



Motiv8↑

8 Ways To ROCK
Your Own World

Sheira Brayer

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The advice contained within this book does not constitute, or serve as a substitute for, professional psychological treatment, therapy, or other types of professional advice or intervention.

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DEDICATION

To my mother for giving me life.

To my daughter for giving it meaning.

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MUSIC

Because I believe in the power of music, each chapter¹ features an original companion song written by yours truly to reinforce the concepts presented. All songs listed below plus 3 bonus tracks are available online including on iTunes and Spotify for your listening pleasure.

MEDITATION*Breathe*

OPTIMISM*Change Your Mind*

TOLERANCE*We're All The Same*

INTUITION*A Way Will Be Shown*

VIBE*Givin' It Out Again*

ATTITUDE*It's Not What You Say It's How You Say It*

THANKFULNESS*Thank U*

EXPRESSION*Gift of Song*

Bonus tracks:

A Song for Ayden – written for my daughter

Don't Have Your Eyes – written by my daughter

A Mother's Love – written for my grandmother

¹ Except "Thankfulness."

DISCLAIMER

This book is meant for both moms and their teen daughters. When I decided to write this, my very first thought was, “Alright, let’s get real. Teenage girls aren’t going to want to read this if their *mothers* are reading it. In fact, they’ll run in the opposite direction!” But then I thought about it again... and I quickly realized that, even if today’s girls might not *want* to at first, they *should* be reading the same book as their mothers. Let me guess, gals: you totally disagree. I thought you might. So I came prepared — here are the top three reasons why this book makes more sense than you might think:

Reason #1: As much as teenage girls are convinced that their mothers can sometimes be their nemesis, their worst nightmare, or the devil incarnate, the truth is that girls want to be connected to their moms. Likewise, no matter how frustrating or immature their daughters can be, mothers want to be there for their daughters every step of the way. So basically, no matter how you slice it, a strong mother-daughter bond is a non-negotiable part of life — and the only way to strengthen that bond is to have both parties at the same table.

Reason #2: Every woman was once a girl, and every girl will eventually become a woman. Don’t just read this for Present You — read it for Past You, and Future You too! When women remember where they came from, and girls gain insight into where they’re headed, everyone benefits. We share so many of the same concerns, aspirations, insecurities, and emotions. And — on the flip side — it’s about time we start appreciating (as opposed to disparaging) our differences.

And finally, **Reason #3:** It’s my book and I’ll do what I want!

PREFACE

Let me ask you a question: Are you happy that you're female? I'm sure few people, if any, have asked you this question before. But really think about it for a second. Are you relieved to be able to let out your emotions without the fear of being called a wuss? Are you excited to be able to experience the miracle of giving birth? Are you proud to be part of a long lineage of incredible women who have helped shape the world?

Undoubtedly, there will be some days when your answer to that question will be a resounding "HELL NO!" Days when you feel like no one understands you. Days when you're doubled over in pain from cramps. Days when it hits you hard that women still only make \$0.78 for every \$1 that a man makes. But the fact of the matter is days like those are the reason we need to start believing in the power of the female.

Society is still articulated in a predominantly male voice. It's mostly men who make laws. It's mostly men who run companies. It's mostly men who are acknowledged for big accomplishments. I don't bring up this fact for the sake of bashing men, but rather to shed light on the startling *lack of balance* in today's society. The word "equality" is the one that gets the most airtime in discussions of women's

rights — and understandably so — but I believe the true goal is balance. Balance, by definition, is the even distribution of elements to ensure that the larger entity doesn't fall apart. The simple fact is, all variations of gender, race, religion, sexuality, and creed are needed to create this balance.

The good news is we are making incredible strides! In the last 95 years, we've made more advancements than in all the thousands of years preceding it combined. Just fifty years ago, only 6% of doctors, 3% of lawyers, and fewer than 1% of engineers were women. Back then, women weren't allowed to compete in the Boston Marathon, and — here's a good one — women needed their husband's permission to get a credit card. What's more, this past decade has proved that it's not just about fundamental rights like voting and owning money — now it's about empowering women and girls to be everything they want to be. From viral video campaigns like Dove's and Pantene's, to movies like *Girl Rising* and *Brave*, to movements such as Women For Women International, Equality Now, and Chime For Change... it's happening. Girl power isn't just a cute saying anymore — it's a real thing.

We've made so much progress and should be so proud, but we can't let up now. We still have so far to go to reach that pivotal point of balance. If we get complacent, we'll never get there. We must continue forging ahead, plowing through obstacles, and showing our peers — and ourselves — what we're capable of.

It's easy to blame men for our hindered influence in modern society. But when we delve into the heart of the issue, it becomes evident that it may not just be men who are stopping us from becoming all that we can be; it may be ourselves. In conversing with women and girls from all walks of life, I see an inordinate amount of pettiness, jealousy, insecurity, and downright meanness. The movie *Mean Girls* tackles this concept head-on, and we would all do ourselves a big favor to learn from it. The IndieFlix documentary *Finding Kind*

provides another, real-life example of this undeniable negativity. In it, the film's creators — Lauren Parsekian and Molly Thompson — travel the country from coast to coast interviewing women and girls about their experiences. One of the most salient moments was when they interviewed grown women who recalled being tormented, put down, and ridiculed in their tween/teen years. To this day, they break down and weep as they recount how badly it made them feel. We need to remember that experiences are cumulative. Some believe that negative school experiences are transient, but they are anything but. Females are capable of being vicious when they feel wronged. Honoring our contribution to the current imbalance in society means putting an end to the emotional hurt that often defines our formative years. As the first female Secretary of State Madeline Albright so clearly put it: “There is a special place in hell for women who don’t help other women.” If we want to be empowered, we must start by empowering each other.

The mother-daughter relationship is the starting point for that transformation.

Moms, we are raising the women who will further — and hopefully conquer — our cause. This could be the generation that changes everything. This could be the generation that finally sees the election of a female President. This could be the generation that closes the wage gap. This could be the generation... but only if all of its members are instilled with confidence, respect, determination, and a strong sense of self. We need to show our daughters how to leverage their many strengths, and we must take this role very seriously. If your own challenging upbringing is hindering your ability to help your daughter, then you must seek guidance in some form. If we’re not being all that we want our daughters to be, or at least growing and learning alongside them, then we’re not fulfilling our role as a parent.

Now, I'm not saying it's easy to parent a tween/teen girl. Good ol' Mother Nature (emphasis on "Mother"!) truly has a way of giving you a run for your money. One minute, your daughter is asking for a favor; the next, she's telling you to get lost. The volatile nature of young girls can be exhausting, no question. But if you can remember what *you* were like as a teenager, you can start to understand that it's not necessarily toward *you* that the occasional (or not so occasional) rage is directed. Also, when you learn to see how your own behavior affects the relationship, you'll be one step closer to not only raising a happier daughter, but also maintaining a healthier connection with her.

As for all the teen girls out there, I have to give you a lot of credit — being a teen girl today is *way* harder than when I was growing up. Back in the day, there were only a few ways to feel embarrassed or be ridiculed in front of others. Today, there are hundreds — and it's not just in front of your friends, but potentially in front of the whole world — and in HD! The amount of scrutiny and pressure you experience simply boggles the mind — and the hardest part for me is seeing how much pressure you put *yourselves* under. The pressure to be, look, talk and behave perfectly can really add up. I know, I've been there. I'm imagining you sometimes think to yourself "there must be a better way." Well, I'm here to tell you there *is*.

Feeling good in your own skin takes time.
Keep your heart and mind open,
and be patient.

My goal is to open you up to how fabulous you are. This book is what I refer to as a "toolbox." It covers 8 essential tools that will help teen girls and their moms build confidence, manage stress, and feel

good in their own skin. Girls, if you can learn these things while you're young, you'll be much better off down the road. And, moms, it's never too late to learn new things — especially alongside your daughter(s)!

My wish for any woman or girl reading this, no matter what your situation, is that the skills I outline trigger an “a-ha” moment — that lead you to realize how to help yourself in ways you never could before. I hope that Motiv8 lives up to its name, and motivates you to make change — in your life, in relationships, social circles, and ultimately, your communities.

But before we can get there, we have to start at the core. We have to start with just one amazing, valuable, irreplaceable person. We have to start with you.

INTRODUCTION

I've always been fascinated with the concept of "motivation." Some of us seem to be truly self-motivated, while others seem to be sloths on the couch of life. What is that about? Some of it can be attributed to heredity, but that's only a small part of it. I came across something else — something far more telling — about human beings.

Some people believe that motivation is the first step to accomplishing a goal. As it turns out, the people who are the most motivated are the ones who realize that isn't true.

MOTIVATION EXPLAINED

We are always trying to accomplish a thousand things at once. Clean out the attic. Learn French. Eat healthy. Marry Adam Levine in a picturesque ceremony on the beach in Aruba. But often, especially when it's a challenge (Adam Levine is already taken), we wait and wait and never take that first step. We then conclude, "well, I guess I'm just not motivated," as if motivation is a little fairy with a pink tutu and a magic wand that sprinkles motivational pixie dust on your lazy self and then flies off into the abyss.

According to John Maxwell's book *Failing Forward: Turning Mistakes into Stepping Stones for Success*, motivation is actually never the first step

in making things happen. Let me repeat that: *motivation is never the first step in making things happen.* The first step is *making a decision.* Anything that requires hard work starts with a firm and unwavering decision that it will be so.

The next and probably most important step is Nike's tagline: JUST DO IT. The power in taking action, no matter how insignificant it may seem, cannot be overstated. For example, if you want to get more physically fit, the simple act of putting on your sneakers is critical. Granted, it also might be a good idea to take a few steps with your sneakers on. But for some of us, just putting on our sneakers is half the battle. Once you begin to take action consistently, you start to see results. And it's those results that give you the motivation you need to keep going and reach your goal!

It's usually the smallest of actions that
can cause the cogs of momentum to
move in our favor.

Take me, for example. I have wanted to write a book for years now, and it was literally the day that I wrote just one sentence in a Word document that got the ball rolling! I remember watching the cursor move as I typed and saying to myself, "I'm doing it! I'm actually doing it!"

MY BIG TOMAHAWK MOMENT

Back in 2000, I was on a JetBlue flight from Florida to New York with my twin sister reading a book she'd recommended called *You'll See It When You Believe It* by Dr. Wayne Dyer. As I was reading it, I remember saying in my head "Oh boy, my mother could really use

It's so easy to blame everything and everyone outside of us for the problems in our lives, but that only results in frustration — never in change.

My hope for you is that reading these words begins to draw your focus inward toward your own awareness, emotions, strengths, and shortcomings. If you can consciously do that, minute by minute, day by day, you can literally change your life. I call it “*living from inside-out.*” As a society, we spend so much time focusing on our relationships with everyone around us (parents, siblings, teachers, kids, neighbors, co-workers, etc.) that we begin to miss out on cultivating the most important relationship of them all — the one we have with ourselves! Just like a camera's focus can be adjusted to put the background image in or out of focus, you too can shift the focus from all those background distractions (gossip, news, drama, cell phones, iPads, siblings, girlfriends, boyfriends, etc.) to focus on *you*, the most important subject of your life's story.

Using the word MOTIVATE as an acronym, the chapters that follow will take you through eight critical skills that are intended to open you to new ideas which, in turn, will help you reduce your stress level, increase your awareness and feel more in control of your life.

MEDITATION

To clear out my mind

When I say the word “meditation,” what is the first image that is conjured up in your mind? Is it a swami dude, sitting on the ground with legs crossed at the knees while chanting (like this?)

If that’s the visual you have, you’re not alone. It’s commonly misconstrued that meditation is a religious practice (probably because it has its origins there). Today, the practice of meditation is widely recommended and scientifically proven to be one of the most highly effective stress reduction techniques. The textbook definition of the word *meditate* is “to engage in mental exercise (as concentration on one’s breathing or repetition of a word or sound, known as a mantra) for the purpose of reaching a heightened level of awareness.” So, in essence, meditation allows you to gain control over your mind, instead of your mind controlling you. On the whole, we girls and women tend to do the latter — we think, ponder, worry, obsess, analyze, over-analyze... then we lather, rinse, and repeat. And we wonder why there’s so much drama in our lives!



Here's a question: When you wake up in the morning, after getting out of bed and before leaving the house... what do you do? Yes, you brush your teeth. Yes, you get dressed. Yes, you then decide you don't like what you're wearing, take that off, and get dressed again. But there's something else that you do that's more important than you might think: you go to the bathroom. Ever think about why you do that? Simple. If you didn't, your body would build up with toxins and you would get really sick. And maybe even die. And that would suck.

To coin a new SAT analogy, meditation is to the mind what pooping is to your body. Negative thoughts are toxic to the mind. Women and girls are especially burdened by a never-ending build-up of toxic thoughts. "I'm not pretty enough." "My thighs are too fat." "Everyone else has their lives figured out and I'm a hot mess!" Everything in your life starts with a thought. Those thoughts lead to beliefs, which lead to words, which lead to actions. The danger lies not in the thought itself, but in the *belief* of the thought; this is why we must go straight to the source. If we don't take the time each day to flush out toxic thoughts, we're hurting ourselves more than we realize. Luckily, meditation is a very accessible way to reverse the damage.

THE PRACTICE OF MEDITATION

Now, I know what you're probably thinking; I thought it too when I first gave meditation a shot: "Is this a joke? Not think? Me? Yeah, right." If your mind is anything like mine before I started meditating (and if it is, G-d bless you), it's comparable to a hamster wheel going 'round and 'round in perpetual motion. But hey folks, it's called the *practice* of meditation for a reason — it takes a lot of practice! To refer back to our renewed concept of motivation, once I made the *decision* to meditate consistently, I became more skilled over time, and that made me curious as to how far I could actually go. Today, I can say with unequivocal certainty that meditation has transformed my life. If

I had known about this when I was younger, I'm pretty sure it would have helped me be less of a bitch to my mother. Sorry Mom!

So now the question becomes, how do we incorporate meditation into our daily lives? Well, consider the amount of things we make time for that have absolutely zero impact on our quality of life. We do certain things routinely — wash our hands, watch TV, check our cell phones, use social media — without even blinking. And yet, spending a few minutes every day quieting our minds, focusing on our breath, and being more present is considered a big pain-in-the-butt chore! If you can make time for a bevy of mindless activities, you can certainly make time for something that can profoundly change the quality of your life.

If you don't go within, you'll go without.

MEDITATION EACH DAY KEEPS THE DOCTOR AWAY

Think of meditation as a prevention technique. People who want to avoid heart attacks take an aspirin every day. People who want to avoid osteoporosis lift weights. So, logically, people who want to avoid anxiety, impatience, mental clutter, and premature aging should practice meditation. I'm pretty sure that would include 99.9999% of humanoids.

If the prevention benefits mentioned above are not enough to convince you about the miracle of meditation, you should also know that, in addition to reducing stress and anxiety, meditation can:

- Lower your blood pressure (a key indicator of good health)

Just like there's no one right way to exercise or study, there's no one right way to meditate.

Meditation reveals an interesting dichotomy: on one hand, it follows a particular set of guidelines, and on the other hand, it's totally customizable. Some prefer to meditate sitting upright on a chair; others (like myself) prefer to meditate lying on their backs. Some prefer to meditate guided by a soothing voice, music, or ambient sounds, like running water or white noise; others (like myself) prefer to meditate in silence. But that's the beauty of meditation — there's no one right way to do it. All forms can be effective, depending on the willingness of the practitioner. Try a few different methods and find the one that suits you best.

Meditation is all about breath. Focusing on the breath is what allows us to get out of our own heads, even if just for a few seconds. One of the best ways to get into a solid breathing rhythm is to use imagery. For example, imagine a bowl of soup in front of you. When you inhale, you're smelling the soup, and when you exhale, you're blowing on the soup. Another thing you can notice is that when you exhale from your nose, the air is warm, and when you inhale, it's cooler. So to take the focus away from your mind and the thoughts that often dictate its activity, feel that sensation, and repeat the phrase “in, cold... out, warm” in your mind.

A third technique that never fails to propel me into a semi-hypnotic state is called “The Third Eye.” With your eyes closed, take a few deep breaths and then very slowly cross your eyes so that they land on the bridge of your nose, where an imaginary “third eye” would be.

With each long exhale, feel yourself falling deeper and deeper into an abyss of peace.

MINI MEDITATION SESSIONS

Although it's ideal to set time aside, meditation does not always have to be scheduled. Meditation "mini sessions," as I like to call them, are an incredibly helpful way to counteract stressful situations on an as-needed basis. For example, girls, let's say you're dealing with friend drama at school. As you know, drama can escalate in minutes to seemingly outrageous proportions. If you feel yourself starting to get sucked in like a dust bunny into a vacuum cleaner, that's your cue to take a minute or two to do some deep breathing. Afterwards you'll be in a much better state to make a decision that will serve you best. You might more consciously decide to keep going, replying, posting, or spewing. Or, dare I say, you might choose to step out of the conversation. Meditation has the power to help you acknowledge the merit of a different route — a route that *you* choose and *you* control. Simply deciding that you're not going to be a part of the negativity can give you an incredible sense of empowerment. You only need to do it once to feel the euphoria. Try it if you don't believe me!

Not taking any action is an action unto itself.
And sometimes it's the best action to take.

Moms, here's an opportunity for you. The next time you're stuck in traffic and you realize you're going to be late to a meeting or to pick up your child, or to wherever you're going, look at it as a chance for you to take a deep breath, and re-process the situation. As you're in the car, staring at the sea of vehicles surrounding you, take a second and say to yourself: "I'm going to smell the soup and blow on the

soup five times right now.” You can’t make those cars disappear; (only Jim Carrey in *Bruce Almighty* can do that). So given the reality of the traffic, focusing on your breathing is your best bet. It’s also another awesome way to model behavior for your daughter. Traffic, like everything else you have no control over, is one of those phenomena that can either enrage you or make you more mindful. Which do you choose?

The ultimate multipurpose de-stressing tool, meditation can also help alleviate the burden of a stressful (or seemingly stressful) situation *after* it happens. Whether it’s fighting with a family member, reviewing your never-ending to-do list, or dropping a gallon of milk down your basement stairs while bringing in the groceries (although I wouldn’t know, because that exact situation definitely did not happen to me), there’s always a way to backtrack after the fact. Meditation can easily help reverse the damage of losing it with your kids, lamenting the shortage of hours in a day, and/or watching milk spill all over your basement floor as you look on in horror. [Insert “there’s no use crying over spilled milk” joke here.]

NOT SO FAST....

There’s another interesting technique that works in conjunction with meditation that has a similar calming effect: slowing down your speech. When I was a teenager, I did everything quickly: walking, thinking, eating, and, of course, talking. When I would talk to my mother in “Teen” (its own language in which every other word is “like”), she would look at me and say, in her Israeli accent, “Eh, Sheira, stop talking so fast. You’re going to get a speeding ticket.” She was right, but the reason why only dawned on me later in life. By speaking too quickly, we don’t allow ourselves the opportunity to think about what’s coming out of our mouths. When we’re intentional and selective with our words, we’re much more in control.

You...decide...how...quickly...or...slowly...
you...want...to...speak.

We've all said things that we've immediately regretted. Had we taken even just a nanosecond of a pause before we said it, we'd likely have been better off. So if you want to avoid getting a "speeding ticket" (and believe me the fine can be pretty steep), try putting on the brakes when it comes to the pace of your speech. This also goes for text or e-mail communication. It's so easy to angrily punch some letters and press "Send" — but just like spoken words, you can't take them back 30 seconds later when you regret saying them. *Think* before you speak (or type).

SELF-INQUIRY

A final thought on the practice of meditation: It's not only a way to feel calmer; it's also a way to get to the root of our mind's most pressing conflicts. It's pretty logical when you think about it. When our mind is quiet we have an open forum to ask ourselves questions. For example, if you find yourself constantly feeling overwhelmed at having too much to do — which I believe holds true for many girls and women — you may want to ask yourself, as you're quieting your mind: "Why do I constantly feel overwhelmed? What can I do to feel more balanced?" Don't try to come up with answers right away; don't try to immediately fix it. Just sit with the emotion of feeling overwhelmed. At some point, as if by magic, the answer will begin to surface.

When I first started to meditate, I asked myself the aforementioned question. And for a few sessions, when I still wasn't very good at quieting my mind, I would ask it, get nothing, and then immediately be tempted to quit meditating and go about my business. But a few

Key MEDITATION takeaways:

- There are many different ways to practice meditation or mindfulness. Experiment with various methods until you find the one that works best for you (and there may be more than one).
- Start with focusing on your breathing: “in cold, out warm” or “smell the soup, blow on the soup.” If you find yourself in a stressful situation, and you can remove yourself, go into another room (right before you “fall off the cliff”), and take 10 deep breaths.
- Speak more slowly. When you become more conscious of your speech patterns, your pacing, and the words you choose, you feel more empowered and in control.
- The most important thing you can do is to *not* beat yourself up when your mind goes to thought. Just *gently* bring yourself back to the breath. It’s called the *practice* of meditation for a reason!

If your sense of worth is dependent on people and situations external to you, you're not living from the inside-out.

STINKY THINKING 101

Let's say you stub your toe. Naturally, your mind zeroes in on the stubbed toe and how much it hurts. The pain seems to get worse and worse, until it *kills*. Oh, the agony. It's all over. R.I.P. toe.

Here's a novel idea: choose to put your focus on something else. Anything else. Here's a proven scientific fact: your brain can't focus on two things at the exact same time. So the next time you stub your toe, just look up and put all of your attention on the first thing you see. I'm serious. If you look up and see a doorknob, look intently at it and repeat the word "doorknob" over and over again in your head. This sounds weird, but it works! And it just goes to show you, there's another way. There's always another way.

The stubbed toe is a small example, but it speaks significantly to the power of our minds. Our minds can generate some pretty mean thoughts about ourselves and about others. So if, for example, we say to ourselves that we're ugly, fat, or stupid — and we keep thinking about it — the thought becomes bigger and stronger until it takes over.

But when we're aware that we're taking part in what I call "stinky thinking," we have the opportunity to see it for what it is and change it. When you practice monitoring your thoughts, you can say, "Oh, there I go again," and you can begin to choose to replace the stinky thought with one that serves you better. We deserve to be treated well and it all starts with us. Remember: we teach people how to treat

us. If we treat ourselves like crap, why would we expect anyone else to treat us any better? It's a big fat "duh," but somehow we all still do it.

Think of a time (possibly just a few minutes ago) when you generated some "stinky thinking." Let's use a generic example:

"Ugh, I hate my thighs. They are so gross. I can't believe I ate another piece of bread. I'm such a loser."

If you were to say out loud to someone else what you just said to yourself, you'd probably think you were one of the nastiest people on the planet. This is what it would sound like:

"Ugh, your thighs are so gross. I can't believe you ate another piece of bread. You're such a loser."

Here's another common example:

"I'm such an idiot. I always say stupid things. What the hell's wrong with me? No wonder I don't have a boyfriend. I'm going to end up alone, living in a tiny wooden shack with 65 cats."

If you were to say this to someone else, they would hear:

"You're such an idiot. You always say stupid things. What the hell's wrong with you? No wonder you don't have a boyfriend. You're going to end up alone, living in a tiny wooden shack with 65 cats."

Would you *ever* say these things to anyone else unprovoked? Of course not! Why, then, do we let ourselves get away with being so mean to ourselves? Living from the inside-out actually forces you to recognize that you have a relationship with yourself. Do your best to make it a good one, just like you would with a friend, colleague, or family member. At the end of the day, your relationship with yourself is the most important one there is.

was imagining the sound of the crowd, sweat on his brow, sound of his sneakers hitting the ground, step by step. I'm talking about really feeling like you're there in that moment. Of course your visualized action doesn't have to be as physically intense as sprinting in the Olympics. It can be as simple as taking a test, confronting a friend about a problem, or learning a new song on the guitar. The most important thing to keep in mind is that the ultimate goal of visualization is not to *trick* yourself into feeling accomplished without taking action — it's to *actually* take action! Yes, dream about answering those hard questions, talking to your friend, or strumming those chords... but then go make some flashcards, pick up the phone, or break out the sheet music!

When you visualize your goal, make it
as real in your mind's eye as possible.

Visualization offers us clarity, which often leads to a heightened sense of motivation... but afterwards, we still need to get up and make it happen.

MUSIC TAMES THE BEAST WITHIN

Visualization is a highly effective tool that produces tangible results, but sometimes we need a little extra push to tap into the mind power that will get us there. One of the things that can get you there in a heartbeat also happens to be one of my favorite subjects — music! Take a moment and think about one of your favorite songs. When it's playing, no matter where you are or what you're doing, you're immediately transported to another emotional state. As a professional songwriter, I know firsthand the impact that music can have, and for that reason, I believe that it's an extremely underutilized tool. When

I'm in a crappy mood, the first thing I do is get my phone and pull up a playlist I created named "Cheer Up."

Music is the universal language
and the universal healer.

Music can literally change your body chemistry. It activates both emotional and intellectual regions of the brain, releases dopamine (the feel-good hormone), lowers cortisol levels (the stress hormone), and generally reduces your overall level of anxiety almost instantly. We asked hundreds of girls (aged 11-17) what they do to relieve stress, and listening to music was the number one answer!

With that in mind, I put together a list of some great songs, and included it in the back of this book. The list is divided into eight sections, and each song was handpicked to reinforce the specific lesson taught in that particular chapter. For example, this chapter is "Optimism," so the songs in that section are all about thoughts, visualization, and positivity: Corinne Bailey Rae's "Put Your Records On," R. Kelly's "I Believe I Can Fly," and Pharrell's "Happy," among others.

START TODAY

Here's the bottom line, gals: you wouldn't be mean to others, so don't be mean to yourself. Anger, judgment, and blame are never going to solve problems, but kindness, understanding, and appreciation always will. When all is said and done, every minute you spend chastising yourself is a minute totally wasted! We all have different ways of handling issues — and whatever your way is, *that's okay*. Let today

be the day that you decide to be more tolerant of yourself and others
(a perfect segue as we move into the next chapter).

Key OPTIMISM takeaways:

- Notice your stinky thinking. Remember that just noticing is a *huge* step. When you do, immediately replace the thought you have with another thought and repeat it a few times. Even if you don't believe it right away, continue to do it until it becomes second nature.
- Visualization is a great way to start your day. Imagine who you want to be and what you want to do, whether it's a tangible, physical goal, or a personality trait you're working on honing. Keep thinking about it, feeling it, and most importantly, taking action toward it. Thinking positive + feeling positive + acting positive = MAGIC!
- Make a playlist with all the songs that make you feel good and listen to it for at least 10 minutes each day.

TOLERANCE

To everyone be kind

Once upon a time, there was a little boy named Abram. Abram lived in a small farm village in Poland called Radich, with his mother Henya, father Akiva, and little sister Manya. Abram had a wonderful childhood growing up on the farm located at the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains surrounded by strawberry and blueberry patches, apple trees, and a beautiful stream where he and his sister would play. Sounds like a little slice of heaven, doesn't it?

When Abram was five years old, his parents, who valued education above all, sent him to a school on a horse and buggy about two hours away. He would stay there during the week and come home on the weekends. He missed home terribly, but his parents always stressed to him how important it was for him to get a good education.

On August 2, 1942, when Abram was just 14 years old, his life changed forever.

On that day, as World War II raged on in full force, his mother, father, and sister were told to report to the nearby town of Turka to be given work relocation instructions. Abram's mother asked him to

stay and watch the farm, and told him they would be back later in the day.

He never saw them again.

When Abram's family arrived in town, they were shoved onto a cattle car, and shipped off to a death camp where they were immediately killed. Abram was spared because his mother had the foresight to secure an "arbeiter" (worker) card for him. He knew how to read and write; most people in the village did not. Quite literally, education saved his life.

Soon after, the Nazis came for him, and he escaped deep into the Carpathian Mountains where he lived for the next two years. During that time, Abram survived the impossible. He was often near starvation, but he fought through. Once, he was captured, but he escaped. On several occasions he was shot at, but each time they missed.

The war ended in 1945 and four years later, on March 17, 1949, he arrived in New York. He had nothing: no family, no job, and no money. He put himself through school, worked odd jobs, and graduated cum laude with an Accounting degree from Baruch College. He eventually started his own firm, got married, and had three children and five grandchildren. All three of his children have made it a priority to continue passing on his incredible story.

I should know. I'm one of them.

DADDY'S GIRL

My father is one of the most inspiring people I know. He's my real-life superhero! He went to hell and back, lost everything that was near and dear to him, and still managed to survive physically *and* maintain an exceptionally positive attitude throughout his entire life. I'm in awe of the man.

reminder of how much more we need to do as a global community to counteract the rampant intolerance that permeates our world.

We can all understand how horrific these things are on a global scale, but do we ever stop to think about it on a local scale? In our communities? Our schools? Our families? Intolerance is intolerance — period. Any form of it is dangerous and should be treated as such. Think about the bully on the playground who disparages other children because of their weight, height, skin color, clothes, and even religious beliefs. If that bully's actions were addressed with the same sense of horror that global intolerance elicits, the chances of another mass genocide would nearly be eliminated.

There are dozens of stereotypes that perpetuate intolerance: gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, culture, etc. However, if you're observant, you'll know that human intolerance is not limited to these larger categories. Both consciously and subconsciously, we put others down for the smallest of things — things a person has no control over — such as a birthmark, their height, the way they walk, talk, chew their food... the list is never-ending. It's no wonder there's so much hatred in our world. We're trying to combat hate with hate! It's a total recipe for disaster.

Adding to the list of bad news is the fact that intolerance is harder than ever to address, thanks to the boundless technologies that govern our society. Cyber-bullying is much more difficult to control because the internet is so easily accessible and spreads information like wildfire. Once a hurtful remark is posted, shared, or messaged, it's now out there with the potential to end up on every screen used by humankind. And by allowing that to happen, we're being anything *but* kind.

When you use your cell phone to blame, shame or embarrass someone, it says more about *you* than your target.

Somehow, when we see the grotesque manifestations of inhumanity played out through war and atrocity, it's crystal clear to us how wrong it is — but when we see it played out right in front of us on a mobile device, it merits no more than a shrug. Technology has granted us the “permission” to trash our peers without having to say it to their faces; but that permission has done nothing more than create a bunch of cowards. It's time we realized that it's the “smaller” instances of intolerance of which we need to be most mindful. Just as smoldering embers left unattended have the ability to spread into a massive, devastating fire, so too can bits of intolerance snowball into an unimaginable Holocaust.

Girls, do you speak up when you see injustice playing out in front of you? Do you alert an adult when things get out of hand? Women, how about you? Are you calling out the wrongdoers, or are you tacitly going along with their judgment, trying not to make any waves?

The next time you choose to not say or do anything in the face of intolerance, just remember: if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem.

THE ORIGINS OF HATRED

I often ask myself why there is so much hatred and intolerance in the world. How did this come to be? This may seem like a complex question, but in all honesty the answer is pretty straightforward. Outward intolerance is merely a reflection of what's going on inside. Our negativity toward others originates in our own insecurities, and we project

those internal conflicts onto the external world. If we're intolerant of ourselves, how can we possibly be tolerant of others? As American surfer Laird Hamilton said, "Make sure your worst enemy doesn't live between your own two ears." By the same token, however, if we make a conscious choice to be kind to ourselves, we'd be amazed at our capacity for kindness toward the rest of the world.

We can't have peace in *the* world until
we have peace in our *own* world.

INTOLERANCE PART I: BE AWARE, DON'T COMPARE

One major way we convince ourselves of our lack of worth is by comparing ourselves to others. The comparison game is poisonous. It's a surefire way to sabotage our relationship with the person who *should* be our best friend: ourselves. Here's the eye-opening thing about the comparison game — we tend to only compare the parts of our lives where we feel a lack. Girls might look at attractive celebrities and say "Oh, if only my body looked like that!", or "Oh, if only I had their talent!" The problem with that line of thinking is if you're going to compare your life to someone else's, you need to compare your *whole* life to their *whole* life.

The truth is, we have no idea what goes on behind closed doors in another person's day-to-day existence.

On the surface, you might see someone with lots of success, money, beauty, and popularity. But what if you found out that that person has an eating disorder? Or maybe has a toxic relationship with her parent? Or is being stalked by a creepy, potentially dangerous fan? What if you knew all that? Would you still want to swap places with

them? My guess is... no, thanks! In fact, they might even want to switch places with *you!* Never thought about it that way, did you?

Don't compare your life to someone else's. Compare it to the best version of the life you want to live.

The healthier, non-stinky thinking way is to be a racehorse. Yes, a racehorse. Racehorses wear blinders when they race, so they can focus on the path ahead without being distracted by their competitors. You need to do the same. Put on your blinders and focus on your own route, your own gifts, and your own potential. The comparison game is exhausting, both mentally and physically. Don't give in to it! (Girls, don't think this is only directed at you. Moms are just as guilty of playing the comparison game as you are.)

If we take even the smallest step toward catching ourselves when we start measuring our lives against someone else's, and then consciously choose to wear those racehorse blinders, we are making huge strides for tolerance. And look, if you're going to compare, compare yourself to the best possible version of *you!* Because, remember, if we all threw our problems in a pile and had the option to take someone else's, we'd grab ours back in a heartbeat.

INTOLERANCE PART 2: TAUGHT TO HATE?

It's amazing how many times I've encountered women who talk about their relationship with their own mother, swearing up and down that they will never be like them or do to their kids what their mom did to them. Yet somehow, the patterns continue. Unless we

lasting relationships, showing empathy for others, and problem-solving constructively and ethically.” SEL teaches our children how to be human beings first and foremost, so they can cultivate the self-control, compassion, and an ability to get along with other people who might not think, talk, or behave like they do. Imagine that! Maybe learning to be a good person should actually take precedence over learning to memorize facts and figures or sit through a standardized test!

If we don't start teaching our children tolerance and empathy, we'll end up with a planet full of highly educated jerks.

While it's important to acknowledge and welcome new ways of educating children in our schools, it's paramount to remember that home is the first and most important “school” for our children. Home is the foundation. Home is where the seeds are planted. Modeling empathy, gratitude, mindfulness, self-esteem, flexibility, tolerance, and love is a parent's job. Put some thought into preparing the curriculum you want your children to graduate from!

Of course, the best of both worlds happens when schools and parents effectively partner together to create a robust and collaborative program. So speak up, get involved, and take action! And check out additional resources in the “Resources/Websites” section in the back of the book.

TOLERANCE AS A THRESHOLD

An alternate definition of tolerance is “the ability to accept, experience, or survive something harmful or unpleasant,” such as a high

tolerance for pain. Having a high tolerance threshold is often looked upon as a good thing. But as I've gotten older (and wiser), I've realized that there have been many occasions where I tolerated something I shouldn't have. What happens when our tolerance is *too* high?

Girls, why do you allow boys to make inappropriate, offensive, and borderline obscene comments about you? Why do you let your so-called "friends" talk down to you over trivial situations? Why do you permit teachers to treat you unfairly when you work so hard day in and day out? Are you afraid of how you'll be perceived if you speak up? Do the boys' comments make you feel popular or desirable? Do you feel like it's not worth the effort to stand up to other girls and risk ending up friendless? Does it put your grades in jeopardy to question an authority figure? Whatever the case may be, when someone says something that makes you feel uncomfortable or upset, you have every right to respond and make it clear that you will *not* tolerate it. A simple yet firm "don't speak to me like that" will let them know what you will and will not put up with.

You may find that taking that first step might be directed to some in your own family. I'm sure there are times where you feel like you've tolerated too much B.S., where you feel like you just give and give and give and it's not reciprocated.

There have been times when I, Sheira, "Princess of Empowerment," have reached my limit and gone over the edge. Times where I've kept my cool until some attitude gets hurled my way triggering an explosion: "LISTEN YOU *#@&!!!! I DO EVERYTHING FOR THIS FAMILY AND YOU HAVE THE FREAKIN' NERVE TO TALK TO ME LIKE THAT?! ONE MORE WORD AND I'LL TAKE THIS ENTIRE PLATE OF PASTA THAT I JUST SLAVED OVER FOR AN HOUR AND THROW IT IN YOUR UN-GRATEFUL FREAKIN' FACE!" (More of a mom example, but girls, I'm sure you can relate too.)

When I look at a stranger on the street, all I see is a human being, just like me. I see a person with a heart, brain, and body — just like me. They could be male or female, young or old, short or tall, thin or heavy, gay or straight, black, white, yellow, brown or purple; it doesn't matter. I see a person with wants, needs, emotions, experiences, and every other aspect that's universal to the human race.

Furthermore, I see how I play a role in their life simply by interacting with them, even if only once. And I don't take this role lightly. I think we need more happy idiots on our planet — people who see no place for hatred, intolerance, shame, or blame. Everyone is simply doing the best they can with what they've been given — and if we internalize that, we will be left with no reason to hate anyone or anything.

We are all born loving, kind, giving, and tolerant beings. From birth on we're all taught, raised, and influenced by our different upbringings — but that doesn't take away from the fact that we're all born with the same blank slate. My dad taught me the importance of being tolerant, even when the world isn't — a lesson he learned from his beautiful, loving, and kind-hearted mother. My wish for us gorgeous girls and women is that we endow every word, action, and intention with love and care for others and ourselves. Make a choice today to not allow any room in your life for hatred, resentment, or intolerance. Not for strangers on the street, not for your co-workers not for your family, and certainly not for yourself. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” If we do this on a consistent basis, the torch will be passed on to future generations of girls... and the memory of my grandmother, Henya Brayer, will live on.

I'd like to share the lyrics to one of my songs, which was inspired by my father's journey. I don't want to get too “Kumbaya” on you, but I believe that one of the reasons I was put on this planet is to help

move the world away from fear and towards connection. I hope it inspires you to see the world through a new set of eyes.

We're All The Same

© Sheira Brayer

"We're All The Same" is available on most digital platforms including iTunes and Spotify.

*I often stop and wonder where we get all our thunder
When will the vicious cycle end?
I cannot seem to understand why man is inhumane to man
When will we call each other 'friend'?*

CHORUS:

*Cause we're all the same; we laugh and cry
We're all the same; we all live and die
Let's make the journey matter now
Let's win the game
We're all the same; when cut we bleed
We're all the same; we all have a need
To love and to be loved and to let peace reign
We're all the same

We've got so much to live for, picture a world without war
Put all the hatred in the past
This would make quite a story to leave our children glory
The kind of glory that will last*

CHORUS

*Look at your neighbor, and think of what would happen
 If danger came to our world
 Wouldn't care about race or color
 No, we'd be side by side with each other
 Just like sister and brother
 Oh can't you see how it could be?*

*Cause we're all the same; we laugh and cry
 We're all the same; we all live and die
 Let's make the journey matter now
 Let's win the game*

*We're all the same under the skin
 We're all the same deep down within
 Want to be proud of who we are
 Not be ashamed*

*We're all the same; gonna make it real
 We're all the same; now let's start to heal
 And take responsibility instead of blame*

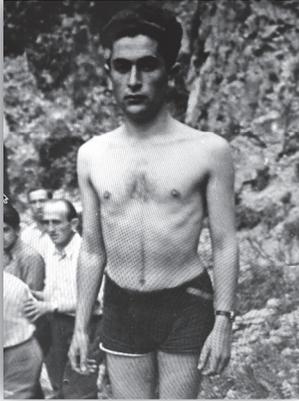
*We're all the same; oh can't you feel it
 We're all the same; if we could only see it
 Then we'd have everything in the world to gain*

*Cause we're all the same
 We're all the same
 After all we're all the same*

Key TOLERANCE takeaways:

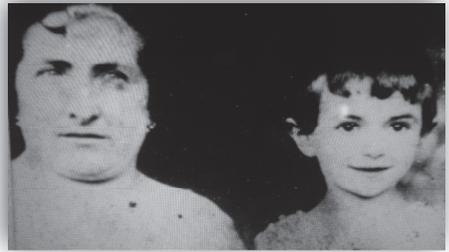
- Tolerance starts within. You can't give away what you don't have inside. Start noticing your "stinky thinking" when it comes to tolerating yourself, and over time you'll see how much more you have to give to others.
- If you witness intolerance of any kind, speak up. It doesn't have to be long and preachy. A simple "Hey, what you're doing isn't right" may be enough to get someone else to take notice. That said, never put yourself or others in harm's way. Call for help if you feel a situation may escalate and put you or someone else in danger.
- Notice behavior from others that you tolerate that maybe you shouldn't. Put boundaries in place for what doesn't feel right to you (verbally and physically). It's a critical step in empowering yourself.
- Pay it forward! Do a random act of kindness every day or volunteer your time to a great organization — it costs nothing and feels amazing!

Following are several photos that provide background about my dad's life, and help frame his journey from Poland to the United States... and back again.



This is the youngest photo I have of my dad (age 16). It was taken right after the war.

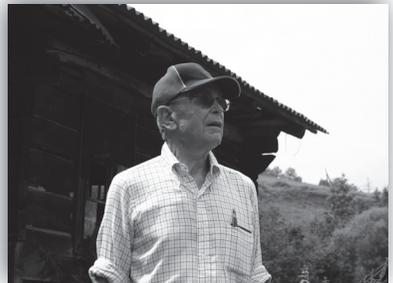
This is the only picture my dad has of his family. On the left is his mother, Henya and on the right, his little sister Manya.



In 2009, after many years of begging my dad, we finally made the journey back to Poland and found his house.

The trip was one of the most emotional experiences of my life.

My dad standing in front of his house overlooking the hill where he and his sister used to play.



End Of Preview

Motiv8: 8 Ways To ROCK Your Own World
is available for sale on Amazon and Kindle.