

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author of *Girl, Wash Your Face*

RACHEL HOLLIS

GIRL, STOP
APOLOGIZING

A SHAME-FREE PLAN FOR EMBRACING AND ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

PRAISE FOR RACHEL HOLLIS AND *GIRL, STOP APOLOGIZING*

“Rachel Hollis is a live-out-loud leader with a heart for helping women tenaciously chase their purpose and dreams without apology. Rachel’s ability to share stories and principles with raw honesty inspires her readers to discover and take the practical steps that will put them on a lifelong path of personal growth.”

—**Dr. John C. Maxwell, author and leadership expert**

“Ever felt stuck? Ever struggled to make time for your dreams—or struggled even to admit those dreams to yourself? In *Girl, Stop Apologizing*, Rachel Hollis points out the pitfalls, challenges, and excuses that stop us from achieving our aims. She speaks with refreshing (and often hilarious) candor about her own experiences and mistakes, and offers concrete advice about how to create the lives we want.”

—**Gretchen Rubin, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Happiness Project***

“*Girl, Stop Apologizing* is the life-changing guide (and permission!) we’ve all needed to dump our excuses, embrace our dreams, set boundaries, and gain real confidence and momentum in life. It’s how to overcome a ‘lifetime of people pleasing’ and start crafting the vibrant, authentic life you deserve. This is a must-read for taking your destiny into your own hands. I loved every page!”

—**Brendon Burchard, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Millionaire Messenger*, *The Motivation Manifesto*, and *High Performance Habits***

“Reading *Girl, Stop Apologizing* is like sitting down with a best friend who can speak deeply into the dark places you’ve been trying to hide and shines a light on them. Rachel has the ability to help you silence your inner mean girl while encouraging you to believe that you truly can change and become the woman you’ve always envisioned yourself to be. Rachel’s gift is in giving you permission to not feel alone or ashamed of where you’ve been, while also giving you hope and a plan for what’s ahead of you. Her voice in my ear has been a guiding light to pursue greatness and more for this one life I am living.”

—**Jenna Kutcher, photographer, podcaster, educator, and host of *The Goal Digger Podcast***

“Rachel is the modern-day Oprah and female Tony Robbins! She provides a safe place for women to dream big and believe in themselves, while also giving the tough love all great moms give to their kids to take ownership of their life and providing the keys to succeed. Rachel is raw, real, and full of life. She combines emotion, humor, and straight-talk to make all of us believe and see how we can have the life we want if we’ve invested the time and learned how to get there. Get this book and *stop apologizing!*”

—**Lewis Howes, *New York Times* bestselling author and host of *The School of Greatness* podcast**

“Though energy-evoking, motivation alone isn’t enough to actually move the needle in your life. Rachel Hollis gets this at the deepest level possible. *Girl, Stop Apologizing* is a true masterpiece that combines heartfelt inspiration with the perfect mix of tools and a framework that can allow you to effectively adopt new behaviors and skills in your life that create real and lasting change.”

—**Dean Graziosi, *New York Times* bestselling author, entrepreneur, and investor**

“Rachel Hollis is a force of inspiration who is impacting the world on a massive level. Her unapologetic message of self-worth will continue to transform lives for many decades to come.”

—**Trent Shelton, author, motivational speaker, and founder and CEO of RehabTime**

“Rachel is the leader in modern-day personal development for a reason. Her authenticity, vulnerability, and experience separate her from everyone else. She just knows how to ‘get real’ in a way that is unapologetically Rachel.”

—**Ed Mylett, entrepreneur, personal development coach, speaker and host of the *Ed Mylett Show* podcast**

“*Girl, Stop Apologizing* is an unflinchingly relatable manifesto that is as unapologetic as it gets. Each chapter is an espresso shot that kickstarts your ‘can-do-itude’ and challenges you to reach further and higher to achieve your goals.”

—**Arlan Hamilton, founder and managing director of Backstage Capital**

“It’s time to truly embrace your greatness, and there is no better rally cry than *Girl, Stop Apologizing*. Unapologetic herself, Rachel is the fearless girlfriend you need to help you leap into the bold unknown and fulfill that big audacious goal you have been waiting to achieve. And that’s a movement I’m thrilled to be a part of.”

—**Amy Porterfield, online marketing expert**

GIRL, STOP APOLOGIZING

A SHAME-FREE PLAN FOR EMBRACING
AND ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

RACHEL HOLLIS



HARPERCOLLINS
LEADERSHIP

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For my daughter, Noah.

*May you live your life—without apology—in
celebration of who God created you to be.*

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IF . . .

When I originally started writing this book I fully planned on calling it *Sorry, Not Sorry*. And, yes, I was basing that title on a Demi Lovato song. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that the song was the impetus for this entire book.

Imagine, if you will, the late summer of 2017 when I first heard this jam. It was a sunny Monday morning. I know it was Monday morning because my entire staff was dancing around our conference table, pumping themselves up for our weekly kickoff meeting. And I know it was sunny because it was summertime in Los Angeles—the exorbitant property taxes ensure that the climate will never fall below a balmy seventy-three degrees.

We always dance it out before big meetings because it brings up our energy and gets us in the right headspace. Each week (to keep things fair) we rotate the role of house DJ, the person on our team who gets to pick our pump-up music. That summer, the entire staff (besides me) was under twenty-eight, so it was a millennial box of chocolates—you never knew what you were going to get. On that particular Monday I heard the song for the first time.

It was love at first listen.

If you've never rocked out to this particular piece, you should add it to your workout playlist immediately. It's upbeat and fun and irreverent to the point of challenge—the exact kind of inspiration you want before an intense cardio session or a first run in the local mayoral election.

Demi lets us know that she's looking great and feeling great and living her life on her own terms. And she's sorry, but she's not sorry. I live for this kind of jam. It's poppy and catchy and easily fits in the arsenal of music I use to give myself energy or alter my mood.

After that first experience, I quickly developed a song crush. I listened to it in the shower, at the gym, in the car—I even went so far as to play the Kidz Bop version when my children were around so I could keep it in rotation. I mean, that's commitment, you guys! Anyone who has ever suffered through Kidz Bop can attest that it's the seventh circle of parenting hell, but that's how much I loved this song. I listened to it all the time, and eventually a question popped into my head: *What am I not sorry about?*

See, Demi, she's not sorry about living life on her terms. She's not sorry for looking good or feeling good or making her ex-boyfriend jealous or taking a bubble bath in a Jacuzzi in the living room—if her music video is anything to go by. But what about me? What were the areas in my life that I absolutely refused to apologize for?

I wish I could tell you that every part of my life is a long list of not giving a tinker's damn what anyone else thinks, but that wouldn't be truthful no matter how much I want to set an example for you now.

As a sidenote, I spent much of my last Christmas holiday in bed sick with a horrible chest cold. I used that time to read many historical romance novels set in the Regency era with brooding dukes who were always saying things like, “Evangeline, I don’t give a tinker’s damn what society thinks!” just before kissing the heroine with the passion of ten thousand suns or whatever. My New Year’s resolution was to start using the term *tinker’s damn* in everyday speech. I’ve already accomplished my dreams, and it’s only January 2. Huzzah!

But, truly, like many other women, I’m still in the process of overcoming a lifetime of people-pleasing. I constantly strive to move through every part of my life unconcerned with the opinions of others, but truthfully, I don’t always achieve it. Yes, even me, the professional advice-giver, even I sometimes get trapped inside the crippling weight of other people’s expectations and have to talk myself down from the ledge. But you better believe there are areas where I have mastered it. There are whole segments of my life where I’ve worked hard to keep my eyes on my own values and not worry what other people might think of them. The biggest example of this? Big, audacious dreaming. Massive, obnoxious goal setting. Being a proud working mother instead of buying into the special brand of oppression found inside mommy guilt. Daring to believe that I can change the world by helping women like you feel brave and proud and strong.

I may occasionally get tied up in the trappings of some stranger being mean on the internet about my hair or my clothes or my writing style—but I no longer spend a single second of my life worrying about what others think of me for having dreams for myself.

Embracing the idea that you can want things for yourself even if nobody else understands the whys behind them is the most freeing and powerful feeling in the world. You want to be a third-grade teacher? Wonderful! Open a dog-grooming studio where you specialize in dyeing poodles pink? Great! You want to save up to go on a lavish vacation where you ask everyone to refer to you as Bianca when your actual name is Pam? Fantastic!

Whatever the dream, it’s yours, not mine. You don’t have to give any justification, because as long you’re not asking anyone to give you approval, then you don’t need anyone to give you permission. In fact, when you understand that you don’t have to justify your dreams to anyone else for any reason, that’s the day you truly begin to step into who you’re meant to be. I don’t mean that you go around middle fingers up, like a Beyoncé song. I don’t mean that you turn bitter and rude and shove your goals into other people’s faces to prove a point. I mean that you focus in on the dream you have, you do the work, you put in the hours, and you stop feeling guilty about it!

Sadly, most people will go through their entire lives never experiencing that at all. Women especially are so brutal on themselves, and they often talk themselves out of their own dreams before they even attempt them.

This is a travesty.

There is so much untapped potential inside people who are too afraid to give themselves a chance. Right now there are women reading these lines who have ideas for nonprofits that would change the world . . . if only they had the courage to pursue their dreams. There are women reading these lines who have the potential to build a company that would alter their families’ lives—and the lives of others who’d be positively affected by the business they created—if only they had the audacity to believe it would work. Right now there are women reading these lines who would invent the next great app, design the next great fashion line, write the next great bestselling book, or create the beauty products we’d all be obsessed with, if only they believed in themselves.

A dream always starts with a question, and the question is always some form of *What if* . . .

What if I went back to school?
What if I tried to build that?
What if I pushed myself to run 26.2 miles?
What if I moved to a new city?
What if I'm the one who could change the system?
What if God put this on my heart for a reason?
What if I could add some income to our bank account?
What if I could write a book that would help people?

That *what if*? That's your potential knocking on the door of your heart and begging it to find the courage to override all the fear in your head. That *what if* is there for a reason. That *what if* is your guidepost. That *what if* tells you where to focus next.

If every woman who heard that *what if* in her heart allowed it to feed the flame in her belly to pursue who she might be, not only would she shock herself with what she's capable of, but she'd astound everyone else as well. I'm convinced that if she—if we—just lived life in pursuit of answering that question, the effect on the world around us would be atomic.

Most of us only consciously use a small percentage of our brain power. But have you ever seen one of those movies where the protagonist suddenly has access to all of it? They take a pill or get trained by a secret government agency, and all of a sudden they can bend metal with their minds and solve the world's poverty crisis in just a few hours because they're using their full potential. I'm convinced that many women in this world of ours are like Peter Parker, pre-radioactive spider bite—they're operating at a fraction of their potential because they haven't encountered a catalyst strong enough to unlock it.

Only a small part of our population is encouraged to believe in themselves and their potential from childhood on. People raised with advantages tend to see more possibilities. People who were taught self-worth from a young age are more likely to believe in their capabilities as adults. People with more resources usually perceive a goal as more easily achieved than those who have less. But what if you weren't raised to believe in yourself? What if you didn't have advantages or many resources? How likely would you be to believe you're capable of so much more? How likely would you be to stick with your goal when you get knocked off course?

But what if you did stick with it? What if you did believe? And not only you, but what if all sorts of women all over the world made the decision to replace other people's expectations with their own imaginations of who they might be?

Can you imagine if 25 percent more of the world, or 15 percent more or even just 5 percent more women decided to embrace their *what if*? Can you imagine if they stopped allowing the guilt or shame that comes from not being a certain way or a certain type of woman to squash their potential? Can you imagine the exponential growth we'd see in everything from art to science to technology to literature? Can you imagine how much more joyful and fulfilled those women would be? Can you imagine how their families would be affected? How about the community? How about other women who see their success and are inspired and emboldened by it and use it as a catalyst to spark change in their own lives? If that sort of revolution were to occur—a revolution of *what if*—we would change the world.

In fact, I believe we *can* change the world. But first, we've got to stop living in fear of being judged for who we are.

I've been sitting here for the last twelve minutes trying to figure out exactly how to ease us into this discussion topic, but you know what? We're all grown-up women; we can handle it. We can handle real conversation. We can handle someone holding a mirror up to our lives, and we can admit some hard truths when it comes to what's holding us back.

So here it is: women are afraid of themselves.

No, it's true. If we weren't afraid of ourselves we wouldn't spend so much time apologizing constantly for who we are, what we want out of life, and the time required for us to pursue both.

For the average woman, the story goes something like this. When you came into the world you were totally and utterly yourself. It wasn't a conscious decision to be exactly who you were; it was instinct. Were you loud? Were you quiet? Did you crave cuddles? Were you fine on your own?

Your needs were simple, your focus was crystal clear, and you didn't ever think about being any certain way—you just were. Then something changed. Something big happened, something that would shape the rest of your life, even if you couldn't have been aware of it at the time.

You learned about expectation.

There you were, being your adorable baby self, and suddenly that didn't cut it anymore. You were expected to do things: stop throwing your sippy cup on the floor, stop screaming when you don't get your way, start using the restroom like an actual person, stop biting your brother just because you feel like it. Two really critical things happened during the period when we switched from being totally accepted as is to having to live up to some expectation.

The first is that we learned to live within societal norms. This is a good thing because, sister, if you were still using a diaper at thirty-two because nobody helped you figure out a toilet, that would not be cute.

The second thing that happened is that we learned how to get attention, and to a child attention equals love. In fact, if you never learn any better, you'll go through your entire life believing that to have someone's notice means you are loved. See: social media as a whole.

Listen up, because I'm about to tell you something that may help you understand literally every person you know and possibly yourself as well. When you were a newborn you needed constant care and notice to stay alive, but at some point you stopped getting that undivided attention because you didn't need it anymore. But you still liked other people's regard (you were a baby after all), and so your clever mind started to test out ways to get notice on demand. Some toddlers get attention by being affectionate, so they learn to be dependent upon it. Some toddlers get attention by doing something that makes their parents laugh, so they learn to entertain. Some toddlers learn to get attention by doing something good that everybody praises; they become an achiever. Some toddlers notice that when they fall down and hurt themselves or when they're sick, Mommy gives them extra time and care; a hypochondriac is born. Some toddlers can't get any attention no matter what they do, so they kick and scream and throw a fit. Being angry is better than being ignored. These toddler tendencies can turn into childhood habits. Childhood habits that go unaltered turn into our unconscious ways of being.

I know it sounds like one big sweeping generalization, but seriously, ask yourself if this sounds like any adults you know. Do you have anyone in your life who always has problems? No matter what day of the week it is, the sky is always falling? That's because their problems give them the attention they crave from others. Do you know anyone in your life who's an overachiever? A workaholic? Always pushing themselves? That's likely because they—like me—got attention through achievement as a child, and the habit is hard to break. Do you know

any women who seem utterly helpless? They constantly need someone else to help them, fix the problem, or counsel them through every decision? I'd bet my bottom dollar it's because they were raised in a home that fed them those lies or controlled every decision for so long that they have no confidence in their own capabilities.

My point is, we learn at a very early age that there are things we can do to hold on to attention, and even if the specifics of how we do it morph and change over time, the overarching way we're taught to gain notice as a child—from being entertaining to being an achiever, chronically sick, overly angry, or always in crisis—often remains the same and affects the way we seek attention as adults.

For me, it was always through achievement that I was able to receive notice from my parents. What this taught me at a very early age was that in order to be loved I needed to do things to earn it. Did my parents love me? Absolutely. But to a child for whom notice is the outpouring of love, the absence of any leads to a desperation to learn what she can do to receive it.

So, let's recap. You're a child and you learn that certain behaviors will get you notice. This begins to implant itself into who you're growing to become. But that's not the only hurtful thing you're learning. It's around the same age when you not only learn how to get love, but you're told *who you'll have to be* in order to keep receiving it.

Have you ever considered how much of your current life is truly made up of your choices and which areas are really just the things that were expected of you?

I was raised knowing that I would get married and have children . . . and quickly. In my small hometown, most of the girls I went to high school with had their first child by the time they were nineteen. When I had my first son at twenty-four I was practically ancient.

Twenty. Four.

What in the actual world? In retrospect that seems incredibly young to me. The idea of one of my kids having a baby by twenty-four makes me start to hyperventilate. There's so much life to live, so many things to see, so much you don't know about yourself yet at that age. I can't say that I'd change anything about when I got married or when I had babies, because that would mean I wouldn't have the children I have now. But the older I get the more I become aware that I was raised thinking that my real value was based on the role I would play for other people. After all, being deemed a good wife or a good mother or daughter is rarely based on how true you are to yourself.

Nobody is standing around after church on Sunday saying, "There goes Becca. You know she's devoted to self-care. What a good mama." Or, "Oh, look! Tiffany is training for her next half marathon. Look at all those hours she's putting into getting strong. What a good wife!" If those conversations are happening, it's nowhere near where I grew up. No, where I was raised women are taught that to be a good woman you need to be good for other people. If your kids are happy, then you're a good mom. If your husband is happy, you're a good wife. How about a good daughter, employee, sister, friend? All of your value is essentially wrapped up in other people's happiness. How can anyone successfully navigate that for a lifetime? How can anyone dream of more? How can anyone follow their *what if*, if they need someone else to approve of it first?

It's no wonder so many mothers send me notes telling me they've lost themselves. Of course they have! If you live your life to please everyone else, you forget what used to make you *you*. And what if you haven't found your partner yet or don't have a desire for children? Are you just a waste of a woman because there's no one else for you to be good for?

No. Of course not. You are a being with your own hopes and desires and goals and dreams. Some are little tiny ones ("I want to write poetry") and some are massive ("I want to create a

million-dollar company”), but all of them are yours and they are valuable simply because you are valuable. You are allowed to want more for yourself for no other reason than because it makes your heart happy. You don’t need anyone’s permission, and you certainly shouldn’t have to rely on anyone’s support as the catalyst to get you there.

Unfortunately, many women struggle with what others might think of the goals they have for themselves. So instead of chasing them, they let their dreams die. Or they pursue them in secret or, worse, with a nagging sense of having failed those around them because they’re doing something for themselves instead of everyone else. They live under guilt and shame and fear. *What if* stops being an ember of possibility in their hearts and becomes a litany of recriminations in their heads. *What if I fail? What if they laugh? What if I waste my time? What if this makes them mad? What if they think I’m greedy? What if I’m losing all this time with my family for nothing?*

When we stay in this place, fear runs our lives and prevents us from moving forward, even to the smallest degree. We may live with a massive fear of failure and a major perfectionist complex. Or we may be afraid because other people have already achieved what we’re considering, so, what’s the point? Or maybe we’re afraid of embarrassment, of falling off the wagon (again). Or we worry we’re not smart enough, pretty enough, young enough, old enough . . . so many possible ways we’re not enough.

As women, we’ve had a lifetime of lies fueling our fears. We’ve had a lifetime of believing that our value lies primarily in our ability to make other people happy. We are afraid of so many things when it comes to our dreams, but the biggest fear is of being judged for having them in the first place.

I call BS.

It’s about time someone did. I call BS to that lie in my own life, and I absolutely call it on your behalf as well.

At the beginning of every single year, I sit down and think of what the overarching theme will be for my work. I try to come up with a message for you, for my tribe, for this group of women that hangs out with me online. When I began writing this book, I asked myself what I wanted to say to you as women and sisters and daughters and friends and single ladies. What I wished you knew. And the answer that flowed out of my heart came from my *what if* spark.

If I could tell you anything, if I could convince you to believe it, it’s that you were made for more. You were made to have the dreams you’re afraid of having. You were made to do the things you don’t think you’re qualified for. You were made to be a leader. You were made to contribute. You were made to make changes for good, both in your local community and the world at large. You were made to be more than you are today and—this is the important part—your version of more might not look like my more, or hers.

For you, maybe *more* looks like finally signing up for the 10K. For someone else *more* might look like making strides to change the way she eats in order to be healthier. For someone else *more* might look like going back to school. For someone else *more* might look like getting out of the relationship with the person who is unkind and hurtful and cruel. *More* might look like not going back to the toxic relationship merry-go-round again and again and again. For someone else *more* might look like being kinder to herself. Maybe *more* is more time and rest. Maybe *more* is controlling your temper by counting to ten before you scream at your kids. Maybe *more* is getting in control of your emotions or *more* therapy or *more* water or *more* believing that you are capable of greatness or *more* not worrying what someone else thinks about you.

Made for more is the definition of you, and your desire for more is not something to be ashamed of! Our potential—the potential that resides in every single one of us—is our gift

from our creator. What you do with that potential is your gift back to the rest of the world. The worst thing I can imagine is that you might die with that potential still untapped inside of you. And so I wrote this book, of the former Demi Lovato title, as encouragement, as a field guide, and also as the wind that fans the flames of your *what if* spark so that it turns into a wildfire.

Why?

Because the world needs your spark. The world needs your energy. The world needs you to show up for your life and take hold of your potential! We need your ideas. We need your love and care. We need your passion. We need your business models. We need to celebrate your successes. We need to watch you rise back up after your failures. We need to see your courage. We need to hear your *what if*. We need you to stop apologizing for being who you are and become who you were meant to be.

I spent a lot of time trying to figure out exactly how I wanted to lay out this book. It's the most—I hope anyway—tactical advice I've ever written down. I wanted it to be easy to understand and easy to apply to any kind of goal, and so I needed to get to the core of what has made it possible for me to achieve my dreams. What I finally asked myself was, *Which elements have either helped or hurt me in my pursuit of personal goals over the last fifteen years?* After all, I'm not an expert. I'm not a specialist or a professor, and I don't know the answer for everybody else. What I do know is how to get from a little town and a childhood filled with trauma to being a successful entrepreneur who built a multimillion-dollar company with only a high school diploma under her belt. I do know how to go from being an insecure young girl drowning in the anxiety of other people's perceptions to a confident and proud woman. I do know how to go from being severely overweight and unhealthy, using food as a coping mechanism and unable to walk up the stairs without getting winded to a marathon runner who leaps out of bed each morning ready to take on the day. I do know how to go from being a desperate people-pleaser just hoping for love to being a woman who is so filled with love for others, for my passions, for my work that I no longer need to seek it out in negative ways. All of these areas of growth in my life were once goals I had for myself, and while I didn't know what I was doing when I first started on this path, I can look back and see the commonalities between each success and failure that got me from there to here.

I am not an expert. What I am is your friend Rachel, and I want to tell you what worked for me. I have tried a bit of everything, but ultimately, achieving big goals both personally and professionally came down to these three things:

1. Letting go of the excuses that kept me stuck.
2. Adopting great habits and behaviors that set me up for success.
3. Acquiring the skills necessary to make exponential growth possible.

I honestly didn't have the self-awareness to identify these steps as I was living them, but I can look back now and see that these were the main factors that led to every success I've had along the way. I have laid each part of the book out in this foundational order on purpose.

I started with **excuses to let go of**, because if you don't recognize the things that are limiting you right now, you'll never be able to move past them. You'll notice, too, that the excuse section is the longest in this book. That's not an accident. The habits and skills we need are straightforward, but the litany of excuses that stand between where we are and where we

want to go is longer and more dramatic than the second half of *Hamilton*. Once you wade through them and identify them as the lies they really are, you can move on to things that make you stronger.

The second part of this book is **behaviors to adopt**, which is my fancy way of telling you that your habits matter a great deal. If you want to see traction and results, consistency is key. Meaning, you can't just do something one time or even ten times and expect it to get you where you want to go. You have to develop behaviors that are so habitual they feel grounded in your DNA. You have to make it so living as the best version of yourself becomes your new normal.

Finally, I finish with **skills to acquire**. These are universal things everyone needs when pursuing any goal. What may throw you off is that these items are rarely listed out as skills. Things like confidence or persistence are typically considered characteristics you either have or you don't, but I want to change your perception about these things. You can cultivate new positive characteristics in yourself, and more importantly, you must if you want to achieve your personal goals more easily.

This book has a lot of information (it took me a lifetime to acquire it), but please don't allow that to overwhelm you. You are strong and bold and capable of more. From here on out, choose to see ideas for change as possibilities in your life. A life filled with possibilities is a recipe for your kind of greatness. Let's dive in!