HOW TO FIND MEANINGFUL WORK THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY
“Caroline Greene’s “Matter” is like a homecoming for every mother who has felt isolated, worried about whether she’s doing the right thing for her family, for her children and for her own life, who has felt guilt or shame or confusion trying to live up to the impossibly high standards our society now requires to be considered a “good” mother. Read this book to feel understood, to learn skills to find and follow your own internal compass, and to realize that taking time to do so isn’t selfish, but the only way to begin to rewrite outdated social scripts in order to create full lives that matter.”

BRIGID SCHULTE
Author of Overwhelmed: How to Work, Love & Play When No One Has The Time

“MATTER packs a lot of intensity into a little package. If you’d like to build a better life, with work that contributes to your happiness, this is a great tool for getting unstuck.”

LAURA VANDERKAM
Author of 168 Hours, and I Know How She Does It
“Caroline Greene has written an essential guide to one of the most important challenges we all face — how to create a life of meaning and how to make career choices that work for our family. Drawing on her personal experience and training as a lawyer, coach and mother, she gives practical, easy to read and easy to follow step by step guidance to living a happy, healthy and meaningful life. This book is both wise and inspiring.”

BARRETT AVIGDOR
Managing Director Major, Lindsey & Africa and Co-Author of What Happy Working Mothers Know

“This is a must-read for every mom! Caroline Greene has created the perfect primer for women who are ready to experience personal growth as they raise their children. It’s one of the best books I’ve seen for both working and stay-at-home mothers. If you read this book and dive into the simple but oh-so-powerful exercises at the end of each chapter, you will love what unfolds for you.”

JILL FARMER
Speaker, Master Life Coach and Author of There’s Not Enough Time: and Other Lies We Tell Ourselves
“Caroline Greene’s book is a balm for harried, high achieving mommas who are beginning to be suspicious something is missing in their parenting experience. She exposes one of the most painful myths of motherhood: ‘Good moms’ shouldn’t heed the call of their own soul because that would be selfish. Gather some smart moms and read this book together; you’re sure to emerge clearer and lighter. ‘Good moms’ may not heed the call of their soul, but GREAT ones surely do”.

SARAH SEIDELMANN M.D.
Author of Born to Freak: A Salty Primer for Irrepressible Humans
HOW TO FIND MEANINGFUL WORK THAT’S RIGHT FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

by caroline greene
Dedication

For my two smart, strong, and resilient little girls.

May you always chart your paths according to what truly matters to you.
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GET REORIENTED
In Chapter 1 of this book, you’ll read about Caroline’s “slumping down onto the kitchen floor” moment. The moment where she realized, amidst choking sobs, that despite her beautiful kids and her beautiful home with beautiful new cabinets, she was not happy. The moment where she realized that, perhaps, she had never been truly happy.

She had tried the fast track, high-pressure legal career. That didn’t make her happy. She had tried being a full-time mom. That was satisfying, in many ways, but still left her feeling dissatisfied in many areas. (Hence: the sobbing.)

The unspoken question — the question that was triggering Caroline’s sobfest — was, “But if neither of those scenarios made me feel happy... then what will?”

Not knowing the answer to that question is painful.

Knowing the answer to that question — but not feeling brave enough to take the necessary steps to make it happen, and not knowing what to do to dissolve all the fear — is equally painful.

I know because I’ve been there.
Like Caroline, and like millions of other moms, I’ve had my own “slumping down onto the kitchen floor” moment. Several, in fact.

I recall my “sobbing on the boat dock” moment at the end of a lakeside family vacation. Ah, the first of many. I didn’t want to get in the car and drive home, because going home meant going back to work on Monday morning, and I loathed my high-pressure career in commercial real estate so much that it made me feel physically sick. (My husband had to practically pry me off the dock and insert me into the mini-van while our kids watched from the backseat, wide-eyed and confused. It was not my finest hour.)

Then, of course, there was my “weeping into the pages of my first Martha Beck book” moment. The moment when I realized that my life lacked purpose and direction, and when I realized that an avalanche of fears I didn’t even know I had were pinning me in place, keeping my life smaller and less vibrant that it could be.

And let’s not forget my “hysterically walking out of my last corporate office so fast I didn’t even bother to say goodbye or pack up my desk” moment. (Fun!)

Or my personal favorite, the moment where my then-8-year-old daughter Emily showed me a poolside photo of mommy and I realized that I was carrying about 35 extra pounds on my frame, because I’d been quietly stress-eating and anger-eating my way up to an uncomfortable number on the scale. THAT was quite a moment, indeed.
I’m guessing you’re holding this book in your hands because you’ve experienced a similar moment recently.

Or maybe because you feel like you’re on the verge of a “what’s the point of my liiiife?” meltdown any minute now.

Or maybe you’re pretty happy with your life, all things considered, but you’d really like to infuse a little more joy into the mix, finding a career path and lifestyle that feels aligned with what you value in a very intentional, deliberate way, rather than continuing to roll along with an “autopilot” kind of life.

Whatever inspired you to purchase this book — a crisis, a sobfest, or just a general sense of curiosity about how to live, work, and parent your kids more intentionally — I am glad you are holding this book in your hands.

My friend Caroline is about to take you on a journey, inviting you to ask the “big questions” that we rarely make time to think about because we’re too busy packing school lunches while simultaneously toasting frozen waffles for breakfast, doing carpool, bandaging our kids’ bruised knees, tending to our spouses’ needs, roaming the grocery aisles in search of that one brand of crackers that your toddler will actually eat, juggling multiple roles, jobs, chores, and volunteer obligations, or, you know, distracted by puddles of our own tears on the kitchen floor.

We rarely take the time to thoroughly consider the big questions that Caroline poses in this book — questions
like, “What types of activities make me come alive?” “If I could write out my ideal job description, what would it say?” “What kind of example do I want to set for my kids?” “What do I actually want out of life, period?” — but we all need to.

Because — as I know, from personal as well as professional experience as a life and business coach, ten years deep in the trenches with hundreds of clients under my belt — if you don’t know what you want, it’s virtually impossible to get it.

But when you do know what you want? When you do have a clear vision for the life you want to build and how you want to build it? Then the party really starts.

As Caroline aptly puts it:

“Once you are grounded in who you truly are and what you truly want, you will always make the right choice.”

You’ve made the right choice in picking up this book.

It’s going to be a beautiful addition to your personal growth toolkit, helping you to understand yourself more deeply, helping you to make the right choices for you and your family, helping you to build a life that is meaningful, rewarding, and challenging (in all the good ways). The kind of life that — one day, a long long time from now, when you’re very old but still totally sexy and hip in that “Helen Mirren at age 100 kind of way” — you can look back on and think:
“Yes. I chose well. I lived right. I set a beautiful example for my kids. I took courageous action to pursue my personal and professional goals. I am at peace. I have no regrets.”

Life: on your terms. With no regrets.

What else matters?
When I was about 8 years old, my brother came home from wrestling camp with a broken thumb and a smug sense of satisfaction. He was wearing a t-shirt that said, “Go hard or go home.” He had gone so hard he had busted his hand. Over the next few years, he would wrestle his way through two knee operations.

He was my hero.

I was doing multiplication flash cards with my mom at the time. I remember because I was complaining that she kept putting them in the wrong pile even though I had gotten them right. “Not fast enough,” she said. “Do it again.”

My mother is a third-generation American, born and raised in Buffalo. My grandmother suggested she major in home economics and get married. Instead, my mom decided to work nights at Dunkin’ Donuts to put herself through law school. Her career counselor told her that women shouldn’t be lawyers. Five years later, she was working in-house for an oil and gas company, and was one of the first women ever allowed on offshore oil rigs. My mom goes hard.

But as chance would have it, she fell in love with an old-fashioned Texan. So instead of running the entire oil and gas
industry, she ran our family and our house. Beautifully. In every way.

When my father started getting sick, she went back to law school, this time to get an L.L.M., an advanced degree in the law. By the end of the semester, she was teaching the same class she had signed up to take. By the end of the year, she was an adjunct faculty member, and had won every teaching award at the school. She accomplished all of this while tending to my father, who by that point had been hospitalized. When he died nine months later, we did what we do. We dug deep and kept going hard. I was twelve.

Shortly after his death, I sat in the auditorium of my public junior high school at the end-of-the-year awards ceremony. I watched as the winners’ names were called, and families erupted in cheers, smiles and laughter. That’s when I decided to win every single award I could. Come spring of the following year, I had: Best History Student, Best Tennis Team Member, Top-Ten Eighth Graders, Honors Society... I don’t even remember them all. What I do remember is that my brother came home from boarding school for three whole days. He sat next to my mom in the audience. I can still their faces as I looked out from the stage. Everyone was smiling.

The following year, I was off to Phillips Exeter Academy, arguably the best private boarding school in the United States. When I graduated, I was in the top of my class, had lettered in five different varsity sports, been recruited to a Division I athletics program at Yale University, and was
voted “Big Woman on Campus.” I organized and implemented A.W.A.R.E. — A Week of Acquaintance Rape Education with my best friend, and we won a prize for it. In my spare time, I sang in a an audition-only choir, an audition-only acapella group, and wrote enough poetry to win the second prize in the annual poetry contest, that due to its second-place stature, never seemed like much of an accomplishment to me.

After that, it was Yale. I graduated magna cum laude with honors in my major, played Division I lacrosse, performed in an improv comedy troupe, and served as the co-director of the Yale Women’s Center. In my spare time, I still wrote poetry, but I also founded R.A.L.Y., the Reproductive Rights Action League of Yale, and participated in get-out-the-vote efforts throughout New Haven. But I didn’t win any awards on prize day. I wished I had worked harder.

When I got to law school, I was busy striving for an even more impressive litany of accomplishments, when I met my now-husband. (He is kind of shy, so we’ll just call him “Husband.”) He was the first one to ask me if I actually liked any of the things I was doing. “It just seems to me,” he said gently, “that it all just really stresses you out.” I had never thought about it before. Stress was part of the deal. What does liking what you’re doing have to do with anything? That just seemed a little, well, self-indulgent. You do what needs to be done and do it well. You go hard, end of story. That’s how you make a difference. That’s how you matter.

Right?
Fast forward ten years, and I’m standing in my kitchen, clutching a cup of coffee in my hands, staring at the sunlight drenching our swimming pool. The kids are playing happily. Husband is in the shower getting ready for work. I’m in 12-year-old spandex that, thankfully, stretched over time.

*I am not unhappy*, I think, as the light flickers through the leaves. After all, I have such a beautiful house. A loving, supportive husband. Two healthy, smart, strong little girls. That’s when my littlest one runs in and hugs my right leg a little too hard.

“I love you, Mommy,” she says.

Of course, I tell her I love her, too, but I can’t help but sigh as she runs away. “Two minutes to shoes,” I call after her as I take another sip.

I watch the day unfold in my head. I will do carpool. Come home and do some dishes. Maybe take a walk. I will spend at least an hour on Google looking at part-time job descriptions that I don’t really want to apply for. I may apply anyway. I’ll work on the *pro bono* legal case that I don’t really like. I’ll work on the Tuition Assistance Auction at my daughters’ school that I agreed to help run, but not so secretly resent doing. And then, before I’ve even showered, I’ll be back in the carpool line.

It wasn’t exactly what I had envisioned when I first packed up my suitcase in Houston and boarded a plane to go to
Phillips Exeter Academy. Or when I hugged my mom outside the stone arches of Old Campus on Yale University. Or when she drove me to Charlottesville to help me pick out a couch for my very first apartment. Or when, in the middle of a private tour of the White House, she leaned over and whispered, “You can have a seat at that table. You could be the Attorney General.”

I sip my coffee again before setting it down. “Time to go, girls. Hurry up!”

When I get back home forty-five minutes later, my coffee is cold. I am considering making myself a Keurig cup when I get an email on my phone. My husband has made partner at his law firm. In only eight years.

He’s a partner.

I’m a housewife.

That’s when I start to cry. I clutch my phone, slide down against my beautiful white cabinets onto my beautiful wood floor, and I cry. For everything I thought I’d be. For everything I could have been. For everything my mother hoped I’d become. For every sacrifice she had made for me that I, here on the kitchen floor alone with the dog, would never pay back.

I cried for every woman who would have come after me that I would have helped and mentored if I had kept working. I cried because the truth was, I didn’t want to. I cried because I knew that I had become the mom, but not the person, I
wanted to be. And with each tear, I got closer and closer to the truth.

When Husband and I met, he was an above-average student. I was near the top of our class. Truthfully, when we got married, I thought chances were higher that I’d end up the primary breadwinner and he’d end up the stay-at-home parent. At least, he’d be the one working more limited hours and helping at home. I was the driven one. Now his career was thriving, while I had left three different legal jobs, taken unpaid maternity leave for three years, and ultimately chosen to stay home.

Of course, there were reasons. Very good ones, in fact. My young daughters both had health problems that were, at first, difficult to diagnose and then incredibly time consuming. Both were in physical and occupational therapy. Both required incredible emotional and physical support. I didn’t want them to go through that without me. I wanted to be there for every doctor visit and every appointment. I had wanted to be home. And I was willing, then, to give up my career to do it.

Now, three years later, I was coming face to face with the outcomes of our choices. I was proud of Husband, not to mention grateful and relieved for what his success meant for our family. He had given me the beautiful gift of being a stay-at-home mother, something that many moms want but simply cannot afford to do. But as I sat there on the floor beneath the sink full of dirty dishes, the tears still streaming down my face, I simply wasn’t thinking of how
lucky I was to have been able to choose to stay home with the children. All I could think about was Starbucks.

When I was working, I would just ask the person in the office next to me: “Want a Starbucks?” Just like that, two grown ups would walk across the street together and have a 15 minute conversation about nothing much at all.

I missed Starbucks.

I missed getting dressed. I missed going into the office. I missed the quiet drive. I missed the chitchat in the elevator. I missed saying good morning to the receptionist as I walked to my office.

I missed opening my email as I looked out over Pennsylvania Avenue. I missed the office supply closet. All those pens! I missed overhearing my assistant answer my phone: “Hello. This is the office of Caroline Greene.”

I missed using my brain. I missed researching and writing and filing briefs and making arguments. I missed standing when the judge entered the courtroom. I missed winning. I missed losing. I missed my desk chair. I missed business cards. I missed mentoring younger lawyers. I missed my mentors. I missed getting the *Wall Street Journal* and seeing my cases on the front page.

I missed feeling like what I did mattered.

I missed feeling like I mattered.

I missed going hard.
But as I looked over at the pair of dirty pajamas and pile of books that had been abandoned in front of the oven, I also knew that I would never go back to my career as a lawyer, no matter how sad I was or how disappointed I felt. The truth was that I didn’t miss the late nights and early mornings. I didn’t miss the insane deadlines and the crazy stress. And I didn’t miss sitting in traffic only to get home and find out the baby was already asleep. Being a big firm lawyer had been a wonderful job, but walking away had been the right choice for me and my family. It still was, no matter how much it hurt to admit it.

So where did that leave me? Sitting there on the kitchen floor all puffy-eyed and snot covered, I started to wonder if maybe there was some way I could be the mother I wanted to be and still have meaningful career. Couldn’t I find a balance between being present at home and making a difference in my work?

Wasn’t there some way I could still have it all?

Up to now, the decisions I made had served my family and, in many ways, me very well. But it was becoming increasingly clear that I was ready to start thinking about what else might be possible for us. I was ready to explore a new path.
TOOLS FOR THE DETERMINED MOM

At the end of each chapter, you’ll find Tools for the Determined Mom to help you on your journey to finding meaningful work that’s right for you and your family. If you’d like even more room to do the exercises, go to www.matterworkbook.com to print your free copy of the MATTER Workbook, which contains each and every exercise in the book and is specifically designed to help support you in your search.

Tool # 1 — Life Assessment

In order to know where we’re going, we have to know where we are right now. This simple tool can help you get started. Look at the list below. Consider how satisfied you are with each aspect of your life. Then assign each aspect a rating on a scale of -10 (abysmal) to +10 (blissful). We will use this scale in various forms throughout the book. Try not to focus on just what you think about the item, but also what it makes you feel physically and emotionally. Write the rating next to the category.

When you are done, go back and look at your ratings. But be gentle with yourself. The purpose isn’t to judge yourself for what is rated high or low. It’s simply to tune in to where you actually are, right now. Notice what surprises you. Notice what doesn’t.
Relationship with Self
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Relationship with Spouse
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Relationship with Children
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Relationship with Extended Family
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Relationship with Friends
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Professional Relationships
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Professional Life
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Financial Stability
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Financial Dreams
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Degree of Busyness
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Degree of Happiness
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Degree of Joy
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Degree of Purpose Or Meaning
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Spirituality
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Community Involvement
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Other
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

After you have rated each category, move on to Tool # 2 — Grieve the Gap.
Tool # 2 — Grieve the Gap

Repeat the exercise above, but instead of rating where you are right now, rate where you thought you’d be by now. In other words, rate your expectations. Don’t let yourself just write 10s across the board. Really dig deep, be brutally honest in reflection, and rate what you thought would be your strongest and weakest areas of your life at this point in time.

Relationship with Self
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Relationship with Spouse
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Relationship with Children
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Relationship with Extended Family
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Relationship with Friends
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Professional Relationships
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Professional Life
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
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<th>Financial Stability</th>
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<td>Financial Dreams</td>
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<td>Degree of Joy</td>
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<td>Degree of Purpose Or meaning</td>
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<td>Community Involvement</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Take a few moments to journal about what is coming up for you. What surprises you? What are you noticing?

If things are even better than you thought they would be, then allow yourself to celebrate. But if they’re not, allow yourself room to grieve the space between where you are and where you thought you’d be. Try to welcome whatever feelings come up. Be gentle with yourself. Giving yourself space to recognize and acknowledge the gap between your expectations and your reality is much harder than just powering forward.
Tool # 3 — Own Your Own Story

After I finished the first draft of this book, my editor told me something was missing. “Just tell your story,” she said. “And remember what you have to say is valuable.” It changed the shape of this project, both on the page and in my own heart. As Brene Brown wrote, “Owning our own stories and loving ourselves through the process is the bravest thing that we will ever do.” Writing this book has invited me to own mine. I’d like to invite you to own yours.

Take a few minutes to reflect on your own story. Use this time to remind yourself of how you’ve gotten to where you are now. In particular, begin to notice how your experiences have shaped how you define what it means to be “successful,” or to “have it all.” Explore whether, or why, you believe those definitions are true for you now.

This may be the kind of exercise that needs to be done in parts. Commit to yourself to reflect and journey back to your hopes and dreams. If you’re having trouble remembering what your hopes and dreams are, it is even more important that you take the time to do this exercise. Be patient with yourself, but be persistent. Reconnecting with your story takes time.
CHAPTER 2
GET VALIDATION

Leading up to the time around which my husband made partner, I decided to start a blog. I think, deep down, I was preparing to grieve my own gap in my own way. I was starting to confront the reality of leaving the law and wanted something to help fill the hole my choice had created.

One afternoon, as I sat staring, typing, and staring some more, my precious little three-and-a-half-year old appeared at my side. She was used to me playing on the floor with her, or maybe chatting on the phone with my mother, not working at a desk. She leaned in towards the computer and asked in her precious little three-and-a-half-year old voice, “What are you looking for?”

“Nothing, Buggie,” I said without looking up. “Mommy’s writing.”

“But,” she said, leaning a bit further in towards the screen, “what are you looking for?”

Never underestimate the profundity of little people. She hit, straight on the head, the very question that so many of us have been secretly avoiding for years. We sit on our iPhones, checking email or updating Facebook, scrolling to see what the 500 “best friends” we never see anymore are
up to. Or we sit at our computers, hour after hour, looking at job listings or checking LinkedIn instead of sleeping. We take career tests and personality tests and chase insight instead of talking to our partners. But what are we really looking for?

For starters, especially for those of us who spent our entire lives striving, excelling, and competing, I think we’re looking for instructions on how to do this thing called life the right way. If someone would just explain what they wanted us to do and when they wanted it done by, then we would get it done right, fast and with a smile. We are, after all, overachievers.

We tackle any task, whether it’s loading the dishwasher, (the coffee cups go on the left side — how hard is that to understand?) folding laundry (you don’t just fold them in half and then quarters — you fold one side in, then the other, then fold them in half — isn’t that obvious?), or any element of our lives with exceptionally high standards and clearly articulated (and usually enumerated) objectives.

That’s why we buy career books with quizzes and checklists with eleven steps to finding the perfect job. So we can get this career thing right!

When I was trying to figure out what was next for me, I spent hours in the library, poring over career books and taking every online quiz I could. Not only that, but I created endless spreadsheets and checklists in my head, carefully detailing each and every aspect of each and every
job (or career path) that I was considering:

- Type of work
- Quality of work
- Reputation and/or integrity of the company
- Mission and vision of the organization
- Organizational culture
- Boss and/or company leadership
- Women in leadership roles and/or mentorship opportunities
- Flexibility — particularly around scheduling
- Potential for part-time options and/or telecommuting
- Commute
- Work hours
- Pay
- Benefits (including on-site childcare options)
- Prestige

I passed endless nights sitting at my computer looking at job listings or checking LinkedIn instead of sleeping, convinced that if I could only come up with the right part-time schedule, with the right hours and flexibility, and enough pay to make it all worth it, everything would be okay. I pored over all the different ways I was willing to compromise so that I could find the “best” solution for me and my
family: I’d sacrifice commute for the right salary. I’d give up the title for good work. I’d work at a less prestigious firm for more flexibility.

We even spent Saturday mornings hauling the babies around, looking at apartments and condos and townhouses that were walking distance to a job I didn’t even know if I wanted to take, because somehow I thought finding the right house would somehow help me make the right decision. Or at the very least, relieve the strange ache I had in my stomach every time I thought about returning to my old job.

I searched for the “right” answers everywhere, but I only came up confused and empty-handed. Why couldn’t I find the right job? Why couldn’t I even decide what it is was I wanted to do? The weight of my options was crushing. I was so overwhelmed by having so many choices and so disappointed in myself for not being able to make the right one. The voices in my head kept me keenly aware of how absurd my situation was: Other moms would kill for this chance. You can do anything. You can go back to your old job. Start a new career. Follow your dreams. And here you are, doing nothing.

The more I tried, the louder they got: Look at you, wasting your education. You’re never going to live up to your potential. You’re not stewarding your gifts. You’re not giving back. You’re missing your chance to matter.
After awhile, those voices were all that I could hear. Without even realizing it, they were in charge of my career search, not me. When I said “healer,” they said “medical school!” When I said “teacher,” they said “professor!” When I said life coach, they said “pastor!” So I explored going to medical school. I looked at every Ph.D. program in the country that sounded the least bit interesting to me. I started and subsequently quit seminary. And the harder I tried, the further I got from what I truly wanted, which made it harder to find the right job. I was trapped in a spin-cycle I didn’t know how to escape.

In the middle of my search, the girls were in preschool on opposite days. So on Tuesdays and Thursdays, my eldest and I would drop off her little sister and go for a cup of coffee and a donut. We’d laugh and sing on good days and stare at each other and eat silently on not so great ones. Both were breathtaking. One day, I realized I had forgotten to get my parking validated. I went up to counter, waited patiently until the clerk was free, and handed him my ticket.

“Sorry,” I said, reaching across the counter, “I forgot to get my validation.”

He looked straight at me and said, what seemed at the time to be very kindly, “You are a good person.”

I lit up inside. A smile beamed across my face in a sort of soft mixture of surprise and gratitude. He must have seen me playing with my daughter, I thought. He must appreciate the way I talk to people and try to make eye contact and smile.
My cheeks got red as I said, warmly and gratefully, with a sense of deep satisfaction, “Oh, thank you.”

He replied, straight-faced, “Was that the validation you wanted?”

I was shocked. Stung. Defensive. Exposed. He stamped the ticket. I took it.

“Yes,” I said, half-smugly, half-laughing, definitely embarrassed. “That was exactly the validation I wanted.”

Because it was.

What I realized when I walked out of the deli and back to my car, hand-in-hand with my little one, was that I had trapped myself by seeking validation everywhere I looked: in my job search, in my volunteer activities, even in my life-coach training. I had become dependent on external feedback loops, whether it was my superiors at work, other moms in my social circles, Husband, or even my own children. So much so, that I had lost the ability to give myself the validation, appreciation, and recognition that I so desperately needed. My need to be seen as the “best” had overtaken my desire to be me.

Maybe it’s because I had gotten lost in mommy-land. Maybe it’s because I had gotten lost well before that. But what was becoming increasingly clear to me was that I wasn’t going to find meaningful work by waiting for some guy behind the counter to stamp my “validation” ticket. I had to figure out how to stamp it myself.
One of exercises I use in my group program is to have my clients begin to notice where (or if) they get a sense of accomplishment or value throughout the day. For most of them, they have to actually do a tangible task in order to feel like their day was worthwhile: organize the closets, put away the laundry, give an awesome presentation, or lead a great call. Only when they had “done something” did they feel any accomplishment at all.

Most also reported noticing how much it hurt their feelings when their partners didn’t notice what they had done. As one mom explained, “To be totally honest, I want my family to think I’m an awesome mom and wife for doing it all. I was the type of worker in my professional life who would push through it all. I was a total workaholic. I always said *yes, yes, yes.* I worked crazy, crazy hours. I always did a good job, but I always put that before my own needs. Now I do the same thing in my role as mother. I want to keep putting more and more into it — even though I know the to do list is endless, I just keep chasing the carrot.”

I know how they feel. The example that comes to mind in my own life is the time I reorganized the *entire* house in one day. The *whole* thing. Plastic bins and all. It was probably the only day in my entire life that my house was actually perfect. When Husband got home, I was standing in the kitchen, ecstatic and exhausted, ready to see his reaction. He walked in, got a root beer, sat down at a *totally different table,* and asked me how my day was — without noticing a thing.
I was crushed. I had wanted him to see, to say, “thank you.” I wanted him to tell me that my efforts mattered, just like a boss or colleague would at work after I had drafted a terrific brief or argument. But he didn’t. And even if he had, it wouldn’t have been enough. He might have noticed the new furniture arrangement, but not the carefully organized art supplies in the playroom. Or the bookshelves, but not the empty junk drawer. *Whatever appreciation he gave me would never be enough.*

Of course, I didn’t know that at the time. So I just kept doing more and more and more. And the more I did, the more empty I felt. And the more empty I felt, the more I did. Because that’s how it works: *the more we do, the more empty we feel. And the more empty we feel, the more we do.* Before we know it, we’re killing ourselves day in and day out only to still feel like we’re failures. *All because we don’t know how to stamp our own tickets.*

If we don’t learn, eventually there will be consequences, whether we choose to believe it or not. For more than one mom I talked to, not learning how to value ourselves and our own efforts led to all sorts of different types of breakdowns, mentally, physically and emotionally. By the time you finish this book, I’ll have told you about two of mine, but I’ve heard about many, many more.

The very same tendencies that bring us success in the world have the capability to bring destruction within us. Our compulsive need to do things “right” can eat away at us from the
inside out. That’s when resentment starts setting in. Or anger. Maybe even rage.

Suddenly, when your husband makes breakfast for the family, all you can see is the pan left on the counter that you have to clean up. When your kids make you a surprise card just because, all you feel is frustration over the paint on the rug. When someone offers to help you out, all you hear is, “you aren’t strong enough to do it alone.” Or when someone offers you an amazing part-time schedule, all you hear is, “you aren’t capable of doing it all.”

If we’re not intentional, pretty soon we’ll stop being able to see what’s right in front of us — all because we’re looking so hard for something we’ll never find outside of ourselves.

As it turns out, that guy in the deli was the voice of my guardian angel. His bad sense of humor set me down the path that would deliver me straight into the hands of the work I was always meant to do: to learn how to stamp my own ticket. Once I realized that’s what I really wanted, I could start right away, regardless of the fact that I still had no idea what I wanted to “do” for my career. I could start, right now, to learn how to matter to me.
Tools for the Determined Mom

Tool # 4 — What Are You Looking For?

When you lose time on the computer, mindlessly doing and doing, what are you looking for? What do you hope you’ll find? What do you secretly wish someone would say on your Facebook page, or in a hand-written note hand-delivered to your door?

I wanted an answer. A clear, succinct answer that would come with a clear, succinct ding on my phone telling me I had new mail. Caroline, you are meant to be a lawyer, it would say. I have the perfect job for you. Or, Caroline, you are meant to write a book. Here is the title, plot and publisher, right here.

When an email comes in, what do you hope it says?

Take a few minutes and actually write these notes, whether it’s from your future self, your inner child or someone you haven’t met yet. Be open to whatever comes up.
Tool # 5 — Stamp Your Ticket

Go to your kids’ crafts, wherever they might be. Currently ours are all over the kitchen floor, so they are easy to find. Now, get some paper, markers, pens, glue and scissors, whatever you feel like using. We are going to make a ticket. There’s a cutout in the MATTER Workbook (www.matterworkbook.com) to get you started. Be creative! Think about a train ticket, passport, or a simple paper parking ticket. Does it feel foolish? Good. Keep going. Cut it out. Draw on it. Ask it question as you create it. What type of ticket do you want to be? Where do you want to take me?

When you’re done, get a stamp. Any stamp. And “validate” your ticket. You may think it sounds silly, but I give you a less than fifty percent chance of completing this exercise without crying. You have the power to stamp your own ticket. Any kind of ticket. Always.
We have all been lost in something. For me, it was “enough,” as in doing enough, being enough, working long enough, trying hard enough. Then came motherhood. The combination was nothing short of brutal. On the outside, things were all shiny-happy, but on the inside things were unraveling, fast.

This was particularly true when I got pregnant with my second daughter. That’s when I entered what Husband and I refer to as, “the Deep Darkness.”

The Deep Darkness was characterized by extreme bouts of crying and general melancholy, spattered with anger. For the duration of the pregnancy, we sort of just assumed that these terrible swings were hormonal (they were) and unavoidable (they weren’t). But as bad as the pregnancy was, the newborn stage was much worse.

That’s when The Deep Darkness became characterized not just by anger and sadness, but also by rage. Seething rage. I would lash with fury even when I wanted to stop myself and then I would just lay on Husband’s chest and mumble through the sobs that I didn’t want to be like this, but that I just couldn’t stop, and he would gently run his hands through my unwashed brown hair until I fell asleep.
When I woke, I would fall to my knees and pray, “Dear God, I know this is your plan for our family and I trust you with my whole heart, but I don’t understand and I need your strength, because this is not my plan for our family and I’m dying here. Seriously. I’m dying.”

Then one night, when my youngest was nine months old, she started sleeping through the night. None of this four-hours nonsense, the entire night. Which meant that for the first time in a very long time, I was, too. It was only then, after I was sleeping, that I began to realize just how out of whack things had become.

One morning soon after, I looked at myself in the mirror and realized the person I saw looking back wasn’t actually me. I’m not sure who she was, but her eyes were flat. Listless. Her color was pale. Cold. And her heart was, I don’t know what. Broken? That’s when I walked into the bedroom where Husband was getting dressed. “Husband,” I said, “I don’t know if I will ever feel happiness like other people. I don’t know if I can. But I know that I can try. For those little girls, for you, for me, I can try. So that’s what I’m going to.”

Husband nodded and said okay, because he is an angel, and so instinctively knew that a single word more or less would probably trigger the rage and close the doors to the possibility of healing forever. Or at least for a long, long time. I nodded too, and said okay back. Then I got dressed, sent a few emails asking for referrals for therapists, and began to heed to the forces at work to change my life forever.
So what does any of this have to do with finding meaningful work?

Sleep.

Without sleep, I had no idea what I needed or wanted. *I didn’t even know I was depressed.* Over and over again, moms tell me that sleep was “hugely important,” or “critical,” to making the changes they desired in their lives. One mom reported going to her boss and asking for an entire restructuring of her department so she could have a better balance that worked for her, *but only after she had started sleeping again.* (The boss said yes, by the way.)

If we aren’t meeting our own basic needs, we can’t possibly strategize clearly and meaningfully about where we want to move our lives. No matter how much we fight it, we simply can’t find meaningful work that is right for us and our families if we are exhausted, under-nourished, ignored and under-appreciated.

This isn’t about beating yourself up with the “I should be healthier” stick. It’s not about sliding back into guilt or shame about those cupcakes you ate or that spin class you skipped. This isn’t about doing anything “right” or “better.” This is about learning to support yourself holistically, so that you have the strength and clarity to find the work you want to do, and do it *well.* Pun intended.

A few years ago, I was pushing the girls through Whole Foods in the double stroller while eating a sticky bun. A
motivational card caught my eye. You know, the ones that have all sorts of quotes in beautiful blues and purples and bold black and whites. It said, “Practice wellness.” Practice wellness? I asked myself. What does that even mean?

Over the past few years, I’ve been slowly learning. As it turns out, wellness is about much more than a diet or an exercise regime, a list of shoulds and shouldn’ts. It’s a wholeness. An entirety. A way of being. And it requires practice.

Practice used to be a loaded word for me. When I thought of practice, I thought of my sixteen year-old self, standing outside in the freezing Exeter cold, throwing a tennis ball against the wall, hour after hour after hour, one hand behind my back, one hand in front of my face. This was me, endlessly practicing to be a lacrosse goalie. The version of me who got up early to run and lift, who was the first to the field and the last to leave, the one who got up each day and read the handwritten note carefully printed in all caps, “LUCK IS WHERE PREPARATION MEETS OPPORTUNITY.” Practice meant the sheer grit by which my dreams come true. Practice meant me beating myself into a better version of me.

But wellness doesn’t work like that. Wellness can’t be fashioned from a pound of flesh. Thinness can. Muscle tone can. But not wellness. Wellness isn’t about looking a certain way or accomplishing a certain thing. It’s certainly not about practicing our way into perfection.

Wellness practice is the true preparation we need in order to find meaningful work that is right for us, and for our
families. By building and nurturing relationships with our whole selves — physically, mentally and emotionally — we reconnect with who we truly are and what we truly want. We begin to learn to stamp our own tickets.

At first, the idea of creating a relationship with yourself might sound strange. I remember the first time a coaching friend asked me what type of relationship I had with myself. I had nothing to say. Relationship? With myself? What? But as I’ve come to learn, creating a relationship with yourself is simply learning how to treat yourself with the same kindness, compassion and respect you extend to everyone else. We show up, listen and respond to our own needs, our own bodies, much like a child. In fact, some days, thinking of my body as my third daughter is the only way it gets any attention! I nurture this relationship in four key ways:

- Rest
- Nourishment
- Movement
- Touch

Let’s take a look at each one in more detail.

REST
I know sleeping while parenting is easier said than done. But if your children were chronically sleep-deprived, you’d do something about it. So if you’re chronically sleep-deprived, we’re going to do something about it, too.
Of course, I have no idea how much sleep you need. Hopefully, you do. If not, experiment with your bedtime. Start listening to your body and see what it has to say about when you’re going to bed. Then see how you feel when you wake up.

When our first daughter was born, I read every sleep book I could get my hands on. The most helpful one was Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child, by Marc Weissbluth, M.D. This book taught me all about my child’s “drowsy signs and sleepy cues.” For example, eye rubbing or neck scratching are signs your child is becoming overtired. The trick in the book is to put your child to bed before they become so exhausted and overwrought that it is difficult to get them to sleep. Whether you believe it works for kids or not, I’ve found that it works for me.

Shortly after we read the book together, Husband started noticing my “sleepy cues.” Apparently, I get fussy. I suddenly get interested in watching that extra T.V. show I wouldn’t normally watch. I don’t want to get off of Facebook. Over time, I’ve learned to tune into my body’s signals before I’m too exhausted to put myself to bed, and fall prey less frequently to the very dangerous pre-bedtime racing thoughts: What did I do today? What do I have to do tomorrow? When is that deadline? When is that permission slip due? When is the field trip? What am I forgetting? When I do, I sleep better, more restfully and longer.

Try listening to your body. See what bedtime it wants you to have. Then be gentle with yourself when you don’t meet it. Be willing to try again.
Of course, sleeping more at night isn’t the only way to rest. In fact, it’s not usually enough on its own. It’s not the only need we have for downtime or integration. Sometimes we need to nap midday, or meditate, or take a walk in the woods, or simply enjoy a little quiet and solitude. Resting can look different to all of us. A few months ago, I got dressed to work out but then got back in bed, fully dressed, instead. Husband found me there an hour later. I hadn’t even slept. I had just lay back down and done nothing. Believe it or not, it took more will power to lay there and do nothing than taking the walk would have. But that’s what my body actually needed, was time to lie quietly. So that’s what I gave it. And it was every bit of amazing as it sounds. Try experimenting with what types of rest your body might need.

NOURISHMENT
We all have learned that we need to feed our bodies well. But, at least in our house, eating well while parenting often still feels like a miracle. Take an average Saturday afternoon. We’ll make our kids ham and cheese sandwiches, then cut them out with cookie cutters in the shape of their favorite animals, balance their plates out with carrot sticks and apple slices, and maybe even add some organic pretzels or cheddar bunnies. Then, while the girls are eating, we’ll sort of hover by the counter asking each other what we are going to eat for lunch while munching on the leftover sandwich bits. Before we know it, we’re not really hungry anymore, and the girls want to go the park. Then a few hours later, I’m sneaking a
half-pint of sea salt caramel gelato because I am *starving*. Not exactly nourishing.

So what’s the alternative? *Try feeding yourself like you feed your own children.* Don’t give yourself things you know hurt your stomach. Try to eat when you’re actually hungry. Don’t go six or eight hours without eating at all. Stick to eating things Michael Pollen and/or your grandmother would consider to be actual food. Plan your meals with as much care as you do your children’s, and have healthy things you enjoy in the house for intended snacks and quick bites.

*Most importantly, stop ignoring your body’s signals.* If one of your children was standing in front of you whining and crying because he or she hadn’t been fed all day, or only eaten junk that made him or her feel bad, or ate so much it gave them a stomachache, you would pay attention. You would help them make a change. So consider extending the same helping hand to yourself. Nourish yourself like you would your own children.

**MOVEMENT**

Every child needs food and sleep, but they also need movement and play. This is something we rarely make time for in adulthood, let alone motherhood. In fact, so often we adults suck all the fun out of it and call it “exercise.” Instead of running around on a playground and hanging upside down on monkey bars, we’re in spin classes and hating
every second. If that’s you, consider tapping back into ways of moving your body that feel like fun. Hiking, biking, swimming, paddle-boarding, hopscotch, jump-rope, cleaning the car, a creative yard project, anything that feels good to your body either while you’re doing it or after it’s done.

Of course, if you have an exercise routine you love, great! Stick with it. You can still use this tool to tap into, when it’s time for welcoming a bit of play into your life. Like 5Ks? Try a color run! But if your exercise routine is leaving you exhausted, annoyed or frustrated, your body might simply be trying to tell you something. You might want to try mixing up your normal routine for a bit, and try something new that feels good to your body.

Whatever you do, keep moving and playing.

TOUCH
Children go through every day being constantly touched. In fact, this is one of the reasons some of moms (including me) actually shy away from extra sources of touch at times. When most of my days are subsumed by the graspy, albeit lovely, touches of my little people, the last thing I want is to be touched again. But the truth is, as human beings, we physiologically need touch.

It doesn’t matter what type, as long as it is loving, kind and supportive of you. It could be more sex. A massage or pedicure. Reiki. An embrace from a friend. Even washing your body in the shower with a lovely smelling body wash.
Ideally, it would probably be a combination of all of the above. *It just has to feel safe and loving to you.*

Of course, I know this is all harder than I’m making it sound. When I first started trying to “do more for me,” I would leave the kids with the nanny on Friday mornings and go down the street to the Starbucks by my house to get a decaf, skinny vanilla latte (a drink the baristas liked to call a “why bother”). Then I’d walk to the cheap nail salon three doors down to get a pedicure. For the first few minutes, I’d feel quite pleased with myself. I had left the kids and done something nice for me! But the feeling faded fast. Soon I found myself wishing it was over and lamenting that I had even come. By the time I got home, I usually felt worse than before I went, which of course only made me feel worse for being so ungrateful.

So what was all that about? As it turns out, *I don’t really like pedicures.* I just didn’t know it. I had become so out of touch with myself, I had no idea what I actually liked, or needed.

At that point in my life, I didn’t need pretty toes. I needed a **daily, holistic self-care practice.** A real friend, a good therapist, a connection that mattered. A walk in the woods, a warm healthy soup, a cup of tea. But I didn’t know any of that. No one had ever taught me to take care of myself in that way.

Taking care of yourself requires more than pedicure or a yearly trip to the spa. It’s more than the right diet or the right exercise routine. It’s even more than friendships and
community. Daily, holistic self-care is about finding what it takes for you to start mattering to you and doing it every day. As one mom explained, “Self-care are those elements that make you feel whole.”

So for right now, consider taking a break from searching online for that perfect job, and go for a walk. Make a salad. Take a nap. Get a massage. You don’t need my permission, but I’ll give it you anyway. Trust me, taking care of you, right now, will be much more productive than editing your resume or checking your favorite job site again.
Tool # 6 — The Anti-Food Journal

If feeding yourself well and regularly is difficult for you, consider starting a food journal to observe your habits and patterns. Of course, I say this, but I happen to hate food journals. In case you do, too, there’s always the anti-food journal. This is my take on a tool I picked up from Susan Hyatt and Brooke Castillo’s Weight School. Instead of writing down everything you eat, ask yourself why you’re eating it. If the answer is I’m hungry, and eating this will fuel my body, then eat it. If the answer is anything else, write down the food and the reason. After you’ve taken the time to write it out and notice your reason for choosing it, if you still want it, eat it. Then notice and write down how you feel afterwards, physically and emotionally.

Tool # 7 — Start Small. Nope, Smaller Than That.

Whatever step you want to take next, start smaller. Take whatever you have in mind and cut in half. Then cut in half again, three times. If you want to take a 30-minute walk in the woods every day, start by opening your back door and taking three deep breaths of fresh air every morning. If you want a daily meditation practice, start with three deep breaths with your hand over your heart, not scheduling a 10 day silent retreat, or even expecting yourself to commit to a 10 minute sit every morning. Let yourself do something easy. It might just be the hardest thing you’ve ever done.
Goal:

Cut In Half:

Cut In Half Again:
Tool # 8 — Meet Yourself Where You Are Now
(Not 20 Years Ago)

The fact that I was college athlete almost fifteen years ago does not mean I should go try and run a timed mile, or sign up for a half-marathon any time soon. The fact that I was a competitive hunter jumper when I was 10 does not mean I know how to ride a horse anymore. I learned that the hard way, too. I ended up on crutches.

Being kind to yourself means meeting yourself where you are now, not where you were twenty years ago in better shape or more regular practice. So don’t just go back to what worked for you when you were in college. By all means, use it as a jumping off point. If you loved painting, go buy paints! Just don’t buy an entire art studio. Part of this process is meeting yourself again for the first time. We change and grow constantly. Do explore past loves with openness and curiosity! Just please don’t assume that because you knew how to play roller hockey years ago, it means you should take on that hill by your house, at least not yet.

What’s one new thing you want to try this week that feels exciting and doable?
Tool # 9 — Take Yourself On A Date

Julia Cameron, in *The Artist’s Way*, has a marvelous tool called “The Artist’s Date,” where she invites her budding artists to take themselves on an actual date of some kind to reconnect with themselves and their own desires. By setting aside a block of time to just be alone with yourself, amazing things can begin to happen. There might be something out there just waiting for you that you had never, ever considered before!

Taking myself on “dates” and reconnecting with what brings me joy has included stumbling onto life coaching, learning to paddle board, walking in the woods, rowing and Reiki. These are all things I had never tried before I was 35! When that playful voice whispers, “Let’s try ice skating,” go do it! If you’d make the time and spend the money so your child could do it, why not for you?

What’s one date you’d like to take yourself on this month?
Tool # 10 — The Wellness Cycle

Body care tends to work in a cyclical fashion, both in a positive and negative direction. If we are resting, we have energy to eat well. If we eat well, we tend to move and play. If we move and play, we tend to invite touch. If we invite touch, we tend to rest.

In the same regard, when we skip or shut down one aspect of body care, we tend to send the whole cycle out of whack. For me, it’s usually starting with food. If I eat a donut, I’m 98.7% more likely not to move that day. Then I stay up too late, get grumpy, don’t allow myself room to be touched or touch myself, and the next thing I know, I’m eating another donut. How about you? Where does your body care get kicked off track most often?

What triggers it?
Name one thing you can do to support yourself in the future:
If you’re anything like me, you’ll have read the last chapter and be a bit fired up by now. Yes, you think as you remember that one week three years ago when you tried meditation, I am going to do that again! For at least thirty minutes. Oh, and start making green smoothies! You might even order a new blender.

But tomorrow, when we find ourselves with ten free minutes, will we make ourselves a smoothie and sit peacefully and gadget-free until our time is up? No way. We’ll unload the dishwasher, or check Facebook, or try to sneak in a browse of our favorite news site to find out what’s going on in the world. Then we’ll look back at the end of the week and realize we haven’t meditated, or eaten one green anything. But the kitchen is clean and we are super up-to-date on our news feeds. All of them.

This happened to me about 10,000 times before I read Laura Vanderkam’s terrific book, 168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think. That’s when I realized that the real issue isn’t finding time. It’s taking it. Or as I like to say, receiving it.

When I first started working with moms, I was sure that my coaching practice was going to be mostly time-management focused. I thought moms would want to learn how to
create time to take care of themselves as well as they take care of everyone (and everything) else. But over and over again, clients told me that they were able to create some time in their schedules for themselves, but they couldn’t allow themselves to actually take it. When faced with the choice between going for a walk, taking a nap, or grabbing coffee with friends, they chose something that seemed “more productive.” Over and over again, they described the walk or rest or coffee as “wasteful” or “not worth doing.” They simply couldn’t give themselves permission to do something supportive for them.

So I asked the women participating in my group program to eavesdrop on themselves for a week or two, and let me know what they noticed. Each and every one of them came back and said how shocked they were at just how mean they were to themselves. They felt like they were constantly judging and berating themselves. It wasn’t just the tone, but also the words they used:

- “You’re seriously going to get a babysitter so you can do that?”
- “You’re going to spend what on what?! What is wrong with you?!”
- “You’re leaving your family for how long? You are such a bad mother.”
- “I don’t know why you’re complaining about being puked on for the 18th time today and doing bath and bedtime alone again. This is what you signed up for.”
This simple exercise revealed that it wasn’t someone or something else keeping them from the doing what they wanted or needed to do for themselves. *Most often, it was their own thoughts and judgments.*

Brigid Schulte, author of *Overwhelmed: Work, Love and Play When No One Has the Time*, runs a project for *The Washington Post* called “Timehacker.” The project pairs one reader who is interested in a “time makeover” with a life coach. Then Schulte reports on the results. Reflecting on her experience with the project to date in “The WorkLife Hub,” she wrote:

> [W]eek after week, as I began writing about more of these Timehacker experiences, one thing was became really clear... what was really getting in the way was people's own heads. What was really holding them back? Fear. Guilt. Feeling they didn’t deserve time to themselves. Lack of belief. Worry that a goal wasn’t really worthy. Perfectionism. Addiction to work. Unrealistic expectations. The unthinking drive to be the Ideal Worker, available 24/7, that workplaces most reward. The drive to be the Ideal Mother, that unconscious bias shows we still automatically expect women to be. The pull of always being hyper busy to show you matter, you fit in, like everybody else...In case after case, the biggest shift that people made come from shifting their mindset.

This of course, begs the question, how do we shift our mindset? *We start by recognizing that we are not our thoughts.*
For some of you, this might be obvious. For others, it might be an entirely new concept. I, for one, had spent my entire adult life assuming Descartes had it right when he said, “I think, therefore I am.” It wasn’t until I did my Reiki training that I knew any differently. There I was, laying on the floor of an unfamiliar yoga studio, surrounded by unfamiliar people, watching my thoughts drift by as if they were floating down a river. Then suddenly, I felt my fingers press gently against my abdomen. I realized in that moment that I was neither my fingers nor my thoughts. So who was I?

Martha Beck calls it taking the place of “the watcher.” Richard Rohr calls it connecting with your “true self.” I call it “coming home to me.” Regardless of what we label it, the process is the same: we begin to, and then develop the ability to, separate ourselves from our thoughts.

We watch them without judgment. We notice with detached curiosity.

One day this summer, I was explaining my work to my tennis teacher who was quick to catch on. “Oh,” she said, “You become the umpire.” She went on to explain that when she was playing competitive tennis in college, a sports psychologist told her the secret to being a great tennis player was being the umpire — to objectively watch the game without a vested interest in the outcome and simply call the shots as they are, not as you think they should be. It’s either out or in. Long or short. Wide or not. No drama. No tears. No breaking rackets and knocking over water coolers.
While of course not perfect, I love this analogy. It helps me put my thoughts in their proper context. From the umpire’s chair, we can look down on the whole court and begin to understand that our minds are just one part of the larger arena of life. We can see how our thoughts are just one player on the court. And then we can decide whether or not we’re going to let that one player set the tone for the each and every match that’s going to be played that day or not.

You are not your thoughts. You are so much more than that. So much bigger and more beautiful and more powerful than whatever your thoughts are screaming at you. So be the watcher. Take the umpire seat.

See what’s going on up there. Look with detached curiosity. Notice what voices you hear. Notice what they are saying. Recognize you are not what your thoughts and criticisms say you are. Choose not to judge yourself. I think you’ll be amazed at how powerful simply noticing your thoughts can actually be.

Often times, we find ourselves with recurrent thoughts that become deeply held beliefs, whether we are aware of them or not. They might have originated in an experience or in someone else whose opinion we really trusted, and so we no longer question them. Without the limitations of our own beliefs, suddenly anything can start seeming possible. As one mom who recently started a catering business while working part-time in retail as the new venture grew told me, “I want my children to be as free as possible in their own minds about what they are able to do... even if it might
be scary [for all of us]...when I was a child I wanted to be an actor, but you know it wasn’t a proper job with a secure salary. But my daughter? The other day she hurt her ankle at school and went to the nurse. The nurse asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up. She said a doctor and a librarian. The nurse said it was very hard to do two jobs. My daughter said, ‘I can do it. My mom does.’ And I thought, well look at that.” When we start releasing our expectations of what we can and cannot do, we start to truly believe in our own ability to make our own dreams come true.
Tool # 11 — Notice Your Thoughts

Mary Oliver wrote, “To pay attention, that is our endless and proper work.” What do you notice when you start watching your thoughts?

What types of thoughts do you hear most often?

What aren’t you hearing?
Now listen to your tone. How do you sound?

Is that the way you would speak to your child? A friend?

How do you want to sound when you speak to someone you love?

What is the number one thing keeping you from speaking to yourself this way?
Tool # 12 — Be More “Productive”

How do you define productivity? Is it a measure of quantity? Quality?

What thoughts do you think when you are not being productive, according to your personal definition?

I had a client who used to tell me all the time how “unproductive” going for walks was. So I asked her to make a list of all the ways she was different after she took a walk. Her list included thinking more clearly, spending less time worrying unnecessarily, returning to the task at hand with greater clarity and energy. Then I asked her to make a similar descriptive list of how she functioned when she didn’t walk. It turns out, she had more time, but not more productivity. She discovered that when she hadn’t taken her walks she
was actually more distracted, more overwhelmed, and less likely to focus on key tasks, instead choosing the ones that were easier to accomplish but that possibly didn’t really matter to her. The energy she “saved” not walking wasn’t supporting her at all.

How productive are you after you take time for yourself?

What would be different in your everyday life if you started shifting your definition of “productivity”? 
Tool # 13 — Write Yourself A Love Letter

Practicing self-compassion takes, well, *practice*. Here’s an exercise Dr. Sharon Neff shared with her audience at Wisdom 2.0: write a letter to yourself using the tone and words you would use with someone you. Express whatever you are feeling kindly and without judgment.
Tool # 14 — Practice Noticing

Simply reconnecting with ourselves through breath can have a profound impact how we are showing up in the world. When we are able to still ourselves with some regularity, we can alleviate stress, shift our emotional states, and even, quite literally, change our brains.

Sara Lazar, a neuroscientist at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard medical school, recently conducted a study that demonstrated the ways mindfulness practices can change our brains. As Brigid Schulte recently reported in her *Washington Post* article, “Harvard neuroscientist: Meditation not only reduces stress, here’s how it changes your brain,” Dr. Lazar concluded that with only eight weeks of a regular mindfulness practice, averaging just shy of thirty minutes a day, five different regions of the brain were actually changed. Areas of the brain pertaining to self-relevance, learning, cognition, memory and emotional regulation, perspective taking, empathy and compassion were all enlarged. While “the amygdala, the fight of flight part of the brain which is important for anxiety, fear and stress in general...got smaller... which correlated to a reduction in stress levels.” If we are willing to commit to the work of separating ourselves from our thoughts without judgment and with detached curiosity, amazing changes can take place in very little time.

Consider adopting a mindfulness practice or joining a community that practices mindfulness together. Check online to see what types of meditation and mindfulness practices
are available in your area. In the meantime, here is another short and simple exercise to help you deepen your practice of awareness:

Set a timer for five minutes. Find a quiet place to sit. Get comfortable. Rest your hands gently on your lap, palms to the sky. Breathe. Begin to notice your thoughts as if they were boats floating down the river. Watch them without judgment. Keep breathing. Keep noticing. Stay quiet and curious.
The more you begin to start noticing your thoughts, the more you will begin to notice your feelings, which believe it or not, is a very good thing. Despite what many of us were taught about feelings growing up (particularly as women), emotions are our most powerful tools to help us unlock our likes, wants and passions, all of which we need in order to find meaningful work that is right for us and our families.

But in order to uncover what our emotions are trying to tell us, we have to actually know how to feel our emotions. As it turns out, just thinking about your emotions, or powering through them knowing what you’re feeling but choosing to “control them” doesn’t count.

I, of course, learned this the hard way.

About two years ago my therapist asked, “Do you ever let yourself feel your feelings?” I was like, who? Me? Are you even listening to me? I feel everything.

She shook her head. “No,” she said, “you think about everything. I think you feel very little.”

At first, I had no idea what she meant. I thought of myself as a self-aware and intuitive person. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized she was right. All those years of
“going hard” hadn’t left much room to process what I was feeling. I had kept myself so busy, so focused on the next thing, that I never actually felt much of anything. Add to that one rather humiliating time I cried in my boss’s office when I hadn’t slept in a week, and I was none to interested in what my emotions had to tell me. I was much more interested in getting the job done than I was in knowing what I feeling while completing it. Over time, however, my therapist gently convinced me that feeling my emotions was something worth trying out. Then one day, I finally decided to start tuning in to what I was actually feeling.

The morning had been a disaster. Someone was half-naked, even though only a moment before everyone had been fully dressed. Shoes were definitely off again. Food and toys were on the floor where they shouldn’t be — a fact that seemed to be obvious only to me. Husband’s socks may or may not have been in the mix. The kitchen sink was overflowing with dishes. The dog was likely barking at something and would not shut up. There might have been a dirty diaper and/or a dog-pee accident involved. Needless to say, I lost it. Big time.

Later that day, after the kids were safely at school, I decided to go back to the experience to see what I was actually feeling that morning. I wrote “What I Feel When I Yell at the Girls” at the top of my iPhone. Then I took myself back to that morning. Here’s what I discovered:

My cheeks were tight. My breathing felt heavy. I felt anger, no, rage. Not sure where it all originated. Was it in my gut? No, higher, above my stomach, but definitely not in it. It
was closer to my heart. And it was rising, first in between my breasts, then up and out, pushing its way through my chest like a desperate hunted animal fleeing from a storm. It barreled up my throat and out of my mouth with such force it made my own eyes water. That’s when it spilled across the girls’ faces, making their eyes water, too.

Since I had learned that anger is a secondary emotion — meaning it is driven by something else — I dug deeper. I asked myself what was underneath the anger? Then it just vomited out of me and onto my phone:

*When I Yell At The Girls, I Feel:* disrespect, misunderstood, unappreciated, unheard, unseen, overwhelmed, alone, undermined, frustrated, stuck, out of control, like I’m failing, like I don’t belong, like I’m a bad mother, annoyed, bothered, disrupted, like I just want to be left alone, like I can’t do this mommy thing, like I should really outsource it to a nanny who can, like I want to hide, melt, fade away, like I was worthless, useless, nothing.

Then I laid in a puddle on the floor and resisted the urge to eat an entire chocolate cake. I think it might have been the first time I ever felt my feelings. Thankfully, it wasn’t the last. Over time, I began to more easily connect with what I was feeling, without the drama or exhaustion that came with that first experience. By choosing to actively feel my emotions on a more regular basis, feeling my feelings has slowly become an important and integral part of my daily life.
As I’ve come to learn, feeling your feelings isn’t just cathartic, it’s actually incredibly helpful. In fact, it turns out that if you want to find meaningful work that’s right for you and your family, it’s a lot easier if you actually listen to what your feelings are trying to tell you, rather than ignoring them let alone “overriding” them. Even the negative emotions, the so-called “bad ones,” have information and feedback for you that can help, as Matthew Hutson recently wrote in his *Psychology Today* article, “Beyond Happiness: The Upside of Feeling Down.”

*Emotions are not inherently positive or negative. They are distinguished by much more than whether they feel good or bad. Beneath the surface, every emotion orchestrates a complex suite of changes in motivation, physiology, attention, perception, beliefs, and behaviors: sweating, laughing, desiring revenge, becoming optimistic, summoning specific memories. Each component of every emotion has a critical job to do—whether it’s preparing us to move toward what we want (anger), urging us to improve our standing (envy), or allowing us to undo a social gaffe (embarrassment).*

*We have the wrong idea about emotions. They’re very rational; they’re means to help us achieve goals important to us, tools carved by eons of human experience that work beyond conscious awareness to direct us where we need to go. They identify trouble or opportunity and suggest methods of repair or gain. They are instruments of survival.*
Emotions provide critical information to help steer us where we want to go. But first we have to learn how to feel them, identify them, and then respond to them appropriately.

To do this, we have to return to being the watcher, or umpire. From our chair, we can look down on the court and see what are our thoughts about our emotions and what we are actually feeling. Then, we can adjust our course of action accordingly.

- Screaming at your children again? Okay. Let’s take a deep breath and start figuring out what that anger wants to tell you, so we can make a change in how this is going for all of you.

- Picking on your partner? Okay. Let’s take a deep breath and start figuring out what’s really driving you crazy so we can readjust.

The only thing that doesn’t work when it comes to our feelings is bundling them up in tight, little packages and stuffing them down deep inside of us. That doesn’t make them go away; it just makes them weigh you down.

To move forward, find the support you need to begin to pull those strings and unwrap that paper to see what’s really going on in there. As my friend Ellen Mayberry says, “Feel your feels.” Cry, scream, melt, beat a pillow or twelve. Just bravely face what you’re actually feeling, and have the courage to let it out and let it go. It might not take as long as you think.
Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, a Harvard-trained neuoranatomist who suffered a severe stroke and spent eight years re-training her own brain, explains it takes “less than 90 seconds” for an emotion to be triggered and processed by our bodies. After that, we are no longer reacting to our automatic biological responses, we are actually reacting to our thoughts recounting the experience, which in turn, triggering a new biological response. Practically speaking, this means the more we learn to simply allow our emotions to be triggered and experienced without attaching to our thoughts about our feelings, the less painfully and more easily we can feel and release our emotions.

Of course, if you’re not used to feeling your emotions, even 90 seconds can feel a bit overwhelming, and at first, it might take a lot longer than that to work through your feelings. So if it doesn’t feel good or safe to face some of these steps on your own, get the professional support you need from a licensed therapist or counselor, especially if you have a history of trauma in your past or know you have some intense or overwhelming, perhaps deeply buried pain to work through. For example, even though I felt comfortable using these techniques on my own while exploring my anger, when I was ready to process some dormant grief over my father’s death, I called my therapist and walked through it with her at my side.

Feeling our emotions is a powerful means of reconnecting with ourselves, our values, and our preferences. Our emotions can serve as a helpful and empowering source of
information when making important decisions. So if you truly want to find meaningful work that’s right for you and your family, don’t be afraid to get a little emotional in the process. It’s well worth a few boxes of tissues and some ruined mascara to get to know yourself and what your feeling. Connecting with you is the only way you’ll truly ever know what’s the “right” choice for you.
Tool # 15 — Let Your “Bad” Feelings Off the Hook

Think of all the emotions you were taught were “bad” or “too big” or “inappropriate,” or plain “wrong,” whether by your family, your friends, your mentors or someone else. Here are a few to get you started: selfishness, jealousy, anger, rage, covetousness, and sadness. There are plenty more! List the emotions that feel most “of-limits” to you here:
Think about why these emotions still feel off-limits to you. What do you think or fear might happen if you allowed yourself to start feeling these feelings?

Name three ways these so-called “bad” feelings might actually be trying to help you?
Tool # 16 — Texts from Your Feels

Susan Hyatt has a great coaching tool called, “Texts from God.” I adapted it to help me tune into the messages my feelings have for me, and call it “Texts from My Feels.”

Think of a big emotion you had recently. If that emotion was going to send you a text, what would it say?
Once I started noticing my thoughts and feeling my feelings, I began to realize just how often I had been shutting down the thoughts or feelings I thought were “wrong” or “bad.” And as I started acknowledging the “negative” thoughts and feeling the “negative” feelings, I started realizing just how much I had stunted my emotional range by shutting down the thoughts and feelings I was previously afraid of facing or acting upon. As Brene Brown writes in *The Gifts of Imperfection*, “We cannot selectively numb emotions, when we numb the painful emotions, we also numb the positive emotions.”

Then something very strange happened. As my emotional range started to expand, I realized that experiencing happiness and joy actually made me very uncomfortable. I started noticing thoughts like, “You don’t deserve that,” or “You didn’t earn that.” I started shrinking from my own happiness. The day I finished the first draft of this manuscript, in a house where several of us were working in parallel structure, I popped a bottle of champagne with my fellow writers. I should have been ecstatic. They were! Instead, I was crying. My manuscript just didn’t feel good enough to celebrate. I felt like a fraud. I still didn’t know how to let joy in, or allow myself to experience it.
Paradoxically, for someone who craved something to celebrate from a very young age, this has been the hardest part of my journey. I’m still learning as I go. What I’ve realized since is that I’m just not used to feeling happiness, let alone joy. Success? Sure. A job well done? You bet. But then once the congratulations die down, it’s just on to the next task or the next thing. Achieving my own standards isn’t something to be rewarded. It’s to be expected. Doing what I think I’m “supposed” to do? No joy in that. But that’s what I spent years training myself to do: doing the next “right” thing. Not following my own joy.

In some ways, experiencing joy can even feel like failing. It triggers a fear of plateauing, which, because I’m no longer moving forward, feels just like moving backwards, “settling,” or accepting a consolation prize of mediocrity.

Nonetheless, since I know people are supposed to have fun, I do the things I have been taught are fun. I go shopping, indulge in a glass of wine or two, maybe take a girls night out once in a while, mostly because I think that’s what I should do. But when I partake in activities I think should bring me happiness but really don’t, I find them so boring and disappointing I end up more disconnected than when I started. So I decide that the so-called happy or joyful activity really wasn’t worth the effort in the first place, which of course, makes me less likely to take time to engage in joyful activities in the future. In all honesty, pursuing activities that are fun and joyful for other people, but not for me,
is the root of this pattern. I didn’t stop to listen to myself, what did I want to do to experience more joy?

This is precisely why when I ask my clients what brings them joy, the vast majority respond, “Joy? I have no idea.” Without even realizing it, we’ve all shut down our natural proclivity for joyful activities, sometimes because we’ve been taught to forego them or earn rewards — and sometimes because we’ve been socialized to find things joyful or fun that leave us wanting or even depleted. And when we weren’t paying attention, we somehow forgot what truly brings us joy.

So how do we change that? How do we create space for more happiness and joy?

First, we start by understanding the difference between the two. While they’re often confused, happiness and joy are very different things. Happiness is circumstantial. Joy persists regardless of the circumstances. Happiness is fleeting. Joy is eternal. Happiness is linked to an external cause; take it away and it fades. Joy has no external cause, so it remains regardless of what is happening all around you.

The only thing happiness and joy truly have in common is that they can’t be earned. They are both gifts. Gifts that we have to actively choose to receive.

Second, we choose. We choose to believe we were created to experience happiness and joy. We choose to invite happiness and joy into our lives. We choose over and over again,
each and every day. We look for the reasons to let these two in, even against all surface issues, even when things are hard.

To be truly happy and to live joyfully takes a daily commitment to ourselves and to those we love. It doesn’t just happen. I wish that it could! If that were the case, I would have spent most of the past decade much lighter than I have. Happiness and joy, like wellness, require practice.

**Third**, we practice. Or perhaps more accurately, we play. We take ourselves on dates. We try new things. We express new opinions. We share our preferences as we recognize them. We ask to go to the movie we think we might want to see. We try wearing more color. We cut our hair. We dance. We laugh.

Think back to when you were a child. Did you paint? Yodel? Clog? Did you love the smell of the salty ocean or the laugh of an childhood friend? Then paint. Yodel. Clog. Dance by edge of the sea. Find that friend and laugh so hard you pee your pants.

Re-explore your basic preferences. What is your favorite color? Why? When I was little girl, every room I ever had was pink with pink roses. We moved every three years, and every three years I got a new pink bedroom with pink roses painted in the corners in a new house. My entire life, I thought my favorite color was pink. Then, at the advice of my spiritual advisor, I was coloring with colored pencils and wouldn’t you know, page after page after page was turning out blue and orange. Listening to my own cues, I
was able to realize after all these years, that *blue and orange* are my favorite colors.

What activities make time pass without your even noticing? What do you start doing, and then look up and suddenly it’s five hours later? For me, it’s writing and searching for sea glass. What is it for you?

In *Finding Your North Star*, Dr. Martha Beck wrote: “There are two rules for using joy to chart a course... Rule 1: If it brings you joy, do it. Rule 2: No, really. If it brings your joy, do it.”

So be brave! Be bold! Have fun! Rediscover what you actually like. Give yourself permission to be happy.

Invite joy. Then watch it overflow into the hearts and lives of those around you. Watch it lead you home to you and straight down the path to meaningful work that’s right for you and your family.
TOOLS FOR THE DETERMINED MOM

Tool # 17 — Source Your Current Joy

In the space below, write down all the things that bring you joy, without judgment. Be gentle with yourself as you go. Your list could be surprisingly long or short. The first time I did this, it was short. In fact, it pretty much looked like this:

- Husband
- Kids
- Food

That was it. I cried for the rest of the day. That’s how I knew it was a good tool.

List of what brings you joy:
When you're done making your list, draw a circle in the space below. We're going to make a pie chart.

Without including your partner and children, graph how much each of the items of your joy list take up in your happiness chart. So for me, it was entirely food. SO. MANY. TEARS. This was insightful but I certainly didn’t want to get stuck here. This was all I was allowing myself of all the possibilities for self-nurturing, joy, and experience. And as I mentioned in a previous chapter, it wasn’t even something I was doing particularly well. But, again, I had to know where I was to chart a course for where I wanted to go.

As you begin this exercise, realize that this is only a starting place. We are simply assessing where you are, without judgment. As you do the exercise, try not only to notice what your sources of joy currently are, but also what else comes up for you. What thoughts are you having? What feelings?

As always, be gentle and kind with yourself.
Tool # 18 — Source Your Future Joy

Once you’ve given yourself some time to process (again, be gentle), create some space for yourself. Take a deep breath, or three. Put your hand back over your heart, if that feels good to you. Connect to your breath, and quiet your mind. Then begin to imagine yourself a year or two in the future. Picture yourself in your mind. You are not just happy. You are *overflowing with joy.*

Describe her. How does she look? Feel to be around? What is different about her?

Now ask your future self what her sources of joy are in her life. Write down whatever comes without judgment. It may be something you enjoyed as a child. It may be some-
thing you’ve always wanted to try, but never have. It may be friendships you have yet to develop, or a relationship with an alienated family member you have yet to reconcile with. It may be a pet you always wanted but never got. Whatever it is, just write it down.

Then draw another circle so we can make a new pie chart. Again, eliminating your partner and children, chart what amount of joy you receive from each thing on your list. What do you notice?
Tool # 19 — Celebrate Small Victories.

If you’re used to doing things a certain way to a certain standard, you don’t congratulate yourself for doing them that way. You got an A? Great. Go get the next one. You got a promotion? Good. What’s next? That’s just the way some of us are wired. But it doesn’t mean you can’t create new connections.

The next time you do something that the soft still voice says, “Yay!” take a moment, take a breath, and say, “Good job, [Name.]” Use your name out loud, just like you were talking to a friend. Maybe even consider rewarding yourself! If you put down the laundry basket and took a nap because you needed one, good for you! Allow yourself to be proud of you.

Tool # 20 — What Makes You Come Alive

Howard Thurman wrote, “Don’t ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

What types of work or activities make you come alive?
What keeps you from doing them?

How could you incorporate these activities into your work?

Would you want to? Why or why not?
As I continue to reconnect with what brings me both happiness and joy, I notice over and over again how much of the joy in my life stems from my relationship with myself and with other people.

This may seem fairly obvious to you, but as an overachiever, I spent most of my life living under the misperception that if I wanted something done right (i.e., my way), then I’d better do it myself. Unfortunately, the combination of my own busy-ness and my own need for self-sufficiency slowly translated into my camping out on mommy island. Visitors not welcome.

I hadn’t realized just how much my tendency to “go it alone” had isolated me from others until I read Glennon Melton’s beautiful, *Carry On Warrior*. In it, she speaks beautifully about what a lifeline her friends were for her. I could feel my cheeks burning. “Must be nice,” I remember muttering. Of course, this would have been the perfect opportunity to ask my jealousy what it had to tell me, but truthfully, I wasn’t ready. At that point, I wasn’t able to see all the ways that I had chosen self-sufficiency over vulnerability. And I didn’t want to admit how I chose to go it alone instead of committing to making and nurturing friendships.
Slowly over time, I’ve learned the importance of having a group of supportive friends, and not just through experience. As Dr. Randy Kamen noted in her Huffington Post article, “A Compelling Argument About Why Women Need Friendships,” “The research shows that the strongest predictor for creating a fulfilled life is building healthy relationships with others — at home, at work and in the community.” It’s no wonder that I came to realize my need for a variety of meaningful relationships in my life.

Over the past few years, I’ve identified and committed to nurturing three key types of friendships in my life: mommy friends, professional friends and soul friends.

**Mommy friends** are exactly what they sound like — other moms with kids in school that are roughly the same age as mine. I meet them in the neighborhood, at pick-up or by the pool. They are in a similar stage in rearing children as me. In fact, that might be all we have in common, and that’s okay. These friends are vital to keeping me sane. As I said to my friend Laura once as we ate pizza over four screaming children, there is just something better about having another person at your side.

**Professional friends** are friends who share my educational or professional background. They may or may not have children or understand my season of life, but they know my industry, share similar career experiences, and understand how my professional world operates. These friends are more than “contacts,” they are sounding boards for ideas and safe spaces to vent frustrations only they would
understand. So as I’ve changed industries, these friends have changed, too.

**Soul friends** are the ones I meet and something just clicks. They “get” me. They see me. Most importantly, they believe in me. And I in them.

When I told my soul friends that I was going to stop being a lawyer and start being a life coach, they cheered. When I told them I was writing a book, they asked what they can do to help and how they could get a copy. When I thought of giving up, they told me to keep going *and why*. My soul friends are no more or less important than other types of friends, but they have been crucial to finding meaningful work. And they have been fundamental to finding my way back to me. More than anything, my soul friends have helped me see that parts of my life and myself that truly matter, with or without the right job.

Of course, there are many more (couples friends, neighbors, friends from our faith communities, etc.). But understanding my need for friends in these three key categories has given me a starting point, even as I continue to gain a deeper understanding of the breadth and depth of friendships I want to have in my life.

That didn’t mean making friends was easy for me. For various reasons, I entered motherhood without a friend group in place. But the more I opened myself to finding and nurturing true friendships, the more I realized that surrounding myself with people who truly saw and valued
me was a crucial part of living a meaningful life, as well as finding meaningful work.

Building these relationships takes time and effort, but it also takes a willingness to allow others to help me. This is often the hardest part! It can feel so much like taking, and I don’t want to take. I want to be totally self-sufficient and give, give, give! After all, we are taught that giving is receiving. But what I’ve come to learn over time is that sometimes, receiving is giving, too.

A few months ago, I came across a picture of my daughter holding out a flower to me. “For you, Momma,” I could hear her saying. As I looked at her beautiful green eyes staring out at me through the photograph, I hoped I hadn’t looked down at her and said, “No, you keep it. I’ll just pick my own. Really. I’m fine.” No way! I hoped I knelt down, looked her in the eyes and say, “For me?! Thank you!”

I want my girls to know that receiving is a gift. When we allow ourselves to receive, we open ourselves to others. We allow ourselves to confess our own limitations. We see other people’s giftings. And we build the foundation for real relationship. As Brene Brown wrote in The Gifts of Imperfection:

Many of us are willing to extend a helping hand, but we’re very reluctant to reach out for help when we need it ourselves. It’s as if we’ve divided the world into ‘those who help’ and ‘those who need help.’ The truth is that we are both.... Until we can receive with an open heart, we are never really
giving with an open heart. When we attach judgment to receiving help, we knowingly or unknowingly attach judgment to giving help.

In other words, to give freely we must receive freely.

Last spring, I texted my new mommy friend Laura in a panic before the school picnic. “I forgot the watermelon!” I frantically wrote. It turned out she had, too. Since I had a nanny to send to the store, I asked if we could get it for her and bring it to school for both us. There was a long pause before she texted back. “Yes,” she said, “that would be amazing.” That’s when I knew we were actually friends. She let me help her and I attached no judgment to the fact that she let me. That’s the power of receiving.

In order to get off mommy island, we don’t always have to do more for others. And we don’t have to “make time” or “spend energy.” We can simply share the lives we are living with the people around us. We can allow ourselves to give and receive with joy.

Now that’s work that matters.
Tool # 21 — Receive One Kindness

This week, allow yourself to accept one kindness from another person: the better seat at lunch, the restaurant you like to go to, the movie you want to see. Let your partner unload the dishwasher or run the kids bath. Whatever it is, receive it.

Don’t just say, “Thank goodness” or “It’s about time” or “I deserved that break” (all of which are probably true). Instead, try looking into they eyes of whoever is bestowing that kindness upon you and allow yourself to receive it joyfully, as if it was a precious flower from a small child.

Reflect on how this exercise changes your view of asking for help. What other areas could you open yourself to receiving help from others?
Tool # 22 — Take a Risk. Make A Friend.

Jessica Roake wrote about her reluctance to create “mommy friends” in a terrific article she published in Slate called “An Ode to the ‘Mom’s Night Out.’” In it, Jessica wrote, “Before I had kids, the idea of a “Mom’s Night Out” would have evoked in me the kind of whole body/soul revulsion usually associated with disgusted teenagers.” But, she explains, “my mother gave me some wonderful advice after an incident in which I skulked by the post office solely in hopes that a fellow adult female might talk to me. ‘Today,’ she said, ‘you’re going to get yourself dressed, go out, and make yourself a friend with a baby.’” Today, I’m passing on that advice to you.

Identify one person with whom you’d like to build (or strengthen) a relationship.

What could you invite them to do with you that would be fun?
What would keep you from asking?

Remember, the worst that could happen is they say no. The best that could happen is you have a new friend and maybe even a regular girls night out. Think about it. What would you tell your child who wanted to make new friends at school?

Take the risk. Make a friend. Chances are they need one, too.
Once you’ve undertaken the journey to reconnecting with yourself and figuring out how you want to truly matter in the world, there’s really no turning back. Deeper knowing simply cannot be unknown. But the journey itself is long and the road is always difficult. The difference is that when you encounter an obstacle, you know your destination is worth struggling to overcome it.

As one mom told me, “[T]he journey... is a road full of potholes. Sure, you fall into them from time to time. But each time you fall down, there is a way to fetch your ladder to climb out.”

Here are the two of the most common potholes I see when helping moms reconnect with themselves and their passions in meaningful ways, as well as a few of my favorite ladders.
OBSTACLE # 1 “MOMMY GUILT”

Dr. Harriet Lerner writes in her book, *The Mother Dance*, “One thing you will learn on the job [of motherhood] is guilt. You may feel guilty about leaving your children for your work and guilty about leaving your work for your children. You will no doubt feel guilty about feeling guilty…”

Or as one mom put it, “The guilt just never goes away. Logically I know, I can take time for myself, but I can’t get rid of the guilt. I would like to work out again, take care of my health more, spend more time with my girlfriends and talk about things unrelated to my children, maybe even take a trip on my own, but I would never do that. The guilt of leaving my children, I just could never get over it.” In this context, guilt can be all-consuming and all-limiting, effectively creating what feels like an insurmountable obstacle. This is no accident. As Dr. Lerner notes:

> [O]ur society encourages mothers to cultivate guilt like a little flower garden, because nothing blocks the awareness and expression of legitimate anger as effectively as this all-consuming emotion... If you’re feeling guilty about not being a good-enough mother, you are unlikely to question the prescription of “good mothering” itself or to question who is doing the prescribing... Guilt keeps mothers narrowly focused on the question ‘What’s wrong with me?’ and prevents us from becoming agents of personal and social change.
In other words, when we are so busy guilting ourselves for failing to live up to expectations (both ours and the culture’s), we don’t stop to take a step back and ask, “Why are my expectations what they are?” or “How can I go about changing them?” We do not have the mental space or energy, either individually or systemically, when we have thoughts or hidden beliefs that mostly consume us in guilt.

The more I learned about guilt and its true emotional function in our lives, the more ironic the “mommy-guilt” trap became to me. As it turns out, guilt is actually meant to help us understand when something is out of balance in our lives. When it’s functioning at a healthy level, guilt helps us notice when we are making choices out of line with our values and brings us back into congruence with our true preferences. The message that healthy levels or experiences of guilt have for us is feedback like, “Hmm. I’m not sure that worked for us. I think we should think about trying something different next time.” When viewed this way, guilt actually has the power to help unlock how to integrate our personal and professional lives in a way that works best for us.

For example, when it comes to parenting and time management, guilt can help us readjust our priorities and make better choices for ourselves and our families. When I feel guilty about snapping at the kids on the way to school, I know that I need a break from the drop-off routine and can ask for help. When I feel guilty about missing bedtime too often, I can make a change, like simply adjust and monitor my schedule so that doesn’t happen as regularly.
So why does “mommy guilt” weigh us down like a ton of bricks and stop us dead in our tracks? I’m convinced that it’s because, most often, it’s not mommy guilt at all. It’s mommy shame.

While they are often confused, guilt and shame are actually two very distinct emotions. Unlike guilt, shame doesn’t give us feedback on our decisions; it imputes those decisions to our worth and identity as human beings. Researcher and Ph.D. Brene Brown explains the difference this way:

Guilt = I did something bad. Shame = I am bad.
Guilt = that was a flawed decision. Shame = I am flawed.
Guilt = That is a bad thought. Shame = I am a bad person for having that thought. In it simplest terms shame is about who we are, not what we’ve done. Unlike the paralyzing effects of shame, guilt often prompts us to make amends or changes our behavior. Feeling guilty doesn’t produce the feelings of being trapped, powerless and isolated... Shame often produces overwhelming and painful feelings of confusion, fear, anger, judgment and/or the need to escape or hide from the situation.

When applied to mothering, I think of the difference between guilt and shame like this:

1. **Guilt:** Maybe working late again tonight isn’t a good choice for me right now. It makes me feel disconnected.

   **Shame:** I’m such a terrible mother for even thinking
about working late again. I better not let anyone see what my “real” priorities are.

2. **Guilt:** Oh, I really don’t want to play Chutes and Ladders again but I feel badly about that. I will play one round.

   **Shame:** What kind of mom doesn’t want to play with their own kid? I’m such a bad mom.

3. **Guilt:** I feel bad that my daughter was crying when I left the house this evening. I might want to rethink how we do transitions.

   **Shame:** I am so selfish for leaving the house and hurting my daughter. Whatever I wanted isn’t worth the failure to meet her needs.

Starting to see the difference?

Guilt gives us the opportunity to explore what it is that’s out of balance and correct it. Shame allows our negative self-talk to dictate how we show up in the world. That voice telling us that we should be doing more at home and at our kids’ school and at work and for our friends and, and, and? The one that is incessant, shrill, and overbearing? It’s most likely mommy shame, not a healthy amount of corrective guilt.

I’ve also noticed that in my own life, shame measures me against external standards (some of which may not even be things I actually truly care about at all), while guilt holds me accountable to my internal preferences, values and standards. Nowhere does this become more obvious
that at school drop-off. Here are just a few of the thoughts running through my head as I’m getting the girls unbuckled and to their classrooms. While this isn’t a lot of people’s finest hour, it certainly has the potential to bring guilt, shame, comparison, and a whole host of self criticism to the forefront:

• I’m barely showered. Oh my gosh, is that smell really me? Look at her long, flowing, perfectly coiffed hair. Maybe she won’t see me.

• I’m in yoga pants. So gross. Look at her clothes. She has the best clothes. And those boots. Do her legs ever end?

• I’m late. What, she’s leaving already? How early did she get here? Isn’t she on like four boards and works full-time?

• I brought goldfish. She brought vegetables she grew in her own organic garden.

This is what Dr. Martha Beck calls “compare and despair!” If there is anything healthy, helpful or informative to learn from this dangerous comparison game, I guarantee you will not find it if all you can think about is crawling into the back of your trash-covered SUV and hiding until graduation, or at least today’s dismissal bell.

The only thing more likely than the carpool line to trigger a comparison shame spiral is social media. Don’t even get me started on Pinterest. I love the moms who love to do it.
I love the kids who benefit from it. I even admire the creativity and initiative. I just don’t love the shame fests that come from it. And Facebook? All those perfect pictures of perfect families in perfect outfits on perfect summer days? So. Much. Despair. That’s why I consider it a spiritual practice to put bad pictures on Facebook. But not everyone does (and my “bad” pictures probably aren’t half as bad as I think they are). The point? Don’t compare.

Choose not to measure yourself against other moms or your “friends” on Facebook. And please, please don’t compare yourself to folks in your alumni magazine. That girl who now teaches English to orphans in China, or the one who was lying on the floor drunk all the time who is now a neuro-surgeon? They are none of your business. Their lives are all composed of their own choices — and their own problems and regrets and comparisons, too.

Byron Katie beautifully wrote in her book *Loving What Is*, “There are only three types of business in the world. Your business. God’s business. And everyone else’s business.” As I always tell my clients, your goal is to stay in your business as often as you can. Let them worry about themselves. I promise you, they are already all over that! It’s your job to stay focused on you. That will help you lay off the shame, for yourself and for others.

But of course, you’re going to compare anyway. I do, too, more than I even realize or like to admit. So when you do, just try to take a deep breath, climb up in your umpire chair, and offer yourself some much needed love and compassion.
Be gentle. Be kind. Be present and forgiving. Start again.

Try to remember that nothing is at it seems. Recently, I had a mother tell me that “I always look so put together,” and, “always seem so in control” — she was talking about me, the mother who literally spent the last two years blogging about losing it with her children after she lost her way in the world. It made me laugh! But that’s how she saw me. Just like that’s how I see the knee-high boots mom, and the super-board mom, and the organic-veggie mom. I see some version of perfection that I haven’t, or could never, reach. But the truth is we don’t know the whole story, just like they don’t know the whole story when they look at us. It’s a snapshot, and often what we are allowing each other to see.

There’s nothing wrong with a little guilt, but it should help guide your path, not shut it down. If you’re feeling trapped or overwhelmed by feelings you’re used to calling “mommy guilt,” take some time to consider whether it’s actually guilt at all. And then consider reaching out to a licensed, qualified therapist or counselor for additional support. I did. There’s no shame in that. Pun totally intended, again.
OBSTACLES # 2 —
THE “SELFISH” VS. “SELFLESS” MYTH

This spring, there was a very serious moment in which I thought I might want to get a Ph.D. in Religion and Psychology, but all the best programs that I was aware of were outside of the DC area. When I told Husband he looked at me and without blinking an eye said, “We’ll move.” The next day, I had an appointment with my coach. I told her the whole story. “Isn’t that great?” she asked. I started to cry. “Oh,” she said. “Oh. I get it.”

“Yes,” I said, through the tears, “Yes. He would move for me. But I wouldn’t. I would never uproot my children, my husband and my life for me.” What we discovered when we dug a little deeper, was that without even realizing it, I had bought into the lie that asking my family to sacrifice something in order to fulfill something I truly wanted was “selfish.”

It turns out, I’m not alone. And it doesn’t have to be something as dramatic as uprooting an entire family. Over and over again, whether it’s about getting a babysitter to go on a date night, or asking their partner to come home early and do bedtime so they can go to an exercise class, or just shifting expectations around the house, moms tell me, “Oh, I could never do that. I just couldn’t!”

Underneath the shared assertion that we can’t do something for ourselves is a mistaken, often unrecognized belief, that “good” moms do everything for everyone but them-
selves. We give and give and give and give. We tell ourselves it is better to give than receive, and we go without. But the idea that “good” moms give with a smile and never expect anything for themselves is a myth. Or more accurately, it is a painful, destructive lie. And it’s precisely why I wrote this book.
Real love doesn’t require you to give up everything. Real love says, *I see you for who you are and love you anyway.* Bryan Adams was crazy when he wrote, “Everything I do, I do it for you.” Who wants that type of pressure?! Can you imagine growing up in a house under the weight of that?

Yes, loving others requires some compromise, but in a mutually respectful way that is actually loving. That is where selflessness and love intersect — in a healthy vein of self-sacrifice. Not out of a sense of duty or obligation. Putting everyone first day after day only breeds anger and resentment. Trust me. Been there.

Indeed, loving others also requires loving yourself. It is where love and selfishness intersect — in a healthy sphere of holistic self-care. As one mom explained it, “The right balance for me is a three-legged stool — a leg for my husband, a leg for my kids, and a leg for me.”

What loving others doesn’t require is a dangerous blend of selfishness and selflessness: doing and doing (and doing) for others without any regard for your own needs and desires. That’s what I call MartyrMom. Its motives are suspect. And it leads to only one place — death. Death of self. Death of joy. Taken to an extreme, it leads to death of the very love it was intended to convey. As Elizabeth Gilbert wrote recently on Facebook:

*Has anyone else out there struggled with the tricky question of confusing “love” with “putting everyone else’s life ahead of yours”? Does anyone else out there*
think this is a particularly pervasive problem for women? Do you see your own mothers and grandmothers, maybe, reflected in this sentiment? Or perhaps your sisters, or your dearest friends? Have you watched women whom you adore and admire allow their lives to be drained away to the very depths — constantly giving themselves to others — until there is nothing left to give? Men do it, too — but I think women do it more... am I right? Have you witnessed the depression, the vacancy, the emptiness, the sickness, and the despair that can result? Or have you done that to yourself — drained yourself, over-given of yourself, until you can’t even find yourself in the story of your own life at all anymore? Have you let it get to the point that you resent every single one of the people you have put before you? And are you still mistakenly calling that “love”?

We may think doing everything for everyone but ourselves is love. But what we don’t realize is that when we chose to put everyone else’s needs above our own, our sacrifices aren’t actually for them. They are actually for us.

We want to be the best moms we can in the only ways we know how. We want our days to count for something. So we try and do everything for everyone else all the time. Yes to make them happy, but also to feel seen, heard and appreciated. When you think about it this way, you can begin to see how doing everything for everyone but ourselves isn’t only selfless. It’s selfish, too. It’s getting our needs met at someone’s even-
tual expense. Maybe our own, but probably also those we are caring for. And excessive doing deprives others of opportunities to step up, learn things, and take charge of their own lives. As one mom recalled about her own season of living in MartyrMom, “Everything was my fault and my responsibility. I was, functionally, a responsibility addict. And I was gaining my worthiness from being so responsible! In the process, I was actually disrespecting my children’s ability to take responsibility for themselves and empowering themselves.”

Real love is an integration of our own needs and the needs of others. Real love allows for giving and receiving, by all involved. In my diagram above, it’s all circles folding into one. Love is love.

MartyrMom is not love. It’s putting ourselves last when we should be equals. And it sucks. For us, and our families. When we choose MartyrMom, everyone loses. But when we choose love, for ourselves and our families, everyone wins. We set new expectations for ourselves, our partners and our children. We expand what is possible for all of us.

One mom explained it to me like this:

*I went from being a martyr to being a mother. Now I ask what is my intention as a mom? How do I want to be? Who do I want to be? [...] That looked like reconnecting with things that lit me up. Giving myself permission to pursue those as teeny tiny as they were (listening to music I like to listen to even if that meant putting my headphones on, playing tennis, coloring).*
In doing this, I’m actually showing and modeling for my child what it means to be an adult. It’s such a powerful thing for moms to realize they are role models.

Do they want their daughters or sons to say that’s what a mom does? She gives up her true self in order to serve everyone around her? And honestly, which is more fun to be around? Doing what lights them up? And bringing that passion and energy back to their kids? Or being a shell of a person? I was a shell of a person. I wasn’t that interesting or fun. I used to be. I knew that. But I had lost all of that. And I had to reclaim it and find it again. Now my son gets to see someone who is doing what they love to do in so many different ways.

Another explained:

What are we teaching our [sons and] daughters if we are not willing to create time in our own lives for the things and people we love other than them? I go out regularly and when I do, I tell them, ‘I am going out with other mommies.’ I want them to see that. I want them to know that’s normal. If they grow up and have children of their own, I want them to have friends and passions and dreams and desires of their own. I don’t want them to lose all that. So I won’t allow myself to lose all of that either.

In my words, loving ourselves well is loving our families well. And love is precisely what will bring us back home to ourselves and support us as we find meaningful work that is right for us and our families.
Tool # 23 — Guilt or Shame?

Try paying attention to the thoughts and feelings you typically think of as mommy guilt. Notice whether or not the thoughts and feelings pertain to what you are doing or who you think you are. If they’re the latter, try reframing the thought so that it characterizes the choice you are making, not who you are for making that choice.

If you experience guilt, consider listening to what it is trying to tell you about what might be out of balance in your life right now. Imagine the guilt is sending you a text. What would it tell you?

Tool # 24 — Loving Yourself, Loving Your Family

Another mom I interviewed shared that someone asked her once how much she loved her kids. “More than I love myself,” she said. The person replied, “That’s not possible. You can only love someone else as much as you love yourself.” If you believe that’s true, then loving yourself well is loving your family well. Name three ways this feels false to you. Then name three ways this feels true. Which one resonates more? Why?
When I started on this journey, my guiding inquiries were, “Can I find right the right balance?” and, of course, “Can I have it all?” But as I started living my life and charting my career based on my actual preferences, on what truly brings me not just happiness but deep joy, I began to realize the questions I had been asking at the start of my journey weren’t truly the questions I wanted answered. In fact, they were part of the reason I had such a hard time finding meaningful work that was right for me and my family in the first place.

As Linda Addison wrote in her Huffington Post Piece, “The Illusory Quest for Balance:”

*Whether women can ‘have it all’ is a sexist question, and women should stop torturing ourselves by asking it. The relevant inquiry for today’s women (and many millennial men) is whether we can have both a rewarding professional life and a rewarding personal life. Of course we can.*

*Starting from a place that assumes otherwise, creates a false binary in which we can have either the family*
or work we want. When we buy into this all or nothing mindset, we trap ourselves within its limitations and narrow our search for meaningful work within its walls. This, in turn, makes it even more unlikely for us to break out and create the life that we truly want, for us and our families.

The millennial generation, coming right at our heels, understands this implicitly. In a recent article in *Forbes* magazine, “What Millennials Want in the Workplace (And Why You Should Be Giving it to Them),” Rob Asgar reported that “88% [of millenials] want ‘work-life integration,’ which isn’t the same as work-life balance, since work and life now blend together inextricably.”

In order to find meaningful work that’s right for us and our families, we have to move past the notion that having a fulfilling career comes at the cost of having a fulfilling family life. As Madeline L’Engle wrote in *Walking on Water*:

> Our firstborn observed me many years ago, when she was a grade-school child. ‘Nobody else’s mother writes books.’ But she also said, around the same time, ‘Mother, you’ve been very cross and edgy with us lately, and we’ve noticed that you haven’t been writing, and we wish you’d get back to the typewriter.’ A wonderfully freeing remark. I had to learn that I was a better mother and wife when I was working than when I was not.

Of course, this might not apply to you. You might be a
better mother and a more complete version of yourself when you are not working. And that’s great! Or, it might totally obvious to you. You might have realized from the get-go that you needed to work to be the mother and person you wanted to be. And if it is, terrific!

But it did apply to me. And it wasn’t obvious, either. Regardless of my education, and of all the feminist studies classes I took while in college, I somehow still bought into this dualistic, all-or-nothing thinking about motherhood. When I was moving up through the law firm ranks, the only advice I got was, “When you’re ready to accept that you’ll be less of a mother if you work and less of a lawyer if you have children, you’ll be ready to have a family.” I believed that. And it was a compromise I wasn’t willing to make. Now I know that it was a false choice all along. The moment I bought into it, I allowed someone or something else to define what it meant for me to be the “best” mother and “best” lawyer and “best” person I could be, instead of owning that responsibility for myself.

That isn’t to say that I regret my choices. I don’t. They have been an integral part of my journey and are the basis for the work that I am now being called to do in the world. They are why and how I have learned to follow my joy and create a life I love. But I hope that my experience and the tools I’ve shared here might spare you some pain and difficultly as you explore what is right for you, and accept or embrace that some of what you once believed was right for you just isn’t any longer. I hope that if you began this book asking
what the “right balance” was for you, and whether you “can I have it all,” you’re now asking yourself “what is it that I truly want?” For some of you, that might mean staying home. Wonderful! For others, that might mean going back to work sooner than you thought. Or school. Great!

I don’t believe the outcome is what is important. I believe the most important thing is questioning the narrative that’s driving you and taking control of your own story so that it aligns with what you truly want. As I tell my clients all the time, I humbly and compassionately do not care what you decide. But I deeply, passionately care that you make an authentic, informed choice that is right for you.

As we look back at the chapters you’ve read so far, you can see just how we’ve laid the foundation for precisely this inquiry. So far in the book, we’ve explored how important it is to have:

- A body that is not exhausted, under-nourished, ignored and under-appreciated;

- A mind that’s not actively distracting us from connecting with our deeper selves and identifying what we truly want;

- Emotions that are received, felt and responded to with open curiosity (particularly when it comes to joy);

- A network of authentic and supportive friends that will support us on our journey; and
• A framework to overcome common obstacles the we’re likely to encounter along our way to finding meaningful work that’s right for us and our families.

And you’ve learned twenty-four different tools to support yourself in the process!

Now it’s time to bring those together to start asking yourself what this means for your job search. Of course, it takes time to practice the things we’ve talked about in this book. Learning to reconnect with you and figure out what it is you truly want doesn’t happen overnight. Chances are, like me, you’ve had a lot of practice doing exactly the opposite. That being said, I’ve gone ahead and put together a ten-step framework to help you on the journey through discerning what it is you truly want, so that you can find meaningful work that is right for you and your family.
TOOLS FOR THE DETERMINED MOM

Tool # 25 — Your Ideal Job Description in Ten Steps

Step # 1 — The Joy Scale
As we discussed in Chapter 6, what brings us joy is a powerful indicator of what type of work will be right for us and our families. To tap into what brings you joy, return to the -10 (abysmal) to +10 (blissful) scale we learned in Tool # 2, Life Assessment. Use the scale to rate as many everyday activities as you can for at least 24 to 72 hours. Record your rankings from the place of the watcher or umpire (see Chapter 4). Listen to what your feel physically and emotionally in your body (see Chapter 5).

Activity:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Activity:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Activity:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Activity:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Activity:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Activity:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Activity:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Activity:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Activity:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

When you’ve completed ranking your activities, take a
moment to congratulate yourself! That took discipline. Then look at all of the ratings you’ve compiled. What to you notice about the type of activities that bring you joy?

What type of activities zap it?
Step # 2 — Ten Minutes to Joy

In order to make choices that align with joy, you have to know what joy feels like. That means you have to actually allow yourself to experience it. What small changes you can make to allow yourself to experience more of joy in the present? What can you do, in ten minutes or less, to allow yourself more joy today?

The more you feel joy, the more you’ll be able to respond to it. And in the meantime, the more you’ll already be experiencing it. It’s a win-win.

Step # 3 — Your List

In the space below, write down all the practical factors that you are looking for in a job (commute, hours, pay, etc.). Use the -10 to +10 scale to rate how important those factors are to you. Again, take the seat of the watcher as you do this exercise.

Job Factor:

Rating:

-10  -9  -8  -7  -6  -5  -4  -3  -2  -1  0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

Job Factor:

Rating:

-10  -9  -8  -7  -6  -5  -4  -3  -2  -1  0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

Job Factor:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Job Factor:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Job Factor:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Job Factor:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Job Factor:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Job Factor:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Job Factor:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Job Factor:
Rating:
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Job Factor:
Notice what your mind is telling you about what is important to you. Notice what you’re body is telling you. Don’t judge. Get curious. And be honest!

If you realize all you want right now is a little bit more flexible income so you can take nice vacations, own it! There is nothing wrong with that. But if you pretend that you really want to save the elephants for next to peanuts, then you’ll find yourself oddly stuck and unable to move forward. Whereas, if you honor your actual motivation, then you’ll make progress towards what you really want (and chances are have something to actually offer the elephants in the end).

What hunches do you have about what you might really want?
Step #4 — Create Your Ideal Job Description Based on External Factors

Write an ideal job description based on the external factors you rated most highly in Step #3. Don’t let what you think you “should” want creep in the way. Keep those judgments at bay and get writing.
Step #5 — Create Your Ideal Job Description Based on Internal Factors

Read the job description you just wrote. Notice the intention or desired feeling behind each factor, which might be more important than the preference itself. For example:

- Short commute > Home every night for bedtime > Present in my children’s life
- Extra pay > More help > Less stress > More familial happiness
- Interesting work > I’m not bored > I’m happier > I won’t regret working and get resentful

Keep drilling down until you get to the heart of what it is you truly want. Then, rewrite the description focusing on these intentions or desired feelings.
Step #6 — Take a Break
I know you want this to work like some sort of magic quiz, but it doesn’t. So go take a walk, read a book to your child, read a book for yourself, have a cup of tea. Just take a rest from this book and this process.

Step #7 — Brainstorm a Dream List
Create a list of possible jobs, interests, or opportunities that match the Job Description Based on Internal Factors you created in Step #5. Don’t focus on the external factors. Stay tuned into the intentions you actually desire, not what you think is actually possible.
Step #8 — Get to Work

Now that you have your dream list, you can start exploring different paths that might be right for you and your family. Start simply. Keep moving. As you go, pay attention to you body and to what feels like joy. Don’t get distracted by short-term gains or solutions. Stay focused on your long-term intentions. Reconnect with your own inner voice that believes you can do it. Keep stamping your own ticket (as many times as it takes).

Step #9 — Be Willing to Fail

G.K. Chesterton once said, “Anything worth doing is worth doing badly.” If you pick something, can’t make it happen instantaneously, and suddenly don’t want to do it anymore, you’ve probably picked something that isn’t right for you. So learn from your choice and try again. On the path to finding meaningful work, you will go through multiple rounds of refining. Then you’ll go through more.

As my beautiful friend Larkin said to me, standing in my kitchen in tree pose, a cup of steaming tea grasped gently in her hands, “It’s all just iterations, Caroline. It’s all just iterations.” Or as one mom put it, “There is no such thing as failure. Failure is just another experience on the way to success.” As we learned in coach training, you have to be “willing to suck at it” in order to gain new skills, experience, or create change.

Be brave enough to make mistakes. Be brave enough to learn from them. Be brave enough to repeat. If something’s worth doing badly, you’re probably on the right path.
Step #10 — Ask for Help

To find meaningful work that’s right for you and your family, open yourself to receiving help. You don’t have to take this journey alone! I’d love to help. Go to www.callwithcaroline.com to schedule a free strategy session today. It’s my way of saying thank you for purchasing this book and on embarking on the incredible journey of finding meaningful work that is right for you and your family.
In this book, you’ve learned how to meet yourself where you are, be honest about where you thought you’d be, and grieve the gap in between.

You’ve owned your story and started on the journey towards meeting yourself again, or maybe for the first time.

You’ve learned what it means to holistically support yourself, not just by eating, sleeping, moving and touching your body, but by beginning to observe your thoughts and feel your emotions as you move through them.

You’ve explored the importance of reconnecting with sources of joy in your life, and using those sources as guides in your search.

You’ve revisited the importance of meaningful friendships generally, and the type of friendships you need specifically to meet your own needs.

You’ve examined some of the common obstacles to putting what you’ve learned into practice. As well as the unique ones you may have created.

And you’ve learned how to reexamine your assumptions and apply these tools to write your own, ideal job description.
The question remains, *will you make the choice that truly matters?*

Ultimately, the only person who can make that decision is you. Anna Quindlen writes:

> Trying to be perfect may be inevitable for people who are smart and ambitious and interested in the world and its good opinion. What is really hard, and really amazing, is giving up on being perfect and beginning the work of becoming yourself.

And not just becoming, but *believing* that such a transformation is both possible and *worth doing*. There is no harder or more meaningful work. But it is not easy, either. As e.e. cummings writes:

> To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing it’s best, night and day, to make you everybody but yourself means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can ever fight — and never stop fighting.

This long journey home to ourselves, this battle to stop being who we think we *should* be and start showing up in the world as who we truly *are*, that is the work that truly matters.

It is that work — the working of becoming more and more fully ourselves — that will enable us to stamp our own tickets, both in our personal and professional lives. The more we show up everyday as our true selves come alive, we diminish our need for the world to affirm the façade we
have created to make ourselves feel safe. We no longer need to hide. We no longer grasp. We no longer kill ourselves only to feel like a failure anyway. We will simply show up as us. *That is our real and most meaningful work.*

When we learn to love ourselves well, we open ourselves to the magic of true possibility. We set ourselves free to live, love *and choose* with joy.

Once you are grounded in who you truly are, and what you truly want, you will always make the right choice. Because each choice, regardless of the outcome, will lead you deeper in knowledge of yourself and your desires.

That’s when we truly matter, regardless of the career choices we make.
I’m a busy mom who writes for busy moms. That’s why this book is as short and practical as possible. But I’m also highly aware of what was sacrificed in its creation, particularly with regards to the systemic and cultural forces that shape the types of “choices” mothers face today. For additional reading on this topic, consider:

_Feminism is for Everyone_

BY BELL HOOKS

_The Mother Dance_

BY HARRIET LERNER, PH.D.

OVERWHELMED: How to Work, Love and Play When No One Has the Time

BY BRIGID SCHULTE

I’d love to hear what you’ve read that’s informed your thinking on the topic. I know there are many, many more that I have missed or simply haven’t read.
For general reading on other topics that I’ve touched upon, I highly recommend the following books, some of which I referenced in the text and all of which have had a profound impact on my life:

*Finding Your North Star, Steering By Starlight, and Finding Your Way In A Wild New World*
*BY MARTHA BECK, PH.D.*

*The Daring Way, The Gifts of Imperfection, and I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn’t)*
*BY BRENE BROWN, PH.D.*

*The Artist’s Way*
*BY JULIA CAMERON*

*Loving What Is: Four Questions That Can Change Your Life*
*BY BYRON KATIE*

*Open Mind, Open Heart*
*BY FATHER THOMAS KEATING*

*The Dance of Anger*
*BY HARRIET LERNER, PH.D.*

*Walking on Water*
*BY MADELINE L’ENGLE*
Carry On Warrior
BY GLENNON MELTON

Self-Compassion
BY KRISTIN NEFF, PH.D.

New Selected Poems
BY MARY OLIVER

The Happiness Project
BY GRETCHEN RUBIN

The Power of Now
BY ECKHART TOLLE

Untethered Soul
BY MICHAEL SINGER

168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think
BY LAURA VANDERKAM
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Caroline Greene is an author, recovering lawyer and chronic overachiever who believes you don’t have to stop being you to be an awesome mom. As a life coach, Caroline helps highly-motivated women that are driven to build lives that truly matter, to them and their families.

Prior to becoming a life coach, Caroline was a prosecutor and white-collar criminal defense attorney. A graduate of Phillips Exeter Academy, Yale College and the University of Virginia School of Law, Caroline lives in Washington D.C. with her two smart and strong daughters, an annoying cat, an adorable, mostly-deaf dog and her saint of a husband. When she’s not working, writing or with her family, she can usually be found walking in the woods, playing tennis or on a paddleboard somewhere.
ABOUT THE DETERMINED MOM’S GUIDES

As I went through my transition from lawyer to stay-at-home mother to life coach, I quickly became frustrated about the lack of practical information and advice on issues I faced every day. I didn’t want to read hundreds of pages that laid out every single detail of every single argument. And I didn’t want to spend hours on the internet sifting through hundreds of people’s perspectives or experiences. I just wanted a concise, useful primer that was easy-to-read, relevant to my life, and preferably entertaining. Thus, the Determined Mom’s Guides were born.

Each Determined Mom’s Guide uses real experiences from real moms to provide practical advice about real issues. They are not meant to be exhaustive or all-inclusive. Nor are they meant to address the societal or systemic problems that created the issues in the first place. It’s simply my hope that they provide some much-needed relief from, and perhaps a fresh perspective on, the very real pressures real moms face every day, ideally in 100 pages or less, so you can get back to living and loving well.

Let me know what you think at caroline@carolinegreenecoaching.com.
Do you find yourself wondering if your path towards finding meaningful work includes building your own business?

Go to www.determinedmomsguide.com to get your copy of NEXT today and start growing a successful business that’s right for you and your family!
ABOUT DIFFERENCE PRESS

Difference Press offers solopreneurs, including life coaches, healers, consultants, and community leaders, a comprehensive solution to get their books written, published, and promoted. A boutique-style alternative to self-publishing, Difference Press boasts a fair and easy-to-understand profit structure, low-priced author copies, and author-friendly contract terms. Its founder, Dr. Angela Lauria, has been bringing to life the literary ventures of hundreds of authors-in-transformation since 1994.

YOUR DELICIOUS BOOK

Your Delicious Book is a trailblazing program for aspiring authors who want to create a non-fiction book that becomes a platform for growing their business or communicating their message to the world in a way that creates a difference in the lives of others.

In a market where hundreds of thousands books are published every year and never heard from again, all of The Author Incubator participants have bestsellers that are actively changing lives and making a difference. The program, supported by quarterly Difference Press book-marketing summits, has a proven track record of helping aspiring authors write books that matter. Our team will hold your
hand from idea to impact, showing you how to write a book, what elements must be present in your book for it to deliver the results you need, and how to meet the needs of your readers. We give you all the editing, design, and technical support you need to ensure a high-quality book published to the Kindle platform. Plus, authors in the program are connected to a powerful community of authors-in-transformation and published bestselling authors.

TACKLING THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF PUBLISHING
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by Dana L. Ayers

**Matter: How to Find Meaningful Work That’s Right for You and Your Family**
by Caroline Greene

**Reclaiming Wholeness: Letting Your Light Shine Even If You’re Scared to Be Seen**
by Kimberlie Chenoweth

**The Well-Crafted Mom: How to Make Time for Yourself and Your Creativity within the Midst of Motherhood**
by Kathleen Harper

**Lifestyle Design for a Champagne Life: Find Out Why the Law of Attraction Isn’t Working, Learn the Secret to Lifestyle Design, and Create Your Champagne Life**
by Cassie Parks

**No More Drama: How to Make Peace with Your Defiant Kid**
by Lisa Cavallaro

**The Nurse Practitioner’s Bag: Become a Healer, Make a Difference, and Create the Career of Your Dreams**
by Nancy Brook

**Farm Girl Leaves Home: An American Narrative of Inspiration and Transformation**
by Margaret Fletcher
Whoops! I Forgot to Achieve My Potential
by Maggie Huffman

Only 10s: Using Distraction to Get the Right Things Done
by Mark Silverman

The Inside Guide to MS: How to Survive a New Diagnosis When Your Whole Life Changes (And You Just Want to Go Home)
by Andrea Hanson

Lee & Me: What I Learned from Parenting a Child with Adverse Childhood Experiences
by Wendy Gauntner

The Peaceful Daughter's Guide to Separating from a Difficult Mother: Freeing Yourself From the Guilt, Anger, Resentment and Bitterness
by Karen C. L. Anderson

Soulful Truth Telling: Disbelieving the Lies That Keep Us From the Love We Desire
by Sharon Pope

Personal Finance That Doesn't Suck: A 5-step Guide to Quit Budgeting, Start Wealth Building and Get the Most from Your Money
by Mindy Crary

The Cancer Whisperer: How to Let Cancer Heal Your Life
by Sophie Sabbage