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By Shannon Kaiser



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Editorial Review

Review

"Shannon's perspective is sunny and bright and will light your day with heart and bliss!" ---Kristine Carlson, author of *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*

About the Author

Shannon Kaiser, named by MindBodyGreen as one of the top 100 Women to Watch in Wellness, is an inspirational author, speaker, travel writer, and life coach. She is the bestselling author of *Find Your Happy*, and a six-time contributing author to *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. She lives in Portland, Oregon.

Emily Durante has been narrating audiobooks for over ten years and is also an AudioFile Earphones Award-winning audiobook director. She has been acting since the age of seven and has performed in a number of stage productions at the professional, collegiate, and regional levels.

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Foreword

Have you ever felt like you were just simply going to combust from the internal pressure that's been building inside you for a long time as you fill with anxiety and fear of not being able to have what you most deeply desire? Maybe you don't even know what you desire. Maybe you are so caught up in your head you can't even hear your heart. Well, no worries, there's more than hope for you here. *Adventures for Your Soul* is the book that will be your road map for change.

Scrolling through the Table of Contents of *Adventures for Your Soul*, I found myself smiling because Shannon Kaiser nailed it! You are about to embark on the adventure of your life! Shannon is one of the happiest people I know, and she will be guiding you on this journey, showing you a lighted path that will change your life.

One important thing to consider is this: We are thinking creatures, and our thinking is as automated as the breaths we take. We do it thousands of times all day long—and it's just about as invisible to us as our breathing unless we wake up and become conscious and aware of our thinking. Shannon gives you the tools you need to become aware of mental tapes that play over and over in your head and offers a solution by providing a mental makeover to help you change your habits and put you firmly on the road to happiness.

Be aware that happiness is not a pursuit, although it's tempting to think so. It appears that all of our gratification in life comes from our accolades, the way we look, and all the stuff we acquire. But no, happiness is none of these things in and of themselves. Happiness is *the journey*. And Shannon provides a "joy route" that changes the mental dynamics holding you back—not from achieving all these things but actually from receiving the JOY when you do achieve. With minds-run-wild, we are subject to being slave to habitual ways of thinking that become unconscious—meaning you might as well be sleepwalking through your life. The only way to be free of the shackles of limitation in this dreamlike state is to liberate repetitive thought patterns that undeniably self-sabotage and suffocate dreams. Muddled by too much thinking, we can easily lose a sense of the natural communication that happens between our hearts and our heads when our

minds are clear. *Adventures for Your Soul* enables us to reopen that pathway and find true happiness.

I once knew a college student named Amy who was very negative and played the victim at every turn. From the outside looking in, Amy had everything. She was smart, attractive, and likable. She had a good family, and she was responsible and caring. What she lacked is the awareness that 100 percent of her anxiety and unhappiness came from inside her mind as she constantly looked for what was wrong with her life instead of focusing on the good stuff happening. Setting too high of expectations for herself and others, she lived with the resentment that follows when all things fall short of those expectations. She sometimes acted out due to the depression that followed, often pushing away the people who cared for her most. She didn't know that all of this was coming from her lack of awareness of some simple principles to happiness—the primary one being that thought precedes feelings and the emotional reactions we have to what's going on in our lives.

THERE ARE THREE THINGS YOU WILL LEARN FROM ADVENTURES FOR YOUR SOUL:

1. You don't have to be stuck in your fears and anxiety any longer.
2. You can recognize and reverse the habits that hinder your ability to hear the language of your heart.
3. The route you can take into your own mind to get back on the journey of joy can be a fun adventure!

Change happens from the inside out, and while many people say it, what Shannon is really pointing to is this: If you want your golden ticket onto the happiness train, you had better first understand the train of thought that you engage with may actually be taking you in the opposite direction of where you really want to go. And, well, that's like being on a train without a conductor.

What I love so much about this book is the way Shannon shows that self-awareness is the key to success in all areas of your life, whether it be your personal relationships, your career, or your optimal physical health. Shannon's inquiry of body health and its relationship to our happiness is critical to shape-shifting into the person you were born to be versus the unconscious being that is driven by invisible habits without an internal compass directing the way. *Adventures for Your Soul* will help you develop your internal compass. It points to the value of aligning mind, body, and heart to be the receiver of happiness that comes through having a joy-filled mind-set that expands our heart's deepest desire, which is to live the best life we can with maximum fulfillment.

This is precisely why *Adventures for Your Soul* is such a profound book and a must-read for anyone who prioritizes happiness as the reason why we do all things in life for others and ourselves. This is the playbook for making small changes and shifts that will yield you large results. The principles in this book will help light the path and teach you the tools for a mental makeover that will turn your scary roller-coaster ride into an adventure and joyride as you find your way back to your natural state of being—happy.

Treasure the gifts of life and love,
KRISTINE CARLSON
coauthor of the Don't Sweat the Small Stuff wisdom book series

Introduction

Today, I consider myself an extremely happy person, but it hasn't always been that way. The truth is that I've made HUGE strides to be where I am today. I had to dig deep inside myself to access authentic joy, the kind that cannot be manufactured by false promises and one-night-stand mantras spit out by pop

psychologists. I used to cry myself to sleep every night. I walked around the cold Chicago city feeling lifeless, numb, and bored with life. At night the tears would always creep aggressively back in and rock me to sleep. I would obsess over my day, and feel tremendous guilt and anxiety tied to my eating disorders, drug addictions, poor choices in men, and staying in a job I hated. These bad feelings would just push me back to my bad behaviors. I would do whatever I could to avoid the sinking feeling that I hated my life and myself, so I tried to numb myself with food, drugs, codependent relationships, etc. It was a vicious cycle.

Realizing something was wrong, I went to my doctor. She diagnosed me with clinical depression and wrote me a prescription. As I opened the door to the pharmacy, an invisible wall literally pushed me back. It was as if a force field had sprung up in front of me, preventing me from getting the prescription filled. As I looked at the scribbled piece of paper, I had an awakening. Although I knew depression is a real, serious mood disorder that requires treatment, and that for many, antidepressant drugs are necessary, my inner voice said, "This is not you; you don't need drugs to feel better. Just follow your heart." I'm not quite sure where that conviction came from. Although I believe that we all have that inner knowing of who we are and what we need, that voice had been muffled so long, drowned out with the thoughts of self-hatred that tormented me. That moment was the turning point of my life. As I ripped up the prescription, I made a promise to myself to always follow my heart and to stop making excuses for being unhappy. I realized, in that moment, that I couldn't control the world around me but I could learn how to control my own role in my life. I could continue to allow the world to happen to me, or I could happen to the world, meaning I could make a difference by becoming healthy and happy. If I could turn my pain into purpose, then perhaps this depression and these dark days could be worth it. I had a choice: I could continue to go down a path that hurt my soul, or I could clean up my life, my thoughts, and my situations. I set out on a mission to heal myself. My thought was that if one less person in the world was hurting, then that is making a difference and helping the world. So I chose to take responsibility for me. No one else, just me. And the most glorious thing happened; I became happy. I found myself. I fell in love with life.

I will be honest: It wasn't a miraculous healing or anything that happened overnight, but rather a consistent focus on showing up and taking responsibility for myself and my own life.

Over time things really fell into place. I used the tools I share in this book to help me reach a peaceful state. Finding hope and inner peace and reaching happiness is a process. But when we show up for the process, we are doing our part and that is enough. Just showing up is the largest part of the battle. And I continued to show up for myself by taking small steps to happiness. I adopted a dog (who is still my adventure buddy), who brought me immense joy through fleeting moments of pain. I moved back to the city I grew up in, Portland, Oregon, to be closer to my family; I left my job in advertising to find work that was more fulfilling, which led me to everything I do today. It was lots of small steps that led to the large transformation in my life.

Until that point of my life, fear had been controlling my every action. Fears like "I am not worthy of love," "I don't matter," "I don't make a difference," kept me playing safe. These fears were subconscious but ruling my choices in life. For example, by believing I was not worthy of love, I picked emotionally troubled men, who were controlling or drug addicts. They too supported my belief that I didn't matter. But once I saw how fear was running the show, I saw how my life had played out. I was miserable. I thought to myself, "Instead of ignoring or running from my fears, what if I dove into them?" The depression, drugs, and eating disorders were all masks keeping me from accessing my true self. Once I acknowledged my fears directly, I could see they were not real and I was able to change things. I immediately broke off my bad romance. I took the steps necessary to free me from addictions and my eating disorders. I joined support groups and twelve-step meetings and found teachers, books, and spiritual guidance to help heal these areas of my life. The right teachers and books came to me, and I was able to free myself from the troubling past. Again, it wasn't an overnight fix. I say this because a lot of the time when we get onto a self-development path, we expect

instant results. And when we don't see changes, we get angry, feel guilty, or get mad at ourselves. In my own journey, I chose to take the expectations out of my healing and instead turned to trusting that each action I took would indeed help me feel happier and healthier. By being in the journey of my own life I was able to go deeper into the healing and allow the process to unfold. This meant I released all self-inflicted guilt or stress, which in turn allowed me to heal faster and make smarter choices for myself.

I left my fancy corporate job in advertising to move back to the West Coast to be closer to my family. Even though I had quit my job and my romance and separated myself from the distractions of addiction and eating disorders, the journey to wellness had only just begun.

I started to trust the guidance within myself. When I first left corporate, I didn't know what I wanted to do, I just knew what I was doing was not working. I began to focus on what I wanted instead of what I didn't want. Even though I didn't know what I wanted in the grand scheme of my life, I knew that I wanted to be happy in the moment. So I focused on things, activities, and people that made me happy. I opened myself to life's opportunities and I started to sense a shift in my perspective. I began to see all things in a new light. There was richness to my life that I was previously blocked from experiencing because of my fear and depression. Small, simple things, like watching the leaves on trees blow in the wind, listening to birds sing, or turning my face to the sun to see the magnificent clouds all became incredibly joyful. I was alive. I began to celebrate the simple pleasures in life and be thankful for my own existence. I started to hear my heart again.

Each adventure I took became a spiritual awakening and a metaphor of my own existence. For example, as I pulled out my magic list (bucket list) I started to check off things like skydiving, and that became a metaphor for working through fear to reach freedom. As I started to live my life more consciously, I began to write. When I wrote about my experiences, something happened to me. I was overwhelmed with love, joy, and true peace. Writing became my sanctuary. I started to document my healing journey in articles for the local newspaper and on my blog. I wrote about overcoming fear in relation to my adventures playing with the world, like bungee jumping or skydiving. As I shared stories, readers reached out to me to say how much they enjoyed my stories. My heart felt incredibly fulfilled with each new message and story I wrote. I sent one story to *Chicken Soup for the Soul* on a whim. Not thinking much about my submission several months later, I received an acceptance letter, which read, "Congratulations. You've been selected as a feature author for our upcoming book, *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Think Positive*." I fell to the floor with excitement, and for the first time in several years, tears of happiness came flooding through. I discovered I am a writer. My greatest joy is sharing my experiences with others. Being a writer was a dream tucked in my heart since I was a little girl. I used to go outside on recess and while other kids were running around and swinging on the swing set, I was sitting in the grass with my journal, writing poetry about animals and the beautiful earth. After the fear and all the layers of pain subsided, I could return to my true self, the younger me that was always there, but just needed to be re-realized.

I began to understand that there were dreams and goals that sat quietly inside my heart, but I had been too distracted to hear them or too afraid to acknowledge and pursue them. When I was depressed, these secret dreams lay dormant and happiness evaded me. As I began to awaken to my heart's true desires and dared to pursue them, a miraculous thing happened: I felt happier and my life felt fuller. But it wasn't the achievement of these goals and dreams that led to these feelings; it was simply the journey of joy toward them. What was keeping me from pursuing my dreams, what was keeping me from moving forward in my life, what was keeping me from happiness, were my own negative thoughts. It was only when I dared to push past these thoughts and banish these beliefs that I was able to move forward on the road to fulfillment.

At our core, all of us want the same thing—to be happy and to live a truly wonderful life—though how we meet this need differs from person to person. I started to see that we could all be happier if we knew what

was keeping us from happiness. Limiting beliefs and fear can stop us from moving forward in life. In many cases, we have daily habits that have become patterns which hinder our happiness. Once we know our patterns, we can break up with them if we are willing. We can understand and overcome our addiction to the suffering our self-sabotaging habits have created. These were my aha moments, and they came to me through following my joy route. The joy route is an adventure for your soul and the path to freedom, an emotional journey that we take to explore our heart's deepest desires.

Through the process of discovering my true self, I started to live my dream life. I stepped away from my life in advertising and became a travel writer, life coach, teacher, speaker, and an author. Once I tapped into the secret of the joy route, settling became impossible. My standards were raised and my dreams were being actualized.

I was on a travel writing assignment and lecturing to a group in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, when it hit me that my next opportunity was to write about and share the process I went through to heal myself from such a dark place. Thus *Adventures for Your Soul* was born. This method is the guide I used to teach others and what I had used myself to leave a life of sadness, regret, depression, and fear behind, that had allowed me to live my dreams and travel the world sharing my message. I had already started using my life as an example to my coaching clients and workshop participants to help them heal from self-sabotaging patterns and addictions, but now I was guided to put this method into a book.

There was one small problem though . . . I was still teaching from my head. At its core, *Adventures for Your Soul* is all about the heart. And although I had already made it through extremely turbulent times, and had confidently made it through my quarter-life crisis with only a few scrapes and bruises, my real adventure had only just begun.

I was happy: I was doing work that I loved for a living and I felt fulfilled financially. My book *Find Your Happy* was doing pretty well for a first-time author. My life finally seemed to make sense and I was fully embracing my new roles of self-help author, life coach, and inspirational speaker. But although I felt joyful at times, my joy was fleeting. I recognized that I wasn't as happy as I could be.

Even though I had made great strides to improve my own life, I still felt as if something was missing. There was still a superficial layer over many of my actions. Sometimes I felt like I was just going through the motions, living but not fully alive. Upon deeper inspection, I realized there was still a lot of work to do. I was fifty pounds overweight, I was single, and I didn't feel connected to the city I lived in. I was craving a deeper connection to my own life, to my work, and to my relationships. I wasn't where I wanted to be in my life. I wanted to live somewhere where I felt part of a community. I wanted to share my life with someone special. Most of all, I wanted to feel good about myself—and I didn't. Although I knew what it meant to be happy, was I truly happy when I was self-conscious about my weight? How happy could I truly be if I stopped feeling great about myself when I looked into a mirror?

I decided to focus first on my weight since I thought that would be the easiest change to make. (Little did I realize how challenging this change would be. Nor did I realize that all my desires were linked and it didn't make sense to focus on one to the exclusion of the others.) Over a two-year period, I followed gurus, jumped on every diet trend, became a dedicated yogi, experimented with green drinks, said daily affirmations, inhaled self-help books, and went on expensive meditation retreats. Despite my efforts to achieve a more healthy body, my pants were still cutting into my stomach. Trying to reach a happy and healthy state of mind proved to be exhausting. I realized that if I continued to look outside of myself for the answers, I would probably never find them. This pivotal realization turned my searching inward.

As I looked closely at my life, I recognized idiosyncrasies and contrasts. I wanted to be healthy and love

myself for who I was, but I was extremely embarrassed at all the weight I had gained. I wanted to find true love, but I was secretly afraid that no one could love me through my layers. These contradictions showed me that no amount of diets, yoga classes, and chanting with gurus would change my outcome and make me happy, healthy, and in love with my own life. I came to understand that the real change had to happen on the inside first.

Sure, we can try to make over our bodies, take part in every fad diet, wear the newest and most fashionable clothes, but without internal change, none of these makeovers will stick . . . and that is why none of my efforts were working. The real change had to be a radical new concept, and thus *Adventures for Your Soul* was truly born. I stopped focusing so much on how my life looked, and I dedicated myself to focusing on how my life felt.

The weight on my body was a manifestation of an imbalance in my thoughts. Again the fears of not being worthy, not feeling worthy of love, kept me feeling unhealthy or unapproachable. *If I wanted lasting change, I had to change the way I was looking at things and myself.* Instead of trying to change my outward environment to reach a healthy version of myself, I needed to start feeling healthy in spite of my current body shape. My change had to happen on the inside.

It wasn't my lack of willpower or lack of ability to focus on my goals that was keeping me overweight; my own limiting beliefs and emotional habits were holding me back. It became obvious that in order for me to get healthy, the emotional habits had to go. I had to look at my fears and limiting beliefs and see what they could really tell me.

The deeper I got into my internal study, the more I realized that my fears were still running the show. For example, feeling unworthy kept me in a process of overachieving (which I talk about in chapter 12, Fear Detox). I would work really hard to try to overcompensate for my insecurity of not feeling good enough.

At the same time, I discovered that I wasn't alone. I was coaching people and clients who expressed similar concerns. They wanted to be happy and healthy, but "stuff" kept blocking them from taking action. I started doing mental "push-ups," and I began practicing the steps I share in this book. As I saw positive changes in my life, I started to share my process with my clients. The results were astounding. After coaching sessions, my clients felt transformed, healed, and connected to their dreams. I too experienced transformation; I started making healthy choices and I felt more self-confident and self-aware.

Once I boldly explored my fears and used my own joy routes to remove them, I was able to accept my current conditions and more fully love myself and my life. Interestingly enough, the more I loved myself, and the more I followed my heart, the more successful and healthy I became. Once I let go of my emotional habits, my coaching practice skyrocketed, my book was selling hundreds of copies in countries all over the world, and I was invited to be featured on international radio and television shows. Best of all though, I received hundreds of personal emails from people all around the world who were empowered by my story—people who were leaving addictions, bad jobs, and relationships behind to find and live their own life adventure.

After putting myself through my own mental makeover, I realized that the size of my body and the foods that I choose to eat are part of my own creative adventure. Loving my body, no matter what size my jeans are, has been the greatest gift this work has given me.

This is not a diet book, nor is this a self-love book; it isn't even a how-to-get-happy book. (For that, check out my first book, *Find Your Happy!*) This is a book that can help you remove every obstacle in your life that is keeping you from everything you want. The tools I share in this book will help you step into what you need most for your own soul's growth. When I started this process, I thought my journey was going to be

about losing weight; what I realized was that I really needed to feel good in my own skin no matter what. The gift these soul adventures gave me was a deep awakening to my own unique worth. Loving ourselves fully and living openly from our heart at every moment are the real opportunities of this journey.

Most of us have good intentions invested in making our desires a reality. We have goals we want to manifest, and we want unlimited happiness and health. The problem is that what we say and what we do about it often clash. Learning to look deeper at our intentions and our actions is what this book is about. It is a guide to help you remove the barriers that are keeping you from unlimited bliss.

Emotional habits can hurt us; they hide out and become pals with our fears, often sabotaging our best efforts to be happy. I wasn't reaching my health goals or getting what I truly wanted, because I had unknowingly brought my emotional habits along for the ride and let them limit me. I have learned that for each habit stopping us from reaching our full potential, there is a major emotional limiting belief at the root of it. For example, I recently completed thirty days in a row of hot yoga with my only goal being to lose weight. By not embracing all the other wonderful benefits I received by sticking to the goal, I missed out on the true experience. I saw that my habit of "clinging to expectations" was actually keeping me from reaching my goals. Once I witnessed this pattern, I was able to disengage and move through my limiting beliefs. For example, I recognized I was fixating on my flaws (which I talk about in chapter 10). By focusing on what I didn't like and what wasn't working, it kept me from enjoying the journey. I learned the power of the joy route, and following my heart's true desires. Once I did this, I was able to release the insecurities and fear and be more present in the moments of my life. Which meant I showed up fully as I was in each moment.

Through my personal and coaching experiences, I have again realized that most humans are, by default, very similar. Despite differences in our cultural backgrounds, our history, or even our education, we all want to be happy. We want to have control of our lives, but we don't always know how to get it. We want to remove our fears and live successfully, abundantly, happily, and peacefully, but we keep getting stuck repeating the same patterns.

Fears about our bodies, our relationships, our jobs, the government, and the world at large affect our actions. We change our routines, switch jobs, move to different cities, buy new clothes, and try new hairstyles, diets, or relationships; no matter what we do, our fears and our patterns persist.

This book can help break that cycle. No matter what you fear, there is a process that we can use to remove the barriers keeping you from bliss. This book will delve deeply into your behaviors to help you build confidence and empower you to make healthier choices. If it helps, you can treat this book like a big "fear detox." This book will change your life if you practice the breakthrough habits shared in each section.

Today, I live and breathe the message I share in these pages and I can tell you that my life has been transformed in miraculous ways. I am healthier, more abundant, and more fulfilled than I ever thought possible. People often tell me how I glow, and how healthy and happy I look. I am comfortable in my body, and in love with my life. Perhaps the real miracle with the principles shared in this book is that radical self-acceptance is possible. I am no longer obsessed with the numbers. I used to get on the scale, and no matter how much I gained or lost it was never enough. I would fall to the bathroom floor crying, pinching my body and screaming out in frustration, or worse, turning to food binges or purging. Today, my life is much different. The scale does not define me anymore. In fact, I use my own body for guidance. I trust myself around food, around others, and around the scale. My clothes fit better, I love what I see in the mirror, and I am genuinely happy and connected to my body. I am healthier than I have ever been.

The hard part is over; you picked up this book because something inside of you knows there is a better way. By being open and willing to make a shift, you have already given yourself permission to do the work.

This process is fun, challenging, and extremely rewarding. In each chapter I will take you through a strategic process to examine and remove the twenty-one most common emotional habits and limiting beliefs keeping you from reaching your goals. The beautiful part of the process is that this book is designed to work for you and with you; by that I mean that you can read it from start to finish as I designed it, and do the strategic exercises in each joy journey.

By understanding the key habits that are keeping you from what you truly want, you will be able to disengage from them and replace your thoughts with a new and more positive perspective. You will see a shift in your awareness, and with that awareness, your external habits will start to adjust. The weight you have been trying to lose for decades will fall away for good. Your troubled relationship with your significant other will become more loving. The job you hate and feel stuck in will change or become a thing of the past, and you will be living your passion. You will feel more connected and at peace with your best self. I know this is possible because it happened for me and hundreds of coaching clients and workshop participants.

After putting myself on this conscious cleanse and giving myself a mental makeover, my goals manifested faster. I feel healthier, and today I feel more vibrant and happy. My self-confidence has grown, and I feel completely connected to my purpose in everything I do.

If you are ready to break the habits that are holding you back for good and step into an extraordinary life, let the adventure begin!

ONE

HABIT HINDERING HAPPINESS

We settle because we think it's the best we can get.

Many people unknowingly play it safe in order to feel love and security. Whether we take a job that does not challenge us and fails to ignite our passion, or we stay in a relationship too long, settling becomes the normal way we manage expectations and reduce pain. During my research, and from insights gleaned from multiple coaching sessions, I started to recognize a clear pattern in people's behavior. People crave new experiences and want passion in their lives, but their fear of the unknown is greater than their desire to reach that state of happiness. Fear of the unknown is one of the most common and limiting emotional habits any of us possess. It can rob us of our dreams.

Throughout this book I will share examples of each habit that hinders our happiness from my own personal experience and multiple coaching clients, and from workshops and events. As I share examples, please feel free to put yourself into the example, as most of these experiences are universal.

I thought about calling this chapter "My Move to Hawaii, and Why We Shouldn't Settle," but it wouldn't have matched the structure of the other chapters. The reality is, I recently made a huge life transition and moved to Hawaii to finish this book and in doing that I realized the power that settling can have over us if we are not aware of its power. When we settle we sacrifice ourselves, and in doing this we hurt our authentic connection with others.

I recognized my own tendency to settle in multiple areas of my life. I would settle in romantic relationships, sacrificing my own desires in an effort to keep the relationship on balanced ground. When I was in the corporate world, after I realized the work was unfulfilling, I settled by staying in the environment. Even in the places I chose to live I would settle. Maybe you can relate. Is there an area of your life where you feel

restricted or bored? Many of us are unaware that we are settling because we are so used to going through the motions. Most of us are just doing the best we can to survive. But I want you to thrive, and in thriving we must look at the habits blocking us from accessing our joy. Settling is the default habit we fall into because it is safe and keeps us feeling secure.

The most prominent and recent example in my own life was settling in my environment. In both my physical environment, living in Portland, Oregon, and my own physical body, I was uncomfortable.

When I first left my corporate job, I came back to my hometown in Oregon. Spending time with family was essential for my healing and regrouping as I stepped into my new career as an author and life coach. But as time went on, I started to gain even more weight and became increasingly isolated, never really wanting to go out or do things. I realized I did not feel comfortable in the city I lived in, and my depression started to creep back in.

My “enough epiphany” came when I noticed that even though I was close to my family and childhood friends, I still felt alone and sad. That is when I learned the importance of our environment and that where we live can have a profound effect on our own happiness. If we don’t like our environment or feel connected to it, we can’t feel fully connected to our best self. In the process of settling for my environment, I piled on over thirty pounds. I was denying my own true self-happiness by staying in a less-than-supportive situation.

I was not inspired by my location, and this had a huge impact on my health, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. When we settle in life, it can manifest into many unhealthy outcomes, things like depression, addictions, debt, and weight gain. These unhealthy habits become a way to manage our unmet needs; we turn to self-soothing devices like food, alcohol, shopping, or self-sabotage instead of confronting the real problem. This was the pattern I was falling into, and I knew I needed to do something before I fell too far. When I finally heard my inner voice tell me I didn’t need antidepressants and that I just needed to follow my heart, I made radical changes in my life, including leaving my job and my bad relationship. I also moved back home. But the truth is, while I needed to be there initially, staying there was not the path my heart wanted to take. I was settling for a dark loft in a city that didn’t fill me with joy. In turn, I was settling for an unhealthy, overweight body. When we settle, our dreams often get suffocated. My unhappiness with my environment drowned out the desires in my heart, and because I was complacent in my unhappiness and doing whatever I could just to get through each day, I didn’t give myself time to think about what I really wanted. That is until things got so bad I started to cry myself to sleep again, and although I had overcome my drug addictions, I was still leaning into food; I had multiple late-night binge-fests and stopped exercising. I was ashamed of all the weight I had gained and I couldn’t find motivation for life. This is what settling can do to us! It steals our joy and manifests into lack of motivation and uninspired action. This was my enough epiphany.

What is your enough epiphany? This is the moment you realize that things are so bad that the situation has to change. It’s the moment when the idea of moving forward in your current state feels like torture, the moment when the only way forward is to change. It’s often when our mental state is conditioned and ready to accept a new behavior or change of atmosphere. Most major transitions in life—getting married, getting divorced, buying or selling a home, moving to a new location, or just “starting over”—start with an enough epiphany. The enough epiphany can be a beautiful moment of self-discovery. Your soul says, “Enough is enough, dear. It is time to make a change,” and you start moving toward what you really want.

Knowing you’ve reached the time for change is really the first aspect of moving out of settling. At this stage your soul is desperate for transformation.

Think about your own life and the areas where you are settling. Most of the time, when you look closely, you

will find you have one or two areas of your life that could use the focus of a little more love and compassion. Looking at the situations in your life where you are settling and analyzing them on a deeper level will help you pull out of this emotional habit. We often settle because we think it is the best we can get, a behavior that is rooted in fear of the unknown or in feeling unworthy. The root cause of my settling in my life was my fear of the unknown. Portland, Oregon, was safe; my family was there. I asked myself what would happen if I moved to a place I really loved? Where do I really want to be? I dreamed of working from anywhere in the world and having a location-independent business; then why wasn't I living my dream? BAM! This revelation showed me why I was so unhappy. I wasn't following my heart, therefore I was bored with life and packing on weight.

The real by-product of settling is that we ignore our inner wisdom, the heart's pull that says there is a better way for you to live your life. And on some deep level, we know this to be true, but we don't move forward, worried we will make a wrong turn or be even unhappier. But the very essence to breaking this habit is to ask yourself what you really want. What is it your heart is calling you to do? Think about this in regards to the situation(s) you may be settling in. In the joy route we will go deeper, but allow yourself to ask these questions now to get warmed up.

Once I got clear about the fear driving my actions and the fact that I was ignoring my own desire to live in a place I was inspired by, I was able to recondition my mind to focus on a more loving, kind, and compassionate approach to living. For me, this approach meant asking myself where I really wanted to be. I sat down and made a list on sticky pads. Each sticky note had one desire. I wrote:

- I want to write my book in a place that inspires me.
- I want to play in nature daily.
- I want to be a great surfer.
- I want to be happy.
- I want to be in Hawaii.

There it was scribbled out on a hot pink Post-it note. I saw my heart's calling. My heart was in Hawaii. The only thing left to do was follow my heart. Now that I knew what I wanted, the next step was to take action toward it, and refuse to settle. I am not suggesting that anyone go to the extreme of uprooting their life by committing to a move to a destination in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, but look at your life and align with what you want in your heart. Maybe Hawaii isn't your goal. But everyone has a "Hawaii," a dream tucked in their heart, and when it's ignored, we self-sabotage and settle.

Once I outed my desire, my inner self guided me to take steps to put this dream into motion. I picked a date to move, and I took my dog to the vet to go through the long process of moving him to the island. I started to downsize my stuff, stripping down and removing things I no longer wanted by donating them to Goodwill. All of these actions were supported by my inner drive to reach my happiness. I focused on what I wanted instead of what I didn't want. Settling was no longer a way I could live. I made Hawaii vision boards and started to share my dream with others. The more I focused on my heart's desires, the happier I became. I felt free.

What we all long for is love and freedom. The freedom to be who we really are and express our true self. When we settle we block off the connection of showing the world our true self. This is why we feel disconnected, unsupported, and unloved. Settling hurts more than just the present way of living; it hurts our soul and keeps us from doing what we really want to do in life.

The real mission of breaking this emotional habit and freeing yourself from settling is to honor your inner

voice in the moment. Honoring your inner voice will almost always lead you to press the reset button of your life.

JOY ROUTE

Press the reset button of your life.

When you look deeply into your own habits, you will see the areas that are stopping you from reaching your goals. To start, ask yourself where you are settling. It could be in the job you hate. Perhaps it's the relationship that bores you. It may even be the knowledge that you are procrastinating on the path to achieving your biggest dream.

We settle in many different areas of our life, but we don't have to live this way. Imagine what your life would look like if you had everything you dream of. What would it look like if you never settled? What if you lived out your purpose and passion? I have found in my own journey that the more I changed what wasn't working, the faster I became grounded and the more comfortable I became in knowing who I really was. That just made it easier to raise my standards. Settling became a way of my past, and the habit of settling was removed completely. Once you really tap into your inner source of abundance and authentic worth, settling for anything becomes painful and impossible to do. You raise your standards and step into an extraordinary life.

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From reader reviews:

Michael Durkin:

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