

# WE OVER ME

The Counterintuitive  
Approach to Getting  
Everything You Want  
from Your Relationship



**Khadeen & Devale Ellis**

Hosts of the hit podcast **DEAD A\*\* WITH K & D**

# *We Over Me*

The Counterintuitive Approach  
to Getting Everything You Want  
from Your Relationship

Khadeen and Devale Ellis

with Leah Lakins



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Published in the United States by Rodale Books, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

[RodaleBooks.com](http://RodaleBooks.com)

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN 9780593577608

Ebook ISBN 9780593577615

*Book design by Andrea Lau, adapted for ebook*

*Cover design by Pete Garceau*

*Cover photograph by Joshua Dwain*

*Interior art from Shutterstock.com/OrelPhoto*

ep\_prh\_6.0\_142435018\_c0\_r0



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## Introduction



**W**e would like to start this book by stating that there is no perfect way to exist in this world. In fact, we'll take it a step further and say that *no one* has unequivocally figured this thing out. We are all in search of this mythical place called "Happily Ever After." Yet, we all find ourselves part of one big social experiment called life. With that being said, we as people don't owe each other anything other than the space to exist freely. So when it comes to relationships, everyone has the right at any point to say, "This really isn't working out for me in a way that is advantageous for all parties involved, so I'm going to move forward in a different direction."

Not exactly how you thought this book was gonna start, huh? You thought it was gonna be a list of how tos and we don'ts. Sorry, but this book is not that at all. This book is about choices. Specifically, the individual choices that led to a blessed union we are very proud of. It's about learning to respect the perspective of the one your heart so desperately wants to control. This book is about learning to love yourself so much that you learn to love someone else the way you always wanted to be loved in the first place. We know that was a mouthful, but trust us, we'll explain. Throughout this book you will learn more about us. Not as an example of how you should live your life, but as an example of how we built the love we have to live the life *we* want. Welcome to our love story.

Even though we share our lives on social media with millions of people, we certainly do not consider ourselves to be a celebrity couple. What we strive to do, along with sharing our highlight reels, pretty pictures of our children, and stories of triumph, is show some of the grit and real trials that arise in our relationship. Hence the reason why you are holding this book in your hands. We pride ourselves on being raw and transparent



about what a healthy relationship looks like to us. The main thing we've learned along the way is that a "healthy" relationship does not come in one form. The secret to a healthy relationship *for you* will never be found on the pages of any book. This book is an entertaining way for you to experience how we discovered what worked for us, and hopefully prompts you to get curious about what works for you. The secrets for what will work for you can only be found in *you*.

We like to try to find the humor in a situation, but our relationship isn't shits and giggles all the time. We are committed to putting in the actual work to make our marriage and our family thrive. We have our moments, and we never want people to look at us as a perfect celebrity couple. We wrote this book so that you can find your own path toward happiness in your relationship.

Ultimately, in a relationship, you have to ask yourself, "Am I willing and in a position to serve the other person?" Too many people go into relationships thinking about what they can gain from another person. Women have their lists of things that they're looking for in a man or men will be seeking what a woman can bring to the table. People have unrealistic ideas and expectations of what they need a person to have; meanwhile, they aren't bringing a fraction of that. If you're trying to get with someone who makes six figures, is handsome or beautiful, and is a go-getter, but you're not any of those things, how do you expect a healthy and equal relationship to work?

Instead of focusing on what you can get, turn that around and declare, "This is what I am bringing to the relationship and this is why I could be of value to someone. I am looking to be a partner. I am looking to elevate. I am looking to grow. I'm looking to build a legacy with someone." These are the goals you need to focus on if you want to grow or rebuild your relationship.

If you are aspiring to be in a relationship, you have to be transparent about what you want, show up as yourself, and leave the representation of yourself at home. That false self is not going to get you far. It can't last. It's not authentic. You need to show up as yourself and be confident in who you

are. If you're not confident in who you are, work on yourself first. Stop going into relationships broken, jaded, tainted, and tattered. If you aren't willing to do the work on yourself first, all you are going to do is project that unhealthy behavior on to someone else.

Our desire to have a healthy relationship stems from seeing far too many unhealthy ones. Those unhealthy relationships that we were exposed to on a regular basis have made the two of us determined not to end up that way. Even as married adults with children now, something will happen between our parents and we will look at each other and say, "We CANNOT be like that."

## ***Khadeen***

Fairytales are a legit setup. By now we should all be tired of the hopeless romantic story about the damsel in distress who is desperately waiting to be saved by a strapping, princely gentleman. The guy who sweeps her off her feet and hoists her out of her current circumstances of destitution and poverty. We tell this story over and over to make ourselves believe their happily ever after, as they ride off into the sunset. The end. Roll credits. Right?

Little did we know that life actually commenced after the fairytale ending. This was a surefire way to set us all up for failure when it came to marriage and relationships. Now is it possible to achieve your own version of a happily ever after? Absolutely. But what they fail to show was the grunt work necessary to achieve this seamless, mystical lifestyle. And still, regardless of the work and time invested, nothing is ever quite so smooth—particularly when attempting to unite two individuals who are aiming to live purposefully in their truths, all while trying to be considerate of each other.

I have heard in the past that love should be easy. For the most part, it actually is. Who doesn't want to bottle up that new, lusty, in-love aura and take a swig of it every now and again to relive that euphoria? The "love should be easy" jargon leads one to believe that intimate connections should



flow without a hitch in order for them to be worth it. That's cute, and yet again, another foolish falsehood. On the contrary, relationships require real labor and effort, regardless of the type. The difference between a relationship with a parent, child, or another family member is that these are typically nonelective relationships. You have no choice about who you were born to or who your birth. In a work environment, you are required to coexist and work amicably with others based on the common goal of the business or company.

The nice thing about friendships and in most cases of romantic relationships is that these are connections where you choose to become involved. For the most part, friendships flow seamlessly because you naturally have common interests, likes, and similarities. It's truly a beautiful occurrence when someone's energy is enough to make you want to be around them frequently. Now throw a little razzle-dazzle, attraction, and lust into the mixing bowl and you have some batter that is good enough to make anyone want to lick that bowl. In spite of that, it's only the beginning.

I admire people who know off the bat that they are not relationship or marriage material. It takes a noble person who is self-aware enough to know that they are not equipped to coexist with another human being. If more people were honest about that, it would save so much heartache and confusion because you are not entering into a space where desires and intentions are misconstrued.

You have to be in love with the notion of marriage, not in love with a person. Now, finding your person is indeed a substantial part of the equation, but a person can and will change. Marrying for the person puts all the onus on that individual and ultimately is not fair to either party. What happens when he or she has a bad day or week? What do you do when life starts *life-ing* and shit ain't as sweet as it once was? Do you throw in the towel when that person no longer contributes to your overall happiness? Marriage is signing up to being on a team where submission to the overall greater good and goals of the family supersedes any solo mission.

I always knew that I wanted to be in a relationship. For as long as I can remember, I desired marriage and kids. I remember attending various

cousins' weddings over the years as a kid, and I would daydream about what my wedding day would look like and who I would be meeting at the altar. I would get close enough to the bride to feel the tulle from her dress against my skin or practice the first kiss on my arm after the officiant pronounced us man and wife. My groom was faceless at the time, of course, but he was someone I knew who would reveal himself one day.

Had I not been married or romantically involved with someone for the past two decades, I believe that I would have been a serial monogamist. I enjoy the company of another person, but juggling men would not have been my thing. No shade to people who do, because sometimes juggling is required to figure what you like and dislike. At the same time, I definitely feel like I missed out on that dating phase of life. I always envisioned that I would be living the *Sex and the City* moment—a young, working, career woman who had her own place, would come and go as she pleased, and date casually. I also intended on settling with someone who, too, had his fair share of relationships. I wanted to be with someone with his wild oats sowed and all, so that when the time came he would know, without a shadow of a doubt, that I was the one. I lucked out with Devale, although I think my route was more arduous.

In my case, I was forced to learn who Khadeen was in my late teens and early twenties, while simultaneously attempting to be considerate of the feelings of a man my age who was also trying to do the same. This was a potential recipe for disaster—and trust us, we have definitely had those disastrous moments. There was a mental and emotional divide that had me in a chokehold. The divide was me learning about myself and tending to the needs and wants of someone else. My love for my relationship oftentimes clouded my logic when it came to what was ultimately best for me, and even Devale.

Many single folks I've spoken to, some of whom are divorced and back in the single dating scene again, have referred to dating as a cesspool of egos, facades, judgment, and uncertainty. But quiet as it's kept, us married folks have our fair share of such activity. Shit ain't always sweet and we will unpack some of that in this book. The good, the bad, the highs, the

lows, the crescendo of breaking points, and the willingness to mend. When I look at the world today, I often think about what could remedy so much of the hurt, pain, evil, and trouble that exists. I would like to think that if everyone was able to experience the kind of love Devale and I have, this planet would indeed be a happier place. I know that's saying a lot, but there is nothing like being able to tackle life with your equal—someone who is along with you for the ride but will also make their own pit stops along the way. Some days, it's almost like getting into the passenger seat of the vehicle, starting a route to a common destination, knowing good and well that maybe you should've taken the other exit, but you go along silently for the ride knowing that you trust and believe you will still end up in the right place.

I would love for other couples to experience the kind of bond Devale and I have. It's often hard to sum up into the appropriate words. But if you will imagine with me for a moment—it's like walking into your favorite Jamaican restaurant and you're craving an oxtail dinner. Not only do they have the oxtail tender and ready, they also have rice and peas, and the server smiles while not being stingy with the portion, *and* gives extra gravy without asking. That's me and Devale, heavy on the gravy. Despite our differences, disagreements, and everything that we've been through, I love the shit out of that man. We're determined to do life together and there is no other option for us. In the past when we've broken up or struggled through hard moments, we would throw around the word *divorce*. But now that word is not even on the table. We know that we're willing to work on whatever it is we're going through in that moment because divorce is not an option and disagreements are temporary.

Forget everything you've heard—marriage is a service-based industry. If you are not up for that task, don't even bother. As we've begun to shift our focus on serving each other and finding ways to make each other's lives better, this mindset has helped us to navigate our goals and our relationship more efficiently because we're so much more intentional about making sure that the other person is in the best space to tackle whatever may come his or her way. Focusing on serving Devale is a practice that I am continually

learning and improving on with each passing day. Some days I'm spot-on, and others, I fall short. There is a humanness when we try to allot grace because life always has a way of showing up and it forces a natural shift. Before, our focus shifted to service. I would wake up, start running down the to-do list for work, family, self, and others, and go full speed into asking, "What deadlines need to be met with our content creation?" or "What do the kids need to do after school?"

But now my mindset has repositioned itself, and the day starts more easily by being curious about how I can be of service to Devale and make his plate a little lighter. Focusing on serving each other has helped us so much with just navigating our respective goals and keeping our relationship healthy. The fact that we haven't really seen many healthy relationships is a driving force for us to set our own couple goals. We create what we want to be our own version of a healthy relationship.

Our goal for you as you are reading our story and learning from our lessons and mistakes is that you can begin to determine how to have a healthy relationship that is built on a foundation of love, service, partnership, and legacy. You do not have to fall into these relationship stereotypes about marriages falling apart after the birth of the kids or marriages collapsing after an infidelity. We've been through those valleys and then some. We are living proof that you can have joy and peace in your relationship if you are willing to put in the work to create your relationship on your terms. It is just imperative that you are forthcoming with yourself, as an individual, and with your significant other, because there is no room for lack of lucidity in any relationship.

## ***Devale***

People think a healthy relationship is the image that a couple chooses to show to the world. Social media has provided a place for people to curate their love story. If you see a couple who appears to be perfect, you most likely will assume that their marriage or relationship is healthy and ideal. In

reality, that couple who you are idealizing may not be in a stable, healthy relationship at all. The worst part about social media is not the fact that people are trying to fool others. The truest complication is that they don't even realize they are fooling themselves.

When I was growing up, my parents always presented a unified front. They not only presented this image to us as their children, but they were careful to maintain that image in front of everyone else. While my parents never argued in front of other people, they would make passive-aggressive digs and comments to each other. Some people would believe that the kind of relationship my parents had was healthy because they kept their arguments private and maintained their peace.

But what I saw from the inside out was how toxic those passive-aggressive comments were to my parents' marriage. While they were good at hiding their disagreements from other people, it was difficult for them to communicate when no one else was around. The people that my parents were trying so hard to front for would have been shocked if they heard the truth of their private conversations. And here is the crazy part, I would consider my parents' marriage ideal to any standards—even today.

I started to realize that this behavior wasn't unique to my parents. When I looked around at other family members and the parents of my close friends, everyone appeared to be happy on the outside. But then when they got behind closed doors, that's when the truth about everything was laid out.

For me and for so many of my peers, we'd never truly seen a healthy marriage when we were growing up. The truth is that we had to learn for ourselves that a healthy marriage is transparent and allows plenty of room for open communication. It takes time to understand that a marriage that makes room for honest communication isn't toxic or abusive—it's one where each partner has room to grow.

Khadeen and I have had people make wild comments about the kind of real and open conversations that we have about our marriage on our platforms. People expect us to be offended or angry at each other instead of realizing that it's that level of communication that keeps our marriage going

and growing. Khadeen and I have agreed to accept honest communication as the foundation for a healthy relationship.

If you're lucky, you have a good best friend who will tell you when your breath stinks or if you forgot to put on deodorant that day. A true friend would never let you walk around smelling like you played full-court basketball just because they don't want to hurt your feelings. Sadly, most of us tend to call that type of friend a hater because we have all been conditioned to view honesty as hate. So even if you have someone in your life who doesn't like telling you the truth, I'm sure you try your hardest to hold on to that relationship. It's natural—we as humans typically want to hear what makes us feel good as opposed to what is good for us. So when it comes to romantic relationships, we tend to stay in relationships that may not be healthy but look good on the outside. We put on a facade. If you want to be in a healthy relationship, be willing to have real, open communications and stop comparing yourself to other couples. When you compare yourself, you're always going to fall short of what you think is the ideal relationship.

We tend to ask everyone else what they're looking for so that we can present these unrealistic goals to our spouse as opposed to asking our partner directly and accepting what they have to say. Once you ask that question, you may not like the answer. But once they've given you their answer, then it's up to you to make the choice of whether you want to work within the realm of their needs and wants and be of service to them.

If you're looking for a healthy relationship, start focusing on your partner. Ask your partner honestly what they need and what they desire in a relationship—and then listen to their answers. Be open and honest about what you need and what you want. That is the best way to truly find out what a healthy relationship is—FOR YOU.

When you turn the final page of this book, I want you to know that you have what it takes to be the kind of partner that you want to be in your relationship. I want you to be empowered to know that you can come back from a knockout fight, a bankruptcy, an abortion, a failed business, or any other kind of disappointment that you can think of and still build a good

relationship that you can be proud of. Khadeen and I have been through all the scenarios I just mentioned (and more!), so we know what it means to choose each other when life gets hard. We know how to love each other on the days when we don't like each other. We're not here to be your relationship gurus—we want to inspire you to find the right answers in your relationship and create the love you want.



# Don't Be Afraid to Make Your Own Rules

Some of the biggest challenges that we hear from couples is that they're trying to follow somebody else's blueprint to create their love story. People are so caught up in trying to look like or be the perfect "couple" that they don't take the time to figure out what's really important to them and what values they need to start their relationship off on a solid and stable foundation.

We started our love journey together in our late teens, so there were more than a few times that we were speeding down the freeway of love with no brakes in sight. While we felt that we were young and invincible, life showed up real quick and let us know that we weren't that special and that we could easily get knocked upside our head with a few bruises and scrapes along the way.

But even with all these twists and turns, the thing that we continue to be proud of is that we created our love based on our own rules. Khadeen was the first one to initiate intimacy in our relationship, and at one point she was the breadwinner in our home as Devale was beginning his acting career. And Devale was the first to be bold enough to pivot into his dream of becoming an actor after walking away from his career in the NFL, which then inspired Khadeen to chase her own goals as a makeup artist, an on-air TV personality, and social media content creator.

Coming from families that looked successful on the outside but were actually emotionally dysfunctional behind closed doors, we knew we couldn't follow the old marriage playbooks from our parents. We had to create our own rules about how we wanted to communicate, build, and thrive together, and create a family that we could be proud of. Some of these rules that we created for ourselves were broken and rebuilt time and time again. Some of our primary values about serving each other and propelling each other's goals have remained the same.

If you are truly committed to having a lifelong relationship that is able to withstand the challenges that are sure to come your way, you have to be willing to step away from everybody's opinions and make your own guidelines. We know that there are still people following rules like observing ninety days of abstinence at the beginning of a relationship, shunning women for embracing their sexual autonomy, taking on those old Mars vs. Venus rules from the 1990s, or feeling like you have to let a man be an alpha male and take the lead. No shade to anybody if these classic approaches work for you. But we have a good feeling that they probably don't, so how do you create a dating vibe that works for you? How do you step into your own sexuality and sensuality without guilt, judgment, or shame? When is the right time to define your relationship? Who gets to say "I love you" first—and does it even matter?

So let's talk about what it means to start off on the right foot in creating a good relationship and help you find the value in creating your own rules.

## ***Devale***

The biggest lesson that I learned immediately from our first date was to say exactly what you mean and what you feel. If you're dating with purpose, when you first meet someone and you're getting to know them, it's important to tell them exactly what you want, what you need, and how you feel. That is the best way to make sure there are no blurred lines. Don't

worry—if they’re the right person, you won’t scare them off. You’ll be setting the boundaries for healthy communication going forward.

After our first kiss, I told Khadeen straight up, “I do not want to be anybody’s boyfriend.” I was *super* glad when she replied, “That’s fine, because I wasn’t looking to be anybody’s girlfriend.” We knew we both liked each other, and we were both curious to figure out exactly what that was going to look like. We were both upfront and transparent with each other. With all my eighteen-year-old’s confidence I said, “I don’t know exactly what I want, but I know that I like you.”

That step was important for me because throughout our marriage, I’ve learned that sometimes you don’t know exactly how to articulate what you want or need from your partner, but you can start by articulating what you want for yourself. From there, the choice is up to your partner to oblige you and decide if they want to serve you in that capacity.

As Khadeen and I continued being honest about what we wanted individually, our relationship continued to grow and the foundation to get stronger. Even if we didn’t agree on what we wanted at the same time, at least I knew what she wanted for herself, and we made choices to serve each other in that capacity. We made mistakes, of course, but having that solid foundation made it easier for us to be honest and reevaluate what was working and what wasn’t.



## **DEVALE’S HOT TAKE**

### **Giving Your Partner Grace**

Give yourself and your partner grace with all the changes that happen during the course of your relationship. Don’t give up on your relationship because it doesn’t look like the ones you see while scrolling through your timeline. Feeling lost and misunderstood early in a relationship is

completely normal. Being deliberate about how you communicate and seeking to understand each other is the only way to truly find common ground.

## ***Khadeen***

All those rules you've heard about from him, her, them, or read in *Dating 101*—forget them. The dance that was supposed to be a synchronized, melodious tango has morphed into that TikTok of somebody's aunt trying to do the latest routine. It's off beat, slue-footed, and out of date. One of the big things that I learned from approaching Devale first was that you can't be afraid to shoot your shot. In full transparency, I didn't march up to him on the first whim. I was a shy teenager who would admire him from afar on a few chance meetings.

I remember seeing his family in the audience when I was emceeing the spring festival at our old elementary school, Bethlehem Baptist Academy, one May circa 1993. At the time, Devale had transferred to another school but his sister still attended Bethlehem Baptist. From the stage, I maneuvered around the spotlight to scan the rows to see if he was in attendance, but no luck. I also happened to work summer school as a student counselor and was placed in his sister's class one summer. I would ask Tori almost everyday if Devale would be picking her up. Poor Tori never knew I was asking just to get a glance of my boo, who didn't know he was my boo just yet.

And then there was the handful of times I would go to Kings Plaza Shopping Mall with my cousin and best friend, Sophia, to see if Devale was behind the Haagan-Dazs counter next to the infamous Cookie House. I ignored Sophia's nudges to just go and buy some ice cream because I was just too nervous about potentially being in conversation with him. What would I say? What would he think? At the time, small talk wasn't my forte and nerves completely got the better of me. It's like I was a ghost follower before ghost following was a thing. One day in particular, I purposely got

cute and talked myself into going for it at his workplace because “why not?!” I did all that just for him to be off that day.

But I also knew that those “chance meetings” weren’t really chance because we went to rival high schools and seemed to have at least two to three degrees of separation. It just had to be the right time, because your girl was definitely plotting. When I talk with my single friends who are looking to date, so often there is a rigidity that some have when it comes to pursuing or being pursued. It’s almost as if the stars, moon, constellations, and flavor of the month at Nothing Bundt Cake all have to align in order to crack a smile or say hello.

I have a friend on the dating scene who made a great connection with a guy and they exchanged numbers. He told her straight off the bat that it would be a little while before he could call her because he was in the process of starting a new job. But she just waited for him to call or text, and she became more frustrated and angrier the longer she waited. I told her she should go ahead and make the first move, but she insisted that she didn’t want to come across as thirsty or desperate. GIRL! Shoot your shot!

I said, “Sis, how do you think I got Devale?” I’ve always tried to encourage my friends to forget about those traditional dating rules. If there’s someone that you see out there who sparks some interest, say hello. Come up with a funny or clever segue to spark conversation because quiet as it’s kept, men like to be pursued as well. That “thirsty” mentality is immature and dated. Go for it in that moment because you just don’t know when you’ll have that chance again. Making that choice to take a chance can be the catalyst for copping your boo. Let that sink in.

## ***Devale***

When I met Khadeen in August 2002 at the Trey Whitfield banquet, I was an honoree and she was the emcee for the evening. My first thought was “Damn, she fine as f\*ck!” and she was wearing a crown, so I was really intrigued.