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# Making your way

The (wobbly) road to success  
and happiness in life and work

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We are  
all works in  
progress.



# Preface - Making it, your way

*Be the hero(ine) of your own life.*

Nora Ephron

A real gentleman does not discuss the women he's broken up with, the taxes he pays, or what he does to stay healthy. That's what Haruki Murakami, one of our favorite novelists, wrote in his inspiring memoirs. He, of course, made up this saying. But if there really were such a saying, it would probably also say that a real gentleman should keep quiet about what he does to be successful in life.

We're not gentlemen. So we shouldn't be worrying about this in the first place. But we admit that, just as Haruki Murakami felt hesitant about writing his own memoirs, we felt some hesitation about writing this book ... a book about career success and living a purposeful life. After all, who are we to tell you what to do? The last thing we wanted to do is to write a recipe book. The type of book that is full of advice that says: 'Ok, everybody — read this and you'll be successful. Follow our recipes and, whoosh, all of your troubles will go away.'

We want to encourage people to set themselves free from such myths and to pursue their dreams with confidence and optimism.

Yet we do need to talk about it. About what it takes to thrive in today's world. That mission is close to our hearts. Because of our work, as a business school dean (Marion) and leadership expert and personal coach (Katleen), we touch the lives of so many students and young professionals. It is

our professional duty to think about the messages we want to convey to them. We wrote this book for them. We often meet people who have amazing potential but who don't realize that potential because of some limiting beliefs about what a career and happiness should look like. We want to encourage people to set themselves free from such myths and to pursue their dreams with confidence and optimism.

In every chapter of this book, we tackle one of those myths that we often encounter. We hope you find inspiration in each of the 15 chapters we have written, whether you are a young student embarking on your career, or a seasoned leader looking for new insights. With this book we hope to stimulate you to **live** your dream and pursue your goals. That requires living with intention, which is the focus of our first five chapters. Call us naïve, but we believe that dreams can come true. Yet not necessarily like in fairy tales. To live your dream, you need to pursue it, and be willing to stumble and **learn** every day. And even though we work at a

The journey to happiness in both work and life is most often a messy one. And that's ok. We are all works in progress.

business school, we're not just talking about the learning you do in the classroom. It's about challenging yourself in different areas of life. More about that in chapters 6-10. After all, everyone has potential to make it. All it

takes is a little bit of guts to **take the leap**. In chapters 11-15 we discuss how that feels, and the ripple effect that you can set in motion. After all: no guts, no glory. By pure coincidence, you may recognize Vlerick Business School's Live-Learn-Leap credo.

In an effort to gain insight into our personal experiences and the stories we encounter, we dove into the research. That helped us to discover that personal stories contain universal truths. You will find these under the heading “What we know for sure”. (A shameless rip-off of how Oprah Winfrey describes her personal life lessons.) As academics, in science we trust, so we’re only sure when we find the research to back up our claims.

This book does contain a certain amount of what might be called life lessons: both our own life lessons (and we’re hopefully only halfway through our own lives!), and also the life lessons of the people we were fortunate enough to meet and talk to. They are personal lessons, and that’s also what this book is to us — personal. As professionals, mothers, wives, friends — juggling many roles — there is one thing we really know for sure: every picture-perfect moment hides a less glamorous reality. As Indra Nooyi’s mom told her when she became global president of PepsiCo: ‘Leave the crown in the garage’. So, as ambitious as the title of this book may be, its subtitle reveals the other side of the coin: that the journey to happiness in both work and life is most often a wobbly one. And that’s ok. We are all works in progress.

So we have left our crowns in the garage, in an effort to keep it real and reveal the mistakes, the doubts, and the slip-ups that are part of even the most seamlessly upward career. Many of the lessons we present in this book are lessons that we also had to learn, sometimes the hard way. The things we would like to tell our younger selves. The things we wish we had known.

We present the things we would like to tell our younger selves. The things we wish we had known.

We've written honestly about what we think and feel and we have tried to stay true to our own styles. And this book is really the product of two very different styles ... brought together in the same way that a jazz combo plays together. Without talking, following each other's leads, and adding to each other's written words on the page.

"Take it from us" is the message you will find at the end of each chapter. However, the most important take-away is this one: Don't follow our recipes too closely ... add your own grain of salt (or pepper or whatever spice you fancy)! Everybody's story is unique. There is no recipe book for life. So off you go, carve your own path, and make your own decisions. Making it, your unique way.



Do you even  
dare to say  
out loud  
what it is  
you are  
dreaming of?

# 1

## Feel the fire in the belly

The myth: you can be anything you want to be

*It always seems impossible until it's done.*

Nelson Mandela

'Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you'll still be among the stars.' That's how the saying goes. So are you shooting for the moon? Or are you keeping yourself to more modest goals? Do you even dare to say out loud what it is you are dreaming of? It takes guts to do so. Take Felix van de Maele, co-founder and CEO of Collibra. Felix started the company while he was still a student, together with 3 other friends. At the time, the company was a pioneer in data governance. Less than a decade later, the start-up became a unicorn: a company less than 10 years old, but nevertheless valued at more than a billion dollars. This was already a formidable accomplishment. But when asked about how he felt about realizing that milestone, Felix only said: 'I'm not really thinking about it. I'm now already thinking more about how we will get to 5 billion in value.'

Is this going to be one of those books that tells you how to get to that 5 billion? Far from it. Because that may not be your goal at all. Or you may have no clue what your goal is yet. And that's ok. You'll discover it along the way. Very few people have dreams and goals as explicit as Felix's. Yours may be much less clear. But no matter how big or small, ex-

plicit or vague your dreams are, none of them will come true without chasing them.

So, yes, this is going to be one of those books. About the wobbly road to happiness and success, whatever your definition of happiness and success is. We'll share with you a few things we have discovered along the way. Through the people we were fortunate to meet. Through the research that we, as academics, can't help but dive into in the search for wisdom. And the many times we learned a lesson ourselves the hard way. Are you coming with us on the journey? Then read on!

### The power of dreams

'What do you want to be when you grow up?' It's a simple question that virtually every child on the planet can answer in a snap. For many years, Marion wanted to become a ballerina, while Katleen dreamed of being a cook or a fiction writer. Look at how that turned out. Very few of us actually go on and realize our childhood dreams. Not even someone like Richard Branson from Virgin, who dreamed of being a poet. Despite all those unmaterialized childhood dreams, growing up doesn't mean that we should stop dreaming altogether. In fact, if you think about it, dreams are the source of most human progress.

Dreaming big  
propels you forward.

President John F. Kennedy (who actually did want to become a president when he grew up) dreamed of putting a (wo)man on the moon ... and he mobilized an entire nation to make it happen. It was literally a moonshot project. Pledging to achieve something as big as going to the moon is probably as crazy as buying a lottery ticket against all the