

ALENCIA JOHNSON

**flip
out
tables**

WORKBOOK

**a practical guide to help you
find your courage and make change**

suggested reading schedule for group use

If you are working through this workbook with a group, here are three suggested reading schedules to choose from. I encourage you to choose a schedule that will allow your group to carefully consider and discuss each reading and exercise, not merely get through an assignment.

4-week schedule

- **Week One:** Preface - Chapter 6
- **Week Two:** Chapter 7-11
- **Week Three:** Chapter 12-16
- **Week Four:** The New Table - Epilogue

6-week schedule

- **Week One:** Preface - Chapter 1
- **Week Two:** Chapters 2 - 5
- **Week Three:** Chapters 6 - 9
- **Week Four:** Chapters 10 - 13
- **Week Five:** Chapters 14 - 16
- **Week Six:** The New Table - Epilogue

8-week schedule

- **Week One:** Preface - Chapter 1
- **Week Two:** Chapter 2 - 4
- **Week Three:** Chapters 5 - 6
- **Week Four:** Chapters 7 - 9
- **Week Five:** Chapters 10 - 11
- **Week Six:** Chapter 12 -14
- **Week Seven:** Chapter 15 - 16
- **Week Eight:** The New Table - Epilogue

introduction

a note from the author

I wrote *Flip the Tables* during a transformative period. The country was coming out of a pandemic and into a historic presidential election. It seemed as if the world would turn a corner—from hatred, division, and fear to hope, justice, and love. Yet, we know change doesn't just happen; it must be earned. Hope is more than a wish. It is built on radical acts of courage, self-love, and discipline.

Systems of oppression are established and sustained by broken people. In a world infected by this brokenness, **our strongest act of resistance is to heal ourselves.**

It's my hope that *Flip the Tables* and this coordinating workbook helps you find the tools you need to do that healing in order to show up courageously for the work ahead. I hope to meet you exactly where you are with what you need. This journey helps us feel all our emotions in order to refuel ourselves with the hope and courage needed to press forward.

Let's do this together.

Alencia Johnson

chapter one

what is disruption?

chapter summary

People were continuously calling me a disruptor. So instead of running from the term, I decided to grab it by its horns. I challenged myself to stop getting annoyed at everyone claiming to be a disruptor and instead embrace the notion that there's a universal desire for change.

Disruption is the wrench thrown into the system. It's the thing that forces you to stop whatever it was you were doing before and then figure out a new path forward. When something is broken, it must be rebuilt or discarded. Disorder makes us pay attention. In the context of this book, there's a purpose for destroying any room that needs changing. The second part of the definition—to interrupt the normal course or unity of; to cause upheaval—gives me chills. Down to my bones. Interrupting “the normal course” is literally

changing the status quo or business as usual, and upheaval, by one definition, means “extreme agitation or disorder: radical change.”

**People who
disrupt are
innovative.**

We are in a period when our lives require radical change, because the world around us requires radical change. Planned or not, disruptions are necessary—and unavoidable. We either resist the change or embrace and influence the change.

People who disrupt are innovative, as there is often no playbook to get the passion building inside them out into the world. Disruptors get up and try again—and do it in front of people who doubt them. They see the impossible as possible—even if they only get halfway to the goalpost. They move through fear, they take risks, they push the envelope and speak up. It doesn't matter who you are; it matters what's inside of you.

You don't have to be an activist or the first to ever do something to be a disruptor. While those people exist, there are many of us who disrupt in little ways every day that still have an impact on the lives around us.

However, not all disruption has led to positive outcomes. Like the global pandemic that is now endemic. COVID-19, a tiny, microscopic virus stopped the world. COVID-19 was an unanticipated disruption, it radically changed our social order and how the world operates. We had an opportunity to pivot, innovate, redirect, and get in tune with who we really are and how we want to show up in the world.

part one

disruption of self

*Not everything that is faced can be
changed, but nothing can be changed until
it is faced.*

JAMES BALDWIN

Before we sow more good in the world, we must sow more good within ourselves.

That requires us to stand in the mirror and face ourselves in ways we've never dared to or have been too fearful to try.

Change begins within ourselves.

Disruptors know this is the hardest work, yet the most important.

chapter two

who am i?

chapter summary

“My therapist asked, ‘Where do you feel worthy unrelated to your career?’ And I think that’s a question all of us—conditioned to job titles and grind culture—should sit with.”

The notion of who we are must be disrupted for us to live the lives we believe we are supposed to live. To be in relationships with people and our communities. To do good in the world. To have everything we not only need but also want. To live in abundance and the understanding that we are a gift to every person and thing we touch. It all starts with understanding who we are as a person. Why are we uniquely made the way we are? Who are we, stripped of the titles and wages? I’m also a person with strong conviction that we are created to fulfill something bigger than us. I’m the daughter of a pastor, and my faith is the most important thing to me.

Quick note: Not every reader is a Christian—and you don’t have to be to understand the concepts in this book. However, since we’re talking about who we are, I’m a churchy girl from the South who before too long will have a Jesus reference. I love Jesus and trap music. We can live in the mix—disrupting the status quo and preconceived notions of millennial Black Christians.



Purpose and our values keep us reeoted.

Purpose and our values keep us rooted. They remind us of what we will allow and what we won’t. As the old saying goes, you don’t know where you’re going unless you know where you’ve come from. Answering “Who am I?” and “Whose am I?” is the only way to start.

Here’s the thing. I know there’s more to experience in life than what I do for a paycheck. I want to give and receive even more. In life, love, and work. Every area. Call me selfish if you want. But I want more people to know Alencia holistically, not just what I produce. That full person lights a torch for others to exist as their highest selves as well.

exercise

Write a letter to yourself about who you are and whose you are. The number one rule? Do not begin with what you do—that's for a résumé or biography. Write about your values and beliefs. Write about the person you are to your communities.

What motivates me?

What do I like?

What don't I like?

What makes me unique?

chapter three

commitment to self

chapter summary

When I left Boston in April 2020, I was struggling in ways I hadn't before. The successful professional and personal lives I'd been stitching together for years were both unraveling. It was the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and right after Senator Elizabeth Warren ended her presidential campaign. I was jobless (but not without options!), single (promising to focus on my personal life after campaigning to save democracy), uncomfortable with my weight, and experiencing a severe flare-up of obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression. Catching up with family, friends, old colleagues, and long-lost comrades through Zoom was like a balm. The fact that I didn't have a job (yet), or a partner (at the time) mattered little. I, we, were alive and surviving. Focusing on that helped drown out the negative self-talk that told me I was just treading water instead of navigating an unprecedented time. Then suddenly things began to shift. My phone started ringing nonstop. Given the intense election and the racial justice uprising in the wake of George Floyd's murder, my expertise was now in high demand. It was time for me to stop living for everyone else and be unapologetically committed to myself. I eventually came to the realization that my professional ennui wasn't just about procrastination, tardiness, and overcommitment. There was something deeper going on. Something within my soul that I hadn't tapped into that made me constantly overcommit, underdeliver, and exhaust myself.

**Other people's
feelings and
experiences are
not our
responsibility.**

Learning to release the pressure of perfection and people pleasing helped peel back the layers. When I got closer to the root, I discovered there was unhealed childhood trauma from emotional abuse I experienced from a family member I didn't have the liberty to cut off. I tried to maintain a relationship with them, understanding a significant number of circumstances made their life challenging, and they harbored much anger and sadness. They also faced challenges of being Black in America, with odds stacked against them economically, politically, through our healthcare systems, and more. I knew they loved me with the tools they had, but our relationship resulted in emotional abuse that took years to identify, reconcile with, and heal to move forward. Trying to find my voice and realizing that this impacted my ability to move forward, I tried implementing boundaries within the relationship. However, first I had to learn about the boundaries I needed within myself to honor who I was and who I fearlessly wanted to become.

Other people's feelings and experiences are not our responsibility: This is a tough but necessary lesson to learn. I finally realized I owed it to myself to honor my relationship with

me as the most important commitment of all. How could I ask other people to treat me a certain way or be committed to being in relationship with me if I wasn't showing up for myself that way? **Only when we release the pressure of seeking perfection can we grow into being who we're supposed to be:** that messy, complicated, beautifully creative human who was created for great purpose. Now that I understood some of the roots of my issues, I realized that the less committed I was to myself, the less disciplined I was.

Discipline can be defined several ways. According to Merriam-Webster, some of these include:

- 1 a. control gained by enforcing obedience or order
b. orderly or prescribed conductor pattern of behavior
c. SELF-CONTROL
- 2 PUNISHMENT

When it comes to self, we respond better to positive, affirming self-talk, so I had to reenter my relationship with the word discipline based on the definitions related to self-control and training that molds moral character.

When we think about the morals that ground us, we often think of the collective morals that keep us from harming one another. But what about individual values? **Morals define broader society while values are more personal.** We must be emotionally connected to our values to remain committed and disciplined in the actions necessary to live them out.

It's a daily practice to grow the muscle that continuously reminds us to value ourselves just as much as we value our loved ones, the things we've invested in, the work we're called to do. But none of that can reach *its* full potential until we reach *our* full potential.

Morals define broader society while values are more personal.

I started to remind myself that values are more important than outcomes, because I was too focused on outcomes. Values give us purpose and motivation. A goal achieved gives us instant gratification and sometimes the fuel to keep going. However, when we don't achieve the goal, we often become hard on ourselves and consider ourselves a failure. Feeling like a failure makes it harder for us to get back up and keep putting one foot forward.

Most important, it's the small daily choices that are related to what I value that keep me committed. Healing our trauma helps us get to the root of all that holds us back from honoring ourselves. We often talk about the need for boundaries with other people, but what about the discipline we need with ourselves, the lack of which holds us back from achieving our wildest dreams? Let's disrupt the notion that discipline is a reaction to something we've failed at and understand it to be the beautiful commitment to ourselves. 10

chapter four

disrupt the self-talk

chapter summary

I believed in the power of declaring our desires and how we speak to ourselves long before manifestation became a buzzword. Whether you pray, journal, write lists, have an inner monologue, talk to yourself in the shower—all of this is self-talk that has power to change your circumstances. These declarations are where we put our faith, trust, and beliefs.

We have the power to challenge and change the world around us—but this is more than toxic positivity. Disruptive self-talk that gets us to our goals and desires is bold, courageous honesty.

Too often, toxic positivity minimizes our feelings in the moment instead of focusing on the honesty we need to move through those feelings. Repeating that “Everything is fine” when you’re dealing with an ill family member doesn’t fully capture the challenging situation. It ignores the emotions and present reality. Going through a divorce saying “I will be okay” doesn’t acknowledge that there will be hard days ahead.

**We have the
power to
challenge and
change the world
around us.**

Instead, say: “Today is really hard, and it’s part of the journey toward my healing.” “My small step today is leading me to the new job of my dreams.”

- **Declare Your Desires Out Loud.** We all talk to ourselves in our head—it’s the longest dialogue we will ever have, because it never ends. However, it’s important to declare those desires out loud, too. For me, that’s in my prayers, in my journals, as I’m driving around in my car, in my home when I’m alone. But the key is to speak out loud—it’s more powerful.
- **Be Intentional and Ready.** Words have more power than we give them credit for. That’s why we must be intentional not just in how we speak to ourselves, but also in what we say to ourselves.
- **Believe It Will Happen.** We must have the faith to believe that it will happen.
- **Speak to Yourself with Kindness.** We often confuse honesty with having to be harsh. Truth is uncomfortable, but how you deliver it matters—starting with yourself.
- **Use Language That Empowers and Encourages.** Using language that empowers. Empowering language affirms a person’s existence, rights, and values, leaving them with a sense of self-worth.
- **Talk from Your Future Self to Help Your Present Self.** Nurturing my younger self has shifted my subconscious beliefs about myself. It’s helped my confidence and shut down the inner critic.

exercise

Write out ten affirmations (“I am” statements) related not just to your values, but also to the life you know you are worthy of. Commit to saying them out loud to yourself daily—in the shower, in the car, wherever. And go back to these whenever you doubt yourself.

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

chapter five

red flag: it's you

chapter summary

"Alencia, sometimes the issue is you." I was completely caught off guard.

An assessment of the areas in my life where I was growing frustrated revealed that I had become passive. Yes, I work hard and had achieved a lot, but I was still letting life happen. I believed that unless I was perfect, I wouldn't be accepted and loved or have the things I wanted. From not reaching out to a company with an idea because my pitch wasn't perfect, to withholding how I felt about a friend who hurt me out of fear they wouldn't receive it, perfect Alencia was stuck in a state of stagnation. So the first red flag in myself I had to face? Not being honest with myself about how I was feeling and embracing the emotions around it. Which led to so many other roadblocks I was putting in my own way.

- **Roadblocks.** Red flags are warning signs for dangerous territory ahead. The red flags are the roadblocks we create out of fear because we believe they will protect us. That's the opposite of the courage we need to go after what we want and deserve.
- **Emotional Walls.** It was also eye-opening as my role in each breakup had a common theme—emotional walls and the need for control. Too often people use self-help and therapy as a green light for building walls, not boundaries. Any slight annoyance or inconvenience from someone, or our own lack of accountability, has us creating walls instead of building connection and relationship in our messy, human way. We need one another to heal, to thrive, to be who we are supposed to be. If we want others to accept our messy, complex, beautiful humanity—to show up for us in times of need even if it's inconvenient—we must let go and do the same for them. We must also accept ourselves instead of having the untrue belief that we are things to be fixed.
- **Control.** Conscious or not, control creeps into our lives when we are consumed with fear and uncertainty. Control also creeps up when we hold ourselves back from trying something new or putting ourselves out there. Moving away from control requires us to release our tight grip on outcomes and embrace the experience of going through. When I'm struggling with control, I think of water. Water runs freely in a stream in nature, but if it's held too tightly in a pipe, that pipe will burst. We must surrender to the flow and trust that who we are is enough for what we want in life.
- **Lack of Faith.** When I feel stagnant, I realize my faith that all will work together for good has decreased. Here's your reminder that what's for you will not arrive with confusion. Increasing our faith propels us even if we don't know what's on the other side.

- **Competition.** We often compare ourselves with other people, and it's important for us to understand where this comes from. Conscious or not, we compete with others for two reasons:
 - First, it may be due to the selfish-based mentality that tells us no one else deserves to receive the dream we're pursuing.
 - Second, it could be a fear-based scarcity mentality that says there's not enough for all of us.
- **Repeated Lessons.** As with overstaying, we can sometimes find ourselves repeating scenarios again and again, only with a different cast of characters. We can't prevent every repeated lesson, but we can strengthen the muscle that helps us recognize patterns earlier on.
- **Settling.** The belief that we aren't worthy of greatness makes us settle for what's in front of us, even if it's ineffective, unaligned, and harmful.
- **Giving Up Too Soon.** In my own experience, breakthroughs and success have always come right after the moment I wanted to give up. But life has taught me that the moment we're overwhelmed with defeat is the moment we must lean in and keep moving forward.
- **Lack of Accountability.** It's a sign of strength to admit when you're wrong. That takes letting go of my ego's need to be right and taking accountability for any harm I've caused, even when it was unintentional.
- **Self-Sabotage.** Self-sabotaging behaviors are those sneaky, daily practices that lead us further away from our goals. It's the procrastination. The limiting beliefs that keep us from starting. The overbooked schedule to avoid completing the tasks at hand. The overconsumption—food, social media, gossip, and more. The list goes on. As we continue to self-sabotage, we continue to feel worse about ourselves and continue the cycle.
- **Perfectionism.** Contorting ourselves to be perfect, becoming a chameleon instead of freely being our authentic selves, is another form of control. Perfectionism breeds the ground for us to be hard on ourselves, treating ourselves with anything other than kindness, grace, and acceptance.
- **Gracelessness.** Extending grace to others is easier than extending it to ourselves. We must disrupt ourselves with grace. Stop being so hard on yourself. You're allowed to be human.

chapter six

ready is a choice—do it scared

chapter summary

Have you wanted to do something only to psych yourself out of it by telling yourself you're not ready? We often make excuses about what it takes to be ready. But that's self-sabotaging behavior. Pushing myself to show up when the opportunity presented itself taught me that everything we want is on the other side of fear.

If ready is a choice, an action, a verb—then we must be courageous enough to make the choice. To be ready is to be prepared mentally or physically for something—an action, experience, or more. Prepared mentally can mean a multitude of things, and too often we continue to move the goalpost.

Courage is not the ability to completely get over fear; it is the ability to persevere despite fear. Courage reminds us that faith and fear can be present at the same time, yet our faith outweighs that fear. Courage is the reminder that even though I may be afraid, my purpose must outweigh my fear. Courage helps us make the choice to be ready. Courageous steps build the muscle that we use to do hard things. The only way to get to the possibilities is to go through the fear and risk being exposed.

The worst someone can say is no. But the only way to find out is by making the choice to put yourself out there and be exposed. New isn't dangerous, but it is uncomfortable—and that's where we trip over ourselves. The discomfort and inconvenience push us out of our comfort zone, promoting growth in the best way.

part two

disruption of vision

If you're always trying to be normal, you will never know how amazing you can be.

MAYA ANGELOU

You can only go as far as you dream. But what if our vision for ourselves and what we can do is stifled by a world comfortable with the old norms? We can reimagine success, reaching new heights with our own set of rules. The status quo table does not make room for us and harms us in the long run. It's time for us to reimagine and build a new vision.

chapter seven

goodbye, boss b*tch—less really is more

chapter summary

Black girl magic. It encompasses the unique resilience, creativity, fortitude, strength, and beauty that Black women have. Our ability to make something out of nothing. To excel at multiple things at the same time. Created by DC native CaShawn Thompson, the phrase is inherently ours—Black women, that is. It describes our unique existence and the ways we magically move through the world. But as often happens, society has commodified (read: commercialized and monetized) the term, redefining something that was positive with negative tropes. And now #blackgirlmagic has become synonymous with the strong Black woman trope. A stereotype that robs Black girls of their youth through adultification. That tells us our pain is nonexistent or valid. That we do not deserve rest. That we should be grateful for crumbs.

#GirlBoss is a descriptor for an ambitious woman playing by her own rules instead of those of male-dominated corporate America, and the book it inspired became a New York Times best-seller in 2014. In its wake, many other young, white, and (mostly privileged) female founders received press attention as model millennial woman entrepreneurs. Initially intended to serve as inspiration for young women founders to do things differently, the concept quickly cracked. Being a #GirlBoss started to feel like a scam. There were scandals and bankruptcies. Headline-making founders left their businesses to—shock!—pay attention to other parts of their lives like family and wellness.

The societal pressure from capitalism forcing us to labor and produce more isn't just harmful to women—the patriarchy doesn't help men, either. It tells them that physical dominance, lack of emotion, and astronomical wealth make them worthy. It encourages men to ignore their emotions in favor of overcompensating at work.

Sure, I want to live comfortably without worrying about finances and leave a legacy for my children, their children, and the causes I support. However, I **gave myself the permission to define the grind differently** for myself. When society rewards achieving our dreams fast (hello, 30 Under 30 lists!) and lucrative (hey, person who sold a company for \$500 million in just five years), it subconsciously tells us that we are not successful if we haven't hit a professional milestone by a certain age or number.

**I gave myself
permission to
define the grind
differently.**

Couple that with the pressure to become married homeowners with kids by thirty—whew! No wonder death by suicide is rising among millennials, young women, and Black people. Couple that with increased social media use being linked to higher rates of depression, anxiety, loneliness, self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts, and you have a recipe for disaster. **Capitalism, competition, and projections of success are setting us up for failure.** It isn't serving anyone, no matter your race or gender.

Am I capable? Absolutely. However, I realized other people's limited views forced me into chasing what they identified as success. So I limited distractions to get clear on what I wanted. A life that thrived on my creativity and flexibility both professionally and personally. A life that unsubscribed from the booked and busy schedule that led to burnout, not success. Defined by my own set of rules and not what other people expected.

I got to the root of this pressure and focused on who I wanted to be instead of how I could live up to others' expectations. I'm now defining it on my own terms. **Busyness is a trap.** The busier we are, the more we run from ourselves and our purpose. Sure, there are high-pressure times that require us to show up nonstop. That's life. However, I love that the pandemic made us realize that a booked and busy lifestyle wasn't serving us. We'd been equating booked and busy with success when it was just burnout and unhealed trauma trying to survive under oppression and capitalism.

Everyone can take a break and quiet the noise of the world. This rest disrupts grind culture and tears down how capitalism has us sick and isolated—and I love it. It's clear that Black feminist frameworks have helped masses of people who do not identify as Black women. And that's fine. That's what happens when we center marginalized experiences. I do, however, need people, in all of their gratitude and admiration for our magic, to stop asking us to save the day—run for president, lead an organization, et cetera—in institutions that do not support us. Well intentioned, yet harmful impact.

exercise

Take inventory of your personal and professional commitments over the next month. I bet your schedule is overflowing with no time for you, huh?

What could I be doing without the distractions or the overflowing calendar?

What could I do less of to be available for [...]?

What needs and commitments are these attached to?

Can I remove some of them?

Are all those meetings necessary or could they be emails?

Do I really have the capacity for more than one social event a week?

Now find at least ten to fifteen minutes in your day to rest. Here are some examples:

- A ten-minute body scan meditation.
- A fifteen-minute journaling practice.
- A fifteen-to-thirty-minute walk outside to not only quiet your mind but also to let the sun, air, and earth heal you. A twenty-minute power nap.
- Or simply just breathe.

Put it on your calendar, recurring.

Bonus: Figure out a response to invitations and save it somewhere handy like your phone’s notes app to reuse. But remember that “No” is a complete sentence, even when people push you to change your mind.

- “Thanks for the invitation. I unfortunately won’t be able to make it this time.”
- “Hey! That’s a great opportunity and I would love to catch up, but I’m a bit at capacity right now.”
- “Can’t make it this time but keep me posted for future events!”

It doesn’t require an explanation—although depending on the relationship, you may want to disclose more. Having something ready builds the muscle to free you for rest.

chapter eight

great and good enough

chapter summary

Release the pressure to have it all figured out. You're just getting started on this journey, and chasing perfection will burn you out, not get you closer to your dream job." Chill out on having it all figured out and excelling at everything.

"I'm not surprised you're dealing with OCD and anxiety," said one of my nurses. "Many successful people put extreme pressure on themselves to be great at it all." I remember her words vividly. It would take years for me to embrace them, but subconsciously I began to accept that to survive, I had to decide what I was great at and be content with being good enough (or even bad in some cases) at everything else. Young people put so much pressure on themselves to be great at everything that it's causing too many harmful expectations.

It is impossible to be exceptional at everything.

We've discussed perfectionism, the pressure we put on ourselves, and flipping over the booked and busy table of burnout. So often we feel we must be great all of the time to be successful, impactful, and worthy of reaching our fullest potential. That is a lie. I'm not telling you to be complacent with your goals and vision, but **it is impossible to be exceptional at everything.** A great leader understands their vision, but also that they can't do everything. They embrace other leaders who have different expertise.

Greatness is being comfortable living at our highest and most authentic self. It requires us to release expectations from others, setting our own measurements of success. Greatness is excelling in some areas and being good enough in others. Trusting that your best effort is good enough in itself is greatness. Of course we should not settle for less, but once you know your values, once you've figured out what makes you content and, most important, what unique gifts you have to share with the world, excelling in those areas allows you to release the pressure in other areas of life.

It isn't about perfection—it is about fullness and the inability to give up. And for us to live in our fullness, we must accept imperfection and the reality that we cannot and are not meant to do everything.

exercise

Without thinking of how society would answer this question, survey three areas of your life where you believe you deserve, as Pimp C said, "the most, not lesser." Write down what you deserve in each area:

I deserve

I deserve

I deserve

Now here's the trade-off: To be great in those three areas, where can you release pressure and be good enough? Write those down and then release them, saying, "My good enough does not make me less capable or deserving. I release the pressure to be perfect."

chapter nine

“what tf do you do, exactly?” (redefine what you do)

chapter summary

While our job isn't supposed to be our entire life, it is imperative that we find some fulfillment in our work so that we can show up in our communities in healthy ways.

Frustration in your career will bleed all over other areas of life. So we must either reframe our mind-set in the current job we don't enjoy or search for new opportunities. Defining your goals and creating the vision you want of yourself and the world is critical to staying on your journey.

- Have a Big Dream and Write It Down
- Assess the Skills and Resources You Have versus Those You Need
- Assess Your Network
- Communicate the Vision
- Be Patient
- Be Okay with Being Misunderstood
- The Trials Are Coming
- Keep Evidence You're on the Right Track
- Have Gratitude and Celebrate along the Journey

exercise

If you haven't been writing out your vision so far while reading this chapter, it's time to do so now. Use these questions as prompts:

What are things you love to do and don't love to do?

What skills and expertise come easy to you? What doesn't?

What makes you uniquely the only person that can fulfill this vision?

How will this vision also allow you to create more impact in your community?

What legacy will this vision leave?

chapter ten


the trailblazer conundrum

chapter summary

“Genres are a funny little concept, aren’t they? Yes, they are. In theory, they have a simple definition that’s easy to understand. But in practice, well, some may feel confined.” Linda Martell’s pointed words on Beyoncé’s *Act II: Cowboy Carter* grabbed my attention on the first listen. They resonated with me deeply, beyond genre bending and Beyoncé. They described the ethos of how trailblazers define life for themselves and force us to confront our beliefs on who and what others could be. Trailblazers don’t just shake the tables, they flip them over.

Trailblazers Realize the Journey Doesn’t Have to Be Lonely

Like many people, I’ve felt misunderstood and lonely at times. As if people didn’t understand that I needed support, and that I didn’t have it all together. However, I quickly realized that letting people in is key to the trailblazer’s journey. The journey feels lonely because we’ve isolated ourselves, we’ve turned our trauma into hyper-independence, and we have unreasonable expectations of others. This is the conundrum of a trailblazer—we may be charting a new path alone, but it doesn’t have to be lonely.



**Trailblazers
embrace
being rare
and
misunderstood**

Trailblazers Aren’t Boxed In... Others Have to Catch Up

Too often, we box ourselves in with limited definitions of what success as a [insert title/role here] is supposed to look like. We also limit our vision of what the world could look like, letting the current societal climate overwhelm us with despair. Then we find ourselves frustrated because the binary definition doesn’t serve us. Trailblazers feel discomfort as a signal it’s time to burst out of the box and create their own path toward their vision. They embrace being rare and misunderstood.

Trailblazers Know Their Worth

When you know you are rare and have spent a lifetime perfecting your expertise—be it your work or your knowledge of an issue—you confidently establish what you are worth and don’t settle for less.

Trailblazers Let Go of Ego and Turn Adversity into the Win

Most people who chart new paths have faced an obstacle that could have taken them off their path completely if it weren't for perseverance. But trailblazers know that ego serves no one—especially not disruptors for good. Our mission is to use our unique talents to move society forward.

Trailblazers Make the Path for Others

Too often, people feel that others must pay the same dues they did to achieve what they've achieved (or more). Let's disrupt this harmful pattern right now. Matter of fact, trailblazers are so confident that there is enough room for all of us to be successful, they believe in lifting as they climb.

Trailblazers Trust That Integrity on Their Journey Is Imperative

There are two kinds of people in the world—the disruptor who intentionally tears down the old to build something greater with others and the Tasmanian devil who bulldozes their way to the top. Trailblazers leave people better than they found them. And we're coming to a place in society where honest people with good hearts are winning.

Trailblazers Don't Just Dream, They Do

Trailblazers must have quite a bit of delusion to achieve their dreams. Impossible isn't in their vocabulary, and they don't wait for someone else to believe in them to move forward.

chapter eleven

childlike dreams

chapter summary

I saw a social media post that said, “Isn’t it ironic that our adult healing work is really just freeing our inner child?” Inner child work involves recognizing that adult behaviors stem from childhood experiences. It helps us heal unmet needs and traumatic experiences as a child. It can also help us move toward the dreams we had as a child. (Cooks-Campbell, 2022) When we’re tapping into a healthy childlike mind-set—real or imaginative—we’re freeing ourselves. Freeing ourselves of expectations. Of fear. Of limiting beliefs. Meeting our younger self isn’t only for professional advancement; it’s also necessary for holistic happiness and healing. People who follow their childhood dreams (or at least pieces of them) are more satisfied and happier in their careers.

Kids Don’t Care What Others and Society Think

Imagine being so confident in our vision that we didn’t worry about other people’s opinions. Think how much further along we’d be toward those goals we have at the beginning of every new year.

They Believe They Have Great Purpose

They innately know that they’re created for purpose and can leave a legacy. Most kids believe they have a superpower, right? Those dreams and beliefs sadly get buried as we get older and are met with a world too limited to hold the capacity for imagination and possibility.

They Say and Do What They Want

Before the world conditions us to judge ourselves and limit the possibilities of what we can achieve, we were able to see the world as we wanted. They say and do what comes to mind without hesitation. Imagine if we removed that hesitation and fear. Not only would what we shared and did free us, but the truth would also positively impact the people around us.

They Try. Fail. And Try Again.

Kids take all the shots—whether they miss them or not. We miss 100 percent of the shots we don’t take. But eventually, we have more hits than misses, and that average will outweigh the missed attempts. Let’s keep shooting until we make it.

They Love the Arts

Kids love drawing, making up stories, painting, and more—even if they don't want to be artists. Activating our creativity makes us feel good. And when we feel good, so many other areas of our lives are positively impacted.

They Fear Little to Nothing

Sure, some fear is normal for safety and self-preservation, but much of our fear has been conditioned by a society that wants us to remain in order and never excel. Fear is an indicator that we should try something or, at a minimum, interrogate it.

They See the World as a Collective

Kids see the humanity in each other. They recognize that we are more alike than different, without prejudice.

They Have Few Limiting Beliefs

Our imagination can come up against negativity and cynicism. However, we aren't born this way. It's that outside cynicism that puts limitations on our minds and what we can achieve—not who we are designed to be.

They Cry, Often

Crying may not change a situation, but it helps release your emotions and provides clarity. Don't hold them in. Our tears are natural, a sign for us to tap into ourselves.

They Also Laugh, Often

It releases emotions that get in the way of us seeing and feeling our vision clearly.

They Are the Closest to Human

Because their views have yet to be challenged by a troubled world, they are in a purer form. In essence, they are closest to human.

part three

disruption of community

Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth.

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM

Our gifts are not our own—they are loaned to us to reimagine and disrupt our communities for good.

To stand in the gap. To use our own sphere of influence to build something new. To “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly.”

We can all change the communities we’re part of—with simple yet bold, courageous choices.

chapter twelve

urgency of now

chapter summary

The reality is that when we wait for someone to create room for us or grant us the opportunity, it may never come. The power systems we operate in unfortunately benefit from oppression and inequity—which reminds us that **there is never a “good” or right time to take action.** The time is now.

For change to happen, we can't wait our turn or for the powers that be to grant us our turn. We must recognize the momentum we have, understand that what we're fighting for can't wait, and be prepared to disrupt the status quo (because how disruptive is it to an established table for someone to push in a new chair?) to have our voices heard.

chapter thirteen

spend your privilege

chapter summary

Privilege is a right or immunity granted as a benefit, advantage, or favor. It involves superior positioning or attaining higher value. Disruptors move from their discomfort to understand that those who benefit from privilege are uniquely positioned to change the system that continues to uphold racial inequities. Privilege isn't a bad thing—it's how you use it. The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck reminds us that while what happens to you isn't in your control, how you respond is. Think of privilege that way—you aren't the reason you have your privilege (for the most part), but you have a responsibility to use it responsibly. Disruptors do not speak for other people—those with privilege open environments for underrepresented voices to be heard. We don't show up to places for the sole, self-righteous purpose of helping someone. We show up knowing that liberation of one

community liberates us all. Spending your privilege is a crucial strategy for communities that are advocating for their needs.

After you secured your seat at the table, it is your responsibility to make sure someone else has theirs as well.

Your ability to become an accomplice in the broader fight for liberation is first acknowledging the privilege you have—who you are, your position, your knowledge. We all have biases that must be confronted. You can do this through research and stretching yourself to learn. Do not get defensive when someone calls attention to a harmful action.

We do not lose anything by expanding the table. Matter of fact, we win when the table reflects all our identities and experiences.

However you secured your seat at the table, it is your responsibility to make sure someone else has theirs as well. And if the powers that be resist these changes, it's time for us to lock arms and build something new—a world that liberates us all.

chapter fourteen

tell your story

chapter summary

Storytelling is all around us. It decreases stigma and centers real, lived experience. Storytelling allows us to build empathy, connect with the world, and humanize experiences. Often, it allows us to connect with people around our similarities and values. In the collective work toward a more just society, you are the missing puzzle piece. Your story. Your unique experience. Your ability to continue. Your ability to transcend. No one can take our stories from us, and that's why they are so powerful. The best stories are deeply personal and evoke emotion, from the storytellers themselves as well as the audience. **When we are moved to emotion, we are moved to action.**

chapter fifteen

explore

chapter summary

Our biases around communities not our own are significantly influenced by the content and culture we consume. Think about it: If you do not interact daily with someone of another identity, the only knowledge you have is through the media you watch or read, the history you learn, or what someone you trust tells you. This is why media—TV, film, music, news—has a significant responsibility to be inclusive of various backgrounds and identities through culturally accurate representations. The internalized beliefs that have seeped into our psyche whether we are aware of them or not are known as implicit biases. Because they live within our subconscious, unless we actively challenge them, they can too often be used to perpetuate harm through actions that lead to segregation, oppression, and marginalization. **Our personal biases and beliefs are impacted by the larger system.** Which is why you hear politicians and leaders of many movements talk about the importance of addressing systemic racism and structural issues.

Traveling isn't the only way to connect with other cultures. And you do not have to live in a major city to be surrounded by people from other cultures.

- Take a culinary or art class. Learn a new language.
- When a major event happens that impacts a specific community (like the police killings of Black people or president Trump insisting on a Muslim ban), choose to listen to the most impacted without judgment or preconceived notions.
- Dive into documentaries, TV shows, and films created by and starring people from communities you may not understand.
- Visit a museum.
- Do some research.
- Look at your circle—are you constantly around people who look and act like you? It's true that we gravitate toward similar people. However, challenge yourself to expand your network to include people with different backgrounds.

chapter sixteen


be salt. be the light.

chapter summary

You are salt and you are light. I grew up with this shorthand saying from Matthew 5:13-16 to remind me that it is our duty to be light in the world. It is our duty to humanity. But it took years before I fully understood what this meant.

Light is a living thing that essentially ignites, illuminates, and burns—for good or bad. However, it is imperative that these injustices are exposed and remain visible—turning away is a privilege and does not change the outcome of the problems. Not only is it our responsibility to face what is happening, but bringing light and attention to it is the only way to find solutions. **Light reveals truth and inspires others to their best.** Greatness ignites other people’s greatness—just as light ignites other people’s light.

Let’s visit the part of that scripture about salt: “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot” (Matthew 5:13 NRSV). Salt is a substance that we use to season or preserve food. Too much salt and the food becomes inedible. Too little salt, and the food hasn’t changed enough. But just the right amount? The dish is transformed. Salt also draws out the things that may not serve us. Salt can cleanse things at the right time—even if it stings at first. So when we talk about being the “salt of the earth,” it’s an acknowledgment that we don’t need much to root out the defects, the problems, the dishonesty. The power is right there in us, the salt. **But in order to transform something, we have to purify it first. Expose the truth. Be willing to disrupt the flow** (much like the first taste of salt can be a bit jarring.)



**Light reveals
truth and
inspires others to be
their best.**

the new table

exhale

chapter summary

As you reflect on how you're feeling, remember that this journey doesn't end. We continue to be works in progress. But by now we **embrace the journey as an important, beautiful experience instead of the destination.** The world needs you to continue this journey because being in beloved community means that we are interconnected. Justice for one person is justice for all people. Healing for you is healing for community. When Jesus flipped over tables in the temple, he was fed up with the hypocrisy and the lies people were telling in the name of his Father, God. As much as we talk about the miracles he performed and the sermons he preached, we often forget about his humanity (or that his bucking the

Embrace the journey as an important, beautiful experience instead of a destination.

system made him an enemy of the state). Whether Jesus is your religious savior or just a historical figure, I imagine you're familiar with some benevolent idea of his life. So if we think about what we have worked through within this book, Jesus really did it first. He disrupted the way he viewed himself and realized he was a vessel for something greater. He had the ability to disrupt the rules of religion with his radical vision of what it meant to be a follower of him. And how did he do it? By being who others told him he couldn't be and wasn't. He was a trailblazer who got to the point about who he was and was also committed to divine rest. Jesus loved justice and sought mercy. He gave radical

grace because of his radical imagination for a beloved community. With all that context, it actually shouldn't be surprising that he flipped over tables. Because he expressed his emotions—whether angry, sad, heartbroken, or glad, he was human and did not promote himself above others.

Remember, you have every tool to disrupt in you.
The tools to disrupt yourself and courageously heal.
The tools to disrupt your vision and thrive.
The tools to disrupt your community and create impact.
I can't wait to keep flipping over tables with you.

