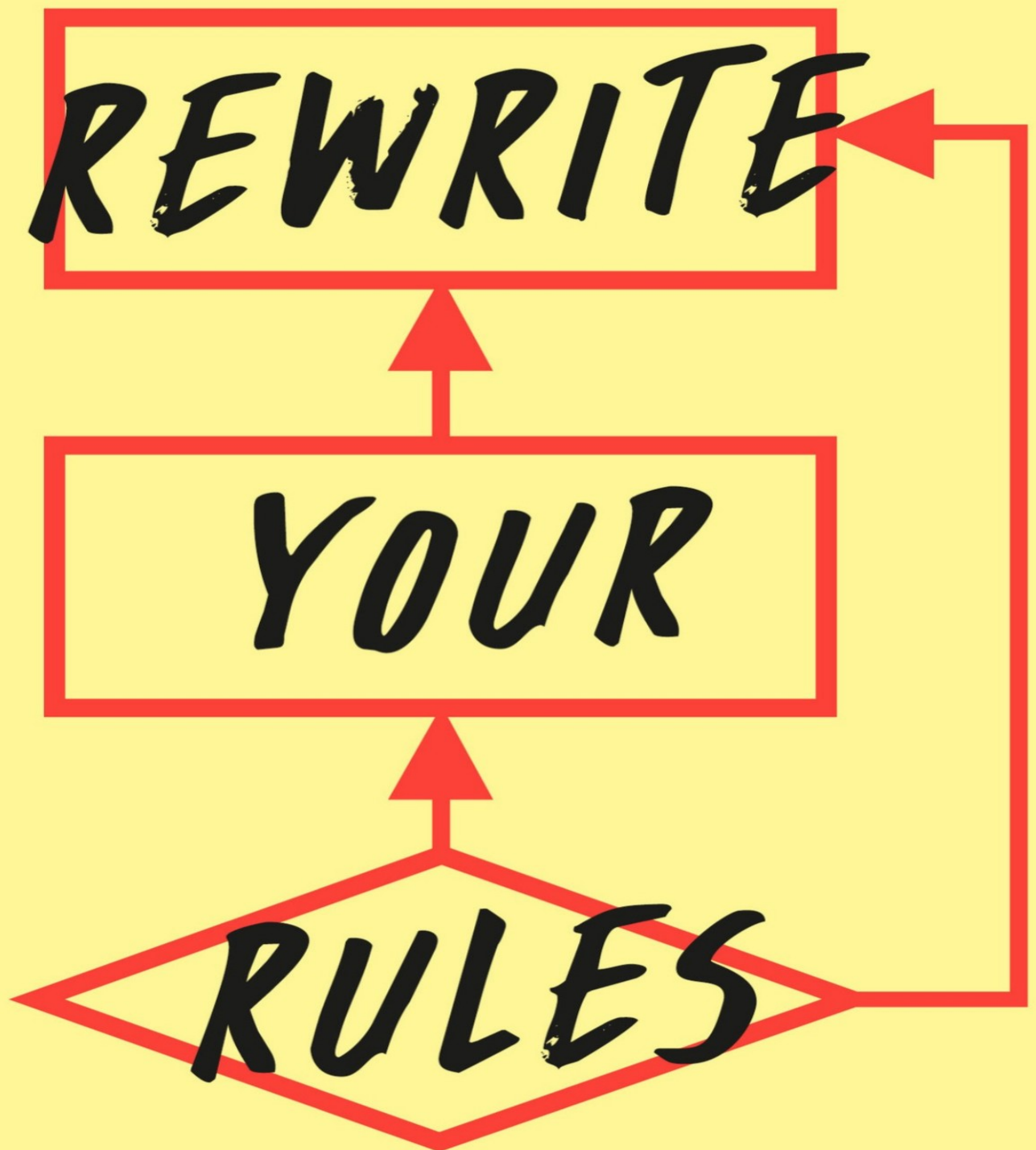
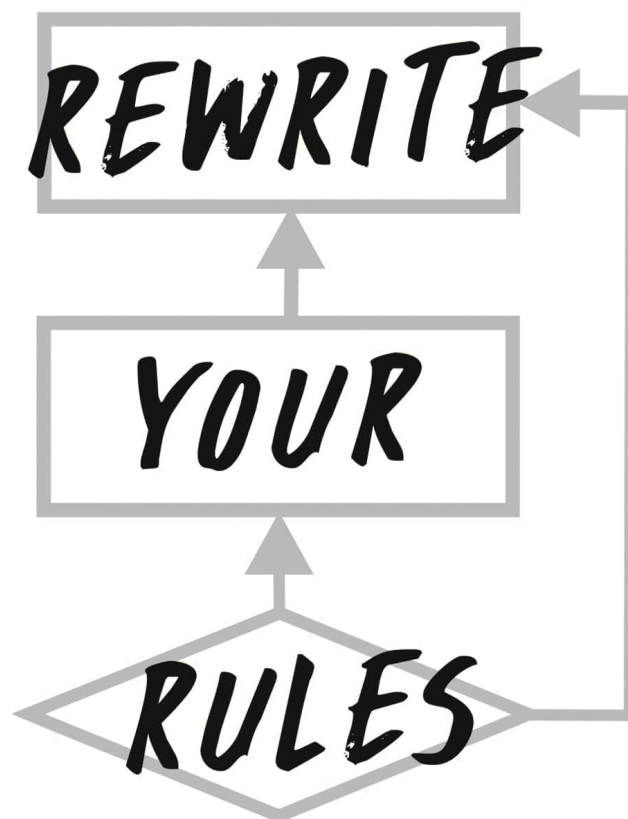


THE JOURNEY TO SUCCESS  
IN LESS TIME WITH MORE FREEDOM



**MORGAN DEBAUN**  
FOUNDER AND CEO OF BLAVITY, INC.

THE JOURNEY TO SUCCESS  
IN LESS TIME WITH MORE FREEDOM



MORGAN DEBAUN



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*Acknowledgments*

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*About the Author*

*To my grandmothers, mother, and the remarkable women  
in my family,*

*This book is dedicated to you. Your dreams, courage, and  
love have made my success possible. Thank you for your  
strength and wisdom.*

## *Introduction*

Ever feel like you're slogging through life, trying to meet everyone else's expectations, only to end up exhausted and unfulfilled? It's as if society, our jobs, and even our families have set up this elaborate maze of "shoulds" and "musts," pushing us down a path that's not only convoluted but downright tiring. Instead of carving out a life that genuinely resonates with us, we get caught in a cycle of pursuing success as it's traditionally defined—climbing the corporate ladder, chasing after more, and somehow ending up feeling unfulfilled. Perhaps you're at a point where you're questioning if the grind is worth it, or maybe you love your job but crave deeper meaning outside of your work hours. You could be juggling the demands of parenthood while aiming for that next big career move or even standing where I once stood: an ambitious entrepreneur with a vision but no clear road map.

What if, instead of constantly trying to meet external benchmarks, we took a step back and reevaluated? Imagine simplifying the process, focusing on what truly matters, and building our lives around those pillars. That's the headspace I was in and have tried to live in since the fall of 2016 when I called my father while I was on the side of the road, declaring it was time for something new.

"I'm quitting," I said as I walked down 6th Street in San Francisco. I'd called home feeling drained, uninspired, and completely dissatisfied with my job at a Silicon Valley tech company.

"Morgan, that's not a responsible decision."

My dad's voice was firm. He wasn't totally wrong. I'd be lying if I said I hadn't had the same thought. However, it was quickly overshadowed by the unshakable belief that I was here to do more than work my way up the corporate ladder at a large tech company. And while the free food, laid-back



office environment (this was prime-time Silicon Valley, there were literal puppies running around), clear upward mobility, and a fast track to a brag-worthy job title sounded good on paper, I knew I would never be satisfied on that path.

To be clear, it wasn't like I was quitting without a plan. I already had an out. I'd been working on a side project for a few months and, while it was far from a safety net, I was fueled by blind passion.

I was twenty-three and had spent months watching tech bros launch start-up after start-up and raise millions in funding for projects that did almost nothing to impact culture in any real way. Yet they were racking up all measures of what we all consider to be "the good life": a flexible work schedule, creative freedom to build, friends as colleagues, and respect. And, I thought, why not me?

It wasn't their superficial signals of success I set my sights on, but rather the ability to see a real dream come to life and make an impact on millions. Not worrying about performance reviews and corporate politics seemed pretty appealing too.

Staring at a computer in a sea of cubicles, I longed for meaningful work. So I left behind the bureaucratic rules that were suffocating my spirit. The rigid structures and chain-of-command mentality stifled my creativity.

The time had come to press forward with the vision simmering inside that I just knew could drive lasting social impact. A vision that would allow me to truly care about the work I was doing. Was it a guaranteed success? Absolutely not. But continuing on an unfulfilling path felt even more risky. I took a leap guided by self-awareness—understanding my core values and strengths. I leapt with resilient purpose, determined to build my skills on my own terms. My entrepreneurial mind would either soar or fail to take flight. A risk I was willing to take.

My journey has taught me that it's entirely possible to design a fulfilling life and career without succumbing to the relentless hustle culture and the success metrics of others. In *Rewrite Your Rules*, we're going to debunk the myth that success is a one-size-fits-all formula requiring endless sacrifice. By

questioning the status quo and shedding the unnecessary burdens society has placed on you, you can uncover a more straightforward, more satisfying path to personal and professional fulfillment. This book isn't about throwing all rules out the window but discerning which ones actually serve you, which ones you're better off without, and rewriting a few to fit the grandest vision for your life. Let's explore how to build a life that's not only successful on the outside but deeply rewarding on the inside, using principles that cut through the noise.

I've been the corporate soldier, scrappy founder, confused romantic, and more. I disrupted the status quo with my companies while still holding true to guidelines tailored to me and only me. Most important, I've made plenty of mistakes and have the bumps and bruises to show for them! Now I spend my time equipping high achievers with the customized blueprints to redefine success and make the changes in their life to get them there. Ultimately, your dreams require rules reflecting your distinct desires for *your* life, not everyone else's.

Since I quit my corporate job, I've gone on to build one of the most progressive and profitable corporations in the media and tech space. I currently lead a team of more than one hundred brilliant co-conspirators as co-founder and CEO of Blavity Inc. What started as a whiteboard vision in my San Francisco apartment living room has exploded into an empire reaching more than a hundred million people each month.

Blavity Inc. operates trailblazing brands in media and beyond, accelerating equity and diverse talent while spotlighting Black culture and identity. Our digital media brands like Blavity, Travel Noire, and 21Ninety amplify and activate a new majority of consumers, influencing how traditional diverse advertising happens through our daily content, newsletters, and immersive in-person experiences. Our community, AfroTech, is the premier tech, equity, and wealth-building platform for Black culture and has become an essential destination for diverse global innovators and professionals, with more than fifty thousand people participating in events annually.

In less than ten relentless years, Blavity Inc. hasn't just moved the needle, we've redrawn the scale for access and business equity for multiple industries. We've scooped up accolades from heavyweights like *The Wall Street Journal*, CNBC, *Forbes*, and *Fast Company*, and we've even received recognition from the White House. I've been honored as one of the *Forbes* 30 Under 30 in media, one of *Inc.*'s Top 100 Female Founders, and in the Advertising Hall of Fame, all before turning thirty-five. Blavity Inc. is not just a corporation. It's a movement, a force of change, an engine of empowerment.

But after an exhilarating seven years scaling Blavity into a media force out of Silicon Valley—raising over \$12 million from venture capitalists while increasing our team from zero to hundreds of employees—I found myself depleted. The relentless hustle took its toll despite our glittering success. My health needed recovering. Relationships required mending. And simmering under the surface lay aspirations beyond business-building: I felt called to explore holistic living.

This realization became clear not in the buzzing California chaos that fueled Blavity Inc.'s growth, but in the rainforest jungles of Costa Rica during a monthlong sabbatical with friends. Surrounded by nature's rhythms and roaring waterfalls, the clarity one can find only in stillness washed over me. I knew that a radical change was required—one making my overall quality of life my new focus so I could realign my body and my time for sustainable impact. It is very easy for our careers to become our identities, and while I loved the work I was doing, my life begged for a reset in terms of *how* I executed my dreams. The time had come for me to renegotiate my own rules.

I had spent all of my twenties being the responsible one. The ambitious, hardworking student with many leadership titles. The serious career-driven founder. But I was maxed out.

Are you maxed out too? Have you been looking around wondering how you got here? I know exactly how you feel. I consider myself a high achiever and many who have come to follow me see themselves similarly. We are

those who constantly strive for more, even at the expense of ourselves, and, at times, without enough clarity on what we want the result to actually be. As a high achiever, I pushed myself to the top, chasing after what I thought I was supposed to want. But then, something shifted. I started questioning my own mindset about what I could or couldn't do to make my life better.

I caught myself thinking, "Why am I waiting to be married before I buy my first house? Why am I holding off on taking that amazing vacation overseas until I hit a certain income level? And why am I stressing about getting recognition or awards if they don't contribute to my own personal goals and values?" I needed to accelerate the ease I was welcoming into my life, to make smarter choices about how I was spending my time and what I was willing to put on autopilot through delegation and smart systems. I needed to design an environment for myself where I could continue to be an intense high achiever (let's face it, that is who I am!) and *also* live a life full of joy. And I want that for you too. Why? The truth is, we really do want success both in the tangible and intangible, and there's nothing wrong with that. But *how* we get there is often flawed.

With *Rewrite Your Rules* we're going to take control of how you're navigating the ups and downs of life to position yourself to achieve success on your own terms. In part one, Master Yourself, you'll gain clarity on your core values, beliefs, and priorities. By getting brutally honest about what you value and what you stand for, you'll build the mental toughness to handle whatever life throws your way. In part two, Master Your Methods, I'll reveal the key to setting goals that actually matter, prioritizing like a CEO, and taking action even when you don't feel like it. Whether it's through ruthless efficiency, strategic delegation, or simply caring less about everyone else, you'll develop a no-nonsense approach to living your life. Last, in part three, Master Your Growth, we'll explore how to keep pushing yourself to new heights, even when you feel like you've plateaued.

## REWRITING THE RULES

Close your eyes for a moment and picture a life where the impact of how you spend your time resonates deeply, success is a constant companion, and personal freedom is not just a wish but your everyday reality. It may seem like a fantasy, especially when facing an endless labyrinth of decisions and unpredictable challenges. You long for quality time with your family, but the climb up the professional ladder demands so much. You dream of immersing yourself in creative pursuits, yet weekend responsibilities drain your energy before you even begin. But here's the exciting part: As you journey through this book, you're not merely flipping through pages, you're walking a path with me, unraveling a decade of entrepreneurial discoveries and lessons that you will be able to apply to every area of your life, be it work, passion projects, or daily living. I'm kind of known as the straight shooter, no-filter type of friend. I tell it like it is, even if it ruffles some feathers. I believe that life's too short to beat around the bush or sugarcoat things. If there's an elephant in the room, I'm the one who's going to point it out and say, "Hey, let's deal with this." I have an uncanny ability to see the holes in someone's playbook and help them reroute. Often getting them to their destination a bit faster, having enjoyed the process a lot more. I've had the privilege of advising some seriously impressive people—we're talking CEOs of *Fortune* 100 companies, top fundraisers for presidential campaigns, founders with companies worth over \$300 million, the real deal. And you know what I've realized? So many of us are living from someone else's playbook, even as we're out there playing at the top of our own game. And it's just not sustainable. This book is more than words. In it, I offer invaluable frameworks and mindset transformations, each designed to empower you. Together, we'll navigate through these insights, helping you firmly grasp your life's vision and turn it from a mere dream into a vibrant, tangible reality. This moment is a celebration, a turning point where you start taking control of your destiny, one page at a time.

I've been a cubicle warrior, struggling entrepreneur, and scared-shitless risk-taker, and I have found myself in every uncomfortable situation that you can imagine a Black female leader in corporate America might find herself in. (There. Are. Many.) For years, emails from curious professionals, both seasoned and green, have accumulated in my inbox wanting to know how I did it. In the digital era, everyone seems to be peddling a new hack, trick, or system, yet few offer the battle-tested mental armor and strategies that allow us to drive our ambitions forward. People have asked me: "Morgan, how do I smash through fear to ascend the corporate ladder?" "How do I turn my side hustle into a thriving empire?" "How do I maximize my potential, impact, *and* wealth simultaneously?" "How do I avoid burnout in pursuit of an extraordinary life?" That's why I created my signature coaching program, WorkSmart, to provide an arsenal of field-tested strategies for those seeking transformative change in business and life.

Over the last decade, I've advised more than ten thousand small business owners and professionals stepping into the next stage of business and personal expansion. But here's the thing: Our journey of growth never truly ends. I want to give my community a resource they can continually reference as new challenges emerge and their goals evolve.

If you've picked up this book, chances are you see yourself in parts of my story. You are a high achiever chasing bold dreams and determined to actualize your potential. Yet somewhere along the way, your relentless drive has left you feeling frustrated or maybe even working backward, like key pieces of the puzzle are missing. The realization creeps in that keeping up the ambitious path you've laid out requires harmony between pursuing your goals and enjoying the journey.

I'm a total nerd when it comes to devouring start-up, self-help, and entrepreneurship books, so I can tell you with complete confidence that there is a major connection between the science of personal growth and the strategies of high-performing CEOs across the world. As I consumed book after book written by the most revered business leaders and self-help gurus, I noticed a glaring gap. The vast majority of these bestselling staples were

written by white men, yet they're marketed as containing universal advice. Try as I might, I struggled to find practical frameworks that took into consideration the everyday realities and unique challenges faced by ambitious women and people of color—the new majority in this country.

What some celebrated male leaders failed to acknowledge were the extra hurdles and demands so many of us juggle day-to-day. The never-ending balancing act of managing a household, the pressure of being the first in our families to reach new heights of success, caring for elderly parents, limited affordable childcare options, impossible mortgage rates, and battling bias and discrimination at work—all while trying to get ahead professionally and financially. The emotional and mental labor often falls disproportionately on our shoulders.

I knew I couldn't be the only one desperately seeking life and career strategies that spoke directly to my experience. Through my work, I began to hear stories from people of color and women expressing how they were burning out and barely keeping their heads above water. The narrative thread was clear: They were putting tremendous pressure on themselves to have it all—raise healthy families, have successful careers, pursue personal passions—because society told them they could, and should, do it all flawlessly and effortlessly. Aren't those rules a bit antiquated?

Whether seeking balance between career goals and quality family time or polishing up passion projects on weekends, you'll find customizable frameworks that will accelerate your growth while leaving the burnout behind. Let's get to thriving on our own terms—not default rules rigged for someone else's definitions of “making it.” Call me a little sentimental here, but I think it's time we start living for those moments that make us genuinely smile, not just for the next accolade or promotion. And yes, you can have both—just make sure it's what you actually want. In *Rewrite Your Rules*, I promise to walk beside you with care, patience, and a little positive pushing while offering real tools (not those internet “hack your life” bits) I wish I had years ago!

Maybe you're where I was a decade ago, burning the midnight oil on a passion project, or maybe the midnight oil is burning you with infinite responsibilities. I want to show you there's another way, a smarter way that leads to the deliciousness, richness, and fullness that you've been craving. From career to love and everything in between, my life has been a series of big, beautiful breakthroughs, and I want you to experience the same.

Let's be real: The relentless pursuit of success often fails to deliver the balance and fulfillment we crave. In our quest for achievement, we become like heat-seeking missiles, locked on to targets while our personal well-being, relationships, and downtime fade into the background. Our minds fixate on the next milestone, promotion, or launch, while our bodies grow weary and our loved ones feel neglected. The very drive that propels us forward also narrows our field of view.

Even when we know we should come up for air, FOMO sets in—the fear that stepping off the treadmill means missing out on opportunities our peers will seize. But make no mistake, they too are likely running on fumes, secretly longing for relief, yet wondering if taking a break will irreparably set back their ambitions.

It doesn't help that many of us have tied our identities and self-worth to the realization of our goals. They've become so intertwined that slowing down, even briefly, leaves us grappling with feelings of failure and loss of purpose. We ask ourselves, "Who am I, if not the person chasing the next goal, actualizing my potential?" Even if we're worn out and depleted, at least we can avoid the frightening prospect of "wasted talent" by staying the course.

But eventually, the truth demands a reckoning: No one can operate at full throttle indefinitely without consequences. Health wanes, relationships suffer, creativity dulls, and motivation frays as this cycle intensifies. As goals are checked off, exhaustion creeps in alongside the next round of ambitions.

Eventually we must confront the glaring absence of boundaries in our drive for achievements. Any separation between professional demands and personal needs has gradually eroded. We've allowed our drive to dominate



nearly all aspects of life, leaving little room for fuller dimensions like self-care, community, family, and pursuits unrelated to climbing ladders. Trying to perfect this delicate balance between ambition and harmony feels impossible when they operate as competing forces under old rules. But with understanding and intention, perhaps we can rewrite the rules.

This was the urgency I discovered from over ten years of pushing full throttle. I created this book to provide high-achieving people the essential elements they were missing: practical wisdom and strategies to achieve their dreams without succumbing to exhaustion. This book provides the blueprint to unite your ambition with fulfillment at every stage and harmonize your choices to result in living your best life. It answers the soul-searching question of how to sustainably achieve greatness on your own terms.

Consider this book your trusted companion—a road map, journal, and sounding board—as you navigate rewriting the rules to live life on your own terms, steeped in daily joy and purposeful living. Whenever you need fresh ideas, perspective, or encouragement, I’ve got your back.

## WHY NOW?

Can I just go ahead and say it? The world feels like it’s on fire. We find ourselves in a time of both pivotal global change and accelerated growth fueled by innovation.

During such periods of volatility, it is not always easy to chart a clear path forward that feels good, looks right, and lands you at your definition of success. An always-on sensationalist news cycle, 24/7 rage-inducing social media feeds, and an escalating cost of living can make even the most ambitious person want to bury their head in the sand until conditions improve. And, more often than not, we are burned out by the day-to-day. When we look up, months have passed without our having made real progress on our personal and professional goals or sticking to that new

routine. No matter how hard you try, your goals, dreams, and measures of success don't feel any more within reach.

I'm going to give it to you straight: It doesn't matter how many external fires need to be put out, achieving success is largely a matter of accepting that the only obstacle standing between you and your dreams is yourself. There is no better day than today to start your journey toward a big leap, to tear up everyone else's rules that have come to define your life and create your own. I know you've heard that before, and yet you still find yourself in the same place, holding this book. But I guarantee that will not be the case if you put these chapters into action. It's time to recognize and own your inherent power to shape both your present-day reality and your future.

And let's be honest—it's also about recognizing when it's time to hunker down and work hard, temporarily surrendering to increased focus and relentless discipline in order to unlock the door to your next level of potential. That's when you step into the greatness that's always been waiting for you.

You want it all, don't you? That skyrocketing career, the passionate relationship, the intellectual hobbies, the social life of a Kardashian, all while getting a solid eight hours of sleep every night. It's a lovely picture to paint, but let's just cut the crap for a moment. That's not a dream, it's an illusion. The sooner you stop chasing it, the better. Time doesn't give a damn about our dreams. It doesn't care how many things we want to cram into our day. It's finite, unyielding, and completely indifferent to our complaints. We have twenty-four hours, just like everyone else. Not a minute more, not a second less. But there's a way to serve your purpose in the world without depleting yourself to get there, wherever "there" is for you.

In order to get the most out of this book you need to have not only the desire to prioritize your growth, but the commitment to do so as well, regardless of your starting point. The things that I will be asking you to do will stretch you and are designed to transform your mindset and how you move in the world. My goal for you is to have less friction between where you are now and where you want to be. My goal isn't to change the ambitions you

have for your life but to make sure that they actually happen again, and again, and again. I had a vision. I built it, grew it, and guess what? I find myself cycling through that same process. Whether it be in business, love, friendships, painting, or even gardening, I use these frameworks and approaches to meet every new phase and stage in my life. I will provide the tools but it's your responsibility to use them.

An extraordinary life requires you to be *extra*. You want a lot? You have to do a lot. But not in the way conventional hustle culture has taught us. By incorporating the methods in this book you'll reduce your risk, mitigate the likelihood of failure, and maximize your happiness and freedom so that you *fully* enjoy the journey. And, if you feel you've read several self-help books and still find yourself in a similar position, know that I'm going to challenge you to *act* on what is in this book. It's not always going to be fun. Oh, man, at times it's going to be straight-up uncomfortable!

I have witnessed firsthand how small, consistent actions compound over time into transformation. If you implement the strategies in this book relentlessly, growth is inevitable. In six months, you may be astonished when reviewing your expansion. I encourage you to email me your wins and lessons as you advance. You can reach me at [MorganDeBaun.com](http://MorganDeBaun.com). Your stories will help me refine this work to further empower the next generation of leaders.

## WHY NOT YOU?

In this very moment, pause and take in the world around you. You're at a unique point in your journey, surrounded by a history of experiences and opportunities only you can see. To truly flourish, immerse yourself in a rich understanding of who you are, savoring your values like a fine wine. Our world often tries to script our lives, but I urge you to gently push that script aside. Instead, wrap yourself in the embrace of your strengths, acknowledge your weaknesses with a soft touch, and look at yourself with the same

warmth and compassion you'd offer a dear friend. Now, let's come to accept something: You can have it all, but not all at once.

Your vision of "all" is deeply personal and it's important to recognize that it will change over time. Your "all" could be a nightmare for someone else! As you grow and experience different aspects of life, your priorities will naturally shift. This is a normal and healthy part of personal development. Having it all isn't about achieving everything simultaneously, it's about understanding and accepting that life unfolds in stages, each with its own set of opportunities and challenges.

The key I want you to remember as you're reading through this book is that your priorities, your dreams, and your definition of happiness are uniquely yours. This means acknowledging what you're equipped to manage at this moment. Attaining your goals is a process that occurs over time, not immediately.

I encourage you to embark on this journey with a journal, capturing your thoughts and responses to the strategies and exercises presented in each chapter. And don't stop there. For further insights, tools, and resources that can assist you in this transformative process, I invite you to visit [MorganDeBaun.com](http://MorganDeBaun.com). Here, you'll find additional support and community to help you continue your journey of growth and self-discovery beyond the pages of this book.

With this book, you'll swiftly navigate from challenges to solutions, gaining an irresistible blueprint that transforms your approach to success. It's a must-read for anyone serious about turning their goals into reality. Here's a sneak peek at the powerful transformations awaiting you:

- Feeling stuck between professional growth and happiness? Blend personal satisfaction with professional achievements for a balanced life.
- Amassing money without direction? Start employing your finances to simplify your daily life and recover valuable time.
- Struggling to lead and scale effectively? Develop systems that enhance both your business and personal life, boosting your overall leadership