

Elevé

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APRIL 2026



COMING BACK

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AND VERSIONS OF
OURSELVES THAT NEVER
STOPPED BEING OURS**



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Never miss an issue of Élevé

This third edition explores the dreams, identities, and unfinished parts of ourselves that quietly stayed with us. These stories reflect what it means to return to something true, to remember what still calls you, and to reconnect with the parts of you that never really left, even after life pulled elsewhere. Subscribe now for exclusive access to future editions. We're only getting started, and you're on the list.

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Elevé

WHAT IS ELEVÉ?

In French, *elevé* means elevated. Uplifted. Raised up. That's the spirit behind this magazine: a celebration of the humans behind the spreadsheets.

Produced by Anchor, the same team building technology to simplify B2B payments. Elevé is our way of honoring the stories, passions, and full lives of the people who power this industry.

We believe in great software, but more than that, we believe in people. This is Elevé. You're exactly where you're meant to be.

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Letter From the Editor

There was a moment that kept showing up in these conversations, not right away, but just after the first answer, when there was finally a little space to think more honestly. That's when something would shift. Someone would remember, and you could hear it in the way they said it. "I haven't thought about that in a long time." "I forgot how much I wanted to do that."

It wasn't always about one big, defining dream. Sometimes it was a place they had always wanted to go. An experience they hadn't made time for yet. Something they had done once and couldn't stop thinking about. A version of their life that had felt possible at one point, and still did, if they let themselves consider it again.

What struck me most was how quickly those things can fade into the background. Not because they stop mat-tering, but because everything else gets louder. Work. Responsibilities. The pace of everyday life. The things that need your attention now. And yet, when given the space to reflect, people remembered not just what they wanted, but how deeply they wanted it.

This issue became about that moment. The recon-nection. The realization that something meaningful is still there, even if it hasn't been top of mind in a while.

What followed that realization was often gratitude. Not just for the possibility of doing it one day, but for the chance to remember it at all. To say it out loud. To ac-knowledge that it still holds weight.

Inside these pages, you'll find stories that take differ-ent shapes. A decision to try something unconventional in search of clarity. The pull toward the sky and what it means to become a flight instructor. A reflection on father-hood and how becoming a dad can quietly reshape every-thing. A desire to leave something meaningful behind, to think about legacy in a way that extends beyond work.

Some of these stories reflect experiences already lived, while others are still unfolding or just beginning to take



*"One life, just one.
Why aren't we running on fire
towards our wildest dreams?"
Source unknown*

shape. Some feel expansive, others quieter and more person-al, but all of them point to the same truth: there are parts of us that don't disappear; they simply wait for our attention.

If there's anything I hope this issue gives you, it's a moment to consider that for yourself. Not in a big or over-whelming way, just enough to pause and notice what's still there. The thing you've been meaning to come back to. The part of you that never really left.

*With heart,
Haley Kershner,
Customer Marketing Manager, Anchor*

Laura Beth

Slow and Steady, She Finally Got It Right

After years of growth, development, self-reflection, and learning to stand fully on her own, she redefined what marriage meant, choosing partnership not out of expectation but out of intention.

For years, Laura Beth (LB) Sullivan believed marriage was something she was supposed to want, a milestone shaped more by expectation than conviction. But somewhere between therapy, building a business, and learning how to like her own company, that idea shifted. What once felt like pressure became something far more intentional. “I really want to partner with a good man,” she says, describing a desire that emerged not from fear of being alone, but from a deep understanding of who she had become. The dream was no longer about timing or appearances. It was about readiness, about choosing a relationship that would make her healthier, not just happier, and trusting herself enough to wait for it.

In her 20s, marriage felt like a next step she was supposed to take. It existed alongside another expectation, that life would naturally include both a husband and children, that happiness would follow that formula if she followed it correctly. But even then, there were early signals that her path might not unfold that way. Her parents, steady in their perspective, reminded her often that “there are worse things in life than being single,” a message that would later anchor her when the timeline she once imagined began to stretch.

As she moved into her 30s, something began

to change. Through therapy, through pursuing a master’s in counseling, and through the quiet, ongoing work of understanding herself, her perspective on relationships deepened. What had once been about checking a box became something more nuanced, more intentional. Marriage was no longer about meeting a societal expectation. It became about partnership. About growing alongside someone. About choosing, not needing.

That distinction mattered more than she realized at the time.

Because alongside that growth came uncertainty. There were moments when she wondered if it might not happen at all. Turning 40 forced a kind of reckoning she hadn’t been able to avoid before. She knew she didn’t want to have children after that point, which meant letting go of a version of life she had once assumed would be hers. “I grieved it,” she says, acknowledging both the loss and the quiet acceptance that followed. It wasn’t just about timing. It was about identity, about releasing the idea that her life had to look a certain way to be meaningful.

There were harder moments, too. Seasons where the gap between what she thought her life would be and what it was felt especially sharp. She describes periods marked by frustration, by trying to fill that gap in ways that didn’t align



with who she wanted to be. “I would go home and look in the mirror and be like, who am I?” she says. It was less about any one decision and more about the realization that she was living outside of her values, trying to force something that wasn’t right.

That awareness became a turning point.

In one relationship, she recognized something uncomfortable but undeniable. She wasn’t showing up as her full self. She was trying to control outcomes, trying to shape the relationship into something that would ease her own loneliness. “I felt like I was using him to not be lonely,” she says. “And that’s not who I want to be.” Walking away meant choosing integrity over comfort, even when it would have been easier to stay.

It was a decision she could not have made years earlier.

That version of herself, she knows now, wasn’t ready yet. Not for the kind of relationship she ultimately wanted. “I still needed to do a lot of learning and growing,” she says. And that learning didn’t come all at once. It came through small, compounding moments. Choosing to go to grad school. Leaving a stable role to start her own business. Letting go of friendships that no longer felt healthy. Surrounding herself with people who reflected back a version of herself she was still learning to believe.

“They saw who I was and called me out,” she says. “They stood in that gap until I got there.”

Over time, something shifted internally. Not in a dramatic, overnight way, but in a steady accumulation of self-trust. She began to like who she was. To recognize her own worth without needing it reflected back through a relationship. “I am a gift,” she says, describing a realization that felt both simple and hard-won. It wasn’t about becoming someone new. It was about finally seeing herself clearly.

And with that came a different kind of peace.

Two months before she met Barry, she reached a point she describes as surrender. Not resignation, but a conscious decision to stop forcing

something she could not control. “I don’t want to make something happen just because I’m not willing to wait,” she says. It was a quiet shift, but a significant one. For the first time, she was no longer trying to engineer the outcome.

When Barry entered her life, she didn’t meet him with wide-eyed optimism. If anything, she was cautious. Protective of her energy, aware of how much she had already invested in her own life and work. “I don’t have the energy to go through heartbreak again,” she says. Instead of leaning in quickly, she did the opposite. She set clear boundaries. She told the truth, even when it felt blunt. She refused to shape herself to fit what she thought he might want.

“I really want to partner with a good man.”

“I’m not doing that anymore,” she says. “You either are okay with me, or you’re not.” What made this relationship different wasn’t a sudden,

overwhelming feeling. It was consistency. Barry knew what he wanted, and he wasn’t afraid to pursue it. He respected her boundaries. He showed up steadily, without games or ambiguity. “A man is like, I know what I want,” she says. “I’m not going to let you go.”

Their relationship unfolded slowly, intentionally. Both of them carrying past experiences that made them cautious, but also clear. They set a shared pace from the beginning. “Slow and steady,” she says, a phrase that would eventually be engraved inside their wedding rings. It wasn’t just a sentiment. It was a commitment to doing things differently this time.

There was no rush to prove anything. No need to force certainty before it was ready. Instead, there was a steady accumulation of reasons to stay. To say yes, one step at a time.

When he proposed, she was caught completely off guard. Not because she didn’t see a future with him, but because she wasn’t tracking it, wasn’t trying to predict or control when it would happen. “What are you doing?” she remembers asking, surprised as he got down on one knee. And then, just as quickly, the answer became clear.

It wasn’t about a perfect moment. It was about a mutual decision.



“I’m not in the relationship to make me happy. I’m in the relationship to make me healthy.”

“I want to say yes to him before I say yes to anyone else,” she says. That, more than anything, is how she defines knowing.

Marriage, she admits, surprised her in ways she didn’t expect. Not in grand, sweeping gestures, but in the quiet, daily reality of it. “I enjoy being around him,” she says, almost laughing at how simple and significant that realization is. After years of independence, of building a life on her own terms, she didn’t feel confined. She felt grounded.

“I’m not in the relationship to make me happy,” she says. “I’m in the relationship to make me healthy.”

It’s a distinction that reframes everything.

Because for LB, the dream was never just marriage. It was becoming the kind of person who could choose it for the right reasons. Someone

who could stand fully on her own and still decide to share her life with someone else. Someone who understood that love is not something you force into existence, but something you grow into, slowly, steadily, over time.

Looking back, she knows it would not have worked if she had met Barry earlier. Not because of him, but because of who she was then. “I wasn’t ready,” she says simply.

Now, the dream feels different than it once did. Less about timing. Less about expectation. More about alignment.

“Don’t waste your life wishing for what it could be,” she says. “Live where you are.”

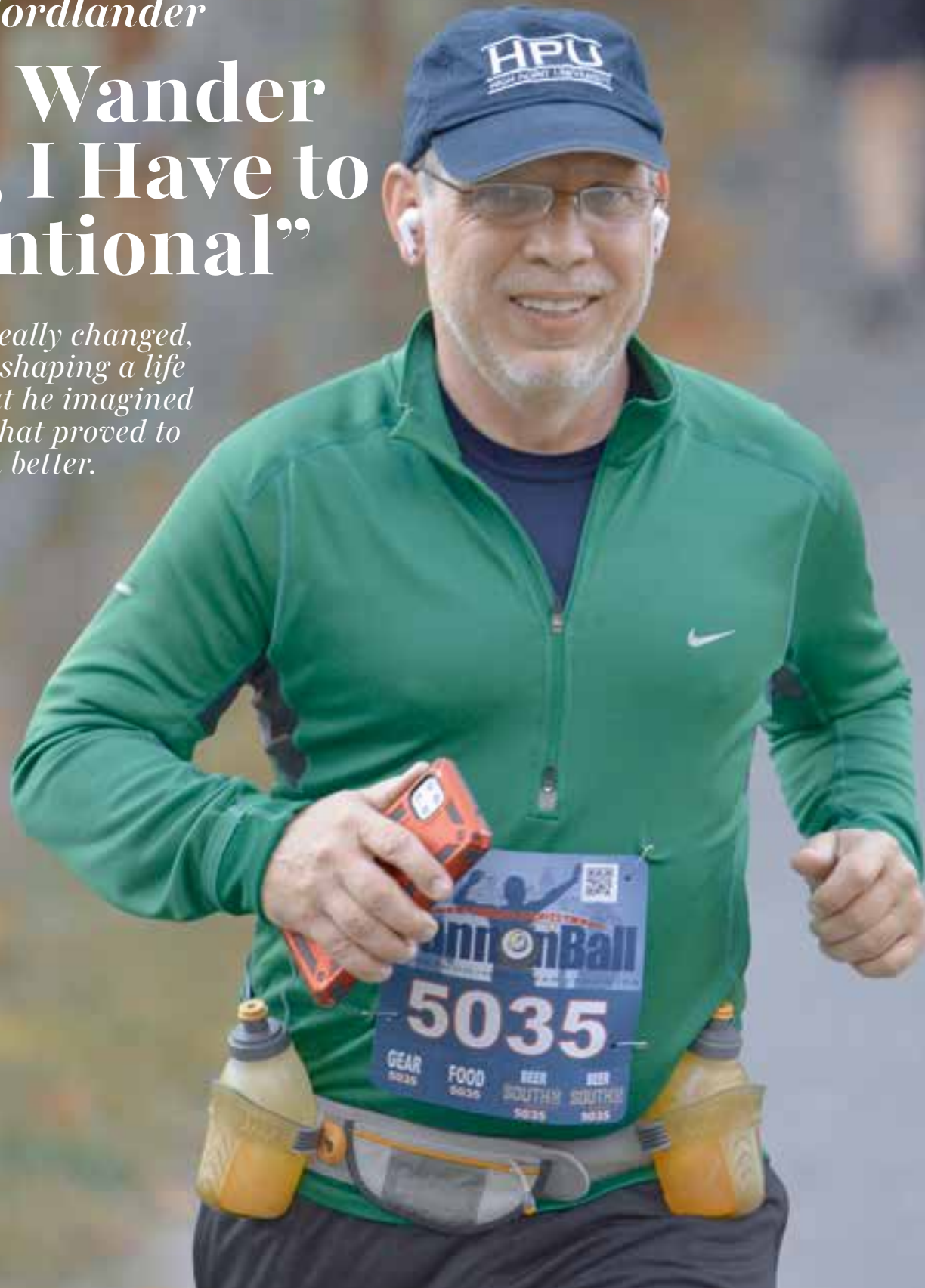
Because for her, that was the turning point. Not finding love, but becoming someone who no longer needed to chase it.

And then, when the time was right, choosing it anyway.

Robert Nordlander

“I Can’t Wander Out of It, I Have to Be Intentional”

The dream never really changed, only the path did, shaping a life defined not by what he imagined as a kid, but by what proved to fit him even better.



As a kid, Robert Nordlander imagined a life defined by motion, risk, and purpose, the kind he saw on shows like *Chips* and *Miami Vice*, where the people chasing danger always seemed just a step ahead of it. “I always liked to be the guy that rushed into burning homes,” he says, describing a pull not just toward adventure, but toward being the one who shows up when it matters most. For years, the dream was clear: become an FBI agent, chase bad guys, live a life that felt as meaningful as it did unpredictable. But the version of that dream Robert ultimately built didn’t look exactly like what he imagined. In some ways, it became something far more aligned than he ever expected.

The plan, at least in the beginning, was surprisingly strategic. Robert knew early on that the FBI often recruited accountants and lawyers, so following in his father’s footsteps, he chose accounting, not because it was the dream itself, but because it could be the door into one. It was a practical decision layered underneath something much more instinctive, a desire to step into situations where something was at stake, to be the person who ran toward problems instead of away from them.

That instinct showed up long before his federal career ever began. As a teenager, he became a junior volunteer firefighter, drawn not to the idea of danger itself, but to what it represented. “Sixteen years old, yeah, sign me up,” he recalls. Even then, there was a pattern forming, one that would follow him through every stage of his life.

After graduating college early, before he was even old enough to fully step into federal law enforcement, Robert stayed the course in accounting. Life moved forward in the way it tends to do, steady, practical, building. But the dream didn’t disappear. It waited. And when he reached a point where staying put no longer made sense, he made a decision that would shape everything that followed.

“If I’m going to do it, now’s the time to do it.”

He applied everywhere: the FBI, Secret Service, DEA, IRS. It wasn’t about one specific badge anymore. It was about stepping into the kind of work he had always imagined for himself. The IRS Criminal Investigation division was the one that called him back.

It wasn’t the FBI. But it was something else entirely.

What he found there was a version of the dream that felt sharper, more focused, and unexpectedly more aligned. Instead of splitting his time across different types of cases, he spent twenty years immersed in white collar crime, using accounting not as a stepping stone, but as a tool. It was, in many ways, the exact intersection he hadn’t known to look for.

“It was a great marriage between law enforcement and accounting,” he says. “That’s all you do, is use your accounting skills in a law enforcement function.”

The work gave him what he had always been drawn to, the pursuit, the problem solving, the sense that what he was doing mattered. But it also gave him something the original dream may not have. Stability. A sense of place. A life that didn’t require constant movement or uprooting.

With the IRS, he could stay in one city. Build a life. Raise a family without the uncertainty that often comes with other federal roles. Looking back, that tradeoff doesn’t feel like a compromise. It feels like clarity.

“I didn’t feel like dragging my family around the country because I wanted a career,” he says.

That perspective, grounded and deliberate, is something that seems to have deepened over time. Because while the early version of his dream was about action and momentum, the version he lives now is shaped just as much by intention.

It’s a word he returns to often. Not as a concept, but as a practice.

“There’s times in your life where you realize this carries more weight than you thought it did,” he says.

“At the end of the day, I hope people think that I treated them fairly.”

In his thirties, it showed up in his work. The realization that talent alone wouldn't carry him as far as consistency would. That being dependable mattered more than being the smartest person in the room. That showing up, over and over again, was what built a career.

"You don't have to be the smartest guy in the world," he says. "You just have to be consistent and dependable."

Over time, that same principle extended into other parts of his life.

Health. Finances. Relationships. Giving. Areas where it's easy to drift without noticing until the impact becomes unavoidable.

You don't accidentally build the life you want. You choose it, repeatedly, often in small, unremarkable ways.

That idea reshaped how he approached giving in particular. Something he had always done, but not always with intention.

"I was giving, but I wasn't being intentional about it," he says.

So he changed it. Not in a dramatic way, but in a deliberate one. Setting aside money specifically to give away. Looking for opportunities instead of waiting for them. Turning something passive into something active.

It's a shift that mirrors the larger arc of his life. The move from instinct to intention. From chasing a version of a dream to fully understanding what made that dream meaningful in the first place.

Because at its core, the desire was never really about the title. It wasn't about being an FBI agent specifically. It was about something more fundamental.

Helping people.

Stepping in when it mattered.

Doing work that felt like it had weight to it.



"I always liked to be the guy that rushed into burning homes."

Even his time outside of federal work reflected that. Serving on city council. Riding along with police officers to better understand their work. Eventually becoming a volunteer deputy, spending nights and weekends doing the kind of work he had been drawn to since he was a kid.

"I'll play cops and robbers on weekends," he says, half joking, half serious.

But underneath it is the same throughline. A life built not around a single role, but around a consistent desire to serve.

That perspective has also been shaped by what he's seen along the way. The realities of law enforcement that don't show up in television versions of the job. The complexity of

people. The patterns that repeat.

"There's truly evil people in this world," he says. "But a lot of it is alcohol or drug related."

Seeing both sides, the prosecution and the defense, added another layer. A more nuanced understanding of justice. Not as something absolute, but as something that requires care, precision, and restraint.

"I can't make a guilty person innocent," he says. "All I can do is make sure their rights haven't been violated, and they're not getting steamrolled."

It's a perspective rooted less in judgment and more in responsibility.

And when he thinks about what all of it adds up to, the career, the choices, the evolution of how he sees the world, the answer isn't complicated.

It's not about titles or accomplishments.

"If I had, at the end of the day, I hope that people think that I treated them fairly," he says. "That I was kind to them."

There's something quiet about that answer. Something that doesn't try to impress or overreach.

Just a simple measure of a life well lived.

For Robert, the dream may have started with flashing lights and high-stakes pursuits. But the version he built is defined by something steadier.

Not just what he did.

But how he chose to do it.



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Deb Elver

“Why are you waiting?”

After reading Die with Zero, she stopped waiting for someday and started making the moments that matter now, beginning with the trip she had always put off.

Deb Elver never thought of herself as someone with a formal bucket list. The dreams were there, places she wanted to go, experiences she imagined “someday,” but they weren’t urgent. They lived in the space most people reserve for later.

“I didn’t really have a bucket list written down,” she says. “But in my mind, it was like, when I retire, I want to do these things.”

It’s a familiar structure. One most people follow without questioning it. Build the life first. Work hard. Be responsible. Then, at some later point, enjoy it.

For a long time, that framework made sense. It felt disciplined. Thoughtful. Even necessary. But embedded in it is an assumption that rarely gets examined closely, that there will always be time later to do the things that matter most.

That assumption began to shift the moment Deb read *Die with Zero*, by Bill Perkins. One story, in particular, stays with her. Perkins writes about moving up his own milestone celebration, realizing that waiting could mean missing the chance to share it with the people he loves most.

It isn’t the scale of the story that lands. It’s the reasoning behind it.

Timing isn’t neutral.

“All we have is our memories,” she says.

The idea stayed with her longer than she expected. It followed her out of the book and into her own life, quietly reframing something she hadn’t previously questioned. Because if memories are the point, then delaying them starts to feel less like responsibility and more like loss. And suddenly, the idea of waiting didn’t feel responsible anymore. It felt like missing something you might not get back.

Within hours, that realization became personal.

A place she had always talked about, Iceland, came to mind. It had lived comfortably in the category of someday. A place she would get to eventually. A trip that made sense for later, when there was more time, more space, fewer competing priorities.

But this time, someday didn’t feel neutral.

“I just finished reading the book and thought, you know what, I really want to go to Iceland,” she says.

She walked into her office, opened her email, and saw an offer for a trip to Iceland waiting for her. A limited-time deal. A deadline. A small but undeniable push.

“It felt like it was meant to be.”





“I think a lot of it is fear of running out of money.”

Within minutes, she brought it up to her husband. Shortly after that, she booked the trip. No long deliberation. No pushing it into the next year or the next phase of life.

It was a simple decision on the surface, but what it represented was not.

It wasn't about Iceland.

Before, time felt abundant in a vague, undefined way. After, it felt more specific, still open, but no longer infinite.

That subtle shift changed how decisions felt.

Because when time is assumed to be endless, waiting feels safe. When it's understood to be finite, waiting starts to feel like a choice, one that comes with trade-offs.

In Deb's world, that realization shows up every day.

“I think a lot of it is fear of running out of

money,” she says.

It's something she sees constantly in her work. People who have built successful careers, accumulated significant resources, and still hesitate when it comes to actually using what they've built. They plan carefully. They optimize relentlessly. They delay.

“If everybody knew the day they were going to die, it would be no problem,” she says.

Because then the math would be simple.

But uncertainty creates caution. And over time, that caution can turn into something else. A habit of postponing. A tendency to believe that later will somehow be a better, more appropriate time to live fully.

The problem is, later isn't static. Health changes. Energy shifts. Interests evolve.

“I see that with clients all the time,” she says.

“One year they feel fine, the next year they don't



want to do the things they used to do anymore.”

The window for certain experiences doesn't stay open indefinitely. It moves, often quietly, until one day it's no longer there in the same way.

That's the part people underestimate.

Waiting isn't neutral. It's a trade. You're trading the version of yourself who can do something now for the assumption that a future version will want to, or be able to.

Sometimes that trade works out. Sometimes it doesn't.

That perspective has changed the way Deb approaches conversations with her clients.

On the surface, those conversations are about money. Taxes. Investments. Long-term strategy. But underneath, they often carry something more personal. Questions about what matters. What's enough. What kind of life someone is actually trying to build.

She thinks about one client who wanted to carefully structure his finances to minimize taxes years down the line. It was a smart plan.

Technically sound. But it raised a different question for her.

“Who are you saving money for?” she asked.

The answer shifted everything.

Because the plan wasn't really about his life. It was about preserving wealth for someone else, someday.

That's where the mindset shift lives.

Not in abandoning planning, but in re-centering it. In recognizing that money is not just something to protect. It's something to use. To translate into experiences, time, and moments that actually shape a life while you're still living it.

She sees the opposite approach, too. Clients who give generously while they're still here. Who want to see the impact of what they've built. Who choose presence over preservation.

Those stories resonate differently with her now.

Because they reflect something she's learning to practice herself.

That practice isn't about constant spontaneity. It's about intention.

"It doesn't have to be travel," she says. "It could be spending more time with your grandkids, or starting something you've been putting off."

The specifics are different for everyone. The pattern is the same.

Stop deferring what matters.

For Deb, that shows up in how she structures her year now. Trips planned ahead of time. Space created deliberately. Experiences treated as priorities, not rewards that come after everything else is done.

It also shows up in how she protects that time. When she steps away, she fully steps away.

"I'm not even bringing my computer," she says.

Because presence isn't something that happens automatically. It requires boundaries. It requires choosing, again and again, to step out of the constant pull of work and responsibility.

"A lot of what we do is being a sounding board for people," she says.

Clients come to her not just for technical answers, but for perspective. For reassurance. For help navigating decisions that are often emotional as much as they are financial.

That kind of work takes energy. And that energy has to be replenished. Experiences. Time away. Moments that feel fully lived.

What shifted for Deb isn't loud or dramatic. It doesn't look like a complete reinvention from the outside, and that's what makes it so easy to miss. But internally, something fundamental has changed. She no longer sees time as something that will stretch to accommodate her plans. Instead, she recognizes that the life she's been preparing for is already happening, and that waiting for a later version of it carries a cost.

Not always a visible one, but a real one.

Because the longer something is deferred, the more it depends on variables no one can control. Health. Energy. Interest. The presence of the people you want to share it with. What once felt



"All we have is our memories."

like a responsible delay begins to look more like a quiet risk.

For Deb, that realization didn't show up as a single, defining decision. It showed up in smaller, more immediate choices. Booking the trip she had talked about for years. Taking the time instead of postponing it. Asking different questions about what her work and her money were actually for.

The trip to Iceland wasn't the point. It was proof that the things we say we'll do later are often available now, if we're willing to move them forward. Proof that the version of life we imagine for the future isn't something we arrive at, it's something we either choose now, or quietly postpone until it's no longer available in the same way.

And maybe that's the question underneath all of it.

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Caleb Johnson

Not for Fame, Not for Numbers, Just to Feel Like Himself Again



Caleb Johnson didn't grow up chasing the kind of dream that comes with metrics attached to it. There was no vision board filled with streaming numbers, no fixation on audience size or industry validation. Music was there early, woven into the fabric of his childhood, but it wasn't something he questioned or defined. It simply existed, something he did because it was part of his world.

His mom was musical, always singing, always connected to it in a way that made it feel alive in their home. She had traveled and performed in college, and that sense of movement, of expression, stayed with him. By the time he was six or seven, he was already in lessons, starting with the recorder before quickly moving to the trumpet. What followed was years of formal training, the kind that teaches discipline as much as it teaches sound. Reading sheet music. Playing in orchestras. Learning how to follow structure before ever questioning it.

From eight to eighteen, music was constant, but it was also defined. Classical. Structured. Guided. It lived within the boundaries of what was written on the page. And then, as often happens with things that are tied to a specific season of life, it stopped. College came, and with it, a quiet disconnection. Not just from music, but from having any kind of creative outlet at all.

For a while, that absence didn't feel urgent. Life filled in around it. Work, routines, the early stages of building a career. On the surface, everything looked like it was moving in the right direction. But somewhere underneath that, something started to feel off.

He was in a sales role, early in his career, doing what he describes as "going through the

motions," settling into what he calls the "groove of life." It was stable. Predictable. The kind of path that makes sense on paper. But there was a growing awareness that something was missing, something he hadn't realized he had lost until he felt the absence of it.

In his early twenties, he reconnected with music, turning it into a space for self-expression, reflection, and creating something that feels entirely his own.

"I need something that reminds me of who I am," he says now, reflecting on that moment. Not something tied to performance. Not something measured by outcomes or evaluated in a quarterly review. Something separate. Something his.

Something his.

The return to music didn't come from a single, dramat-

ic decision. It unfolded more quietly, through a realization that there was still something inside him that needed a place to go. That realization sharpened during a songwriting session he attended, led by a music producer in London. It wasn't about technique or theory. It was something more abstract.

At one point, the group was asked to write as if they were rain. Not themselves, but something else entirely. To answer questions from that perspective. It felt strange, almost detached, until the exercise shifted.

When they returned to themselves and looked at what they had written, the realization landed. What felt abstract was actually deeply personal. "There's a ton inside of me that I need to get out on a piece of paper," he says.

That moment didn't just reconnect him to music. It reframed it. It became less about skill and more about expression. Less about getting it right and more about getting it out.

Since then, his approach has been intentionally simple. No waiting for the perfect setup. No holding off until he feels more qualified. Just



“I need something that reminds me of who I am.”

creating with what he has, exactly where he is.

His current setup is modest: a laptop, basic monitors, and a simple workspace. But that limitation has become part of the process. “Do what I can with what I have already,” he says, a mindset that keeps him from getting caught in the endless loop of needing more before starting.

Most days, creating looks less like a polished session and more like experimentation. Opening the software. Trying something. Learning as he goes. Some sessions end with something he’s proud of. Others don’t. But the outcome isn’t the point.

“It’s more about the practice of showing up and being present for the art form than any-

thing else,” he explains.

That consistency has led to something tangible. His first single, created alongside friends, including his wife, who is featured on the track, was released without expectation. No targets. No pressure. Just curiosity.

And that’s what made it meaningful.

“I didn’t really have any expectations for it... it could just exist,” he says.

What surprised him wasn’t the release itself, but what followed. Messages from people he didn’t expect. Casual connections reaching out to say they were listening, that the song had found its way into their playlists. Small moments



of connection that only happen when something is put out into the world without control over how it will be received.

Those moments reinforced something he's still learning to trust. The value isn't in trying to make something for everyone, but in making something honest enough that it resonates with someone.

That idea carries into the kind of music he's creating now. A project he describes as affirmations for his current season of life, grounded in his experience in his early twenties and the pressure, uncertainty, and constant push for self-improvement that come with it.

Instead of leaning into the weight of those feelings, he flips them.

A song about feeling behind becomes "right on time." A tendency toward self-criticism becomes a reminder that growth and self-acceptance can exist at the same time. The music doesn't ignore reality, but it reframes it, offering something steadier in return.

If the dream continues to grow, he's clear about what he wants it to feel like.

Not forced. Not rushed. Not performative.
Just an extension of who he already is.

"I think it would just feel like an expression of who I am," he says. And more than that, something that might give other people a moment of ease in the middle of everything else they're carrying.

There's also a clarity about what he doesn't want. The parts of the industry that prioritize status over substance. The pressure to fit into something more marketable at the expense of individuality. He's seen how easily that can dilute what makes something meaningful in the first place.

"People want the edge," he says. The thing that's different. The thing that feels like it belongs to the person who made it.

Looking ahead, he doesn't define success in terms of scale. He defines it in terms of consistency. Music as a "landing place," somewhere he can return to, whether it's to process something difficult or to create something entirely new.



"Do what I can with what I have already."

Because for him, this dream isn't about becoming something else.

It's about staying connected to who he already is.

And if a future version of himself could speak back to him now, there's a sense of what that would sound like. A kind of reassurance.

"You're on to something," he says. A reminder to trust the process. To stop second-guessing. To keep creating the things only he can make, for the people who will recognize themselves in it.

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Lynnette Oss Connell

The Dream That Waited 20 Years

For years, yoga helped her carry the weight of demanding seasons. Now, Lynnette is learning to lead with it, turning a long-held dream into a practice that centers both her life and the people around her.

For more than two decades, Lynnette Oss Connell carried a quiet, persistent dream: to become a yoga teacher. It began not in a studio, but at a desk, during her early years in public accounting, when long hours of sitting led her to seek relief. What she found was something deeper. “I fell in love with it because of the benefit to my peace,” she says. Over time, the practice became a steady undercurrent through seasons of stress, motherhood, and even trauma. But it wasn’t until after selling her firm in 2023 that the question shifted from someday to now. Walking into her first training session, she didn’t hesitate. It felt, as she puts it, “like when a puzzle clicks.”

For Lynnette, yoga was never just about movement. It was about composure. In the earliest days of her career, as she navigated her first busy seasons in public accounting, the practice offered something she didn’t yet have language for but instinctively needed: a way to stay steady

in the midst of pressure. “It helped me navigate my first busy seasons with a little bit more composure than I think I would have had if I hadn’t,” she says.

That sense of steadiness became something she returned to again and again, even if the dream of teaching remained in the background. Life expanded in the way it does. She built a firm. She raised a family. She moved through seasons that demanded her full attention, including periods of medical trauma within her family that required her to respond quickly, decisively, and without pause. In those moments, yoga wasn’t always something she could access in real time. But it became something she relied on afterward.

“So much of what we do is reactive,” she says. “If somebody’s not breathing, you’re on the phone, you’re getting them to the ambulance.” The practice, at that point, became a way to process what had already happened. A way to move





“I fell in love with it because of the benefit to my peace.”

es. Grounds herself. Waits until she can engage without being pulled into the same intensity.

“I can’t affect a positive change if I’m getting sucked into the negative energy,” she says.

It’s a real-time practice. Imperfect, evolving. But intentional.

At its core is something yoga has been teaching her all along: calm isn’t the absence of chaos. It’s the ability to remain steady within it.

That lesson extends beyond her home and into what she imagines next.

While she’s still in the middle of her training, Lynnette is already thinking about how she wants to share what she’s learning. Not in a broad or abstract way, but in specific, personal contexts.

She’s especially drawn to working with older adults.

“It felt like when a puzzle clicks. It was just the right next piece.”

“I just love working with our elders,” she says. “They’re such an untapped resource of joy, perspective.”

In her community, she’s surrounded by people in their seventies and beyond. People who carry decades of experience, wisdom, and, often, physical limitations that make traditional perceptions of yoga feel out of reach.

Her vision is to meet them where they are.

“To help them with their daily joy, to alleviate some pain, and hopefully create more community around movement,” she says.

It’s not about complicated poses or performance. It’s about accessibility. Presence. Connection.

And in many ways, that mirrors what the practice has become for her.

Not something to achieve, but something to return to.

If she could speak to the version of herself who first had this dream 20 years ago, she wouldn’t rush her forward.

“It’s going to happen,” she says.

There’s no regret in the waiting. No sense that she missed her moment.

Instead, there’s an understanding that timing isn’t always something to control. Sometimes, it’s something to recognize.

“I think in every person’s life you have windows,” she says. “For me, it wasn’t an option earlier, and now it is.”

And when that window opens, the work becomes something else entirely.

“Don’t say no when the window is there,” she says. “Don’t be so afraid to say yes.”

Because sometimes the dream doesn’t change. The person who’s ready to live it does.



Tiffany Gonzalez

Success Got Her Here. Now She's Bringing Everyone With Her

After a childhood shaped by financial stress and sacrifice, Tiffany Gonzalez is redefining success by creating the kind of family experience her parents could never fully enjoy.

She can already see it. Thirteen people, kids under six running through the sand, her parents finally still, everyone together in a way that never quite felt possible before. “A little chaotic,” she admits, laughing, “like Home Alone mixed with the Brady Bunch.” But this isn’t just a family vacation. It’s the outcome of years of work, sacrifice, and a deeply personal definition of success that has evolved over time. “The feeling is gratitude,” she says. “It’s giving back.” For Tiffany, the dream is simple on the surface: pay for the trip, bring everyone together. But underneath, it’s about rewriting what those moments cost, and what they’re worth.

For most of her early life, money was something you felt before you understood. Tiffany grew up in a two-bedroom apartment with her parents and two sisters, three girls sharing a room that held both a crib and a bunk bed. It was close, in every sense of the word. Close quarters. Close relationships. Close enough to overhear the quiet conversations about bills, about overtime, about how they were going to make it all work.

Her father worked blue-collar jobs. Her

mother worked as an administrator. Both worked constantly. Overtime wasn’t optional, it was necessary. “We were very aware,” Tiffany says. “Why isn’t dad here on Saturday? He’s working overtime.” There wasn’t blame, just reality. A steady understanding that time, energy, and presence were often exchanged for stability.

Vacations, when they happened, carried that same tension. They were rare, and they were meaningful, but they were also heavy. Tiffany remembers two trips to Germany to visit family who had left Cuba and built lives there. As a child, those trips felt expansive. She was ten years old, playing with cousins, racing go-karts, standing in a moment that felt bigger than anything she had known. “This is so nice,” she remembers thinking. “This is so nice to be carefree and fun with your family together on vacation.”

But even then, she could feel it. The stress before the trip. The counting of dollars during it. The weight that followed after. Years later, as a teenager, she learned the full picture. Those trips had put her parents into debt that took years to repay. “Six years,” she recalls thinking. “You’re still paying off a vacation that happened





*“We were very aware. Why isn’t dad here on Saturday?
He’s working overtime.”*

six years ago.”

That realization didn’t take away the beauty of those memories, but it reframed them. It planted a question that would follow her into adulthood: what does it take to create these moments, and at what cost?

The answer, for Tiffany, became both practical and deeply personal. If money was the barrier, she would learn everything about it. She would understand it, control it, use it differently. “If you want to fix something, you have to be super knowledgeable about it,” she says. That decision led her into accounting, into studying the time value of

money, budgeting, investing, taxes. Not just as a profession, but as a way to rewrite the story she had grown up inside of.

At first, success looked like what you would expect. Revenue milestones. Team growth. Recognition. The external markers that signal you’ve made it. Then it shifted. It became the ability to travel, to create experiences for herself, then for her husband, then for her children.

And then, quietly, it shifted again.

On family trips with her own kids, she started to notice

something. They were having fun, but they were missing something too. “They get bored,” she says. “They want to play.” Play with their cousins. Share the experience with more than just their immediate family. And at the same time, she knew her parents and siblings couldn’t easily join. Not without the same kind of financial strain she remembered from childhood.

The idea came together slowly. Part instinct, part realization. She was already creating these kinds of experiences for her team through company retreats. Why not do the same for her family?

Now, the vision is clear. Thirteen people. Her parents, her sisters, their partners, their children, her own family. All in one place. No one calculating the cost. No one carrying the stress. Just presence.

“A sense of relief,” she says, when asked what she hopes they feel. “Relaxation. Gratitude for life and health.” Without the pressure of money, the experience becomes something else entirely. Simpler. Fuller. A conversation that lingers longer. A moment that doesn’t come with a cost waiting on the other side.

For Tiffany, that shift is everything. Because behind this dream is another story, one that has shaped her understanding of sacrifice in a way that goes far beyond finances.

Her father left Cuba at 22 years old on a handmade raft.

The story is one she grew up hearing, but its weight has only deepened over time. Facing forced military recruitment and limited options, he made a decision that required a level of courage Tiffany still measures her own life against. He built the raft in secret, hiding materials in rocky coves. Told almost no one. Left in the early hours of the morning with only a cousin and, unexpectedly, a third person who forced their way into the plan.

They launched from near the Coast Guard, a choice that felt almost unthinkable. “The Coast Guard is looking everywhere else,” he reasoned. “They don’t think anyone is crazy enough to leave from right here.”

For three nights, they drifted. Paddles lost. Taking turns kicking the raft forward. Navigating by stars. Sunburned, dehydrated, surrounded by darkness so complete they couldn’t see their own hands. “It’s only you and the stars

*This is so nice to be carefree and fun with
your family together on vacation.*





*“It’s like a full circle. You made sacrifices,
I’m making a sacrifice, and we all get to benefit from it.”*

out there,” Tiffany says, recalling his words.

Eventually, a Russian ship found them. Then the U.S. Coast Guard. Then, finally, Miami.

That decision, that moment of risk and uncertainty, is something Tiffany returns to often. Especially when she faces her own fears. “Nothing I can do in this lifetime is ever going to be as courageous as that,” she says.

It’s not just the courage that stays with her. It’s the sacrifice.

“I think one of the biggest life lessons I’ve gotten from my dad is that it’s not just about courage,” she says. “It’s the sacrifice. I’m willing to sacrifice my life for my next generation to have a better life.”

That belief runs quietly through everything she’s built. The long hours. The missed events. The discipline required to create something sustainable. Turning sacrifice into something the next generation doesn’t have to carry in the same way.

Which is why this dream, this one trip, holds so much weight.

It’s not just a vacation. It’s proof.

Proof that the sacrifices made before her, and the ones she continues to make now, have led somewhere. That they’ve created a life where giving back doesn’t come at the same cost. That success can look like a full table, a crowded beach, a moment where no one is thinking about what it took to get there.

If you ask her what that moment will mean, she doesn’t hesitate.

“Success.”

Not the kind measured in revenue or recognition, but something quieter, more lasting. The ability to bring everyone with her. To let her parents rest. To let her children play. To stand in a moment that once felt out of reach and know it no longer is.

And maybe, most importantly, to give her father a reflection of what his sacrifice made possible.

“I think he would feel very proud,” she says.

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Jennifer Feinson

A Creative Life, Waiting Its Turn

In the middle of loss, homeschooling, and uncertainty, Jennifer Feinson picked up a paintbrush. What followed wasn't just a way to pass the time, but the beginning of a creative path she hopes to grow into something more.

“It started during COVID,” Jennifer says, tracing her dream back to a time that was already filled with loss, uncertainty, and two kindergartners at home. Her father had passed away just months before, and suddenly, life had slowed in a way she hadn’t chosen. Down in the basement, where a bouncy house helped her boys burn off energy, Jennifer noticed furniture she had been meaning to work on for years. “Why don’t I just start one of these projects?” she remembers thinking. She didn’t have formal training, just YouTube videos and a willingness to try. What began as something to keep her mind active soon became something she genuinely loved, and eventually, a dream of opening a studio where she could create freely.

For more than 30 years, Jennifer built her career in accounting and finance, a path defined by structure, precision, and steady progression. Creativity wasn’t absent from her life, but it lived more on the edges, something she appreciated rather than something she actively pursued. It wasn’t until everything slowed that she had the space to notice what had been quietly waiting.

At the time, her twin boys were just beginning

school, navigating their first year from home. Like so many families, their days were a mix of screens, schedules, and restless energy. To help them move, to give them a break from sitting still, Jennifer set up a bouncy house in the basement. It became a place for them to burn energy, but also, unexpectedly, a place where something else began.

“I was down there with them while they were going crazy,” she says. “And I just kind of noticed these pieces of furniture I had that I kept meaning to do something with.”

They had been there for a while, solid wood pieces that she knew had value, even if they didn’t quite fit her home as they were. Like many things in a busy life, they had been waiting for the right moment, or at least a moment with enough time attached to it.

This time, she decided to start.

At first, it was simple. She began experimenting with paint, learning how to stain, figuring out what worked and what didn’t. There was no formal training, no structured plan. “I would honestly go on YouTube,” she says. “There’s a community that does this kind of restoration work.” From there, she learned by watching, by

trying, by making mistakes and adjusting.

It was, in every sense, a process of learning by doing.

What surprised her most wasn't just that she could figure it out, but how much she enjoyed it. The work required patience, attention, and a willingness to sit with something long enough to understand what it needed. Each piece brought its own decisions.

Sometimes, she would look at something and feel it didn't need to be changed much at all. "It's really beautiful the way it is," she says. In those cases, her goal was to bring it back, to clean it, restrain it, give it shine again, and restore it to what it might have looked like when it was first purchased.

Other times, the piece invited something different. A shift. A new identity. Maybe a darker base, a lighter top, something that felt more modern, more aligned with how people live now.

"Each piece is different," she says. "You can



kind of see the potential in it."

That idea, potential, is what keeps drawing her back. Not just in the work itself, but in the stories behind the pieces.

One of the moments that stayed with her most came when she picked up a cedar chest from an elderly woman who was moving into assisted living. The piece had been listed to give away, but when Jennifer arrived, the experience felt different than the others.

"She told me it was her wedding chest," Jennifer says. "She told me the whole story."

The chest had been part of her life for decades, something that had lived in her home through different chapters. Jennifer took it with the intention of restoring it, but also with a sense of responsibility to honor what it had been.

"I told her, I promise I'm doing something with this."

Today, that piece lives in Jennifer's home, transformed into a side table with new legs, but still carrying the story it came with. "It had been in somebody's home for 50 years," she says. "That was kind of an interesting dynamic."

It's not just about furniture. It's about continuity. About taking something that might otherwise be discarded and giving it a new place to belong.

Right now, all of this happens in a small, makeshift studio in the corner of her basement. It works, but it comes with limitations. Furniture is not small. It requires space to move, to sand, to stain, to let things sit and dry.

"When it comes to furniture, it's all about having the space," she says.

When she talks about her dream, that's where it starts. Space. Not just more of it, but the right kind of it. A studio that allows for both the work and what comes after.

She imagines it as two parts. A workshop where she can do the hands-on work, sanding, staining, building, and a showroom where the

"I think if you want to be creative, you can create a business out of it."



"Each piece is different. You can kind of see the potential in it."

finished pieces can live. A place where people can walk in, see what she's created, and maybe even bring in pieces of their own to be transformed.

"If somebody wants to bring a piece that they want redone, they would have a place to come," she says.

It's a vision that extends beyond just making things for herself. Because as much as she enjoys the process, she also knows there's a limit to how many pieces she can keep.

"There's more pieces I'd be interested in doing than I'm able to keep," she says. "It's about the creation part and then the finished product. And then give it to somebody who will use it and enjoy it."

That idea, of creating something and then letting it go, is part of what makes the work feel meaningful. It's not about accumulation. It's about transformation.

Right now, time is the biggest constraint.

Between her career and her family, there aren't long stretches available to spend in the basement working on projects. Her boys are older now, active, and her days are full in a different way than they were during COVID.

"I've slowed down because I'm busier," she says.

But the dream hasn't gone anywhere. If anything, it has become more defined.

"I think that's why this is a dream," she says. "At that point in my life where I have that time to dedicate to something, I really think I want to do something creative."

She doesn't attach it to a specific timeline. It's less about when and more about readiness. A next chapter, whenever that arrives, where there is space not just physically, but mentally, to build something different.

"When I'm ready to move into that next chapter," she says. "Even if I'm not working as much, and there's more time."

There's also something else woven into that vision, something she hopes her sons might take with them.

One of them, she notes, naturally gravitates toward the arts. Toward creativity in a way she didn't pursue in her own career. Watching that has shifted how she thinks about what's possible.

"I think if you want to be creative, you can create a business out of it," she says. "It can be a career."

It's a quiet but important belief. That creativity doesn't have to sit on the sidelines. That it can be something you build a life around, not instead of stability, but alongside it.

For Jennifer, that realization came later. But it feels no less real.

The studio isn't built yet. The time hasn't fully opened up. But the work has already begun, in small, steady ways, in a basement corner, in pieces that move from forgotten to finished, from past to present.

And when that next chapter comes, she won't be starting from scratch.

She'll be continuing something she's already started.

Sabrina Burke

What Happens When the Dream Isn't Enough

Theater gave her purpose, identity, and a place to belong. Leaving it meant redefining all three on her own terms.

Sabrina Burke doesn't hesitate when she talks about what theater once meant to her. "I love theater so much, but I hate acting," she says, laughing at the contradiction that shaped her path. What she loved wasn't the spotlight, it was everything behind it. Running shows off-Broadway, coordinating lights and music, managing the chaos so the magic could happen, she found her place in a world most people never see. It was her dream, even if it didn't look like one from the outside. But loving something deeply doesn't always mean you can stay. And for Sabrina, that realization came slowly, then all at once.

Long before she was managing productions in Manhattan, Sabrina knew she wanted to be part of something creative, something alive. The moment that crystallized it came unexpectedly, while she was running the soundboard at Queens College for a dance performance. She was juggling cues, syncing music with lighting, listening to instructions, when something shifted. "I couldn't stop myself from dancing," she recalls. In that instant, she wasn't just operating

the show, she was inside it. Not performing, not exposed, but essential. "I felt like a part of this huge production without having to put on the costumes or rehearse or practice or anything." It was the perfect balance, and it hooked her completely.

That feeling followed her into the off-Broadway world, where she spent years working her way up from spotlight operator to production manager. The work was demanding in ways few people outside the industry fully understand. Days blurred into nights. Shows didn't start until late, often 10 p.m., and ran past midnight. Her mornings began slowly, recovering from exhaustion, before shifting into the quiet, meticulous work of production, printing playbills, organizing costumes, managing equipment. But the real intensity came on weekends, when rehearsals stacked, actors rotated in and out, and everything had to be ready, always.

She remembers walking through Manhattan in the afternoons, flyers in hand, slipping them under windshield wipers to promote the show. Then it was back to the theater, opening the



space, checking mic packs, running tests, preparing for the unpredictable. Because once the show started, anything could happen.

And often, it did.

The productions she worked on weren't traditional. In one, the audience stood shoulder to shoulder on a dance floor, drinks in hand, as

actors performed around them. It was immersive, chaotic, electric, and required constant vigilance. A missed cue, a technical failure, or even a blackout could throw everything into disarray. In one instance, the power went out mid-show, leaving actors in costume among a crowd that didn't quite know what to do next. "It was a little scary," she admits. There were no clear boundaries, no easy exits, just a team trying to hold the experience together in real time.

And still, she loved it.

When she thinks back, it's not the stress that surfaces first, but the joy. The music, especially, stayed with her. "When I'm having a bad day, I put on Studio 54 Pandora, and I listen to disco," she says. Years later, she still knows every word, every movement, every beat of the choreography she watched over and over again. "There was never a time that it wasn't a blast." Even now, the memory lives in her body.

But the same world that gave her that joy also asked for something she couldn't ignore forever.

The financial reality of theater was stark. Despite her growing responsibilities, despite years of commitment, the pay remained minimal. At one point, she was earning just \$50 a week. It barely covered transportation and food, let alone rent. When she finally asked for a raise, the response stayed with her. "Well, whatever hap-

pened to people doing it for the love of theater?"

The question lingered, not because it inspired her, but because it clarified something she hadn't wanted to face. Love, on its own, wasn't enough.

"I have to eat too," she remembers thinking.

Around the same time, another decision was forming, one that had nothing to do with money

and everything to do with what she valued most. She had been offered a role at the Philadelphia Opera House, an opportunity to grow, to learn, to move deeper into the career she had worked toward for years. But it would require leaving home, leaving her family, at a moment when her life outside of work was beginning to shift. Her older sister was expecting her first child.

The choice was clear, even if it wasn't easy.

"If you're going to travel for work, you miss your family," she says. "And if you stay for your family, you might miss out on work."

She chose her family.

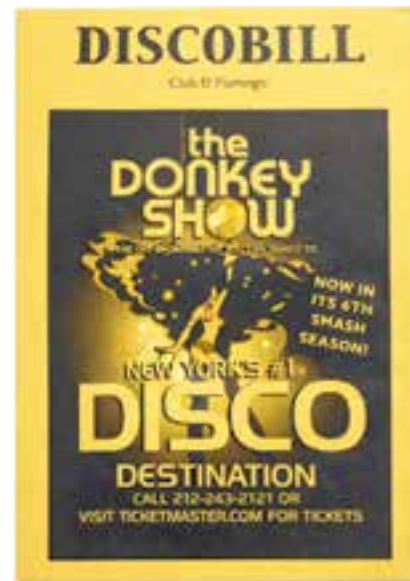
Leaving theater wasn't a triumphant pivot or a clean break toward something better. It was, in many ways, a quiet reckoning.

"I felt like the dream disappointed me," she says.

Not because she hadn't achieved it, but because it hadn't sustained her in the ways she needed. The long hours, the low pay, the isolation behind the scenes, it all added up to something that no longer aligned with the life she wanted to build.

And yet, she doesn't speak about it with regret.

If anything, there's clarity in how she looks back. She understands what theater gave her,



"I felt like a part of this huge production without having to expose myself."



"Well, whatever happened to people doing it for the love of theater?"

and what it didn't. She recognizes the skills she carried forward, the ability to manage high-pressure environments, to navigate personalities, to ensure that no matter what happens, the show goes on.

Today, those same instincts show up in a very different setting. In finance, in client relationships, in the way she approaches her work, she still draws from that foundation. "Dealing with CFOs and CEOs is not very different than dealing with directors and producers," she says. The environments may have changed, but the core of the work, the coordination, the problem-solving, the resilience, remains.

She also brings something else with her, something less tangible but just as important. A sense of creativity, of presence, of understanding how people engage with what they see and expe-



rience. It shows up in how she presents herself, how she builds her business, how she connects.

The dream didn't disappear. It evolved.

And in some ways, it expanded.

She met her husband through theater, a connection that continues to shape her life today. He now teaches theater, not to create performers, but to help students learn how to communicate, how to engage, how to be understood. It's a different kind of stage, one that reaches into the future.

For Sabrina, that may be the most meaningful part of all of it. Not the shows themselves, but what they made possible.

Because the truth is, the dream didn't fail. It just revealed itself more honestly than she expected.

Fashion

The off-duty uniform

There was a time when professionalism had a dress code you could recognize from across the room. It lived in structure. In pressed trousers, tailored jackets, fabrics that held their shape no matter how long the day stretched. You dressed to signal something. Competence. Credibility. Distance. The uniform did part of the talking before you ever had to.

That version of work hasn't disappeared. But it's no longer the default.

Today, work happens in quieter, more personal spaces. A morning call from the kitchen. A strategy session from a home office. A client conversation that begins on screen and ends somewhere in between everything else your day holds. The boundaries have softened, and with them, the expectations around how we show up.

Not just visually. Interpersonally.

There is a growing pull toward something more human. Less performative. More reflective of real life. The kind of presence that doesn't rely on formality to establish credibility, but on clarity, consistency, and the ability to connect.

And what we wear has had to evolve alongside that shift.

The modern uniform is no longer about dressing for a place.

It's about dressing for a rhythm. One that moves between focus and flexibility, structure and ease, work and everything around it.

This is where the off-duty uniform begins to take shape.

Three ways of showing up

The shift away from a single dress code has not created chaos, but range.

What has emerged instead is something more nuanced. A set of choices that reflect not just where you are going, but how you want to feel when you get there. The modern professional doesn't rely on one uniform. They move between versions of it, depending on the moment.

Some days require structure. Others call for ease. Most live somewhere in between.

And while there are countless brands shaping this landscape, three stand out for how clearly they represent these different modes of showing up: Theory, Alo Yoga, and Everlane.

Theory: when presence still carries weight

There are still moments when structure matters.

Not in the rigid, performative way it once did, but in a quieter, more grounded sense. A leadership meeting. A high-stakes conversation. An environment where clarity

and confidence need to be felt before they are spoken.

Theory exists in that space.

Its tailoring is precise, but not heavy. The lines are clean, the fabrics lighter, the overall effect more modern than traditional. It offers a version of professionalism that feels considered without feeling distant.

What makes Theory relevant now is not that it preserves the old uniform. It's that it refines it.

You can wear a structured blazer over something soft. Pair tailored trousers with a more relaxed top. The pieces integrate rather than dictate. They allow you to hold presence without fully stepping away from yourself.

For professionals who still navigate moments where perception matters, Theory provides a kind of anchor. Not armor, but alignment.

Alo: the middle ground, perfected

If Theory represents structure, Alo Yoga lives in the space most professionals now occupy most of the time.

The in-between.

Days that are full, but not formal. Meetings that matter, but don't require a full shift in identity. Work that happens at home, but still asks you to show up with intention.

Alo has built its identity around that balance.

The pieces are comfortable, but not casual in the traditional sense. There is a visual clarity to them. Neutral palettes, streamlined silhouettes, outfits that feel cohesive without effort. You look put together, even if you didn't spend time trying to be.

That distinction is what makes Alo feel so aligned with the current moment.

It supports the reality that most professionals are no longer dressing for an audience. They are dressing for themselves, and for the kind of day they are stepping into. One that moves fluidly between work and life without clear transitions.

Alo doesn't ask you to change outfits to match those shifts. It moves with you through them.

Everlane: consistency over complexity

There is another approach emerging alongside all of this. One that is less about balancing extremes and more about removing them altogether.

Simplify the wardrobe. Reduce the decisions. Build something that works, every day, without needing to be reconsidered.

Everlane has become a natural choice for this mindset.

The brand doesn't rely on statement pieces. It doesn't chase attention. Instead, it offers consistency. Well-made basics, neutral tones, silhouettes that repeat easily across different contexts.

For professionals navigating full schedules and constant decision-making, that simplicity

becomes valuable.

You don't have to think about what to wear. You already know it will work.

There is a quiet confidence in that kind of consistency. It doesn't draw attention to itself, but it supports everything else you are doing. It allows you to show up as yourself without adding unnecessary layers.

In a world that asks for more from your attention than ever before, that restraint feels intentional.

What the off-duty uniform really reflects

It would be easy to read all of this as a shift toward comfort. And in part, it is. But comfort isn't really the point. It's a result. What's actually changing is the role clothing plays in how we work.

The old model relied on visual signals. You looked the part first, and credibility followed. There was a kind of distance built into that. The uniform created separation between who you were and how you were expected to show up.

That distance doesn't hold in the same way anymore.

Work is more visible now, but also more personal. People are on video, in their own spaces, having more direct conversations, often without the layers that used to sit in between. And because of that, how you come across has less to do with formality and more to do with clarity and presence, and whether people feel like they can actually engage with you.

What you wear still plays a role in that, just not in the same way.

It doesn't need to signal author-

ity as much as it needs to make sense. To feel consistent with how you work, how you communicate, and how you move through the day. Something that holds up across contexts without needing to be adjusted or explained.

That's where brands like Theory, Alo Yoga, and Everlane fit in. Each one reflects a different way people are navigating what „professional“ looks like now.

Because for most people, there isn't a clean transition between on and off anymore. Work doesn't begin and end in the same defined way. It sits alongside everything else. Meetings, errands, breaks, conversations, all moving in and out of focus throughout the day.

And the uniform has adapted to that. Less about stepping into a role. More about continuity.





Hope Brown

What If Your Biggest Dream Was the Impact You Leave Behind?

Instead of chasing milestones, she's building something quieter and more lasting, measured in the lives she touches and the people she empowers along the way.

When asked about her dreams, Hope Brown doesn't have a place, a purchase, or a personal milestone. Instead, she answers with something far less tangible and far more enduring. Legacy. "Leave people better than you found them," she says, describing the impact she hopes to have on the people who pass through her life. It's not a typical response to a question about bucket lists, but then again, Hope has never approached life in typical ways. Whether she's calming a client in a moment of stress or listening to a stranger open up on a subway, her focus is the same. Add something positive. Leave something behind that lasts.

For Hope, that mindset didn't come from a single defining moment. It was modeled early, shaped by what she witnessed growing up in a family where responsibility extended beyond the walls of their own home. Her father, a business owner, wasn't just focused on success. He created opportunities. He gave people work, taught them skills, and helped them support their families. Watching that, Hope internalized

something that would stay with her: if you're in a position to help, you should.

"It's really your responsibility to reach back and help other people," she says. Not out of obligation, and not for recognition, but because someone once did that for you. A cycle. A continuation.

That philosophy shows up in the smallest moments, the ones most people might overlook. A conversation that steadies someone who feels overwhelmed. A pause to meet someone exactly where they are instead of pushing them to explain more than they're ready to share. Hope is intentional about that. "I try not to add to the overwhelm," she says. Instead, she focuses on creating a space where people can either open up or simply exist without pressure.

It's a subtle skill, but a powerful one. And for Hope, it's something that has followed her for as long as she can remember.

Even as a child, people gravitated toward her. Classmates, strangers, people who somehow felt comfortable sharing more than expected.

“I remember thinking on the playground, why is this kid telling me this stuff?” she says, laughing. But over time, she stopped questioning it and started recognizing it for what it was. A kind of trust. A quiet invitation to show up for people in a way that mattered.

Now, those moments happen everywhere.

On a subway, she once noticed a woman who seemed to be having a difficult day. They started talking, nothing extraordinary at first, just a conversation between two strangers. But it didn’t stay surface-level for long. The woman opened up, sharing pieces of what she was going through. Hope listened, offered reassurance, and when it was time for the woman to get off, they hugged.

Then came the moment that stayed.

“She was like, ‘What is your name?’” Hope recalls. “And I said, ‘I’m Hope.’ And she was like, ‘Oh my gosh, you’re Hope. You were what I needed today.’”

It’s happened more than once. Enough times that Hope no longer sees it as coincidence. She sees it as a privilege.

“It’s a privilege that someone would feel comfortable enough to talk to you,” she says. And in those moments, her name feels less like something she was given and more like something she’s grown into.

That wasn’t always the case.

Growing up, her name made her stand out in ways she didn’t always appreciate. It drew attention. It invited teasing. At one point, she even questioned why her father chose it. But his answer reframed everything. He saw something in her. A kind of energy. A light. And he wanted her to carry that forward, even in moments when life felt uncertain.

Over time, she began to understand the weight and the gift of it.

“I realized the power in that name,” she says.

Now, it shapes the way she moves through the world.

In her work, that same presence shows up in a different form. Tax season, for most people, is synonymous with stress. Fear. Uncertainty. Even when nothing is wrong, the

process itself can feel overwhelming. Hope has learned how to meet people in that moment and shift it.

“Listen, we’re doing everything right,” she tells them.

“Even if we aren’t, we can pivot and correct it.”

It’s not just about solving the problem. It’s about helping people feel steady again. Capable again. And that’s where

her definition of legacy becomes clear.

She doesn’t want people to leave her feeling dependent. She wants them to leave empowered.

“Whatever that might mean for them,” she says.

That idea extends beyond individual interactions and into something broader. In her community, in her relationships, in the people she works with, Hope is focused on what continues after her. Not just success in the traditional sense, but sustainability. Growth that carries forward into the next generation.

She talks about it like a staircase.

“Every generation is building that next stair,” she explains. “So the next generation can step on it and go a little higher.”

It’s a simple image, but it holds everything she’s working toward. Her children. Their future. The emotional, financial, and personal stability she hopes they inherit and build on.

But legacy, for Hope, isn’t only about support. It’s also about accountability.

“I know I seem like a nice person,” she says, smiling. “but some days you are not going to like me.”

She holds people to the things they say they want. She challenges them when needed. Not to push them away, but to push them forward. Because growth, she believes, doesn’t come from comfort alone.

“It’s not all flowers,” she says. “You have to go through the challenges to appreciate the highs.”

That balance, encouragement and honesty, empathy and accountability, is part of what makes her impact last. It’s not just how she makes people feel in the moment. It’s what stays with them after.

Even she isn’t immune to the moments she helps others navigate.



“If the door opened for you, you’re supposed to be in the room.”



“If I could just add a little bit of light to people’s lives, that’s good.”

Despite a long and successful career, she still finds herself in new rooms, facing new challenges, questioning whether she belongs. It’s a feeling she knows well. But instead of letting it take over, she’s learned how to respond to it.

“If the door opened for you,” she says, “you’re supposed to be in the room.”

So she walks through it. Even when it’s uncomfortable. Even when it’s uncertain. Because the alternative, wondering what might have been, is something she refuses to carry.

“I don’t want to be some old lady with regrets,” she says.

It’s one of several mottos she lives by. Another is simpler, almost playful in its delivery but serious in its application: “I never tell myself no.”

That mindset has led her to ask questions she once might have avoided. To pursue opportunities that felt just out of reach. And more often than not, she’s found that the answer waiting on the other side is yes.

Not because it was guaranteed, but because she was willing to ask.

Still, even with all of that, her definition of success remains remarkably grounded.

It isn’t about recognition. It isn’t about scale.

It’s about the ripple effect.

She wants people to feel like they’re not alone. To understand that whatever mountain they’re facing, others have climbed it too. That they can do it. That they’re capable. That they belong.

Sometimes, she says, people just need to hear it.

“You can do it.”

And sometimes, that’s enough to change everything.

When she thinks about how she wants to be remembered, her answer doesn’t shift.

“If I could just add a little bit of light to people’s lives,” she says, “that’s good.”

A smile that lasts a little longer. A moment of clarity. A sense of warmth that lingers after the conversation ends. For Hope, that’s the dream.

Not something to check off. Not something to arrive at. Something to leave behind.

Proposals here. Invoices there.
Payments? Who knows where.

 anchor pairs proposals, invoices, payments, reconciliation, and agreement updates, so the whole workflow lives organized in one place instead of scattered across the firm.



Kristen Keats

More Than a Stamp: The Tradition That Keeps Them Coming Back

What started as a love of exploration has become a growing tradition of connection, inclusivity, and shared experience across generations.

For Kristen Keats, the dream isn't just about seeing the national parks. It's about creating something that lasts long after the trip is over, something that lives in the rhythm of shared mornings, inside jokes, and the quiet understanding that comes from doing life together, even if only for a few days at a time each year. "Having a common goal and really feeling the connection," she says, describing what keeps everyone coming back.

It's a dream that, on the surface, looks like a checklist. There are parks to visit, stamps to collect, and plans to make. That instinct, she admits, comes honestly. Her dad was "very much a list checker," someone who had visited all 50 states and passed down not just a love of travel, but a way of approaching it, with intention, with curiosity, with a quiet sense of completion.

But somewhere along the way, the list stopped being the point.

Instead, it became the container for something else entirely.

Each trip follows a rhythm that feels both familiar and flexible. Mornings begin early, not by choice, but by nature. The sun comes up, the dogs

stir, and someone starts boiling water for coffee. There's a moment, before the day really begins, when everyone gathers around the campfire, coffee in hand, talking through what comes next. It's simple. Grounding. The kind of moment that doesn't ask for anything except presence.

From there, the day unfolds with a kind of balance that Kristen has come to value deeply. There's always something to explore, a hike, a landmark, a specific experience unique to wherever they are. But there's also space to pause. Afternoons stretch out into hammocks, books, card games, or just sitting still, resisting the urge to "go to the max." Evenings bring food, conversation, and eventually, a return to the fire, where the day softens into laughter, stories, and stargazing.

It's not about doing everything. It's about doing enough, together.

And over time, those shared days have become something more than memories. They've become markers.

There was the trip to Crater Lake, where the expected beauty of the lake gave way to something even more surprising: towering lava spires





Having a common goal, really feeling the connection.

rising from the ground in ways no photo could have prepared for. Being there, seeing it in person, shifted something. “There’s no substitute for that,” she says, reflecting on the difference between knowing a place exists and actually experiencing it.

There was Denali, where the scale of the landscape expanded not just their sense of place, but their understanding of how other people live. Conversations with locals revealed realities they had never considered, towns where sunlight is scarce, where daily life looks entirely different from their own. It’s those moments, the unexpected ones, that stay with her. The ones that widen perspective without asking permission.

And then there are the quieter memories.

The ones that don’t show up on a map.

Like the morning her son’s girlfriend, someone they had never met before, stepped out of a tent, asked for coffee, and sat down around the fire as if she had always been part of it. “It was just that moment of like, she’s one of us,” Kristen says. Years later, she still is.

That’s the part you can’t plan for.

The way a tradition expands.

What began as a family trip has grown into something more inclusive, more layered. Friends are invited. Partners join. This year, there will be twelve people. Twelve personalities, twelve perspectives, all figuring out how to move through the same experience together. It’s not always seamless, but that’s part of the growth. Learning to coordinate, to compromise, to make space for each other, it’s all built into the experience.

And maybe that’s the real lesson these trips offer.

Not just adventure, but awareness.

A reminder that there is always more out there than the world we move through every day. That it’s easy to stay in our own bubble, to forget the scale and variety of what exists beyond it. These trips interrupt that. They create a kind of reset, one that replaces noise with perspective and routine with wonder.

“I’m 55, but I’m always still in wonder of the world,” Kristen says.

That sense of wonder is what she hopes her kids carry forward. Not just the tradition itself, but the mindset behind it. The idea that there should always be something to look forward to.



“I’m 55, but I’m always still in wonder of the world.”

Another place. Another experience. Another reason to gather.

Because the truth is, she knows they won’t see everything. Not every park. Not every place. Time and logistics won’t allow for it. But that’s not what matters.

What matters is that they keep going.

At least once a year, no matter how complicated schedules become or how much life shifts

around them, they choose this. They choose to come together, to step outside of their routines, to build something shared.

And maybe one day, that circle will grow even wider.

Grandkids around the fire. New stories layered onto old ones. The same morning coffee, the same sense of belonging, passed down again.

Kristy Short

Seven Hours That Changed Everything

After decades of managing anxiety and doing the work, Kristy Short chose a different kind of breakthrough, one that asked her to face fear, release control, and finally access the part of herself she'd been holding back.

Kristy Short had done the work. Years of therapy, self-reflection, and managing anxiety had helped her build a life that looked strong on the outside. But something still felt stuck. “I felt like there was this tight little ball...this 10% of who I am that I just couldn’t unravel,” she says.

So when she heard someone share their experience with psychedelics, something clicked. After months of research and conversations, she made a decision that felt both terrifying and necessary. “I think this is the next chapter in my mental health journey,” she says. What followed was a seven-hour experience that would challenge her, scare her, and ultimately change how she sees her life.

Kristy is not someone who takes decisions like this lightly. She describes herself as someone who has “been an active participant in the healing process” for as long as she can remember. Anxiety, she explains, is something you learn to manage, but it never fully disappears. Over time, it evolves. New triggers emerge. Old patterns

resurface in different ways. And even with progress, there can still be something unresolved beneath it all.

That unresolved piece became impossible to ignore after what she calls a “spiral” at the end of 2024. When she regained her footing, she felt strong again, but also aware that something deeper remained untouched. It wasn’t obvious. It didn’t disrupt her ability to function. But it lingered. “There was like this tight little ball right here in my chest,” she says, describing a sense that part of her was still guarded, still inaccessible.

She had heard it before, too, from others. “You’re so great, but you only give 90% of yourself,” people would tell her. “You keep 10%.” At the time, she dismissed it. “I thought, you’re crazy. Of course I am vulnerable. I’m an open book.” But hearing it more than once made her reconsider. “I’m the common denominator,” she says. “So there’s validity to that.”

The idea of psychedelics didn’t come out of nowhere. It surfaced after she attended a ses-





*“It became very clear that I did not exist...
and it made me realize, boy, do I want to be here.”*

sion where someone shared their own mental health journey and experience with a guided psychedelic ceremony. The story stayed with her. It didn't feel like a shortcut or a trend. It felt like a possibility.

Still, she didn't rush.

For several months, she researched. She read studies, many focused on trauma and PTSD, particularly in military populations. She spoke directly with people who had gone through similar experiences. She asked questions, gathered perspectives, and made sure she understood both the potential and the risks. “With all of the information and all of the intel and all of the research, I made a very informed decision,” she says.

That decision led her to a certified sanctuary in San Diego.

Even then, fear didn't disappear.

“My biggest fear was that something would go wrong and I would die,” she says. She had never experimented with drugs, rarely drank, and had always been “very by the book.” The unknown felt real. The stakes felt high. But so did the potential for change.

Preparation became part of the process.

In the days leading up to the experience, she focused entirely on herself, something that did not come naturally. “I'm the kind of person that's like, who can I help? Who needs something?” she says. Turning that attention inward required intention. She prioritized sleep,

nutrition, time outside, and exercise. She practiced gratitude when fear surfaced. She unplugged from work. “That was key,” she says.

For once, everything was about creating the right conditions for her own healing.

The psychedelic experience itself lasted seven hours, though time lost its meaning almost entirely. “When I came to, it was dark outside,” she says. “I remember asking, why is it dark? We've only been here for like 20 minutes.”

It had been an entire day.

There were moments of clarity and connection, particularly at the beginning, where she felt completely open, free of guilt, shame, and fear.

She spoke freely, without hesitation, sharing things she normally kept guarded. “There's nothing that I didn't tell them,” she says. “I was completely open, no guards up, no fences.”

There were also moments of intensity.

At one point, she found herself in what she describes as a state of complete non-existence. “It became very clear that I did not exist,” she says. “This darkness is what it feels like not to exist.” The experience was deeply unsettling, especially given her past struggles. “It is terrifying,” she says. “But it made me realize...boy, do I want to be here.”

That realization stayed.

In the days following the experience, she felt physically depleted but emotionally open. “I felt wiped,” she says, but also “very open and porous.” Instead of rushing back into normal life, she gave herself space to process. She rested. She journaled. She allowed thoughts and insights to come slowly, in pieces.

What began to emerge wasn't just reflection, but direction.

“I have woken up every day with a sense of...it's a new day and man, am I happy to be here,” she says. The underlying sense of dread she had been carrying began to lift. Not entirely, but meaningfully. “I'm not saying I'm completely fixed,” she says, “but the alternative does not appeal to me at all anymore.”

Alongside that shift came something else, something more subtle but equally important.

A willingness to receive. For much of her life, Kristy had defined herself by what she could give. Independence was a point of pride.



*“I think this is the
next chapter in
my mental health
journey.”*

Support, even when offered with love, was often declined. “I'm fiercely independent. I'm cool. I don't need it,” she says.

Now, she sees that differently.

“I deserve it,” she says. “And what have I taken away from the people who love me who've wanted to do things for me?” Allowing others in, she realized, isn't a burden. It's connection.

That shift is shaping what comes

next.

In the “afterglow” of the experience, Kristy began writing again. A second book, tentatively titled *The Year of ME* (My Evolution), started to take form. It will expand on her earlier work, diving deeper into the stories she has already shared while also documenting this latest chapter. “I'm going to dig deeper,” she says. “And I'll certainly dedicate a large portion to the psychedelic journey.”

The title itself reflects a broader intention.

“I want to make 2026 the year that I do all the things that I want to do and don't hold back,” she says.

That includes travel, something that lit her up even during the experience. “Finland is on my bucket list,” she says. “I want to do the whole...ice plunge tour across the entire country.” Even recalling that moment, she remembers the feeling vividly, the happiness, the clarity, the sense of possibility.

It's a vision that feels different now, not abstract, but accessible.

Still, she's clear about one thing. This path is not for everyone.

“It is not something to be taken lightly,” she says. “You really have to do your due diligence.” The experience required preparation, trust, and a commitment to the work before, during, and after. “It's not a one and done,” she says. “You still have to do the work afterwards.”

But for her, it was worth it. Not because it solved everything, but because it shifted something fundamental. It helped her face fear in its most extreme form and come out the other side with a renewed sense of presence, possibility, and self.

And perhaps most importantly, it helped her access that missing 10%.



Ryan Lazanis

One Goal, A Thousand Small Efforts

What started as a simple challenge evolved into something more enduring, a test of consistency, adaptability, and the mindset required to keep moving forward, one small effort at a time.

Ryan Lazanis doesn't romanticize the idea of completing an Ironman. "It's probably going to be painful," he says plainly. But that's part of the point. For Ryan, the goal has never been about crossing a finish line for the sake of it. It's about finding something that feels hard enough to matter, committing to it, and seeing it through. "I like to find these new challenges and just try to overcome them," he says. Even after being forced to slow down and rebuild, the goal hasn't gone away. If anything, it's become simpler. Just keep going, a little bit every day.

That instinct, to seek out challenge for its own sake, didn't start with triathlon. Before the idea of an Ironman ever entered the picture, Ryan had already immersed himself in another demanding world. CrossFit gave him structure, competition, and a clear way to measure progress against others. There was always something to push toward, always a faster time or a stronger performance within reach. But over time, something shifted.

At a certain point, improvement became incremental. The gains were still there, but they came

at a cost, more time, more energy, more effort for smaller and smaller returns. "When I feel that the level of effort that I have to exert to make a very small incremental improvement, it's not very interesting anymore," he explains. It wasn't a loss of discipline or drive. It was something closer to curiosity. He had learned the system. He understood the game. And once he reached that point, the question became what was next.

The answer came casually, almost accidentally. A conversation with a friend over dinner turned into a joke, and then into a plan. They would try a triathlon. Nothing too serious at first, just a short-distance race to see what it was like. Ryan pulled out an old bike he hadn't used in years, started running again, added swimming into the mix. It was new, unfamiliar, and that was enough to make it interesting.

He's not new to the challenge either, having completed several triathlons over the past five years, most recently a Half Ironman in September 2024.

When his friend dropped out, the easy choice would have been to let the idea go with it. In-



“I’ve had my best ideas during that quiet time.”

stead, Ryan kept going. He had already committed, at least in his own mind. The date was set. The plan was in motion. “I just figured I’d keep going,” he says. It wasn’t dramatic. It didn’t need to be. The decision had already been made internally, long before there was anyone else to hold him accountable.

Training brought a different kind of challenge, one that was less visible but no less demanding. Unlike CrossFit, much of it was done alone. Hours spent biking, running, swimming, repeating the same movements over and over again. “A lot of it is really boring,” he says. “You’re on your own, and it’s kind of lonely.” There’s no crowd, no immediate feedback, no shared energy to carry you through. Just time, discipline, and the willingness to keep showing up.

And yet, within that repetition, something else began to take shape. Long rides without music or distraction created space, the kind that’s hard to find in a day filled with constant input. “I’ve had my best ideas during that quiet time,” he says. What might look, from the outside, like isolation or monotony became something more useful. A place to think. To work through problems. To arrive at clarity that didn’t come as easily anywhere else.

If the training itself demanded consistency, it also required a level of structure that touched nearly every part of his life. Preparing for a half Ironman meant balancing multiple disciplines at once, swimming, running, biking, often in the same day. Some sessions happened early in the morning before work, others late in the evening. Weekends were reserved for longer efforts, hours spent on a bike or out on a run. It wasn’t just a workout plan. It was a reorganization of time.

That kind of commitment comes with trade-offs. Time spent training is time taken from something else, family, friends, or other hobbies. “You can’t do it all,” Ryan says. Prioritizing the goal meant saying no to other things, even when they were enjoyable. It meant choosing the long ride over a round of golf, the early morning session over a slower start to the day. Not permanently, but consistently enough to make progress.

And then, just as the path forward seemed clear, everything changed.

A split-second moment, unexpected and entirely unrelated to training, brought everything to a halt. While out with his daughter, Ryan turned quickly and hit his head on a tree. At first, it didn’t seem serious. He carried on as usual, continuing with his routine, pushing through as he always had. But the impact lingered in ways he hadn’t anticipated.



“A lot of it is really boring... you’re on your own, and it’s kind of lonely.”

The months that followed forced a different kind of discipline, one that looked nothing like the structured intensity of Ironman training. “The first six months, I was basically useless,” he says. Progress wasn’t measured in miles or hours anymore. It was measured in how he felt from one day to the next, in how much he could do without triggering symptoms that made even simple tasks difficult.

For someone used to pushing limits, the adjustment wasn’t easy. The instinct to keep going, to train harder, to maintain momentum, didn’t disappear. But ignoring the signals from his body only made things worse. “I didn’t listen to my body for like a good 10 months,” he admits. Eventually, the lesson became unavoidable. Progress now required restraint.

What replaced the old routine was something far less predictable. Effort had to be carefully managed, increased gradually, and pulled back when necessary. Some days allowed for more, others required less. “Sometimes my sessions are 10 minutes,” he says. “Sometimes it’s 30 minutes.” The consistency remained, but the scale shifted.

It changed the definition of progress entirely. Where once improvement meant going faster or longer, now it meant simply being able to do a little more than the day before, without setbacks. It meant paying attention, adjusting, and accepting that forward movement wouldn’t always be linear.

In some ways, the experience added a layer of meaning to the original goal. The Ironman didn’t disappear. It just

moved further into the distance, no longer tied to a specific date, but still very much present. There’s no elaborate timeline, no rigid expectation. Just a steady return, one small effort at a time.

That same mindset extends beyond training. Building a business that allows for this kind of pursuit requires intention, the ability to design something that supports not just work, but life outside of it. “You need a business that gives you that kind of freedom,” he says. Without it, the hours required for training and now for recovery wouldn’t be possible.

The Ironman, in that sense, becomes more than a physical challenge. It’s a reflection of how he approaches everything else, understanding the system, committing to the process, and adjusting when necessary. Not abandoning the goal, but reshaping the path toward it.

There’s still uncertainty ahead. Whether he completes one Ironman or stops after the first, whether it happens next year or later, remains to be seen. “I’ll test the waters,” he says. The outcome isn’t fixed, and that’s part of what makes it sustainable.

What remains constant is the approach. The willingness to show up, even when the effort feels small. The discipline to keep going, even when progress is slow. And the understanding that sometimes, the most meaningful version of a goal isn’t the one you start with, but the one you continue to pursue, even after everything about it has changed.

Tailor Hartman

“I Think the Biggest Thing Is Giving Myself Permission”

What starts as a dream of cooking school becomes something more meaningful. A chance to disconnect, reset, and choose a different way of living, even if only for a while.

For Tailor Hartman, the dream starts simply: go to cooking school. Maybe somewhere traditional, like Le Cordon Bleu. Maybe somewhere smaller, more personal, learning from someone in a village, and living close to the rhythm of the place. He hasn't locked in the details, but that's not really the point. The clarity isn't in where he would go. It's in what the experience would give him.

“I think the biggest benefit is giving myself permission to live a non-traditional life,” he says.

That idea, permission, comes up again and again when he talks about it. Not in a dramatic, burn-it-all-down kind of way, but in something quieter and more intentional. A willingness to step outside the structure he's built and see who he is without it. Even if only for a little while.

Cooking, for him, didn't start as a passion. It started as a practical decision. In his mid-twenties, he wanted to be healthier, to eat better, to feel better. So he started cooking at home. Simple meals at first. Learning as he went. Like most people do.

But somewhere along the way, it shifted.

“I have some anxiety day to day,” he says. “And cooking is really good for that. I can completely disconnect and fully focus on it and make something I'm really proud of in like 45 minutes.”

That's the part that stuck.

Not just the outcome, but the process. The way it pulls his attention into one place. The way it quiets everything else. The way it turns time into something tangible, something you can taste, share, improve.

Over time, he got better. Not through formal training, but through repetition. Curiosity. Small adjustments.

“I have like seven to ten things that I cook over and over again,” he says. “And every time I do them a little differently, I get better at it.”

He talks about making ramen, sourdough, dishes he's refined enough that, in his words, they've become the best he's ever had. Not because they're perfect, but because they're his. Built over time. Learned through doing.





“I think the biggest benefit is giving myself permission to live a non-traditional life.”

That’s where the idea of cooking school comes in. Not as a career move. Not as something to monetize or turn into the next chapter of his business. But as a way to go deeper. To understand the craft at a level he hasn’t yet allowed himself to reach.

“I don’t even know how to cut things the right way,” he says, laughing. “I just kind of wing it.”

There’s something freeing about that, the creativity that comes from not knowing the “right” way. And he’s aware of the tradeoff.

“I’ve had hobbies before where I got more serious about them, and it kind of takes away from

the creativity,” he says. “Like when you learn how things are supposed to be done.”

It’s one of the few hesitations he names. The idea that structure might replace instinct. That mastery might come at the cost of experimentation.

But even that isn’t enough to outweigh the pull. Because the real draw isn’t perfection. It’s immersion.

“If I did it, I’d have to fully disconnect,” he says. “I wouldn’t want clients texting me while I’m trying to cook something. That would ruin it.”

In his mind, this isn’t something you half do. It’s not nights and weekends. It’s not squeezing it in between meetings. It’s stepping away entirely. Six months, maybe more. Somewhere else. A different environment. A different pace.

That part matters just as much as the cooking itself.

“I’ve kind of always lived around home,” he says. “So going somewhere and getting outside my normal environment would probably make me grow in a way I haven’t before.”

There’s a pattern in how he talks about it. Growth, not in the traditional sense of scaling something or building something bigger, but in stretching beyond what feels familiar. Choosing discomfort on purpose. Not because something is broken, but because something else is possible.

It’s the same instinct that shows up in other parts of his life. Running a business. Pushing through things that feel uncertain. Doing things he doesn’t always feel ready for.

“I think getting outside your comfort zone is always rewarding,” he says. “Even though it’s scary.”

The idea of being more nomadic, of experiencing different places, different cultures, different ways of living, ties into that, too. It’s not about escaping. It’s about expanding.

“I just want to experience as many things as possible,” he says. “And this would be one of those things.”

And when he looks ahead, years from now, that’s where the clarity sharpens.

“I think I would regret not doing it,” he says.

It’s not framed as urgency. He’s not packing his bags tomorrow. There are practical considerations. His business. Financial flexibility. Making sure he can step away without immediately needing to step back in.

“I’d need to know I could fully disconnect,” he says. “And not have to come back and go right back to work.”

It’s thoughtful. Measured. Something he knows would take planning.

But it’s also something he hasn’t let go of. Even without a specific school. Even without

a timeline. The idea is still there, steady and persistent.

Maybe it’s Le Cordon Bleu. Maybe it’s somewhere smaller, less defined. A village. A kitchen. A person willing to teach him.

The details can change.

What doesn’t change is what it represents.

The chance to focus on something fully. To learn it the right way. To step outside of the life he’s built and prove to himself that he can.

Not forever. Just long enough to see what happens.



“I can completely disconnect and fully focus on it and make something I’m really proud of.”

Melissa Miller Furgeson

A Lifetime of Saturdays, One Stadium at a Time

What began as a childhood ritual in Ohio has grown into a shared dream: traveling the country, one college football stadium at a time, in pursuit of connection, tradition, and a feeling that still feels like home.

Melissa Miller Furgeson doesn't remember a single moment when college football began for her. It was simply always there. Growing up in Ohio, weekends revolved around games, with her dad throwing passes in the backyard and her parents holding high school season tickets year after year. What she carries from that time isn't just the game itself, but the feeling around it, the sense of being part of something shared, something alive. Now, decades later, that same feeling has taken on a new shape: a dream she shares with her husband to visit every major college football stadium in the country.

It's a goal that feels expansive, but also deeply familiar. Not a departure from her life, but a continuation of it.

As a kid, football looked like afternoons outside, her dad stepping in as quarterback while neighborhood friends gathered on the acre of land where she grew up. It looked like weekends filled with games on TV, her dad an "avid, maybe rabid" fan

of Ohio State and the Cleveland Browns. There isn't one defining memory she points to. Instead, it's the repetition of it all, the steady rhythm of seasons, games, and time spent together that shaped how she understands connection.

What has stayed with her most is the feeling inside the stadium. "You have this group of friends who you've never met," she says. "You're all just as excited to be in this electric environment." It's a kind of collective energy that doesn't require introduction or explanation. People arrive separately, but once the game begins, they move together, cheering, reacting, experiencing it all in sync.

She's found versions of that feeling elsewhere, in accounting conferences and large gatherings where people come together around a shared interest. But in a stadium, it becomes something more immersive. There's a moment she describes, walking through the tunnels beneath the stands, where everything is still contained, unseen. And then it opens.





“It opens up in front of you like this grand sort of cathedral of sport.”

“It opens up in front of you like this grand sort of cathedral of sport.”

The field, the crowd, the scale of it. The band playing, the mascots, the traditions layered into every part of the experience. It’s not just a game unfolding. It’s an event, something orchestrated and communal, where the atmosphere carries as much weight as the score.

That distinction matters to her. Watching at home is about the game itself. Being there is about everything surrounding it, what she calls “all of the hullabaloo.” It’s the details, the rituals, the shared anticipation, the way the energy builds and moves through the crowd.

About five years ago, as she and her husband began thinking about what life might look like once their three kids were grown, that feeling resurfaced as something to build toward. Their youngest is now in college, and with that shift came a question: what comes next?

They knew they wanted to travel. But more than that,

they wanted a reason to travel, something that would shape where they went and why.

College football became that reason.

What began as a conversation turned into a plan. They considered buying an RV, then decided renting one made more sense. The idea was to build trips around games, to move through different parts of the country with something anchoring each stop. National parks, new cities, long weekends structured around stadiums they had never seen before.

So far, they’ve visited 12. The pace is intentional, shaped by full-time work and fall schedules that don’t easily open up. Two or three games a season, trips that sometimes double as visits to their kids. When they go to Iowa, for example, it’s not just about the stadium, but about seeing their youngest, who now has her own season tickets.

There’s no urgency to complete the list. If anything, the

slow pace is part of the appeal.

Along the way, something unexpected has shifted for Melissa. She assumed she would stay loyal to her own team, Ohio State, and that every game would be filtered through that lens. Instead, she’s found herself widening her perspective.

“I did not expect that I would be so excited about watching other teams that weren’t my team,” she says. “But since we started doing this when our kids were the age of these players, I’ve felt this sense of, they’re just like my kids.”

It changes how she watches. The players are no longer just part of a team she’s for or against. They’re individuals she finds herself rooting for, wanting to see succeed, feeling connected to in a quieter, more personal way.

That same mindset shapes how she shows up in the stadium. She doesn’t leave early. Even when the outcome feels certain, even when her team is losing, she stays.

“We’re there to support the team,” she says. “It’s not just entertainment.”

The experience, for her, is something to be seen through. Something shared, not consumed.

Some of the moments that stay with her most aren’t tied to the outcome of a game, but to the people around her. At a Northwestern game, she and her dad sat next to opposing fans who had brought homemade chocolate chip cookies and offered to share them, even though Melissa’s team was winning. In another game, she was in the stadium when a quarterback suffered a serious injury. Before anything was announced, the entire crowd seemed to understand at once. The energy shifted, moving into a collective silence that transcended rivalry.

These are the moments that define each stadium for her. Not just the size or the traditions, but the way people show up inside them.

Still, the traditions matter. Ohio State’s Script Ohio remains one of the most meaningful. The marching band spelling out “Ohio” in cursive across the field, the precision of it, the way it draws the crowd in. Once a year, alumni join, creating multiple scripts at once. It’s something she has seen many times, and yet it never loses its impact.

There are still stadiums she’s looking forward to. Penn State, with its size and the “white out,” where the entire stadium dresses in white. It’s something she has watched from afar and wants to experience from within, to feel the scale of it in person.

And then there’s the Rose Bowl. Growing up in Ohio before the playoff system, I saw the Rose Bowl game as the

ultimate goal for Big Ten teams. “That was the ultimate prize,” she says. Even now, that meaning hasn’t shifted. Being there would be less about checking off a stadium and more about stepping into something that shaped how she understood the sport from the beginning.

Their trips have taken on other layers, too. Food has become part of the experience, with the two of them seeking out Michelin Bib Gourmand restaurants along the way. Each destination becomes more than a game, more than a stadium. It becomes a way of exploring, of paying attention, of building something shared across time and place.

At its core, the dream is simple.

“It represents my sense of adventure and pursuit of fun and connection,” Melissa says.

But beneath that simplicity is something more enduring. A continuation of what began in childhood, carried through years of routines and responsibilities, now reshaped into something that belongs entirely to this next phase of life.

A way of staying connected, to each other, to the past, and to that feeling she has been returning to all along.



“You have this group of friends who you’ve never met, but you’re all just as excited to be there.”



Fady Hawatmeh

Recovering CFO who built the AI tool I wished I had | Jordanian ...
[Visit my website](#)
2h • Edited •

I got 100+ VC rejections before my first yes, and I don't blame them

Talking about AI in 2018 made me sound insane

Talking about AI in Finance in 2018 made me sound insane and dumb

I had spent 4 years in FP&A at Boeing and 5 years running my own consulting shop

I knew the problem was real because I had lived it

But knowing something is broken and convincing someone else to bet on you fixing it, those are two very different things

For 4 years, I paid for everything out of my personal checking account

Sold my condo, sold my car, moved back with my parents

Borrowed money from my best friend

I kept pitching anyway, because I knew this was something

If you don't believe in your idea this much, it's difficult for others to

8 years later, we're still here, pioneering AI in Finance



8



Yuri Kapilovich, CPA

Following
Lifestyle Firm Owner | Less than 40 hours a week year-round | ...
3w •

I figured out how to get clients to answer your open items/emails

Yesterday I emailed my client: "Hey man so I finalized your return and you owe \$12,100"

Client immediately answered with "wait Yuri but I didnt even give you the expenses you been asking about"

You damn right you didnt.....today I finalized the return for real for real



Jonah Rice, CPA and 233 others

53 comments • 1 repost



Candy Bellau, CFE, PI

Storyteller, co-host of Unbalanced Podcast, Fraud Fighter, and ...
2w •

I have not been posting on LI as consistently as I would like. 1st quarter has kicked my butt!

On top of work & life, I am trying to finish writing my book, and I have 1000% more respect for anyone who has written and published one. I did not know how much of yourself goes into it or how much work it is.

2nd quarter is almost here - let's do this!



Lynnette Oss Connell, CPA and 20 others

3 comments



Erin Pohan

Entrepreneurial Accountant | Upkeep & W&U Search | Top 100 ...
17h • Edited •

Share a job that's not on your LinkedIn resume and did it help you get to where you are today?

I'll go first.

Worked part time at a tanning salon for 5 years during my college years. It definitely taught me how to people. One time a lady came in with her husband and treated me so poorly she made me cry (her husband seemed mortified). She later came back with a Starbucks treat and an apology and told me I needed to toughen up. Even though the job was cake, learning how to interact with so many different personalities is what I carry with me today.

Pic of baby Erin at the salon.





Elad Shmlovich and 22 others

33 comments



Ryan Lazanis, CPA

Following
Giving systems to firm owners to unlock freedom and growth
[View my newsletter](#)
4d •

Would your 2010 self believe this is actually your job now?

I was a 30-something running a growing cloud accounting firm... traveling with my wife, figuring things out, trying to build something real.

This picture was taken in 2016 in Raja Ampat, Indonesia (great spot btw).

Life was good. But I had no idea what was coming.

Because if you told that guy on that island that he'd go on to build a community of hundreds of modern firm owners...

... people growing their firms, doing cool things, and actually having a life while doing it?

I would have laughed. Politely. And then gone back to stressing. LOL.

But here we are.

We are so hard on ourselves sometimes.

We forget to look back at how far we've actually come.

So every once in a while, look back.

Just to remind yourself that the version of you from 10 years ago would probably be pretty blown away right now. 🙄



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FROM THE FEED

ELEVÉ

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Gaynor Meilke

The Kind of Dream You Don't Check Off

What begins as a different answer to a simple question unfolds into a deeper philosophy, one rooted in self-awareness, resilience, and the belief that everyone has something within them worth bringing forward.

Gaynor Meilke doesn't think of her bucket list in terms of places to go or things to accomplish. For her, the idea itself needed to be redefined. "It's getting to the purpose that I feel that I've been given in the world," she says. That purpose is clear, even if it's not easily measured. Helping people, adults and children alike, see themselves fully, often for the first time. It's a goal shaped by years of inner work and lived experience, and one that reframes success entirely. Everything else, the trips, the milestones, the traditional markers, comes second. "That's just icing on the cake."

That perspective didn't appear overnight. It was formed slowly, through experiences that required her to look inward long before she had the language to explain what she was doing. Growing up, life felt unstable, both emotionally and physically. Her family moved often, and much of her early environment required her to stay small, to keep a low profile while more complex dynamics unfolded around her.

"It was always kind of starting somewhere new with new people," she says. Over time, that constant resetting built a kind of adaptability, but it

also left something unspoken underneath it all. A need that wouldn't fully surface until much later.

When she looks back now, that need feels clear. "Probably being seen," she says. It's a simple phrase, but it holds weight. In a household where her parents were navigating their own struggles, including mental health and addiction, attention was often directed elsewhere.

What she absorbed instead was a deeper awareness of how easily people can go unnoticed, even within their own lives. That awareness would eventually become the foundation for the work she does today, but at the time, it simply became part of how she moved through the world, observant, empathetic, and quietly attuned to what others might be carrying.

Her own challenges would deepen that understanding. At eleven, she developed an eating disorder that would follow her into her mid-twenties. "It was probably about 15 years," she says. The experience forced her into a kind of self-examination that many people spend a lifetime avoiding. It wasn't just about changing behaviors, it was about understanding why those behaviors existed in the first place.



What she uncovered was something that would stay with her. "Nobody's going to save you," she says, describing one of the hardest truths she had to face. "It's all on you."

That realization didn't come with a sense of isolation so much as responsibility. Change, she learned, doesn't happen because someone else tells you it should. It happens when you decide you want something better for yourself. That shift became a turning point, not just in how she approached her own life, but in how she began to think about helping others. Because once you've done that work, once you've sat with the harder questions and chosen to move through them anyway, you start to see the same patterns everywhere.

You see it in the ways people hold themselves

back. In the resistance that shows up when someone is close to stepping into something bigger. In the quiet belief that maybe they're not ready, or not enough, or not meant for more. And you begin to understand that what most people are searching for externally is often something they haven't fully recognized within themselves.

That's where her work lives now.

Through speaking, workshops, and the programs she's built, Gaynor focuses on helping people uncover what's already there. She works with adults who want to show up differently in their businesses and their lives, and with children and teens who are still forming their understanding of who they are. "Every single



“We don’t need correction for children. We need connection.”

person has something within them that is meant to come out and help somebody else,” she says. The work isn’t about adding something new. It’s about removing what’s in the way.

That belief becomes especially powerful in the work she does with children. It’s where she feels most aligned with her purpose, in part because she understands how early those internal narratives begin to form. Children, she explains, are incredibly intuitive. They see more than adults often realize, but they don’t always have the tools to process what they’re experiencing. Without guidance, those early moments can quietly shape how they see themselves for years to come.

So she teaches them something different. Through practices like mindfulness, yoga, and conscious parenting principles, she helps children learn how to regulate themselves, how to listen to their own inner voice, and how to understand their emotions without being overwhelmed by them. At the same time, she works with parents, helping them recognize that

the way they show up, especially in moments of stress or frustration, has a lasting impact. “We don’t need correction for children. We need connection,” she explains, a philosophy she’s deeply aligned with through her training.

It’s work that feels both immediate and long-term. Immediate in the sense that it changes how a child experiences the world right now. Long-term in the sense that it shapes who they become, and how they move through relationships, challenges, and opportunities later in life.

Her passion for this space deepened even further through her own experience as a parent. When her daughter began navigating her own mental health challenges, including an eating disorder, it brought everything into sharper focus. Not just the emotional weight of watching someone you love struggle, but the awareness of how common these experiences are, and how often they go unaddressed.

“I would say for people whose kids might be experiencing some kind of mental health disorder... it’s more common than you think,” she

“Every single person has something within them that is meant to come out and help somebody else.”

says. There’s no blame in it, no failure. Just an opportunity to respond differently. To provide support, to remove shame, and to create space for healing in a way that perhaps wasn’t available in previous generations.

In many ways, that’s what she sees as legacy. Not something fixed or finite, but something that evolves through each generation’s willingness to become more aware, more conscious, and more intentional.

“I feel like every generation of my family has become a little bit more aware,” she says. And in her daughter’s path, now studying to become a therapist, she sees that continuation taking shape in its own way.

Still, she’s careful not to define that as the goal. What matters most to her is that her daughter becomes fully herself, not an extension of her.

“I just always wanted her to be her own person and be free,” she says.

That idea, freedom through self-understanding, sits at the center of everything she does.

It shows up in the way she approaches personal

growth, through daily practices that allow her to process, reflect, and stay connected to what she’s working toward. It shows up in the way she talks about resistance, not as something to avoid, but as something to explore. And it shows up in the advice she gives to others who feel stuck and are looking for answers outside themselves.

“Don’t look for external solutions,” she says. “Start within and see where the resistance lies.”

Because for Gaynor, the dream was never about reaching a specific destination. It was about becoming someone who could help others recognize their own.

And maybe that’s why her answer feels different. It doesn’t end with a moment or a milestone. It expands outward, into the people she’s impacted, the conversations she’s started, the awareness she’s helped create. It lives in the quiet shift when someone sees themselves a little more clearly than they did before.

Not something you arrive at.

Something you pass on.

Marit Burmood

The Lesson She Learned Too Late May Change Everything for the Next Generation

After years of watching what happens when financial education comes too late, Marit Burmood is focused on reaching students early with lessons that actually stick.

“I just had so much money. I didn’t really think much about it.”

In her twenties, she was bartending and waitressing, coming home with hundreds of dollars in tips each night, splitting cash into envelopes for rent, utilities, and savings. It looked responsible from the outside. It even felt responsible at the time. But underneath it was something quieter and harder to see: a complete absence of financial education.

At 29, she went back to school for business management with an emphasis in accounting, driven by a realization she couldn’t ignore anymore. “No one’s going to fund my business,” she remembers thinking. “And if I try to start one, it’s going to crash because I don’t know anything about money.”

That was the moment everything sharpened. Not just what she didn’t know, but what it had already cost her.

Because despite years of earning well, there was little to show for it. No investments. No credit built. Just savings that disappeared quickly once she stepped into a new chapter. The gap wasn’t about effort. It was about access to the right information, at the right time.

That realization didn’t stay in the past. It became the throughline of everything that

followed.

Over the last decade, Marit has worked with a growing number of young clients, especially Gen Z influencers, content creators, and athletes. People who, in many cases, are earning significant income earlier than previous generations ever could. From the outside, it looks like success. But from where she sits, the pattern is clear.

“They really make a lot of money,” she says. “And then I started noticing... big messes. Back taxes. Confusion about profit versus revenue. Not understanding the basics.”

The issue isn’t intelligence. It’s timing. The pace of how young people are earning money has outgrown the pace of how they’re being taught to manage it.

And nowhere is that gap more visible than in what they don’t know to ask.

Taxes are often the first breaking point. Not just filing them, but understanding them. Federal, state, payroll. Concepts like FICA feel foreign. Even foundational questions, like whether forming an LLC changes tax obligations, become sources of confusion. It’s not uncommon for someone to be making real income while still operating without a basic financial framework.

At the same time, there’s a deeper layer. The emotional distance from long-term thinking,



When Marit talks to younger clients about investing or retirement, she knows she's working against something bigger than just a lack of knowledge. She's working against time itself, or rather, how far away it feels.

"They don't want to save for retirement," she says. "It seems like it's for-ever away."

So she adjusts. She doesn't lead with theory or rules. She leads with something they can see.

If you invest this much now, here's where you'll be at 30. If you wait, here's the difference.

"They're visual," she says. "They want it short. They want it quick."

It's not about simplifying the truth. It's about translating it.

That instinct, to meet people where they are instead of expecting them to meet the system where it is, is what led to her biggest dream. Not a business expansion. Not another service offering. Something bigger, and in some ways, more personal.

A textbook.

Not the kind that sits untouched in a classroom or teaches outdated models of how money works. Something different. Something built for the way this generation actually learns.

"I want to be a person they look back on when they are 40 and they're like, thank goodness for her," she says. "But I can't do it one-to-one. It has to be one to many."

The idea has been forming for years, shaped by the same stories repeating themselves in slightly different ways. The client who made fast money and lost it just as quickly. The athlete whose career ended sooner than expected. The creator who never realized how much they owed until it was too late.

The stakes are real. And they're closer than

people think.

"As quickly as they can build the business, they can lose it," she says.

Her goal isn't to scare people. It's to prepare them.

At the core of what she wants to teach is something deceptively simple: time matters more than perfection.

"If they just don't hide their head in the sand and start a little bit at a time," she says. "they're going to be in such a better position."

That philosophy shows up most clearly at home.

As a mother of three daughters, Marit is constantly navigating the balance between providing and teaching. The instinct to make things easier is always there. So is the awareness that ease doesn't always build understanding.

Her approach isn't rigid or heavy-handed. It's integrated into everyday life in ways that feel tangible.

Her nine-year-old daughter works in her firm, earning a real paycheck. She's on payroll. She has a custodial Roth account. When she received her first W-2, she waved it around excitedly, proud of what it represented, even if she didn't fully understand it yet.

"She loves getting the W-2," Marit says.

It's not about turning childhood into a financial lesson plan. It's about creating familiarity early, so it never feels overwhelming later.

And just as importantly, it's about making it feel good.

"They're excited because they feel fulfilled around it instead of just harped at," she says.

That distinction matters. It's the same one she's trying to bring into classrooms.

Because the problem, as she sees it, isn't just that financial education is missing. It's that when it does exist, it often doesn't connect.



"I just had so much money. I didn't really think much about it."



"I want to be a person they look back on when they are 40 and they're like, thank goodness for her."

"It depends on the state," she says of current programs. "They talk about the basics... but they're not keeping up with the pace of today's generation."

Ten years ago, most young people weren't building businesses online. They weren't navigating multiple income streams before their mid-twenties. The expectations were different. The risks were different.

Now, the system hasn't caught up.

Her vision is to bridge that gap. Not just with a book, but with an ecosystem around it. Materials teachers can easily use. Videos that mirror the way students already consume information. Tools that don't require translation.

"If we're really going to get it in, we need to make it easy for the teachers," she says.

She's already started laying the groundwork. Outlines built over time. Voice notes turned into drafts with the help of AI. Partnerships with programs like Junior Achievement to better understand how curriculum is structured and



approved.

There's a timeline, loosely set at three to five years. But more than that, there's momentum.

"It'll catch on like fire," she says.

Not because it's flashy. Because it's needed.

At the heart of all of it is a single idea she comes back to again and again, whether she's talking to clients, her daughters, or imagining a classroom full of students encountering this for the first time.

"Time is their most valuable asset," she says.

It's the thing older generations would give anything to get back. The one advantage young people don't yet realize they have.

And if they can understand that early, even imperfectly, everything else becomes more possible.

They don't have to get it right all at once. They don't have to master every concept. They just have to start.

That's the lesson Marit learned too late.

And the one she's determined to make sure they don't.

Logan Graf

It's Something I Could Never Let Go Of

A forgotten Mustang became a teenage obsession. Now, it's a long-game promise Logan Graf hopes to pass down to his daughters.

Logan was 13 when he found it, a 1965 Mustang hidden in his grandparents' barn, buried under years of dust, boxes, and neglect. "There's no way," he remembers thinking. He'd been going there his whole life. How had he missed it? But once they cleared it off, the reality set in. It was rough. Rusted. Smelled like it had been forgotten for good. And still, he wanted it. "I would love to be able to work on this," he said at the time, already imagining what it could become. Years later, that same car sits in his garage again, unfinished but not forgotten, now tied to a different dream.

At the time, Logan was just beginning to get into cars, collecting books, taking auto tech classes, and trying to understand how things worked. The Mustang felt like something bigger than a project. It felt like an opportunity. His grandparents, who had originally bought the car for his mom years earlier, agreed to help him get it running. What followed was not a clean restoration story. It was slow, imperfect, and full of small setbacks that would come to define his relationship with the car.

The first time he picked it up from the me-

chanic, it was running, at least enough to try. He remembers sitting in it, taking in what it meant to be inside something that old, something that had already lived a life before him. But the moment didn't last long. A few miles into a test drive, the smell hit. Gasoline, strong and unmistakable. When they pulled over, it was pouring out of the tank, rusted through after years of sitting untouched. It wasn't ready. Not yet.

Still, that didn't stop him.

By the time he was in high school, Logan was driving it when he could, even though "half the time I was trying to get it to work and half the time it was not working." There were moments that felt like freedom and moments that felt like frustration. The car would stall at stoplights, leaving him stuck while a line of classmates waited behind him. It was embarrassing, unpredictable, and far from reliable. But he kept driving it anyway.

Because when it worked, it gave him something no other car could.

"There's no radio, there's no AC," he says. "It was just you and the road." Even at 50 miles





“I still felt like the coolest person on the road.”

per hour, it felt faster, louder, more alive. Every sound came through. Every movement mattered. And when people looked over at him, noticing the car, he felt it. “I still felt like the coolest person on the road.”

That feeling carried with him into college, where the Mustang followed him through long drives between Austin and Lubbock, leaving early in the morning to avoid the risk of overheating in the heat. It was never the easy choice. It was the meaningful one.

Eventually, practicality caught up.

A more reliable car replaced the Mustang for daily use. Internships, work, and life demanded something that wouldn't break down at a stoplight or leave him stranded miles from home. The Mustang was parked at his mom's house, covered, waiting. And as the years passed, it slowly stopped working altogether. The battery died. The gas tank rusted again. Time did what time always does to things left untouched.

When Logan bought his house in 2018, the Mustang came with him, this time into a garage. He told himself he would fix it. That now, finally, he had the space and the time.

Then life expanded again.

A business. Three daughters. A life no longer defined by open hours waiting to be filled. And yet, his relationship with time has shifted. Where he once filled every available moment with work, something else now pulls at him, asking for his attention in a different way.

“I don't want to work all the time now,” he says. “My kids are not always going to be there.”

The Mustang became something different in that shift. Not just a project, but a question. Was it still worth holding onto something that required so much time he didn't have?

He considered selling it.

“I had to really wrestle with that decision,” he says. The car had sat for years. It took up space.

It demanded more than it gave, at least on the surface. But when it came down to it, he couldn't do it.

“There's just no way at this point I could ever sell it.”

Instead, he made a different decision. He asked for help. He invested in getting parts of it worked on that would have taken him years on his own. Not because it was easy or cheap, but because it meant something to finish it.

Now, the goal is clear. Not just to get it running, but to get it running in time.

Logan has three daughters. His oldest is seven. “I have at least seven years,” he says, half practical, half hopeful. He wants them to experience what he did, even if it looks different now.

“I just want them to be able to experience what it's like to drive a really old car.”

He knows they might not care the way he does. They might not feel the same attachment. But that's not entirely the point. The car is a bridge, whether they realize it or not. It connects his grandparents to him, his younger self to who he is now, and, hopefully, to them.

“It's part of my soul,” he says. “It has my blood, sweat, and tears.”

That's not a metaphor. He's been cut working on it. He's broken down on the side of the road. He's been frustrated, stuck, and unsure if it would ever come together. And still, he keeps coming back to it.

Because the Mustang isn't really about the car, but about what it represents.

“I think the Mustang can be just a symbol of something we strive for,” he says. “Something we can have goals for.”

It's something unfinished but not abandoned. Something imperfect but still worth investing in. Something that carries the past forward without needing to be polished into something unrecognizable.

And maybe one day, it will be something his daughters remember not just as a car in the garage, but as something their dad refused to let go of.

Not because it was easy.

But because it mattered.



“It was just you and the road.”

Jason Blumer

A Life That Leads Back to the Classroom

*The next chapter isn't about leaving work behind.
It's about returning to where it all started,
this time with something meaningful to give.*

Jason Blumer doesn't hesitate when he talks about what's next. After more than 30 years in entrepreneurship, he's thinking about a new chapter, one that looks very different from the life he's built so far. "You get to a point where you want to give back," he says. For Jason, that means becoming a professor. The idea traces back to his own college experience, where a handful of professors didn't just teach, they cared. Now, decades later, he can still remember them. And as he looks ahead, he keeps coming back to one question. What would it mean to be that kind of person for someone else?

The answer, for him, is not about slowing down. If anything, it's about focusing more intentionally on what matters.

Entrepreneurship, as Jason describes it, is not a quiet career. It is relentless, demanding, and deeply consuming. "These companies really can take over," he says. For more than 25 years, he has lived inside that pace, building, leading, and navigating the constant pressure that comes with creating something from nothing. It's a path filled with uncertainty, wins, losses, and a level of responsibility that doesn't easily turn off

at the end of the day.

Over time, that kind of intensity changes how you think about the future.

Now, Jason finds himself reflecting in a way he hadn't before. He talks about remembering what his parents used to say, about beginning to see the world from the perspective of someone not just building but also transitioning. It's a strange realization, he admits. One that brings both clarity and a new set of questions.

What comes next is not an ending. It's an iteration.

He already sees the shift happening. In his current work, he spends less time doing technical accounting and more time coaching leaders, consulting with entrepreneurs, and helping others navigate the same challenges he's faced. It's a role built on experience, on pattern recognition, on understanding what works and what doesn't because he's lived it.

But there's something about the idea of a classroom that feels different.

"I really wonder if I could do it for younger people," he says. "It would be a joy to do it."

That word, joy, shows up often when he talks



about this next chapter.

Part of it comes from memory. Jason's own college experience was shaped by professors who went beyond instruction. In a small program, with only a handful of students, those relationships mattered. They were mentors, not just teachers. They paid attention. They cared. And even now, more than 30 years later, those moments have stayed with him.

That kind of impact is what he hopes to recreate.

Not through perfection or authority, but through honesty.

By his own admission, much of what he's learned over the course of his career has come from mistakes. "You can look back on some really impactful mistakes," he says. Both personal and professional. The kind that shapes how you lead, how you make decisions, how you show up for other people.

That perspective, he believes, is what students need most.

Not someone who claims to have all the answers, but someone who understands what it feels like to not have them.

"I am not here to be the expert," he says of how he imagines himself in the classroom. "We're going to learn and grow together."



"where you want to give back."

It's a philosophy rooted in empathy. In remembering what it felt like to be at the beginning of something, unsure, overwhelmed, and trying to figure out if you're capable of building a life that works.

College, he says, is both freeing and terrifying. There is space to explore, but also a quiet pressure. Will this lead somewhere? Will I be able to make it? Those questions don't always get answered in a syllabus.

But they can be met with encouragement.

Jason talks about wanting students to feel safe enough to fail. To try things, get them wrong, and learn without the weight of real-world consequences pressing down on them. He imagines a classroom where curiosity is valued, where questions are welcomed, and where the goal is not just technical mastery, but personal growth.

"I hope they'll fail a little bit," he says. "And fail safely."

That kind of environment, he knows, can change people.

It's the same kind of environment he now tries to create in his work with entrepreneurs and leaders. Spaces where people can be honest about what's not working, where they can process challenges, and where they can find a way forward without having to pretend they have it all figured out.

Because the truth is, even after decades of experience, no one really does.

There's also something else pulling him toward this path. A curiosity that hasn't faded.

Jason doesn't talk about retirement the way most people do. In fact, he doesn't talk about it at all. "I would just go to school forever if I could," he says. He reads constantly, often choosing material that challenges him rather than entertains him. He listens to ideas he doesn't fully understand, trusting that over time, they will start to make sense.

That desire to keep learning is what makes the idea of going back to school, even later in life, feel exciting rather than intimidating.

"I love to read things that I don't get," he says. "And if I keep washing myself with it, I



"These companies really can take over."

start to learn."

In that way, the classroom is not just a place where he would teach. It's a place where he would continue to be a student.

That dual role feels important to him.

It also reflects something deeper about how he sees this next chapter. It's not about stepping away from ambition or drive. It's about redirecting it.

Even the practical challenges, going back to school, earning additional degrees, adjusting to a slower pace, don't deter him. If anything, they're part of the appeal. Another problem to solve. Another experience to move through.

"I anticipate it would be hard," he says. "But I want to go through that transition."

The same mindset shows up when he talks about writing his first book, a goal that once felt overwhelming. At the beginning, he wasn't sure he had enough to say. By the end, he had more than he could include.

"Anytime you do something hard, you can do it again," he says.

That belief shapes how he sees everything that comes next.

Including the impact he hopes to have.

If there's one thing Jason returns to again and again, it's this idea of change. Not the kind measured in metrics or milestones, but the kind that lasts in people.

"I hope they are changed as people," he says, speaking about the entrepreneurs he's worked with, the leaders he's coached, and the students he hopes to teach one day.

More encouraged. More thoughtful. More capable.

He doesn't need them to remember his name. What matters is that they remember how they felt. That there was someone who cared enough to share not just knowledge, but perspective. Someone who helped them see what was possible, even when they weren't sure yet.

"There was a professor," he says, imagining the future. "Who cared enough to talk about life."

That, for him, would be enough.

Because in the end, this dream isn't about changing direction. It's about coming full circle.

From student to entrepreneur. From builder to mentor. From learning to teaching.

And back again.

Alex Miles

For the First Time, She's Not Letting Herself Quit

A half-marathon isn't about running for Alex Miles. It's about discipline, identity, and becoming the kind of person who doesn't stop when things get hard.

For most people, signing up for a half-marathon starts with a love of running, or at least some version of it, but for Alex, it begins somewhere much quieter and much more personal, rooted not in passion but in a kind of unfinished conversation she's been having with herself for years.

"I'm not a runner," she says plainly, without hesitation, and yet that's exactly what makes this goal matter. Because this isn't really about becoming someone who runs for the sake of it, or chasing a finish time, or even proving anything outwardly, it's about something far more internal. "Running a half-marathon would represent that I am capable of doing hard things," she says, and what she means is not just the race itself, but the ability to stay, to follow through, to not quietly walk away the moment it gets uncomfortable.

For years, running has lived in that space between intention and follow-through, something Alex believed she should be able to do, something she returned to again and again with

a kind of hopeful determination, buying the shoes, starting strong for a week, convincing herself this time would be different, only to fall out of it just as quickly.

It wasn't a lack of desire, or even effort, but a pattern she couldn't quite break, one that slowly built into a quieter, more frustrating narrative about herself.

"I had no business thinking that I could run, have no plan, and still be successful," she says now, recognizing that what looked like inconsistency on the surface was often just a lack of structure underneath it.

Over time, that kind of cycle doesn't just affect what you do. It affects what you believe about yourself. It creates a subtle but persistent erosion of trust that makes it harder to begin again, let alone stay.

That loss of trust didn't exist in isolation. It was layered into a much larger shift that had been happening quietly over the years, one that began after having kids, when her focus, like so many women, naturally shifted outward.

Days became organized around what they needed, what they were doing, and what came next. Somewhere in that constant motion, her





“Running a half marathon would represent that I am capable of doing hard things”

own needs slowly moved further down the list until they were almost invisible.

“I was so focused on my kids. I rarely focused on my own needs,” she says.

The impact of that kind of shift isn’t always immediate. It builds gradually, showing up not just physically, but emotionally. In the way you feel in your body, your energy, and your sense of self, until one day you realize you don’t quite feel like yourself anymore.

That realization deepened during the years she ran her own business, a chapter that, on paper, looked like independence and growth, but in reality became all-consuming in a way

she hadn’t anticipated.

The pressure to make it work, to find clients, and to keep everything moving narrowed her world until there was very little space left for anything else.

“You get into the biggest, deepest, darkest hole,” she says, describing a kind of tunnel vision where everything revolves around survival, and your health quietly falls to the side.

It wasn’t just about weight or energy levels. It was the cumulative effect of being stretched too thin for too long, of operating in a constant state of urgency without the structure or support to balance it.

The shift didn’t come from running, at least not at first. It came from something much simpler, and in some ways, much more revealing: a Lagree class.

What started as curiosity quickly became something else entirely, not because it was easy, but because it wasn’t. “It was the hardest workout that I’ve ever experienced,” she says, remembering how sore she was for days after that first class.

And yet, she went back. Then she went again.

What she found there wasn’t just a workout. It was structure. It was community. It was a way of showing up that didn’t rely on doing it alone.

Surrounded by other women in similar stages of life, navigating similar challenges, the experience became less about pushing through alone and more about showing up together.

“I’m such a community person... all along, all I needed was a group class,” she says.

For the first time, movement didn’t feel like something she had to force herself into. It felt like something she could return to, something she could build consistency around.

Over time, that consistency added up in tangible ways. She lost more than 30 pounds, but more importantly, she rebuilt something deeper. Confidence. Trust.

The quiet but powerful understanding that she could stick with something. That she wasn’t someone who always stopped. That maybe the story she had been telling herself wasn’t entirely true.

And it’s from that place that the idea of a half-marathon began to take shape.

Still, even now, the fear hasn’t disappeared. It’s just changed form. It’s no longer about whether she can start. It’s about whether she can meet the expectations she might place on herself along the way.

“I think my biggest worry is disappointing myself,” she says.

For someone who is goal-driven, the instinct is to measure success by a number. A time. A benchmark. But this goal is asking something different.



“All along, all I needed was a group class.”



I want my kids to see that I did something hard."

To finish.

That shift requires letting go of perfection and choosing consistency instead. It requires redefining success in a way that prioritizes showing up over measuring up.

That's part of why she chose to make it a destination race in Malibu. It gives her something to look forward to, but it also raises the stakes just enough to make backing out harder.

It turns the goal into something real. Something she's committed to.

But even then, the race itself is only part of the story. Because when Alex imagines crossing that finish line, the moment isn't just about her.

"I want my kids to see that I did something hard," she says.

She wants them to see what it looks like to choose something difficult and stay with it. To understand that growth doesn't stop, even when life is full, even when it would be easier not to try.

She's already shown them what it looks like to work, to build something, and to change direction when something no longer fits. This becomes another extension of that. Another example of what it means to keep evolving.

She won't be doing it alone. Her husband is running it with her, not as a motivator, but as a partner going through the same process, the same uncertainty, and the same challenge.

It's something new for both of them. Something they're choosing to do side by side.

And yet, at its core, this still comes back to her. To identity.

To the version of herself she's been circling for years. The one who doesn't just start, but stays. The one who doesn't quietly decide halfway through that it's not for her. The one who keeps going because she decided it matters.

She doesn't need to be fast. She doesn't need to look like the runners she sees online. She doesn't need to love every mile.

She just needs to finish.

Because for the first time, she's not letting herself quit.



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Yuri Kapilovich

Now, It's Time to Fly

What started with flight simulators became something more enduring, a quiet, persistent pull toward a life defined by freedom on his own terms.

For Yuri Kapilovich, the dream has never really left. It started quietly, in his teens, with hours spent on flight simulators and a fascination with planes that felt less like a phase and more like something waiting. Decades later, after building a career and a life shaped by different choices, that pull toward the sky still lingers. “It was like the freedom,” he says, describing what first drew him in. Not prestige, not practicality, but the idea of being able to “go anywhere, do whatever you want.”

The dream now is simple, if not easy. To earn his pilot's license. To reclaim a version of freedom he's spent years intentionally building on the ground.

For most people, a dream like that fades. It gets replaced by something more practical, more urgent, more aligned with the life that actually unfolds. But for Yuri, flying never fully disappeared. It just moved to the background, quietly coexisting alongside everything else he was building.

A career that didn't go exactly as planned, shaped in part by a single unexpected moment. “Had I gotten an A in a class, I probably would've gone into finance,” he explains. Instead, a grading mix-up closed one door and opened another, leading him into accounting. It wasn't the path he originally envisioned, but it became the one he committed to.

That pattern, life nudging things in a different direction, shows up more than once. Flying, too, had its moment of forward motion before being paused. A few lessons. A few hours in the air. Enough to confirm what he already suspected, that it felt exactly the way he imagined. “That takeoff feeling... it was definitely a cool feeling,” he says. But like many things that require both time and money, it didn't fit neatly into the version of life he was building at the time. So he stepped away. Not permanently. Just long enough for other priorities to take shape.

Today, those priorities are clear. A busi-



ness designed intentionally, not to maximize output, but to support a certain kind of life. One where freedom isn't theoretical, it's built into the day. "If you want to go to the gym, or go on a boat ride, or just do something in the middle of the day, that's freedom to me," he says. It's a deliberate rejection of the expectation that success in his profession requires constant availability. There's a tradeoff, of course. "You're not going to have millions of dollars of income," he admits. But for him, that's not the point. Being present for his family is.

That mindset didn't appear overnight. It was shaped, in part, by observing a different way of living. Time spent in Europe left an impression that went beyond the scenery. It was the rhythm that stood out. The way people structured their days. The way work existed, but didn't consume everything around it. "They work to live, not live to work," he says. It's a distinction that's easy to recognize and much harder to replicate, especially in a place where the cost of living and cultural expectations pull in the opposite direction.

Still, he's built something that gets as close as possible. A version of success that prioritizes time over scale, presence over constant growth. And within that framework, the idea of flying fits differently than it once did. It's no longer something that competes with everything else. It's something that complements it.

Because the dream itself hasn't changed. If anything, it's become more defined. Not as a career, but as an experience. A skill. A way to move through the world differently. "If I had the time, I would do it," he says simply. The barrier now isn't desire. It's logistics. Hours required. Training. The practical realities that come with earning a license.

And yet, the vision is clear. Small, specific moments that make the whole thing feel real. Flying to the beach for the day. Taking his wife and kids along for the ride. Turning what would normally be a drive into something else entirely. "That'd be super cool," he says. It's not framed as a grand, life-altering goal. It's framed as something more personal. Something that adds to the life he already values.

That perspective becomes even more meaningful in the context of family. Because having children doesn't eliminate dreams, it reshapes them. It changes how time is allocated, how decisions are made, what feels possible in a given moment.

"Your priorities shift," he says. There are fewer impulsive decisions, fewer opportunities to chase something purely for yourself. But there's also more meaning in how



*"I was completely open,
no guards up, no fences."*

you choose to spend your time.

And maybe that's what makes this dream different. It's not about escape. It's not about leaving anything behind. It's about adding something in. Something that has been there, quietly, for more than 20 years.

If his kids ever read this one day, he knows exactly what he'd want them to take away. Not the specifics of flying, or even the details of his career path. Something simpler. "Be a good person," he says. "Treat people well, treat people respectfully. All the things will come to you eventually."

It's the kind of advice that mirrors the way he's chosen to live. Intentionally. Thoughtfully. Focused on what matters, even when that means letting go of what doesn't.

And maybe that's why the dream of flying has stayed. Because at its core, it was never really about the plane. It was about freedom.

Not the kind that requires leaving everything behind.

The kind you build first, and then, when the time is right, finally take into the sky.

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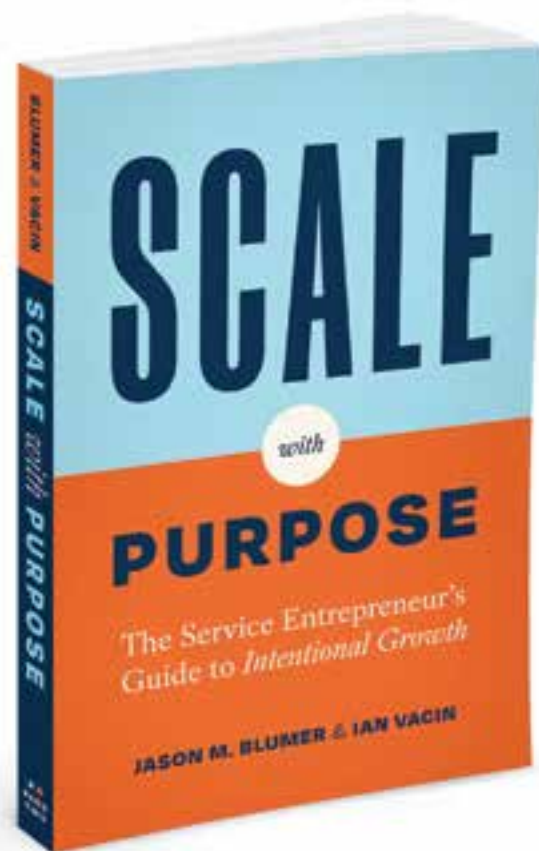
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Editor's shelf

Books to inspire, comfort, and spark conversation.



Scale with Purpose

by Ian Vacin and Jason Blumer

Scale with Purpose is a thoughtful, highly practical guide to growing a service-based business without losing control of it in the process. Written specifically for firm owners and service entrepreneurs, the book challenges the default assumption that growth is always a good thing and instead asks a more important question: Is your business growing in a way that actually works?

Drawing on decades of experience and real-world data, Ian Vacin and Jason Blumer break down what it really takes to scale intentionally. At the center of the book is a focus on human capital, your team, their capacity, and how work is structured across the business. Rather than pushing for constant expansion, the authors emphasize understanding workload balance, planning capacity, and aligning growth with what your business can sustainably support.

The book walks through the different stages of growth, showing that scaling is not linear but a series of shifts that require new structures, decisions, and leadership approaches. It offers clear frameworks for thinking about hiring, profitability, and operational design, all grounded in the realities of running a service firm.



The Fraud Informed Advisor

by Candy Bellau

You are working with a new client – the books are a mess, cash flow is tight, and no one has answers. Something feels off, but you are not sure what is going on. Before jumping to conclusions, you need to sift through the chaos and provide answers.

Bad bookkeeping, mismanagement, and fraud can look identical on the surface. The difference lies in intent, opportunity, and what can happen when no controls are in place.

The Fraud-Informed Advisor™ was born out of the question Candy Bellau is most often asked at conferences – how do I tell the difference between mismanagement and fraud? This book provides accountants, bookkeepers,

CPAs, and financial advisors with a framework for thinking clearly, asking the right questions, and confidently providing feedback based on facts, not feelings.

You will learn about the fraud triangle, the Three C's, how to recognize red flags, and what gateway theft is. This five-phase diagnostic process can be used in any engagement, at any stage of your career.

Your client may not know if there is a wolf in their midst dressed as an innocent sheep... but you will.

Civil Warrior

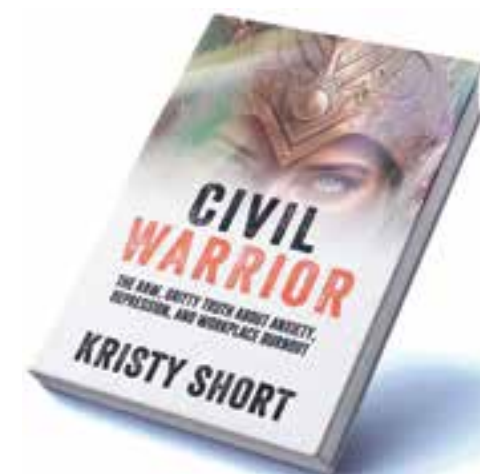
by Kristy Short

Civil Warrior is a raw, deeply personal look at what it means to keep performing while quietly struggling. In this memoir, Kristy Short shares her long battle with anxiety, depression, and workplace burnout, drawing from years of lived experience in high-pressure professional environments. The book unfolds through a series of honest, journal-like reflections, capturing moments of panic, exhaustion, and resilience without trying to smooth them over.

What makes Civil Warrior stand out is its refusal to offer a tidy resolution. Instead, it leans into the complexity of mental health, especially for high achievers who

are often the most practiced at hiding their struggles. Kristy challenges the idea that silence equals strength, calling attention to the cost of pushing through without acknowledgment or support.

This is not just a story about hardship, it is about awareness. It invites readers to recognize the signals of burnout, to question the expectations they carry, and to rethink what strength actually looks like. For anyone navigating demanding work and the pressure to hold it all together, Civil Warrior offers something rare: honesty, perspective, and the quiet reassurance that they are not alone.



Joe Woodard

The Phone Call That Made Him a Dad

Joe Woodard thought he understood what it meant to want a family. He didn't expect it to arrive in a single day or to change his sense of purpose forever.

Joe doesn't hesitate when he names the dream that quietly shaped his life long before it came true. "My dream was to be a father," he says, a desire rooted in the "very strong nuclear family" he grew up in and hoped to recreate for his own children. For years, that dream felt both close and out of reach, shaped by loss, grief, and the slow acceptance that it might never happen. And then, without warning, everything changed. One phone call. One decision. One moment that seemed to collapse time itself. "We woke up that morning not parents," Joe says, "and we went to bed that night parents."

That dream began long before the call.

Joe was raised in a family he describes as tight, consistent, and deeply formative. He was close with his parents and his brother, shaped by the kind of everyday experiences that, over time, create a sense of belonging. It isn't something he takes for granted. "I understand I'm privileged to have experienced this type of childhood," he says. But it also planted something lasting. He didn't just want a family one day. He wanted to recreate that experience, to give his own children the same kind of founda-

tion his parents had given him.

When he met his wife, Sandra, shortly after moving to Atlanta, it felt aligned with that vision. They met at church, both new to the city, both building something from scratch. What started as a moment of recognition turned into a relationship, and eventually, a shared plan for the future. They married knowing they wanted a family, and because they had started later, both in their mid-30's, they didn't wait long to begin trying.

At first, it seemed possible.

They were able to get pregnant. However, staying pregnant proved to be something else entirely.

Over the course of a few years, they experienced multiple miscarriages. Each one brought its own emotional and psychological weight, but one loss, in particular, shifted everything. After reaching the second trimester, after letting hope settle in more deeply than before, they lost the baby. The emotional impact was profound. "The news of the miscarriage was devastating to both of us, and, given the level of bonding Sandra had formed with our son in the womb, I know that whatever grief I went





“We woke up that morning not parents, and we went to bed that night parents.”

through doesn’t compare to my her journey during that difficult time.” Joe says.

On the advice of a grief counselor, they named their son Stephen, and a couple of years later, they buried the tiny urn of his ashes with Sandra’s grandmother. They grieved Stephen not just in the immediate aftermath, but in the years that followed. Sandra, he says, still carries that grief decades later. For Joe, the loss was layered, both the loss of a child and the experience of watching his wife endure that kind of pain.

Eventually, they made a decision that felt both necessary and heartbreaking. The emotional cycle of hope and loss had become too much. They chose to step away from trying. Not because they no longer wanted a child, but because they needed to protect themselves from what continued trying might cost them.



“We’re going to have a home,” Joe says of that time. “but it will be a childless home.”

Life moved forward.

They focused on their careers. Joe was traveling frequently for work, teaching across the country. His wife was building her career in corporate America. The dream of becoming parents didn’t disappear, but it became something quieter, something that lived in the background rather than at the center of their plans.

And then the phone rang.

A birth mother had delivered a baby girl. During her time in the hospital, she made a decision that Joe still describes with reverence. She decided she was not in a position to raise her daughter and wanted to place her for adoption. However, she had two conditions. She didn’t

want her child placed into the system, and she wanted her to be raised in a Christian home.

The birth mother called Joe’s church. The church called Joe and Sandra.

What followed was sudden and disorienting. “Kind of a panic and excitement all in one.”

Joe recalls. They prayed. They talked. And then they decided.

They would go get her.

There was no long lead-up, no gradual transition into parenthood. No nine months to prepare. No nursery built in advance. No steady adjustment to the idea of a child entering their lives.

His wife went to the hospital, while Joe was across the country, trying to get home, pacing airport floors in frantic and futile attempts to find a last-minute flight home. Even with extraordinary efforts to reroute him, he couldn’t make it back in time. So, he

did the only thing he could do. He waited.

Meanwhile, while Sandra was at the hospital getting their new daughter, something else was happening at home.

Joe and Sandra’s friends, who had already been through the early years of parenting, emptied their basements of everything they had saved: Baby clothes, supplies, furniture. One of these friends had a key to the house, and within hours, they transformed a room in Joe and Sandra’s home into a nursery. Not slowly, not over weeks, but all in a matter of hours. A space built by community, in real time, for a child who had not been part of the plan just hours before.

“I had no idea a baby could move a house,” Joe says, whimsically.

By the time his wife brought their daughter home, the house had already begun to reshape

itself around her. Joe secured a spot on a red-eye and met his daughter the following morning.

They named her Karis.

The name came from Joe’s background in classical Greek. It means, as he explains, receiving goodness you did not deserve. A gift that isn’t earned but given.

The meaning stayed with them, not just as a name, but as a framework for understanding what had happened.

Parenthood, for Joe, wasn’t just about raising a child. It became something more expansive. A reorientation of purpose.

“My pastor says maybe the most important thing in your life is not what you do, but who you raise,” he says.

That idea stayed with him. It shifted how he thought about success, impact, and what mattered most. The work he had been doing, the career he had built, didn’t lose its importance. However, the



“My dream was to be a father.”

family took the central role.

“I believe that whatever I’ve been able to accomplish in my life,” he says, “what she is going to do with her life... is so much greater.”

Today, Karis is 18. She’s pursuing her own dream, one she’s held since middle school, to attend NYU. She worked toward it for years and is now there, shaping a path that is entirely her own.

For Joe, the dream that once defined him has evolved into something quieter, but no less powerful.

He wanted to be a father.

He became one in a single day.

And now, the dream is no longer about him at all.

“I just hope I live long enough,” he says, “to see the goodness she brings to the world.”

Ian Vacin

The Unfinished Part of an Otherwise Complete Career

A successful career, a published book, and decades of research later, one question still lingers. What does it mean to revisit a path you walked away from and decide if it still matters?

For Ian Vacin, the dream has never really gone away. It's lingered quietly, re-surfacing in moments of reflection, in classrooms where he stood at the front instead of sitting among students, and in the research he's spent decades shaping on his own terms. Pursuing a PhD isn't about reinvention. It's about returning to something unfinished. "I got cold feet," he says of the moment he walked away from a fully funded PhD engineering program just one week before it began.

At the time, the decision felt practical. He had already been working full-time, building momentum in a career that was both financially rewarding and grounded in real-world application. The alternative meant stepping away from that progress and into five or six years of uncertainty, with no clear picture of what would come next. He chose the path that made sense. The one that moved forward.

But clarity in the moment doesn't always translate to closure over time.

What he left behind wasn't just a program. It was a version of himself. One that leaned fully into research, into depth, into the kind of aca-

demic rigor that formalizes curiosity. And even as he continued to build, earning two master's degrees, teaching at UC Berkeley, and eventually co-authoring a book rooted in years of research and observation, the feeling never fully disappeared. "It's always kind of been in the back of my mind," he says.

That lingering question isn't about capability. He's already done the work in many ways. Over the past two decades, Ian has studied the accounting profession from the inside out, analyzing patterns, behaviors, and the invisible forces that determine why some firms grow while others stall. That work culminated in *Scale with Purpose*, a book he co-authored after years of research, testing, and refinement. The process itself was exhaustive. Nearly two years from start to finish, layered on top of an already eight-year foundation of research.

And even that didn't fully satisfy the curiosity.

If anything, it deepened it.

"Writing the book was a really big undertaking," he says. "It satisfied that a little bit, but it also kind of scratches the itch more."



It's an interesting tension. The closer he gets to answering the question, the more expansive it becomes. Not because the work is incomplete, but because the framework surrounding it is different. A PhD wouldn't just be about doing research. It would be about doing it within a system that demands a different level of rigor, structure, and validation.

That distinction matters to him.

Not for recognition, at least not primarily. Though he's honest enough to acknowledge that part of it exists. "I've got a lot of friends who are PhDs, so they're all doctors," he says. "That's the ego part of it."

But the deeper motivation is something else entirely.

Curiosity.

The desire to explore ideas more fully, to test them in a more formal environment, to be pushed by mentors and frameworks that operate at a different level of depth. It's about creating space to think in a way that everyday life doesn't always allow. And that's where the question becomes more complicated.

Because life, as it exists now, is full.

There's the company he's still building, one that supports hundreds of employees and, by extension, their families. There's the responsibility that comes with that, the weight of unfinished work that feels more immediate than any personal pursuit. There's coaching, teaching, parenting, the everyday moments that pass quickly if you're not paying attention.

And there's the reality that time is no longer abstract.

Going back to pursue a PhD now wouldn't look like it did at 22. It would mean stepping into a room where he's older than most of the students and, in

many cases, older than the professors. It would mean revisiting material he's already mastered, relearning processes he's already lived through, and doing it all while checking his ego at the door.

"It's a lot of humble pie," he says.

There's something deeply human about that recognition. The awareness that growth doesn't always move forward in a straight line. Sometimes it requires stepping back, starting over, placing yourself in environments where you are no longer the most experienced person in the room.

And choosing to do that anyway.

But even that clarity doesn't make the decision obvious.

Because the question isn't just what he would gain. It's what it would cost.

Time away from his family. Time away from the company. The ripple effects of stepping back from one area of life to invest deeply in another. Those trade-offs feel heavier now, more consequential in ways they didn't before.

"You realize that decisions you make have impacts beyond yourself," he says.

That awareness reframes everything.

It shifts the dream from something purely personal into something that has to be evaluated within a broader context. Not just can I do this, but should I. Not just what will this give me, but what will it take from the people around me.

And yet, even with all of that, the question doesn't disappear.

It evolves.

In some ways, he's already found alternative paths toward the same outcome. Writing the book. Continuing research independently. Exploring new ideas, like how AI will reshape the structure of accounting firms, and considering how



"I got cold feet."



"When you get outside your comfort zone, that's when magic happens."

those ideas might turn into future work. These are ways of engaging the same curiosity without committing to the formal path.

But they don't fully replace it.

Because the PhD represents something specific. Not just knowledge, but completion. A box that was never checked. A decision that was made quickly but lived with for years.

"Satisfy the fact that I never actually did do it," he says.

There's a quiet honesty in that. The acknowledgment that not every dream is about transformation. Some are about resolution.

Closing a loop.

Proving something to yourself, not because you need the outcome, but because the question has stayed with you long enough to matter.

Still, even that isn't the final answer.

Because when he talks about what matters most, the conversation shifts. Away from degrees and achievements and into something more immediate. The impact he has on the peo-

ple around him. The moments that happen in everyday life. The students he teaches, the teams he coaches, the small but meaningful ways he helps others grow.

Those are the things that feel tangible.

The things that feel enough.

And yet, the presence of "enough" doesn't always eliminate the desire for something more.

For Ian, the PhD sits in that space. Not as a necessity. Not as a missing piece that defines his success. But as an open question. One that has followed him through different stages of life, changing shape but never fully fading.

Maybe that's what makes it matter.

Not the outcome, but the persistence.

The way certain ideas stay with you, asking to be revisited, reconsidered, reimagined as you grow. The way they challenge you to decide, again and again, what's worth pursuing and what can be left unfinished.

And maybe, in the end, that's the real dream.

Not the degree itself, but the willingness to keep asking the question.

Caroline Passmore

“He’s My Why”: The Life She’s Building for What Matters Most

After building a business to create flexibility, Caroline Passmore is chasing something quieter, a home by the water, fewer working hours, and more time with the person who matters most.

For Caroline Passmore, the dream isn’t complicated, even if it carries the weight of everything that matters most. “We value every moment that we still have together,” she says of her husband, whose illness has reshaped how they think about time. What she wants now is a home by the water where life can slow down, where he can fish when he feels up to it, and where they don’t have to plan around distance, traffic, or uncertainty.

After building a business that allows her to work from home and support her team, Caroline is finally close to the life she’s been working toward, one centered not on work, but on being present for the person who is, as she puts it, “my why.”

The clarity of that dream didn’t come from ambition. It came from disruption.

There was a time when life followed a more familiar rhythm, workdays structured, respon-

sibilities layered, and the future assumed to stretch comfortably ahead. But when her husband was diagnosed with a tumor in his spine, that sense of certainty shifted. Time stopped feeling infinite. It became something to notice. Something to protect.

“It’s a hard thing to deal with knowing that we never know how long we’ve got together,” she says.

And yet, within that uncertainty, something else took shape. A sharper sense of what matters. A refusal to let life be dictated by urgency that doesn’t serve them. A quiet, steady decision to build a life that makes space for what they still have.

That life centers around a place she calls their “last home.”

Not because it marks an ending, but because it represents arrival. A place where the outside noise softens. Where daily life no longer re-





“We value every moment that we still have together.”

quires navigating traffic, schedules, and constant movement. Where staying home is enough.

“To find the place where we both can be happy... where we will find peace for ourselves,” she says.

In her mind, it’s always near the water. That detail never changes. Whether it’s a lake just beyond the backyard or a nearby river, the presence of water is essential. It offers something intangible but immediate, a sense of calm, a rhythm that doesn’t need to be forced.

It also offers something practical.

If her husband wakes up feeling unwell, the day can unfold gently. If, by afternoon, he feels strong enough to go outside, he won’t need to plan, pack, or travel far. He can simply pick up a fishing rod and step into a part of himself that has always been there.

Fishing isn’t a casual hobby for him. It’s been part of his life since childhood, when he worked on a charter boat at just seven years old. Over time, it became something more serious, something he pursued with discipline and intention, competing in bass fishing tournaments and building

a reputation that reached a national level.

He had plans.

But like so many plans, they were interrupted.

His body, after years of demanding work and physical strain, no longer allowed him to continue in the way he once imagined. And then came the diagnosis, another shift, another layer of limitation that neither of them had planned for.

Still, Caroline doesn’t frame his story around what’s been lost. She talks about who he is.

“He’s an extraordinary fighter,” she says.

It’s that spirit that shapes the life they’re building now. Not a life of retreat, but one of intention. One that prioritizes what he can do, what they can share, and what still feels possible.

That’s why the dream includes small, specific details. Chickens in the yard. More bunny rabbits, something she laughs about as an “obsession.” Fruit trees they’ve talked about planting for years.

These aren’t aesthetic choices. They’re expressions of a life lived closer to the ground. A life where time is spent tending, caring, noticing.

It’s also a life she’s been building toward for years, even if she didn’t fully realize it at the start.

Her business began as a solution. Working outside the home became difficult as her husband’s health required more of her presence, so she created something that allowed her to stay close. Something flexible. Something she could shape around their life instead of the other way around.

Over time, that solution became something bigger.

Today, she leads a team of six, primarily women working part-time, many of them balancing motherhood and careers in ways traditional jobs don’t always allow. The structure is intentional. Flexible hours. Work that fits into life, not over it.

“I’m not building my business for me,” she says. “I’m building my business for them.”

In giving them that freedom, she also created the possibility of her own.

Now, for the first time, she’s able to step back. Not completely, but enough. Enough to imagine mornings without alarms. Days that don’t revolve around deadlines. Time that can be spent together without needing to be carved out.

That transition hasn’t been effortless.

The past year, in particular, has been defined by preparation, getting their current home ready to sell, completing repairs, making decisions, moving toward something that still feels just out of reach.

But now, they’re close.

“It’s exciting,” she says. “It’s going to be just a huge sense of relief... on to the next adventure.”

There’s a quiet bravery in that kind of transition. Letting go of a place that holds years of memory. Stepping into something not fully defined. Trusting that the life you’re building will meet you when you get there.

For Caroline, that trust is grounded in something deeper than certainty.

It’s grounded in relationship.

She met her husband online, both of them carrying histories, previous marriages, complicated pasts. When he entered her life, her son was sixteen, and the adjustment wasn’t seamless. There were differences in personality, in

expectations, in the way their lives had been structured.

But over time, those edges softened.

Today, she describes the relationship between her son and her husband as close, easy, rooted in mutual respect. Their families blended, expanded, and grew into something that feels stable, supportive, and deeply connected.

That foundation is what makes the dream possible.

Not the house. Not the land. Not even the water.

Those are the setting.

The center is the life they’ve already built together, and the decision to protect it, to prioritize it, to shape everything else around it.

“He’s my why,” she says.

It’s a simple sentence. But it carries the weight of every decision that followed.

The business she built. The hours she’s working to reduce. The move they’re preparing to make. The life they’re choosing, deliberately, before time has a chance to make the choice for them.

What Caroline is creating isn’t about escape. It’s about alignment.

A life where work supports what matters, not competes with it. Where time is spent intentionally. Where presence isn’t something you have to fight for.

A home by the water.

A slower pace.

A life built around love, while it’s still here to be lived.



Martin Moll

What If Conferences Felt Like This Instead?

Inspired by the belief that environment shapes behavior, he's dreaming up a conference space designed for reflection, restoration, and deeper human connection.

When Martin first describes his dream, it doesn't sound like a conference center at all. There's no mention of ballrooms or packed agendas, no emphasis on scale or spectacle. Instead, he starts with something far less tangible and far more telling. A feeling. Relief.

"You take a deep breath," Martin says, describing the moment someone arrives and finally lets go of the stress they've been carrying. It's the kind of exhale that doesn't happen often in professional settings, especially in industries where showing up often means performing, presenting, and pushing through. For Martin, that's exactly the problem.

After years of attending conferences and leading within high-pressure environments, he's come to believe that the way we gather is fundamentally misaligned with how people actually connect. Particularly for introverts, which, as he points out, make up a significant portion of the accounting profession.

"I'm so introverted, almost painfully so," he says.

And yet, like so many others, he's spent much of his career learning how to override that instinct. Stepping on stages, leading teams, speaking to rooms of hundreds. Showing up in

ways that were necessary, but costly.

"I know the price that it takes," he says.

That awareness, built over time and experience, is what sits at the center of his dream. Not just to build something new, but to correct something that has long felt off.

Traditional conference spaces, as he sees them, ask people to be more than they naturally are. Louder. More outgoing. More "on." The energy is constant, the stimulation unrelenting. And while people show up and participate, they often do so by stepping outside of themselves.

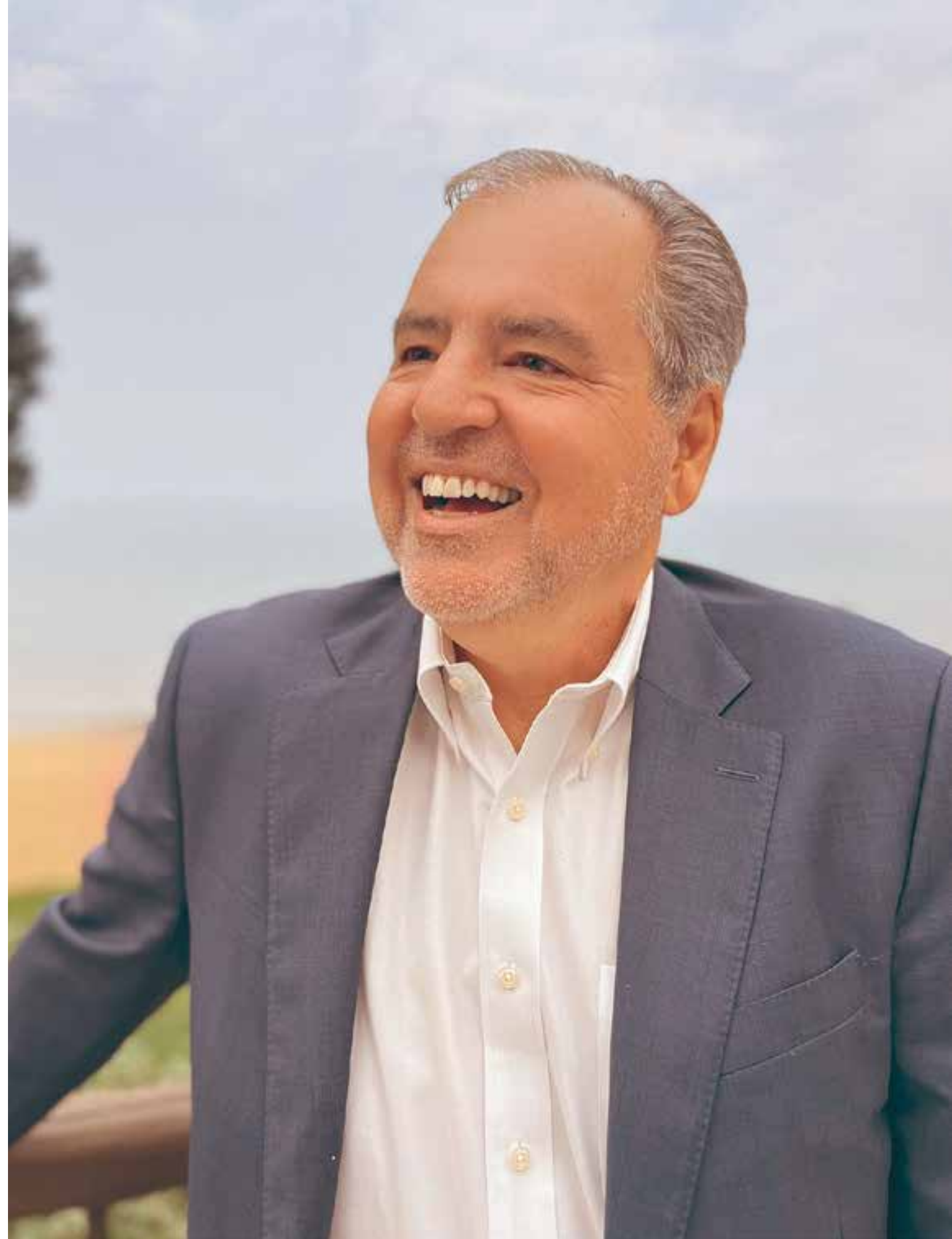
"They don't show up as their true selves," Martin says. "You're seeing them outside of who they really are."

His vision challenges that dynamic at its core.

Instead of designing a space around presentations, he imagines one built equally, if not more, for what happens in between them. The quiet conversations. The one-on-one moments. The decision to step away, not because you're disengaged, but because you need to reset.

"The magic is the conversations that you have during breaks," he says.

In most conference environments, those moments are an afterthought. People spill out of windowless rooms into crowded hallways, competing for a handful of seats or standing



in clusters that never quite feel comfortable. There's little room to breathe, let alone to think. Martin wants to change that.

In his version, every detail is intentional. From the moment you arrive, the experience shifts. Parking is easy. The environment feels calm. There's a sense, almost immediately, that you can settle in.

"It's just like you take a deep breath and you feel like, okay, I'm here."

Inside, the main gathering space would feel open and grounded. Not sterile or overly polished, but somewhere with character, something like a converted warehouse or a building with history and strong foundations. A place that invites presence rather than demands attention.

But it's what exists beyond that central space that defines the dream.

He imagines an abundance of smaller environments, what he calls "rooms," though many of them exist outdoors. Spaces designed for different types of interaction and different times of day. Areas where small groups can gather, where two people can step away for a conversation, or where someone can sit alone without feeling out of place.

"If we have 50 people or 100 people, that's about as big as I'd want," he says. "And then those 100 people leave, and there's 200 places to sit."

The goal is simple. No one should have to



"You take a deep breath and you feel like, okay, I'm here."

search for space.

And more importantly, no one should feel like they have to fill it.

Part of what shapes this vision is something Martin has observed repeatedly over the years. Not just in conferences, but in the way people move through professional environments more broadly.

There's a kind of learned behavior that takes hold.

"You get into conference mindset," he explains. "You know what to expect."

By the third or fourth event, people arrive already anticipating the experience. The noise. The expectations. The subtle pressure to engage in a certain way. And so they adjust. They perform. They participate in ways that may not feel entirely natural, but feel necessary.

Martin isn't interested in refining that system. He wants to disrupt it.

"I almost want them to be like, oh wait, I'm actually just showing up as me."

That shift, from performance to presence, is where he believes something more meaningful can happen. Not just better conversations, but deeper ones. Ideas that don't surface when people are guarded or depleted, but emerge when they feel relaxed, seen, and safe enough to think differently.

"I think a deeper exchange of ideas," he says, imagining what it could unlock.

At its core, the dream is about creating the conditions for that kind of exchange. And for Martin, those conditions are as much about what's removed as what's added.

Less noise. Less pressure. Less expectation to constantly engage.

More space. More flexibility. More room to simply be.

He points to moments outside of work as a reference point. Time spent with close friends, where conversation flows easily, or doesn't happen at all, and both feel equally valuable.

"We could spend four hours... and not say a word to each other and that's just fine," he says.

That level of ease is rarely present in professional settings. But he believes it could be, if the

environment supported it.

And that belief extends beyond individual comfort. It connects to something larger about the future of work and the role of human connection within it.

"As the world changes, the firms that lean more into being human are the ones that are going to win," he says.

Creating a space that encourages that humanity isn't just a personal aspiration. It's, in his mind, a necessary evolution.

There's also a deeper layer to the dream, one that moves beyond conferences altogether.

Martin doesn't just want to build a space for his industry. He wants it to be used by others who might not otherwise have access to environments designed with this level of care.

Nonprofits, in particular, come to mind. Organizations doing high-stakes, high-pressure work, often without the resources to step away and think strategically.

"This is just a way to give back to them," he says.

He imagines them using the space for retreats, for conversations that require time and clarity, for decisions that benefit from being made in the right environment. Not rushed. Not constrained.

Because if there's one thing Martin returns to again and again, it's this idea that space matters.

That where you are shapes how you think, how you show up, and what becomes possible.

He's seen glimpses of it before. Moments at past events where a different setting changed the energy entirely. A cabana by the pool where people gathered more naturally. A nursery that felt more open and alive than a traditional venue.

"I know they're out there," he says. "I just want to do mine."

And if he does, if this space becomes real, the impact he hopes for isn't measured in attendance numbers or revenue. It's something far more personal and enduring.

A place that becomes part of people's stories.

A place tied not just to what was discussed, but to what was felt. The conversations. The



"They don't show up as their true selves."

clarity. The moments that stayed with them long after they left.

Because for Martin, the dream isn't just about building a better conference. It's about creating a space that holds meaning. One that outlasts him.

A place where people didn't just gather.

They showed up differently.

And maybe, because of that, left different too.

Corry Jankowski

For the Ones Who Never Get Credit

She's not interested in writing about the hero. She wants to tell the story of the person who made the hero possible.

Corry Jankowski doesn't hesitate when asked about her biggest dream. "To write a book that people actually read," she says, laughing a little at how simple and big it sounds all at once. It's a dream she's carried since she was ten, shaped by a lifelong love of reading, writing, and history. But what she wants to create isn't centered on the obvious heroes. It's something more subtle. A historical fiction novel that focuses on the people "no one would ever know that they had a name," the ones who stood just outside the spotlight, but still changed everything. Drawn to stories from moments like World War II, she's especially interested in the quiet acts of courage that rarely get recorded. The goal isn't to write the next great novel. It's to tell the kinds of stories that make people feel something real.

For Corry, stories have always been more than entertainment. They've been a way of understanding people. Growing up, she gravitated toward books set in the past, especially those rooted in real events but told through imagined lives. She wasn't just interested in what happened. She was interested in how it felt to live through it.

That instinct never left.

She describes her interest in historical fiction as something that has always lived quietly in

the background. A steady pull. A curiosity about how people respond when the world around them shifts in ways they can't control. Moments when fear, uncertainty, and courage all exist at the same time.

World War II is one of the time periods she returns to often, not because of its scale, but because of the human stories within it. "There were so many amazing heroes," she says, "but there were also so many people who maybe their contribution was not classified as heroic, but it still was something that really impacted people."

It's those people she keeps thinking about.

Not the ones whose names are remembered. The ones who stood beside them. The ones who helped, enabled, or simply showed up at the right moment.

"They're not the people who are credited with it," she explains. "But the heroes in those stories, they don't do them alone."

In the book, she imagines, the story wouldn't follow the hero. It would follow the person just outside the frame. A driver. A maid. A witness. Someone whose presence made everything else possible, even if no one ever recorded their name.

That idea, that impact often lives in the background, is what makes the story feel important to her.





“They’re not the people who are credited, but it still was something that really impacted people.”

Long before she ever considered writing a novel, writing itself was already part of her life. She comes from a family of writers, not professionally, but as a shared way of expressing themselves. For Corry, it became something natural. Something she turned to without thinking.

Today, that still shows up in small ways. She writes poetry for her children, often inspired by everyday moments. The kind of writing that turns something ordinary into something memorable. It’s playful, sometimes silly, and deeply personal.

But writing a novel feels different.

“It takes time,” she says. “And myself, probably.”

Because for her, writing isn’t just about storytelling. It’s about honesty.

“There’s also a lot of vulnerability in writing,” she explains. “Writing has to come from somewhat from personal experience.”

Even in fiction, something real has to exist underneath it.

Some of that reality comes from her own experiences of starting over. Moments where



life didn’t follow the path she expected. She describes a time when everything felt stable. A home. A business. A growing family. And then, suddenly, that stability shifted.

“We had that experience of where we had a very comfortable life,” she says, “and that vulnerability of really having to start over and have nothing.”

It wasn’t just about losing something. It was about deciding what came next.

“We built this life from nothing,” she says. “We can rebuild this life from nothing. We did it once, we can do it again.”

That experience didn’t just shape her life. It shaped the way she thinks about stories.

Because the moments that define people aren’t always the ones that get recognized. They’re often the quiet decisions. The risks taken without certainty. The choice to act when it would be easier not to.

“We can’t just be passive bystanders and expect that we are going to positively impact anything,” she says.

That belief sits at the center of everything she

hopes to write.

The people she’s drawn to, the ones she calls “hidden heroes,” aren’t fearless. They’re people who understand what they could lose and choose to act anyway.

“They have so much to lose,” she says, “but they know that there is so much to potentially gain from taking this risk and helping someone else.”

It’s not about recognition. It’s about impact.

That same perspective shows up in how she thinks about confidence. She believes people often use language like imposter syndrome as a way to hold themselves back from doing something meaningful.

“I’m not an imposter,” she says. “I am competent. I’m confident.”

It’s the kind of mindset she hopes readers would carry with them after finishing her book. Not just inspiration, but permission. Permission to act. To try. To believe they are capable of more than they think.

When she imagines actually sitting down to write the novel, what excites her most isn’t the outcome. It’s the process of stepping into someone else’s experience.

“I think that empathy is a great place to start on anything,” she says.

To her, storytelling is a way to experience life

beyond your own perspective. To feel something you haven’t felt before. To understand someone you’ve never met.

Because, as she puts it, “we’re generally self-centered,” even when we care deeply about others.

Stories create a pause in that. A moment where someone else’s experience becomes real.

And in that moment, something shifts.

That’s what she wants to create.

When asked what it would mean to finally write the book, her answer is simple.

“It has been on my to-do list probably since I was like 10 years old,” she says.

But success, for her, isn’t about how many people read it.

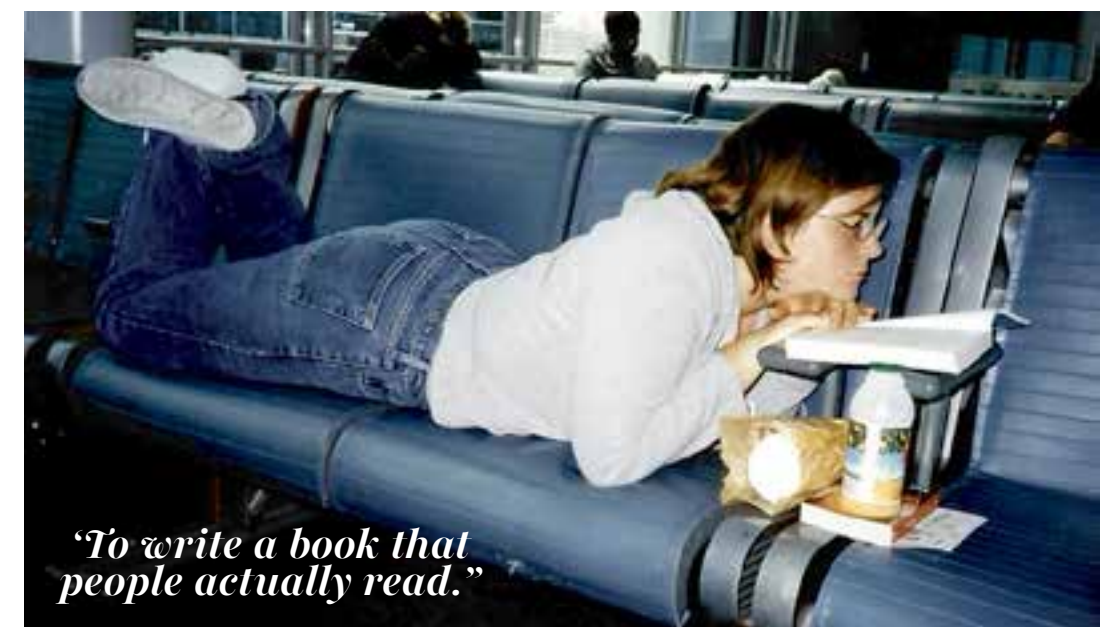
“My goal has really just been to impact one person,” she explains. “If just one person can be present and benefit from the experience, then I feel like that was what I did.”

One person.

One story that stays with them a little longer than expected.

One reminder that you don’t have to be the hero to matter.

Sometimes, the most important role you’ll ever play is the one no one sees.



“To write a book that people actually read.”



Rachel Dauchy

The Three-Day Workweek

Her dream isn't to do less. It's to live more fully in the time she's been working so hard to create.

Rachel Dauchy doesn't dream of leaving her work behind. She dreams of reshaping it. After years of building a business, raising two children, and pushing herself to keep up with an industry that demanded constant learning, Rachel has arrived at a quieter, more deliberate vision: a life where work fits into Tuesday through Thursday, and the rest of the week is protected. "I do nothing but work and I'm getting really tired of it," she says. What she wants instead is space, for yoga, for her family, for the rituals that make a life feel like her own. The dream isn't about doing less. It's about finally having enough room to feel present inside it.

The idea didn't arrive all at once. It formed slowly, over the past year, shaped by burnout and by something more tender. Her children are 16 and 13 now, and the realization landed quietly but unmistakably: time has moved faster than she expected. There was a period when she was a stay-at-home mom, fully immersed in their days, leading activities, showing up for everything. Then she returned to work, started her business seven years ago, and built something she's proud of. But somewhere along the way, the balance shifted.

Now, she finds herself wanting something different. Not an exit from work, but a recalibration of it. A way to hold onto both parts of herself, the one who loves building and the one who wants to be present while her kids are still

close enough to reach.

In her mind, the life she's working toward is vivid. Friday morning starts with yoga, something she's practiced since she was 19. After that, a long bath. A stop for a smoothie or a trip to a favorite store, wandering aisles without urgency. Maybe a visit to Trader Joe's or HomeGoods. Time to plan meals, experiment with recipes, cook without rushing. Later, happy hour with friends from the gym or yoga studio, then home for dinner and a quiet evening with her husband. If the weather is warm, maybe the pool or a game of pickleball. If it's cold, a movie and an early night.

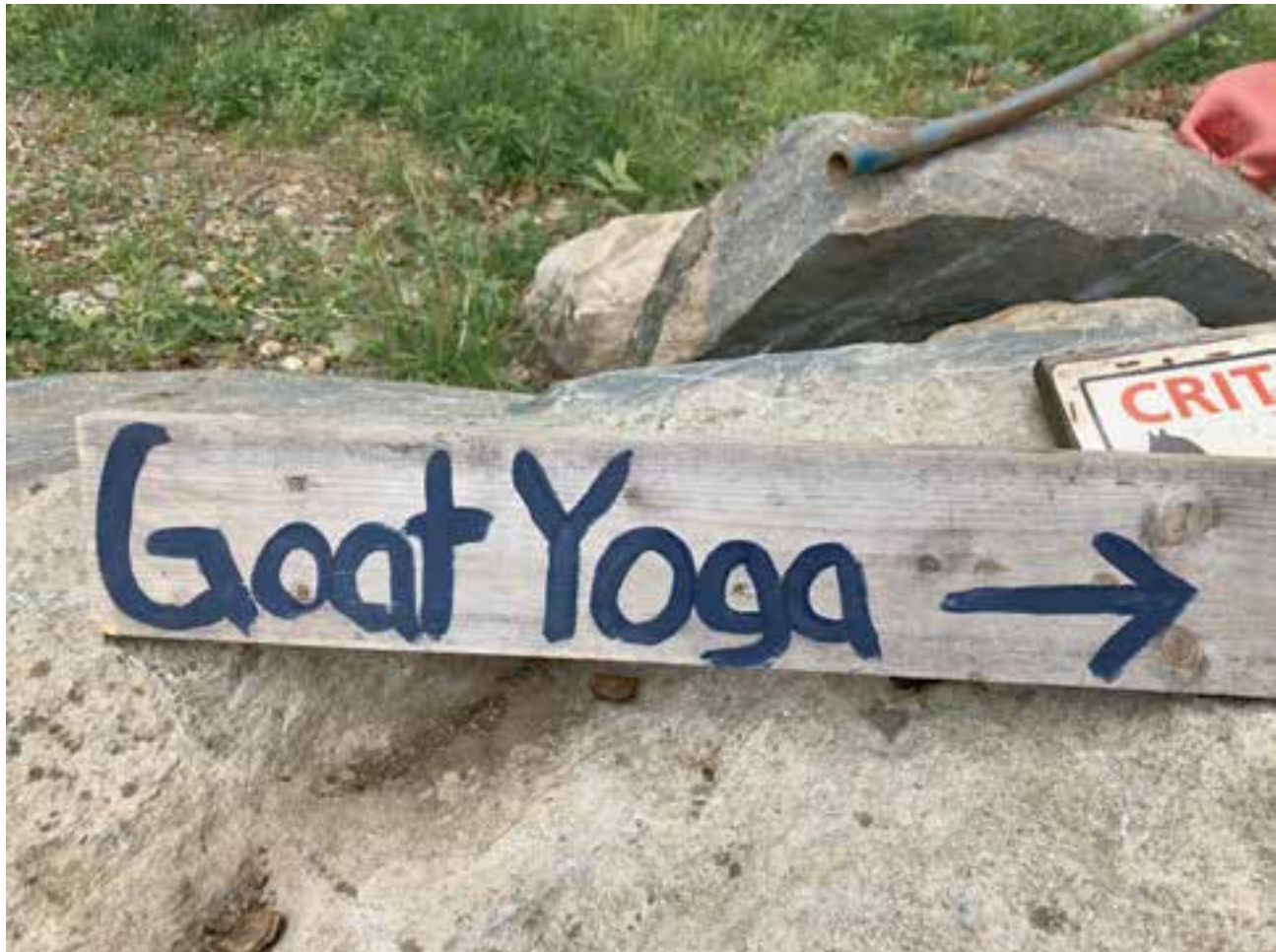
It's not extravagant. That's what makes it powerful. Every part of it is grounded in things

she already loves, things that have simply been squeezed out by the pace of her current life.

"I want to be able to hang out with them and spend a little bit more time with them," she says of her kids. Not in a grand, dramatic way, but in the everyday moments that are easy to miss when work stretches into nights and weekends.

Underneath the dream is a deeper tension, one she's still navigating. She loves working. She always has. There's pride in what she's built, and satisfaction in the mastery she's developed after years of late nights teaching herself new systems and technology. She remembers staying up until midnight, pushing through steep learning curves just to keep up. Now, she feels more capable, more established, and ready to





shift from constant effort to intentional structure.

The three-day workweek isn't about stepping back. It's about choosing when to step in.

That desire for structure, for a life that feels contained and intentional, traces back further than her career. Rachel grew up in an unstable environment, moving often, surrounded by unpredictability. Alcoholism was present in her home, and with it came a sense of chaos that shaped how she learned to move through the world.

"You feel out of control for most of your life," she says. "So you almost overcompensate by becoming controlling."

Over time, through experiences like Al-Anon and through her own self-awareness, she's learned to release some of that need for control. Or at least to redirect it. Now, instead of trying

"I do nothing but work and I'm getting really tired of it"

to manage everything, she focuses on what she can shape, how she spends her time, how her days feel, the small rituals that create stability.

"I want my days to feel a little more living in the moment and celebratory," she says.

Yoga plays a central role in that shift. What started as a casual gym class at 19 became something much more foundational. Over the years, it's evolved into a daily practice that connects her mind and body, builds strength, and offers a form of moving meditation.

For Rachel, yoga isn't just exercise. It's a way to step out of the constant noise in her head. "It's like this mini mountain you're climbing every morning," she says. "If I can do this, I can do anything else."

That mindset, built slowly over years of practice, has shaped more than just her own life. She

sees it reflected in her daughter, a competitive dancer who approaches her craft with discipline and intensity. Watching her, Rachel recognizes something familiar, a shared drive to challenge themselves physically and mentally, to keep going even when it's hard.

In that way, the life she's building isn't just for her. It's something her children are already absorbing, a model of what it looks like to care deeply about both work and well-being, without sacrificing one entirely for the other.

Still, the shift she's working toward won't be simple. She knows that stepping into a slower, more balanced rhythm might feel unfamiliar at first. The last time she made a sudden change, leaving a job abruptly, the immediate aftermath felt disorienting. Days passed in a kind of haze, unsure what to do with the sudden space.

"I'm used to always feeling overwhelmed," she says. "That's sort of become the norm."

Letting go of that pace, even in pursuit of something better, will require adjustment. It means redefining productivity. Sitting with stillness. Allowing time to exist without immediately filling it.

But there's something else waiting on the other side of that discomfort. A version of her life where she can spend a Friday at the lake with her husband, fully present, without guilt. Where she can choose rest or connection without feeling like she needs to justify it.

"I want to be able to go there on a Friday... guilt free," she says. "Like, this is where I'm spending my day."

It's a simple statement, but it carries weight. Permission, finally, to live the life she's been working so hard to build.

If her children read this one day, she hopes they understand that the goal was never to choose between work and family, but to find a way to honor both. She knows they've seen her struggle with the balance, felt the tension of her trying to hold everything at once. More than anything, she believes they want her to be happy, to feel steady, to not be constantly over-

whelmed.

"They want that balance where I'm not wiggling out," she says, laughing.

The three-day workweek is her answer to that. Not a perfect solution, but a deliberate one. A structure that creates room for the parts of life that matter most, while still holding onto the work she loves.

It's not about escaping anything. It's about returning to herself.



"I want my days to feel a little more living in the moment and celebratory."

Brittany Malidore

The Kind of Dream That Only Comes After Survival

Dreaming was once about escape. Now, it's about building a life that lasts, one shaped by presence, purpose, and the chance to rewrite what comes next.

For Brittany Malidore, the dream isn't a destination, a title, or even a single defining goal. It's something far more fundamental, and far harder won. The ability to dream at all. "Before, I dreamed because I had to," she says, reflecting on a childhood shaped by survival, instability, and being told who she would become long before she had the chance to decide for herself. Today, that has shifted. Now, her dreams are about building, something steady, something meaningful, something that outlives her. A life for her five children rooted not in escape, but in intention. Not in proving people wrong, but in creating something right.

For most of Brittany's early life, dreaming wasn't expansive. It wasn't creative or future-facing. It was immediate. Necessary. A way to get through. She describes growing up in "chaos," a word that carries more weight the longer she talks. It wasn't just instability, it was a constant tension, a feeling of bracing for something before it even happened. "You're almost bracing for impact," she says. "You feel this weight... this heaviness."

That kind of environment doesn't just shape your circumstances. It shapes how you see yourself. When you're told over and over that

you won't become anything, that your future has already been decided, it becomes easy to believe it. Dreams, in the way most people understand them, don't have room to exist. Instead, they're replaced with something more urgent. Survival. "I needed to have food and shelter and be able to support myself," she says.

And in that kind of reality, something else happens too. You learn to shrink. "It teaches you to stay quiet, to not expect anything good," she says.

Looking back now, Brittany can name what she needed in those moments with a clarity that only comes from distance. "She needed someone to see her," she says, speaking about her younger self. Not fix her. Not define her. Just see her. But in a childhood shaped by conflict, movement, and competing narratives, she often felt more like something being managed than someone being understood. "It was almost administrative. Executional," she says.

So the shift didn't come all at once.

There was no singular, cinematic turning point where everything changed. Instead, it was built through a series of decisions. Quiet ones. The kind that don't always feel significant in the moment but, over time, begin to redirect the entire





*“Before, I dreamed because I had to...
I had to escape, I had to get out.”*

course of a life. “I don’t know that it was one big moment,” she says. “I think it’s a series of quiet decisions.”

Decisions to choose differently. To question what had been handed to her. To push against the version of herself that had been written by someone else.

Some of those decisions came early. Brittany became a mother at 19. She married young, quickly, trying to reshape the narrative in real time. Looking back, she’s honest about it. Not every decision was the right one. But they were the only decisions she knew how to make without a roadmap, without guidance, without someone in her corner saying, this is another way.

And then, slowly, something began to change. When she met her now husband in her late twenties, there was a shift in clarity. Not just in who she chose, but in how she chose. “I was very clear on what I wanted,” she says. There’s a story she tells, sitting on a couch, eating guacamole

and chips, early in their relationship. She turned to him and said plainly, “If you don’t want to have kids, I don’t even know why we’re dating.”

And that certainty, that willingness to say this is what I want, became one of the first real signs that something had shifted internally.

Motherhood deepened that shift.

“It made everything real,” she says.

Success stopped being about titles or money. It became about stability. Presence. Safety. The things she didn’t consistently have became the exact things she wanted to give. But alongside the joy, there was something else too. Anger. Confusion. A kind of grief that surfaces when you see your own children and realize how different their experience is from your own.

“I would look at my kids and think, how could someone do what happened to me?” she says.

It’s a question without a clean answer. One that doesn’t resolve neatly, even with time.

But instead of letting that question define her,

Brittany made another series of decisions.

To create something different. To build a life her children wouldn’t have to recover from.

In practical terms, it looks like consistency. Emotional safety. A home where her kids can feel, speak, exist without fear. “It’s not perfection, it’s presence,” she says.

And maybe most importantly, it’s the absence of something. The absence of that long, quiet process of undoing your childhood in adulthood.

“I don’t want them to spend their adulthood trying to undo their childhood,” she says.

That idea, more than anything else, sits at the center of her dream now.

But life, for Brittany, hasn’t followed a clean upward trajectory.

In January 2024, she was in a severe car accident. The kind that doesn’t just interrupt your life, but rewrites it. She lost her ability to speak. Lost parts of her memory. Couldn’t walk. Couldn’t do basic things for herself.

“It changed my entire life,” she says.

Before the accident, she describes herself as driven, structured, always in motion. Focused on what needed to be done next. After, everything slowed down in a way she didn’t choose but couldn’t ignore.

“When you lose your ability to function, you realize how much of your identity is tied to doing,” she says.

And in that forced stillness, something unexpected emerged.

Clarity.

Not the kind you get from planning or reflection, but the kind that comes when everything unnecessary is stripped away.

“In a split second, I could have left this earth,” she says.

That realization shifted her relationship with time. With presence. With the people around her. The version of Brittany that came out of that experience is different. Softer. More open. More intentional.

“I was like a hard shell before,” she says. “Now there’s a softness.”



*‘I think I dream
because I finally can.’*

It didn’t erase her past. It didn’t resolve everything. But it changed how she carries it.

Because even now, she’ll tell you she isn’t healed. Not fully. Maybe not ever in a clean, complete way.

“I will always be a beautiful work in progress,” she says.

There are still pieces of survival that live in her. A constant awareness of what could go wrong. A tendency to prepare for the next thing before it arrives.

But instead of letting that

define her, she’s learned how to redirect it.

Into leadership. Into entrepreneurship. Into building something meaningful not just for herself, but for others.

And at the center of it all is still that original shift.

The one from surviving to choosing.

The one from escaping to building.

Because today, when Brittany talks about her dreams, they’re not abstract. They’re not distant. They’re grounded in the life she’s actively creating. A life where her children feel safe, seen, supported. A life where they are allowed to dream without first having to survive.

“I hope they say I was real, I was raw, I was their protector,” she says.

That she showed up. That she was there. That what she built was intentional.

And maybe, most importantly, that she changed the trajectory.

Not just for them, but for everything that comes after.

A purrfect month-end close.

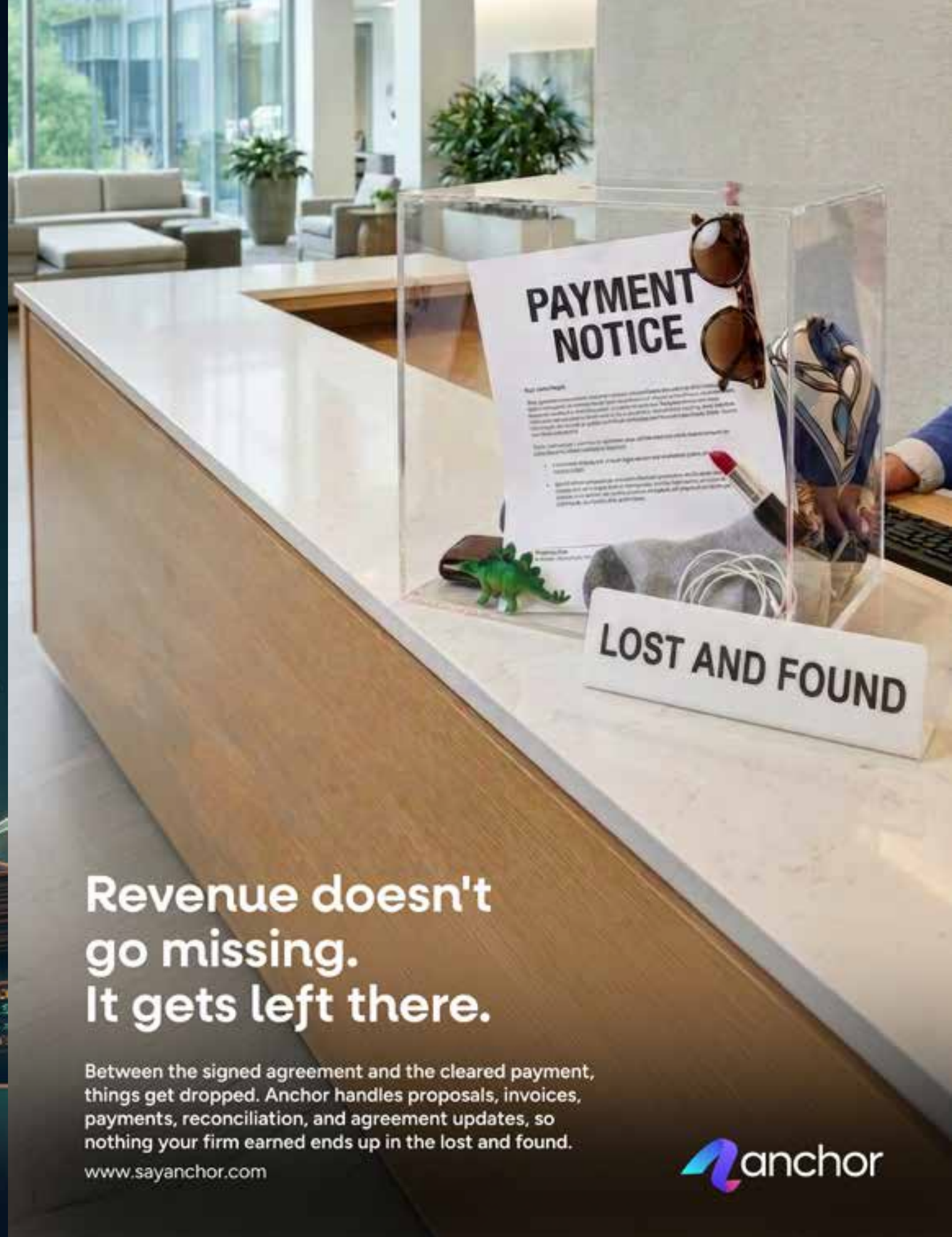


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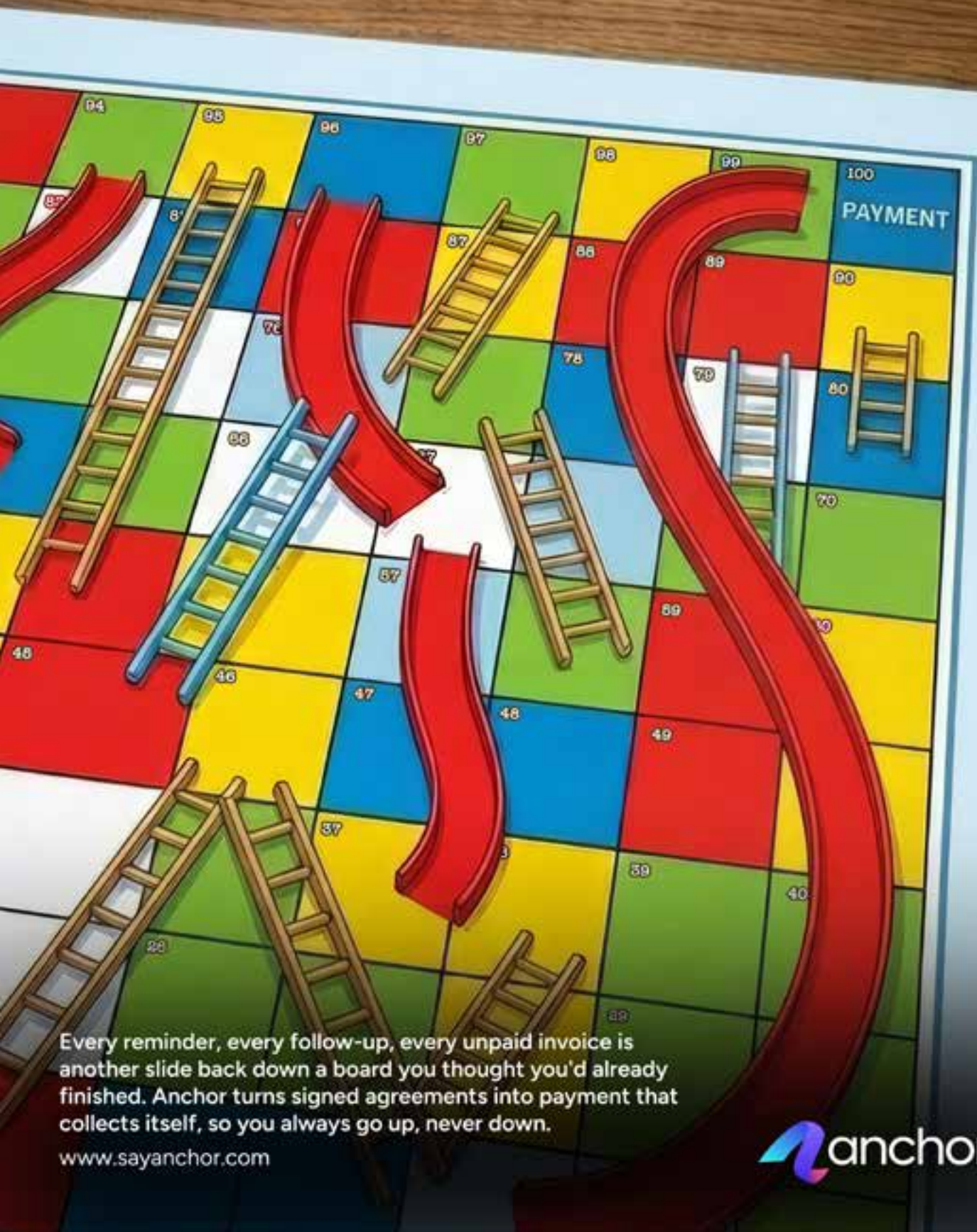
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