



FROM LITTLE
SCRIBBLES TO
BIG IDEAS

*A Half-Century of Life Experience
Yields a Lot of Meaningful Insights*



Discover Your Potential

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DEAR FRIENDS, FAMILY & CLIENTS,

I've been a self-help junkie since I was in high school. Maybe even earlier, if I really could look back. I've written down and remembered snippets of information from books, newsletters, podcasts, songs, memes, other forms of media and many interesting conversations.

In celebration of my 50th birthday and the ability to connect with so many people, I'd like to share some of the insights I've learned.

I've assumed many roles (see below for a slightly exhaustive list*) across many life stages and had the opportunity to interact with **MANY** different people at different times in their lives.

Mara



**These are some of the roles I've played to date: Daughter, Mother, Sister, Friend, Student, Wife, Ex-Wife, Daughter-in-Law, Certified Life Coach, B'nei Mitzvah Tutor, Geriatric Care Manager, Occupational Therapist, Camp Counselor...*

This is what I know in my heart to be true...

1. Everyone wants to be seen and loved for exactly their **IMPERFECT SELF**. In Japanese culture this is known as Wabi-Sabi. Loving something for its asymmetry, flaws and impermanence. When we love ourselves, others and even objects because of their imperfections, instead of despite them, we appreciate everything so much more.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wabi-sabi

2. **PLAY IS POWERFUL** and important at all ages, with others or alone.

Play has many benefits, some of which are alleviating stress, increasing productivity, and refreshing the mind, body, and spirit. In Occupational Therapy school we studied the use of play in healing psychological and physical trauma. Here's an article, should you want to explore ways to open yourself up to the power of play.

fix.com/blog/adults-playing

3. Everyone likes **RECOGNITION**.

Several years ago, I bought stars and stickers for tutoring. I gave stars to my 13 year old students and even my adult students and they'd light up. Seeing that we are recognized for our effort helps motivate us to continue to try.



4. Everyone needs a **CHEERLEADER**. Be someone's cheerleader. Be your own cheerleader. When a 3-year-old goes down the slide for the first time he says, "Look Mom, I did it!" When we are adults and are doing something difficult, no matter how seemingly small, we need someone to see that we did it and cheer us on. Even once the skill has been mastered, the occasional "good job" goes a LONG way!

5. **CELEBRATE the small things (and the big things)**. Take a minute to pause and really celebrate. Always just looking to the next thing and not appreciating what you have achieved so far diminishes our appreciation for how far we've come. Pat yourself on the back, brag to a trusting friend, journal about it. Do something to stop and celebrate and acknowledge the journey.

6. **SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS—create an environment for success**. If you want to be productive, clean up your space. If you want to lose weight, get the crap out of your house. Ask yourself, what has worked in the past? What helps keep you accountable? I highly recommend taking the following quiz that helps you find ways in which you may need more support to reach your goals. quiz.gretchenrubin.com



7. **FULLY EMBRACE AND LOVE YOURSELF**. Love yourself more and more every day. If you don't love yourself, who will? Loving yourself allows you to give and spread love. The other side of love is fear. Fear is catabolic, heavy and often weighs us down and shadows the light that love really is.

8. **Our lives are what we PAY ATTENTION to**. Give attention to the positive and amazing things in your life. Find three great things everyday, no matter how small. Always focusing on the drama and the negative breeds more of that. In coaching school, we did an exercise called Three Great Things and I try to add three great things to a Notes list on my phone every day. Scrolling back through all of those small and big things allows me to reflect and continue to focus on the positive.

9. **Figure out what's important to you—your VALUES**. Values shift and evolve over time—get in touch with yours and keep them visible. If you are doing something because you "should," "have" to or "need" to—it's someone else's values that have been taught to you—maybe even an idealism or society. When you "choose," "love" or "desire" to do something, it's tied to your true values. I've included a great free values exercise here: viacharacter.org/survey/account/register

10. Set **INTENTIONS** for the day, week, month, and year and keep them visible.

In 2017, I picked a word for the year and happened to find a bracelet that had that word. I have picked a new word each year since and found that anchoring to a word or phrase helps me move through life thoughtfully and with purpose.



11. CREATE YOUR OWN SUNSHINE—don't rely on others to make you happy or fill your void. Explore all the things that make you happy and do more of them. When you create joy in yourself, it spreads to others.

12. EMOTIONS ARE CONTAGIOUS—this goes for anxiety and sadness to excitement and joy. We may think that we are able to hide how we are feeling, but it is an energy that is felt—by our children, pets and even the passerby at the grocery store.

13. It's all a CHOICE and you get to choose. Life is a create-your-own-adventure book and you get to write the next page. It's about choosing consciously and intentionally. Ask yourself which choice makes you most proud or takes you closer to your goals and follow that path.

14. LAUGHTER is the best medicine. Humor is everything even in the darkest of times. Comedy is all about finding the really painful and relatable parts and helping us feel less alone. Brené Brown has a great interview with Judd Apatow about laughter and vulnerability here: brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-with-judd-apatow-on-vulnerability-and-laughter

15. Find a way to RELEASE AND LET GO OF YOUR ANGER. Anger is a legitimate feeling, but holding onto hate and anger weighs you down. It's important to feel it and move through it. Find what works for you: music, screaming, destroying something intentionally, an intense workout, whatever works for you.

16. WE BELIEVE WHAT WE TELL OURSELVES—what do you need to hear? You're perfectly capable, you are enough, you are beautiful. When I was younger, I was quite disorganized and often told by others, and then continued to tell myself that I was disorganized. Over the last few years, I've had it WAY more together, but still found that I was "calling myself out" anytime something came up. Once I started recognizing all the successes and calling myself organized, I've been WAY more together in this department. Now, to start telling myself some other things I need to hear...

17. Acknowledge all the YUCKY FEELINGS—guilt, shame, pain, sadness—looking at them and acknowledging them gets us closer to acceptance. By avoiding the yucky feelings, they will grow within us. It's like trying to put a lid on a boiling pot and hoping nothing seeps out, day after day. Here's an excellent article from *Psychology Today* about why feeling bad is good. www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/insight-therapy/201009/emotional-acceptance-why-feeling-bad-is-good

18. CHOOSE YOUR SECOND THOUGHT—our minds offer all sorts of stories and ideas for us to grab onto. It's up to us to choose which stories to listen to and really believe. Find thoughts that are helpful to you and keep them in front of you.



19. AWARENESS is everything. Track what you are doing in order to see where you are. I find a tally mark system super helpful for me. At the top of my daily to do list, I make tally marks next to things I want to track—such as how much water I drink or how much I exercise. The tally marks help me see what I've accomplished so far, and what I may want to do more of.

20. KNOW YOURSELF COMPLETELY. "The most important conversation you will ever have is with yourself," author unknown. If you understand your values, your goals, your roadblocks, your fears, all of you, you are better able to listen to that quiet inner voice and know that it knows exactly what you need.

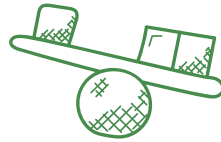
21. LOVE WHOLEHEARTEDLY. Have the courage to be your imperfect self and love fully. You have a deep sense of worthiness and a strong sense of love and belonging when you feel worthy of love and belonging. Love all of you so that you can love with all of your heart. When we hold onto fear, we often put up boundaries and walls around our heart making it more difficult to truly love.

22. VISUAL CUES can help anchor you to your goals. I used to think that vision boards were silly or unnecessary. I have since realized that words and images carry energy and can be so powerful even in small doses. Try using sticky notes, motivating images, vision boards, a piece of jewelry, a token that reminds you of where you want to go.

23. SMALL CHANGES make your goals more achievable. When I have a lot of things to do in a relatively unstructured part of the day, I find that I do something I call time chunking to help keep on track. I'll set a timer for 15, 20 or 30 minutes (depending on how I'm feeling or what the tasks are). I realize how much I truly can accomplish in a very short period of time. This also keeps me from going down a rabbit hole on the phone. Here's an article on the Pomodoro technique developed in the 1980's—a researched version of what I do. lifehacker.com/productivity-101-a-primer-to-the-pomodoro-technique-1598992730

24. Find your CREATIVE OUTLET— music, art, dance, tinkering, cooking, ANYTHING! Build time into your schedule for these activities and watch your productivity in other areas soar. Here's an excellent article from *Forbes* magazine that discusses the benefits of creativity. www.forbes.com/sites/ashleystahl/2018/07/25/heres-how-creativity-actually-improves-your-health

25. Find ways to ENJOY EACH OF YOUR ROLES. We play many roles throughout our lifetime, but finding ways to enjoy them is key. Already in my life, I've held several roles (*see page 2). For a long time, I resisted some of these roles—they didn't feel comfortable to me or there were things I didn't enjoy about them. When I started focusing on the things I did enjoy about each role, my joy grew exponentially. For some of the tasks that I just didn't enjoy, I made them fun by adding music or breaking them into smaller chunks.



26. Humans need a BALANCE of support and challenge. Too much stress and too little stress both have disadvantages (see linked infographic). Too much stress may lead to anxiety, frustration, burnout and depression, and too little stress may lead to boredom, apathy and difficulty focusing. There needs to be balance. When you feel out of balance, what are some things you do? sites.google.com/site/officeofstressmanagement/what-is-stress

27. When you start seeing mistakes, problems and issues as OPPORTUNITIES, you are in the driver's seat. It reframes the situation and allows you to approach the issue differently and learn from it along the way. Winston Churchill was quoted saying, "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."

28. Your body gives you lots of messages about what it needs. LISTEN TO YOUR BODY. Ask yourself what's going on right now. How am I feeling? What could I do right now to take care of myself? It's often a simple thing—like taking a deep breath, having some water, closing your eyes for a few minutes or even doing a 5-minute meditation. For those of you who know me well—if I can meditate, ANYONE can! There are excellent meditation apps—some I recommend are Insight Timer, Calm and Headspace.

29. JUST BE. (One of the hardest quotes for me, yet a constant lesson in letting go.) It's okay to not be okay. Resisting what is only prolongs the discomfort. You don't always have to be doing. Just Be.

30. TRANSITION MINDFULLY between tasks. Instead of finishing up one task and jumping right into another, it can be helpful to check in with yourself. Creating mindful transitions can be a great way to add healthy habits in your day-to-day life.

31. CHANGE TAKES COMMITMENT. It's a marathon, not a sprint. Any habit or behavior we want to change takes commitment. Wanting to change your life vs. deciding to change your life are two completely different animals. Once you decide—take that first step.

32. CONNECT TO THE EARTH. Find ways to immerse yourself in nature. Pick up an acorn on your walk, look at the clouds and the birds, sit in the grass for a few minutes (I know it can be itchy), tend to a plant, take a walk in a forest preserve, take a Zoom call outside. We are all part of something bigger than ourselves and when we stay inside all day, we miss the beauty of what is all around us. When we connect to our world, we are more likely to appreciate it and want to care for it. "Gotta tend the earth, if you want a rose," Indigo Girls, *Hammer and a Nail*.



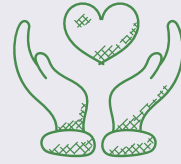
33. Ask people questions from a place of **CURIOSITY** (not judgment) and really listen.

People want to talk about themselves and they just want to be seen. However, judgment shuts people down. Here's a fun article on curiosity and judgment and ways to reframe our judgment so we are kinder to ourselves, others, and the world around us. unfuckyourbrain.com/curiosity-v-judgment



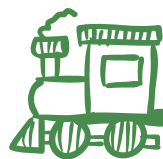
34. Don't rush to judgment. Use **COMPASSION**.

Give people the benefit of the doubt. Everyone is struggling with something in their life and it's not always clear to us what that is nor are we walking in their shoes. Compassion goes a long way—especially when given to ourselves.



- 35. SPIRITUALITY** whether you call it hope, faith, belief, G-d, higher power, Allah, something! anything! is extremely powerful. I used to think that religion or faith was an all or nothing thing. Black and white. There is so much gray—in all of it. It's up to us to shape our own needs when it comes to spirituality.
- 36. RELIGION AND POLITICS:** I used to really avoid these topics—it was something we were told in OT school to avoid talking about with clients. Over the last few years, these have both become unavoidable topics in the world, and truly they need be talked about. We have WAY more in common with each other than we realize. WAY more. It takes conversation, often not an easy conversation, but conversation—and the listening part is everything.
- 37. It's easier to CREATE THE CHANGE you want than accept the life you don't.** We all become complacent and learn to tolerate things. Over time, this can drag us down. We rationalize and shelve things, and we don't realize that underneath it all, we are truly dissatisfied. When we start to look at the things that we have learned to tolerate, we find there are many ways we can tweak and improve, but that takes commitment and responsibility on our part.

- 38. WORST CASE SCENARIO—** sometimes visualizing the worst case scenarios helps people come to terms with those possibilities and then move on to some of the many other possibilities. When we get caught up in these negative stories, it can send us into a swirl of worry. Once we look at them, we often see how much we are listening to our fears vs. our hopes.
- 39. You can only CONTROL YOUR REACTIONS.** If there is one lesson, I have learned from this pandemic, it is that MUCH of life is out of our control; however, each and every day I get to choose how I react to it. I get to choose how much news I ingest, how I spend my time, how I feel about wearing a mask—all of it.
- 40. Pushing a boulder up the hill gets harder as you get to the top. PERSEVERANCE is key.** You can't see the top, but you are probably closer than you think. I think one of my favorite lessons about this is the children's book, *The Little Engine That Could* by Watty Piper. The little engine chanted, "I think I can" over and over again—especially at the top, to achieve its goal. This is something we can all be reminded of, even as adults. Don't give up.



- 41. THIS TOO SHALL PASS.** (This goes for the good stuff and the not so good.) Any one scenario we find ourselves in, is part of our journey. It is not the full story of the motion picture of our life.
- 42. We are creatures, we are ANIMALS.** We have instincts and they matter. We need to listen to our instincts. We need to get quiet within ourselves in order to hear our inner voice. We each have an inner wild self to set free. We survive and we adapt throughout our lifetime. I strongly recommend Glennon Doyle's book, *Untamed*. untamedbook.com
- 43. Channel your SPIRIT ANIMAL or person who helps give you strength in times of difficulty.** Pink, a lion, Fiona from *Shameless*, a wolf. One of my clients channels Superman and says that anytime he's stressed or nervous, he will stand like Superman—legs apart, hands on hips and he immediately feels more powerful. Try it—it works!
- 44. RESILIENCE is crucial to success and we are each capable of strengthening this muscle.** Resilience is built when we are faced with challenges and learn to navigate them. A great parenting book on resilience is *The Blessing of A Skinned Knee* by Wendy Mogel. wendymogel.com/books/item/the_blessing_of_a_skinned_knee A great article on resilience is: apa.org/topics/resilience



45. VALIDATION is key to all relationships. Validation does not mean you agree or approve. As quoted in the linked article below, validation is the recognition and acceptance of another person's thoughts, feelings, sensations and behaviors as understandable. When people feel validated, they feel accepted and safe to continue to share themselves more authentically.
www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/pieces-mind/201204/understanding-validation-way-communicate-acceptance

46. PROCRASTINATION—one of my favorite books on procrastination is *Eat That Frog!* by Brian Tracy. It has some phenomenal tools to help even the best of procrastinators make headway. One thing behind much of procrastination is perfectionism. A wise friend once told me it's better to just do it and come back and make it better, than try to make it "right" or "perfect" the first time.
amazon.com/Eat-That-Frog-Twenty-one-Procrastinating/dp/0792754840

47. Taking care of your MENTAL HEALTH is key to how you navigate the world. There are many things that can help people better navigate their mental health issues, including, but not limited to, regular appointments with a coach and/or a counselor, seeing a psychiatrist as recommended, talking openly about it with trusted relatives and friends, and finding humor along the way. It is a lifelong muscle that can be cared for just like your body and needs different things during different stressors and stages of life. Talk about it!!! Here's a recent infographic on mental health by the numbers in the United States.
nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Infographics/NAMI-You-Are-Not-Alone-FINAL.pdf

48. Setting boundaries is important: If you need me, I'LL BE IN MY TEEPEE, and if I want you in my teepee, I will open it happily. However, everyone needs their own teepee and should be able to invite whomever they want in and keep the flaps closed to those they don't want in their space. No matter the reason. We all need a safe place to call our own—it's part of being human.

49. STRETCH—A LOT! What's the first thing a dog or a cat does when they wake up in the morning or get up from a long nap? They stretch. We need to do it every day and often. Our body needs to move. The more we move and feel our body, the more we want to take care of it.

50. MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS makes sense.

We have basic needs that build on one another: Physiological, Safety, Love and Belonging, Esteem and Self Actualization. When our needs are met on the most basic levels, we are able to reach our purpose. Often there are small tweaks we can make to even the most basic physiological needs, that give us the ability to reach our highest potential. Here's a more in depth glance at Maslow's Hierarchy of needs.
thoughtco.com/maslows-hierarchy-of-needs-4582571



Turning 50 in a pandemic was not the plan, but nonetheless, here I am. The world feels like it is trying to hit reset and I have enjoyed taking time to reflect on how I've been living, figuring out what I want to leave behind and incorporating more of what I want to do moving forward. I've heard the phrase, we are all in the same boat right now, but the truth of the matter is we are all in different boats in a similar storm. I say similar storm—because although we all are in a pandemic, many of us are also dealing with floods, racism and what feels like fire and brimstone (whatever that is). We're now making sure that our boat is sturdy enough to hold us, so that we can start reaching out to our fellow humans and help them build up their boats and weather this storm together. This is an opportunity to be our best selves and I believe we all want that at our core.



Discover Your Potential

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Mara Heichman is a Certified Professional Coach and an Energy Leadership Index Master Practitioner, dedicated to helping her clients discover their potential. She works with people of all ages on issues such as transitions, confidence, career direction, strengthening relationships, and much more. For her clients to discover their potential, Mara helps them identify their obstacles, clarify their goals, and maintain accountability for achieving those goals. The coaching journey is invigorating, inspirational, and a little scary. It takes a results-oriented, fun-loving, and compassionate coach like Mara to guide her clients every step of the way.

In addition to her private practice, Mara speaks frequently on topics like energy leadership, communication, self-care, confidence, life balance, and relationships, among others. She is a certified Occupational Therapist, B'nei Mitzvah tutor, and 23-year volunteer at the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance's Camp I Am Me—for children and teenagers who have experienced injuries from burns—where she co-founded and co-directs the Young Adult Summit.

Mara earned her coaching certification from the Institute for Professional Excellence in Coaching (iPEC). She received her MBA from Loyola University, Chicago and her bachelor's degree in Occupational Therapy from The Ohio State University. Mara lives in the North Shore suburbs of Chicago and has two adult children (18-year-old son and 20-year-old daughter). She enjoys music, dancing, animals, outdoors, yoga, knitting, time connecting with family and friends, and playing games.

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