

You Do You

how to be who you are
and use what you've got
to get what you want

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Quercus

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Today you are You!


That is truer than true!

There is no one alive

who is You-er than You!

— Dr. Seuss

I'm sure you're wondering
why I called this meeting



Life gets exponentially better once you stop giving a fuck about what other people think and start doing what you really want to do. I know this in part because I wrote two entire books on these subjects and they've made a lot of people very happy. Perhaps you are one of those people? If so, you know that my firstborn, *The Life-Changing Magic of Not Giving a Fuck*, taught readers how to say no, set boundaries, and stop wasting time, energy, and money on things that don't bring them joy.

It was **LIBERATING**.

The sequel, *Get Your Shit Together*, taught people how to set goals and achieve them.

It was **WEAPONIZING**.

But the best part about those books — apart from two enduringly useful flowcharts that still pop up from time to time on social media — is that their success enabled me to write this one.

This one is **EMPOWERING**.

And at the risk of blowing your mind up front, the first thing I'm going to do here is unleash the most life-changing statement I've made to date. My *pièce de résistance*. The Mona Lisa of Dear Abbys. Your new secret weapon.

In the immortal words of Destiny's Child...are you ready for this?

THERE

IS

NOTHING

WRONG

WITH

YOU.

Whoa. Are your arm hairs standing up a little straighter? Do you detect angels revving up a chorus in the next room? Perhaps you're in need of a cold shower to quell the frisson in your nethers?

Awesome. That's exactly what I was going for.

Unless...wait...maybe you just rolled your eyes and thought *This woman has obviously never spoken to my parents, bosses, coworkers, or exes, who would have told her exactly what's wrong with me. And she didn't dial up my grade school bullies, teachers, or coaches, either, because they all know a thing or two about why I lack confidence, obsess over my imperfections, and feel generally unworthy.*

Hey, now! Don't be so hard on yourself.

And okay, fiiiiine, maybe there are a couple of things wrong with you—like you wish you were more organized, or better with money. So what? This book isn't called *You IMPROVE You*.

No, this book—*You DO You*—is about **accepting your strengths and your flaws**, whether those flaws are self-identified or just things that you're perfectly happy about but that other people seem to have a problem with. Or, should I say, that you **WOULD** be perfectly happy

about, **if you felt a little more confident in yourself** and a little less worried about what other people think.*

Anyway, you seem like a good person. I have a sixth sense about these things. So, at least for the purposes of the next three hundred pages, I absolutely meant what I said a minute ago: Unless you're a serial killer or one of those people who keeps trying to start "the wave" when nobody around you is interested, **there is nothing wrong with you.**

Then, you may be wondering, why did I purchase a self-help book?

Excellent question! You're a good person *and* a quick study. I love it.

And I'll tell you why: What IS wrong—and what this nifty no-fucks-given guide shall address—is **how society burdens us with conventions, expectations, and arbitrary "norms."** And as a result, many of us struggle mightily against the **sneaky, suffocating pressure to conform**—and then spend so much time feeling bad

* I almost called the book *Whatever Works, Bitches!*, but I'm tired of a certain New York City-based newspaper refusing to print my titles. Don't you worry, though, my potty mouth is alive and fucking well.

about ourselves that we become convinced there *is* something wrong with us, and we flock to bookstores and seminars and gyms and weight loss cults and etiquette experts and plastic surgeons looking for the solutions to “problems” we don’t even have.

You know what I’m talking about, and it’s total bullshit, right?

Well, that, my special snowflake, is precisely why I called this meeting. Because even though there’s nothing wrong with who you are, we live in a culture that right now, AT THIS VERY MOMENT, might be causing you to think otherwise.



When I was growing up, I was made fun of for being too nerdy, laughing too loudly, and belting out “Hey, Buster, move!” during a junior high dance DJ’s spin of the Young MC classic “Bust a Move.” (For what it’s worth, I had an uncle named Buster, so this did not seem weird to me, but neither did that social faux pas endear me to my peers. Kids can be *such* assholes.)

Anyway, it seemed like I could never do anything right, to fit in. The herd was traveling in one direction and I was

fighting my way upstream like a buffalo with a salmon complex. To be fair, I suppose the fact that I would write that sentence proves I have an odd way of looking at the world.

But why did other kids care so damn much?

And why, as adults, should anyone keep caring whether anyone else **acts a little weird, takes a few risks, or makes some unconventional life choices** (like, say, deciding not to have any asshole kids of our own)?

The answer is: they shouldn't. But people who care about that shit aren't reading this book right now, so I'm not talking to them, I'm talking to you. I can't change them, and—pinky swear—I'm not trying to change you, either.

What I can do is help change the way you deal with them and the way you feel about you. (If you're into that kind of thing. No pressure.) I've been doing it for a while and it's worked out pretty well for me. In fact, *You Do You* is probably my most personal book, in terms of *Tales of Challenges Overcome*, though I think it's also the most universal—after all, who doesn't want to just be themselves and get through the goddamn day in whatever way works for them?

Anyone? Anyone? Bueller?

Exactly.

You needn't have been mocked at a sixth-grade dance to understand the sting of judgment or feel the pressure to conform. That can happen at any age and under many circumstances—like when you move to a new city, start a new job, or marry into a new clan. Maybe you're a born contrarian. Maybe you're a savant. Maybe you mixed plaids with stripes one day and decided you liked it. Lord have mercy!

Whatever the case, if you came to this book **feeling different, misunderstood, frustrated, or constrained** by your parents, siblings, neighbors, roommates, bosses, coworkers, Tinder matches, significant others, or society-at-large—well, I'm sorry to hear that, but you're in the right place.

And this may sound like a tall order, but in addition to helping you accept who you are, I'm going to help you find confidence in your beliefs, your attitude, your looks, your goals, and your all-around swagger. Because all of the qualities—yes, even the flaws—that make you, **YOU**, also make you **interesting, capable, and powerful** in your own way.

You just need to own them.

What “you doing you” looks like

The advice in this book boils down to one simple mantra: **Stand up for who you are and what you want.** How do you do that? **Stop letting other people tell you what to do, how to do it, or why it can't be done.***

Each part of *You Do You* builds the argument for **living life on your own terms.** It covers:

- The Tyranny of “Just Because”
- Lowest Common Denominator Living, and why you deserve better
- WNDs (what you want, need, and deserve)
- The social contract, what it's for, and where it fails
- Doubters, haters, and other judgy motherfuckers
- Turning your flaws into strengths—aka “mental redecorating”
- When it's okay to be selfish, why it's pointless to be perfect, how to be “difficult,” and much, much more!

* Yes, this is an ironic sentiment from someone who makes her living telling other people what to do, but I didn't become a bestselling anti-guru by following the rules, now did I?

Part I (“YOU ARE HERE: An orientation exercise”)

In this section, I’ll walk you through the “social contract” — a collection of unspoken yet extremely potent rules, expectations, and obligations that may not be serving you as well as they could. Then I’ll give you a sneak peek at fifteen of its most nefarious clauses, my amendments to which will shape the rest of the book. Gimmicky? Yes. A snazzy way to organize my thoughts and marshal my arguments? That too.

Part II (“DOs & DON’Ts: Rules for the breaking”)

Here we’ll focus on the kinds of rules you learned in kindergarten that don’t necessarily apply to life as an adult, such as “Don’t be selfish” and “Do be a team player.” I’ll show you how to bend or break a few of these with an eye toward improving your life and — just as important — not ruining anybody else’s along the way.

Part III (“WILLs & WON’Ts: Not-so-great expectations”)

This is where you’ll learn how to ignore or straight-up defy people who have the nerve to tell you what will happen or how you’ll feel as a result of *your* life choices. In the chapter called “You will regret that” I’ll talk about making decisions that seem wrong to others but feel oh-so-right to you, and in “You won’t get anywhere with that attitude,” I’ll extoll the power of pessimism in helping you plan ahead and avoid disappointment — aka managing your *own* expectations.

Part IV (“SHOULDs & SHOULDN’Ts: Much too much obliged”)

If you’ve had it up to HERE with fulfilling random, stupid obligations set forth by society — whether to be nice or thin or to act submissive or sane — then Part IV is exactly what the doctor respectfully suggested. In “You should smile more,” I’ll explain why it’s not your job to be nice, and in “You shouldn’t act so crazy,” I’ll reminisce

about the time I snuck a litter box and ten buckets of craft sand into my office and hoped nobody would notice. Today? I'd put that shit on Instagram Stories. Because I finally understand that I'm not obligated to speak or act in any way that robs me of living an authentic life.

And neither are you.



I wrote *You Do You* for people like me, who just want to do their own thing and stop caring about how their desires, motivations, opinions, and decisions are being questioned, dissected, and judged by others. **For misfits, rebels, black sheep, and unicorns.** For folks who want to wear white after Labor Day or spread pimento cheese on their Pop-Tarts; for those who prefer to stay single in a culture that fetishizes elaborate engagement videos or who drop out of med school to open a medical marijuana dispensary.

Shine on, you crazy diamonds.

I wrote it for **all of us who feel pressured to follow rules, meet expectations, and fulfill obligations**—and who don't like it one bit. I wrote it for kids, college students, parents, and retirees, and for grandmas who left

their husbands of four decades to spend their golden years with a “friend” named Mary. I wrote it for readers of my previous books but also for people who’ve never even heard of “that foul-mouthed anti-guru Sarah Knight.”

And finally, I wrote it because **being yourself *should* be the easiest thing in the world**: Wake up, confirm no *Freaky Friday* shit has occurred, and go about your day. Yet so many of us struggle with that—as children, as adults, as lesbian grandmas. We’ve convinced ourselves (or let other people convince us) that there’s something wrong with us. We lack confidence in our individuality and we feel compelled to conform—to be like everyone else, “fix” our “flaws,” and toe the boring ol’ cultural party line.

But what if there isn’t anything wrong with us? **What if there really, truly, isn’t anything wrong with YOU?**

That’s the premise I’m working from, and I think it’s mighty goddamn refreshing.

So instead of trying to change you, let’s celebrate what it means to *be* you—in all your weird, difficult, selfish, imperfect, antisocial, overexcited, unique, and unconventional ways. Let’s harness those “flaws” and turn them

into strengths. And let's set the record straight for all the doubters and haters who sent you running for a self-help book in the first place.

I mean, I appreciate the business, but fuck those people. Come on, let's do you!