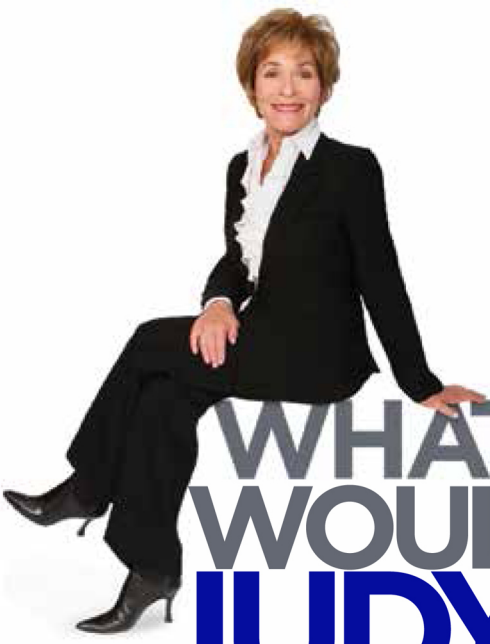

WHAT WOULD JUDY SAY?

BE THE HERO OF YOUR OWN STORY

JUDGE JUDY SHEINDLIN

Foreword by Nicole Sheindlin

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Printed in the United States of America

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FOREWORD

Lessons from My Stepmom, Judy Sheindlin

by Nicole Sheindlin

I first met Judy when I was seven years old, at my kitchen table. It was 1975. My dad and mom had separated the previous year. I came off the school bus one day and saw a shiny blue car in my driveway. I was anxious to come inside and see who was visiting. My dad was seated at the kitchen table with a woman I had never seen before. I climbed into his lap, curious to learn about this new visitor.

Dad said, "This is Judy. She's a lawyer just like me. The difference is, I get the bad guys out of jail and she loves to put them in."

Judy looked me right in the eye, cocked her head, shrugged her shoulders, and said proudly, "That's what I do."

I don't know if it was the directness of her statement, her absolutely perfect posture, or the sparkle in her eye, but I liked her immediately. We became instant friends.

Eight months later, at an intimate ceremony in New York City, my dad and Judy married and we officially became a blended family. We are five children in total, three boys and two girls. I am the baby of the bunch.

Judy was like no other woman I'd ever met. None of my friends' mothers were anything like Judy. I'd heard that women could be doctors and lawyers, but I had never known one. The women I knew who had jobs were either secretaries or teachers. At that time, Judy was prosecuting juvenile offenders. I was blown away by her sense of independence and self-sufficiency. She had it all together. She not only did her job and gave it her all, but she was there for us whenever we needed her.

In the early 1980s, without any specific political affiliation and based on merit alone, both my dad and Judy were appointed judges in New York City. He was assigned to the criminal court in the Bronx, and Judy to the family court in Manhattan.

Growing up with two judges was quite a unique experience. The minutiae of the law and its application in the justice system were endless topics of discussion in our house. It was a perplexing, inspiring, and debate-filled environment. Having Judy as one of my major role models had a profound effect on me. Because she was so bold and direct in both her professional and personal lives, visits to her courtroom left me awestruck. This was her world. Everyone from litigants to lawyers to court and corrections officers moved in the speed and manner Judy directed. And here was something I also never forgot, because it was truly unusual—despite the seriousness of the matters at hand, there was always laughter in Judy's courtroom, always a sense of humanity underneath the absolute decorum. And she led

our family in the same way. She showed us that accountability is to be taken very seriously, results are directly proportionate to effort, and that a victim mentality is useless. Much of Judy's brilliance was in her ability to assess and analyze a situation to determine the most efficient, effective, and righteous solution. This ability was part of the very bedrock of Judy, her core values, which she honed in her early days as a lawyer, then as a family court judge, and as a mother. She didn't just become Judge Judy when she stepped onto a television set. She was always fully herself in every role she played.

I eventually went on to New York Law School, Judy's alma mater. The school is two blocks away from where Judy was then the supervising judge of the Manhattan family court. I would go to school and then spend afternoons in Judy's courtroom. School was all complex legal theory, but in Judy's courtroom were true lessons—in law, humanity, and balance. Should a thirteen-year-old who was caught with a .38 attempting a robbery have leniency because his grandmother died? Should a crack-addicted mother have another chance at parenthood?

The family court was packed to overflowing with hundreds of families in total crisis. There were lines of people waiting to have their cases heard. Here was Judy at her very best, the main player in this entire process. She was no-nonsense, intolerant of excuses, not persuaded by defendants portraying themselves as victims, unimpressed by attorneys trying to stall the proceedings. And above all else,

Judy hated stupid from any of the players. She dispensed her decisions quickly, efficiently, and with impeccable wit, humor, and timing. By this time in Judy's career, she was a master at getting to the heart of the matter. She was a genius at analysis and an expert in people management. Which is why the next step in her journey was no surprise to me.

Judy had been a sitting judge in family court for over fifteen years. She had become nationally recognized for her judicial efficiency, spot-on decisions, and irreverent temperament. In 1994, Judy was approached about doing a television show. She had written a tell-all book about the ineptitudes in our court system and figured she'd exposed enough people that there was little likelihood bureaucrats would want her to remain a judge. She treated this television opportunity as a fun new adventure. I flew with Judy, my dad, and my brother out to Los Angeles to watch her tape a few episodes for a pilot program. Judy bounded onto the set as if she owned the place. There were no reservations about being in a new environment or having cameras all around. She remained completely at ease. I marveled at how Judy could enter this new world with such confidence and comfort, and I wanted to know that secret. I wanted everyone to know it, because I sensed there was a fundamental lesson to be learned in Judy's ability to navigate every new situation without fear or self-doubt.

That desire was the impetus of this book. While I'd read other books advising women how to be successful in life

and work, I had never come across anyone with a personal story or an attitude like Judy's. She is a unique role model because her rise to fame has nothing to do with traditional ideas of female success. She is not a woman who has supermodel good looks, she has no special artistic or athletic talent, she is not from a prestigious family, she didn't graduate from an Ivy League school, she isn't married to a CEO or a politician, and she never had any special political affiliations or favors. Her rise to fame was solely because of her brains, wit, and wisdom. She doesn't view herself as a *female* success. She's simply a success, no qualifiers needed. Other than her first job as a lawyer, where she served as a secretary, Judy has never viewed gender as an impediment. However, she has seen countless women limit themselves by letting other people define them. This book was written to encourage and inspire women to take control of their own destiny. Judy has shown me that the true happily-ever-after is not about hitching your wagon to a Prince Charming but finding your passion and working hard to let it shine (and letting your prince and kids come along with you). She also taught me that life is not a dress rehearsal, that it happens each moment you live it.

Most importantly, Judy models a way of thinking about yourself. She often tells women to be the heroes of their own story. Being true to yourself is what matters most. In that sense, Judy's story can be anyone's story.

This book is not guaranteed to change your life. It is my hope that you will take away an idea, an incentive, a new way of looking at yourself and the people who surround you. I am giving you the benefit of some of my life's experience in the hope that you might find some of my tools useful. If you learn just one thing, I ask that you support the message at the book's conclusion. Thanks, and enjoy the read.

WHAT WOULD **JUDY** SAY?

INTRODUCTION

Have It All?

Can women have it all? The question has been out there for the last forty years or so—much debated, never resolved. Some say that women are crazy to try, that it can't be done, so don't even attempt it. Thankfully, those folks are slowly dying off. At the other end are those who demand that women goose-step to their vision of success: successful spouse, mother, philanthropist, glass ceiling–breaker, gourmet cook, and so on. You get the picture.

The fact is that it's complicated. When I asked the question on my Web site, What Would Judy Say?, a woman named Jane summed it up pretty well, saying it depends on what you mean by "all." She wrote, "If they want a career and a full family life and a clean house and to be able to attend every event at their kids' school and every game they play in, then they might be disappointed." Another way of putting it is you have to determine your own "all"—and it's an individual matter. Much of the anxiety and guilt women feel today is based on their efforts to meet external ideals of perfection, without ever stopping to ask themselves if their lives are working for *them*.

Regardless of their circumstances and choices, there's a lot of pressure on women to meet the highest expectations of everyone around them. Women today have leaned in, opted out, on- or off-ramped, emptied their nests, and cracked the glass ceiling. They've been Oprahized. They've read *Lean In* and *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. They've been praised for holding up half the sky and encouraged to run with wolves. There is no end of experts telling them to be empowered.

But *real* women are not running with wolves. They're too tired—and they don't trust the wolf. They want to be the best they can be, and they want to be happy and fulfilled, but they need ideas, not more pressure to meet someone else's idea of a perfect life.

In my work and life, whether I'm on the set of *Judge Judy*, talking to young women in my mentoring program, or observing my own children and grandchildren, I have come to the conclusion that many women are still lacking some basic tools to negotiate this journey of life. The media is full of advice, but most of the messages, even the helpful ones, don't provide the tools. Much of the advice just seems to raise the bar even higher, without answering the basic question everyone is asking: "But how do I *do* it?"

What's the point of encouraging an overstretched woman to reach for the sky, saying it's possible to juggle a family and career and come out swinging, when the reality is that her highest aspiration is to find an opportunity to take a long nap? How is it helpful to tell women to take risks in their careers, without providing underlying strate-

gies to make the risks worthwhile? It's one thing to preach that every woman is beautiful and extraordinary, but this sounds like an empty platitude to women who consider themselves neither.

I am from a generation of women for whom opportunities were narrower, and even if we pursued careers, there was an understanding that the "job" of wife and mother was the most important of all. You can imagine how hard it was to break through those barriers—to be the only woman in the room at a law school or a courtroom or a conference. Today women are everywhere—flooding the legal and medical professions at a higher rate than men, starting businesses, filling the ranks of corporate management, and doing everything they want to do. But what they've gained in numbers they're still missing in that sense of peace that comes with living a satisfying life. I've talked to women from all professions and walks of life, and I can tell you, they're feeling more frustrated than empowered. They often tell me that they know they have to make some kind of a change but don't know where to start.

I appreciate the fact that people trust me—even young people. They'll write and say, "I started to watch you when I was ten, and I'm graduating from law school now and it's because of you." Nice. Also a bit scary. I might add that I'm also frequently mentioned in obituaries—*Maurice Schwartz, he was a beloved husband, father, friend. Loved to play bridge and every afternoon watch* Judge Judy. *Memorial services at Riverside, Sunday at ten.* It's fascinating to be part of the fabric of multiple generations.

That's why I decided to write this book and share some thoughts and experiences from my own life. Without any special brilliance, connections, or wealth, I found a new role at the age of fifty-one, and I did it my own way. I still believe today that the secret to my success is authenticity. For my entire life I have fought to be an individual, and even though I've had my share of setbacks, being true to myself has ultimately paid off. For people to be happy they must stop trying to meet other people's expectations about who they should be. They must define their own worth. Men find that easier to do. For women, it's more of a challenge.

In this book I want to have an honest conversation with women about what it really takes to get what you deserve out of life: how to define your worth and stick to it; how to find the courage to take risks—and how to build your backup plan; how to ignore the chattering classes (and the fearmongers) and create your own destiny; how to stop pretending you want something you don't really want; how to find balance by giving up the things you only do out of guilt; how to use your special skill as a woman to negotiate the best contract; and how to live happily ever after by living happily today.

I have always been a practical person who tells it as I see it. People listen to me because they know this—even if they don't always like the message or agree with me. But I'll show you that personal success and happiness don't happen by accident. Women say, "Tell me something I need to know." This book is my response.

CHAPTER ONE

The Envelope, Please

For most of my career I was a civil servant, and I was very happy. I had rewarding work, a good salary, wonderful medical benefits, a pension, and six weeks of paid vacation. Then came the seduction of Hollywood. I was faced with an opportunity to take a big risk and leave civil service behind.

Most things that Hollywood produces fail. Profits are made by the rare blockbuster success. Did I have what it takes? Should I even try? I would be giving up a lot. The salary was three times what I was making as a family court judge for far less work, but the risks were enormous, and I couldn't go back. However, because I had prepared myself with a profession, I was able to take that risk, knowing that even if it failed, I'd be okay. I might not be able to return to being a family court judge, but I could be a family court practitioner. Nobody could take my profession away from me.

Preparing yourself when you're young with a profession or vocation you can follow forever allows you to take risks, no matter what your field or your age. Doctor, lawyer, dieti-

tian, hairdresser, financial planner, accountant, carpenter—have a way of earning a living that you enjoy.

Let's talk power for a moment. In the beginning of producing *Judge Judy*, the company had the power. I wanted to be able to reach for the brass ring. In order to do that in our initial negotiations, I had to capitulate. The company could have said, "Your demands are unreasonable, we'll find somebody else, and good-bye." Or at least that's what I thought.

Fast-forward. We were in our sixth year of *Judge Judy*, and it had become a wildly successful show, much to the surprise of its producer and its star. I was fortunate enough to be in a position where I was literally irreplaceable. I don't say that in an arrogant way. It's just a fact. The company could not have produced *Judge Judy* without me.

Now the shifting of power had begun. I had more in the bank than I ever thought I would have in my wildest dreams when I was a family court judge. I was making good money, and I participated in the profits, but I realized I was dissatisfied with the way the profits were divided. I was in a position to say, "I want the income distribution of our profits to be fair."

I said to myself, "Judy, no one can define you." At that point, I stepped out of the typical box called "contract negotiations" and wrote my own script, giving everyone a near coronary in the process. I thought I was right, and I still do.

As my contract renewal period approached, I announced, "I'm not signing any more long-term five-year

contracts. Those long contracts don't protect me. They only protect the company. If the show remains a hit, I'm compensated based on old numbers, and if it flops, you fire my behind. Here's where it stands: I don't have to work anymore. I have a lovely husband and a great family, and everything I need in life. If I choose to work, we're going to be partners." I emphasized that by that I meant *true* partners. Meaning, they would not define what I was worth. I would.

If a business is making money, you don't shut down because you could be making *more* money. I, Judy Sheindlin, had no one to answer to but myself and my family. Had I stopped working, my family might have wanted to stone me, but I was free to make that choice.

The company, on the other hand, was responsible to shareholders. If they could have made $100 million but, because they would then have to share a little bit more, they would only make $50 million, how could they explain canceling my show when they had nothing to replace it with? That was my leverage.

I met for dinner with my boss, the president of the company. The setting was the Grill on the Alley in Beverly Hills, an elegant New York–style restaurant. We chatted about pleasantries for a while. Before he could ease into the contract discussion, I took a deep breath, reached into my bag, and pulled out a sealed envelope. Handing it across the table, I said, "This is what it's going to take for me to do another three years." He looked down at the envelope, a little bit stunned. But he kept his composure. "Don't open it

now," I said. "Wait until after dinner. And I'm looking for a yes or a no. It's not a negotiation."

Inside the envelope was a small note card with my picture and my terms—duration and price. Simple and elegant.

Now, I know people might be wondering whether I really meant it and whether I was scared that they'd say no. In one sense it was a calculated risk, because I didn't believe they would turn me down. I didn't think they could afford to. But I was also prepared to walk away. I didn't *want* to walk away. I loved doing that show—and I still do. But it was important for me to define my worth. Equally as important, the terms were fair. To this day they remain more than fair.

The day after our lovely meal at the Grill on the Alley, the president called and said, "Okay." Good choice.

Three years later it was a new company and a new president. I repeated the process. Word had gotten out, and people knew about the envelope.

We have repeated the process three times—always at the Grill on the Alley. By the third time I had come to like this new president. By then everyone understood the purpose of the meal. I said without preliminaries, "Here's the envelope."

He smiled. "Believe it or not, I have my own envelope," he said. He held up a sealed envelope.

I smiled back at him. "I don't want it," I said.

"Maybe my number is higher than yours," he said.

How to explain? I sighed. "If your number turns out to

be higher than mine, then I'll be a loser," I said. "But if I open your envelope, it becomes a negotiation, and this isn't a negotiation." I didn't take his envelope. He took mine and agreed to my number.

I'm a lucky woman to be able to set my own terms. I am aware of my special circumstances. But I tell this story as a prelude to describing a mentality—an essential point of view—that made defining my own worth a priority in every arena of my life. Long before I was Judge Judy, when I was an unknown worker bee, I usually got what I wanted. *I set realistic goals consistent with my talents.* I never, for instance, wanted to sit on an appellate court. I'm not an academic. Truth be told, I hate to do research. I have a practical mind, and I was well suited for the trial court bench, not the appellate. *Stay with your strong suit. Concentrate on what you are naturally adept at.*

What does believing in yourself really mean? Are there nuts and bolts to being a strong self? Before I delve into the practical, let me set the context by telling you something about myself that might surprise you.

CHAPTER TWO

Pretty, Smart . . . or Something More?

My friend Elaine was the prettiest girl in school when we were growing up. She had two friends, Gail and Gwen, who were also beautiful—the cheerleaders, the fun girls.

I was not one of the prettiest, and I knew this early on, the way young girls do. If you can't be one of the prettiest, then you try to be the smartest girl around. That was my aspiration. So imagine my dismay in the sixth grade when the results of the IQ tests came back and I found out I wasn't the smartest girl either. Beauty and brains—I figured I could get by without one of them, but *both*? What was I to do?

In my lifetime I've seen many girls completely unravel because they're not pretty. And I've seen the further defeat in their eyes when they can't compensate by being talented or smart. If only I could reach out and tell them I was one of them, too. But my entire life took another trajectory for one simple reason: my parents—especially my father—let me know that I was special and I was an individual. That message created my future. I didn't have to be the smartest or the prettiest. I just had to be the best me.

If you're lucky, you have someone—in addition to your parents—who makes an impression on you when you're young. For me it was a teacher in the sixth grade named Irving Bernstein. He was a charming young man, probably no more than forty years old, although he seemed ancient to me. One week I was out sick, and Mr. Bernstein called. Kids don't usually receive calls at home from their teachers, so I was surprised. He said he just wanted to make sure I was okay and coming back to school soon because "you're a very special student."

I certainly knew I wasn't academically gifted, because there were kids who were much smarter. Mr. Bernstein was probably just being kind, but he put it into my head that I was special. I remember it all these years later. It's amazing how such a small gesture can make a lasting impression. My experience wasn't unusual. When I put the question on my Web site, What Would Judy Say?, asking folks to talk about the people who inspired them as kids, a large percentage of them told stories about teachers. Twenty, thirty, forty years later, they still remembered the names of special teachers who made a difference in their lives.

At some point I realized that I had to figure out what I was naturally good at and fine-tune those skills. I came up with the idea that I was naturally good at conversations and had common sense and people skills. So I set out to find a way of distinguishing myself. I admit now that my decision to go to law school came out of the desire to set myself apart from the other girls, as if to say, "All you pretty girls

can go around and do your thing, be pretty girls. I, on the other hand, am going to Washington to become a lawyer." That set me apart.

Somehow I realized, even as a young girl, that I wanted to be my own person. I watched my teenage friends with their boyfriends and saw what a status symbol having a boyfriend was, and how many concessions the girls had to make to be attractive to boys. I wasn't against the idea of being attractive to boys. I just didn't want it to define me. In the sixties, your status was defined by marrying a man who could support you. Being beholden never appealed to me as a life choice. I wanted my status to be something I created.

Let's face it, if your status and worth are dependent upon a mate, and the mate evaporates, what the hell is left?

For example, I knew some basics about myself. I didn't want to take orders from people as a regular diet. There was something very appealing about having a profession and being independent. I actually thought there were only three professions—medicine, dentistry, and the law. I thought about nursing for half a second, but when my father mentioned bedpans I lost interest pretty quickly. I didn't think I was cut out for service. That included politics. My father thought I was destined to be a United States senator because I was always arguing with him, but it wasn't for me. Rule by committee is usually useless and frustrating. (Footnote: see Congress.)

I realized that as a professional, nobody could take my financial independence away from me. If I had a law de-

gree, I could always make a living. That was important to me.

So where was all this self-esteem and self-awareness coming from? I can look back and see the seeds of who I am in my Brooklyn upbringing.

My father was a dentist. After he got out of the military service, my mother's father let him set up his dental office in an apartment above his appliance store, Best Gift Shop, on Broadway in Brooklyn. My dad did pretty well, and to help him grow his practice he had a contract from the welfare department to take on welfare patients. During that time, my family lived in an apartment at 225 Parkside Avenue, in a building where my grandmother and my aunts also lived.

My parents dreamed of buying a house—it was a small dream, and a sensible one. They wanted to buy a house where Dad could put his office in the front and we would live in the back. They had saved just a little bit of money, and they saw a house on Ocean Avenue in Brooklyn that was $9,000. At the same time, they had seen a house in Great Neck, New York, a much more substantial house that had been the home of a dentist, and that one was $15,000. My father went to his father and asked if he could lend him the down payment so he could afford the Great Neck house. His father, who was a wonderful man, said, "All you can afford is $9,000. That's the house that you buy." And for this reason my family stayed in Brooklyn and had a different kind of life than they might other-

wise have had. For one thing, my father had to work harder because the people had less money. He had to see more patients in order to make a living than if he had lived in the more affluent Great Neck.

My father inspired the line for me that has stayed with me all of my life. He said to me, "The measure of your financial success is, the older you get, the less you work for more money." In the beginning he had to treat twenty patients a day at $10 a visit. Later, he was able to change to ten patients a day at $100 a visit. He worked less and made more.

My parents taught me about being true to myself, and they also showed me that in the scheme of things the world was composed of givers and takers. My father loved my mother. He loved my brother and me. He loved being a dentist. He loved to play golf—but if I had to prioritize the loves of my father, I would say that his first love was himself. I think that is perfect, the way it should be. He taught me that the first person that you love has to be you, and you want to do everything that you can to nurture the most important person in your life.

The person in our household who did not put herself first was my mother. My mother was a giver, and her attitude was that it didn't matter what she personally would have liked, as long as everyone else was happy. That's what she wanted. She said repeatedly—and she really meant it—that her happiness was derived from the happiness of the people she loved.

My mother was not a doormat; she was a brilliant enabler. And in one sense she was the most important person in the room because she made such a positive impact on the lives of all the people she touched. Her worth was defined by how much she could give.

My mother was only in her fifties when she was diagnosed with cancer. She was very ill before she died, and she wasn't able to go out much. The year before she got sick she had just gotten her first mink coat, which was quite an event. Lying in her sickbed, it really bothered her that the coat wasn't being worn.

I was working in Manhattan at the time, and every night after work I'd go to visit my mother. On one of those nights I arrived to find a strange little man standing by my mother's bed. Before I could even ask who he was, she spoke up. "Now, Judy, I want you to listen to me. I won't get any pleasure out of seeing you wear my mink coat after I'm gone. But I'll get a great deal of pleasure out of seeing you wear my mink coat while I'm here. So this nice man is going to alter the mink so it fits you, and I want you to wear it when you come to see me, because it will give me so much pleasure. Do you understand?"

The thing is, I did understand. That was classic Mother. The coat was altered and she got to see me wearing her coat on several occasions before she died. She never stopped telling me how much pleasure it gave her.

When I caution women not to subjugate themselves to another person, I am not talking about my mother. Al-

though I would not have chosen her path, she was perfectly fulfilled in her role. She chose it; she understood its joys and trade-offs. She was happy.

That's a different story than the selfless women I sometimes see in both my personal and professional lives. These are women who are superpleasers. They've subjugated themselves to their families or to their jobs, and they really believe that if they just keep sacrificing, one day they'll end up the winner, or be appropriately recognized. You couldn't find more delusions in a gambling casino!

My wise and supportive father and my generous mother somehow gave me the gift of self, despite my coming into the world with no exceptional advantages, except for them. I was not part of an elite family. While dentistry is certainly a noble profession, it is not listed on the Social Register. I didn't have what today we call mentors or role models, so the path was kind of cloudy. But I did have one thing that was key to my development, and that was a great faith in myself and a strong sense of my identity. When I entered law school I was the only girl among 126 boys, and for some reason, instead of being intimidated, I relished the challenge. I enjoyed being the only one. And when one of my professors told me I was "taking the seat of a man," instead of making me feel uncertain—as if I didn't belong—it made me angry. I didn't think, "Maybe he's right." I thought, "I'll show you. You're going to choke on those words."

I entered American University as a combined six-year

law program student, which meant that the law school had to accept me after three years of college. Truth be told, the reason I chose AU was because that six-year program would get my foot firmly wedged in the door. I knew I was a lousy standardized-test taker, and that law school admissions were heavily weighted on those test scores. Those in the six-year program were guaranteed a seat in the law school. I was confident that once I was in, I'd be okay, but I had to ensure that I got a spot. AU's program was perfect—foot in the door, first in my class! Motto: *Plan ahead and don't let anyone or anything (like a standardized test) define you. If you want something, figure out a way to get it.*

In hindsight, I see now that my choice of law school was positive because it reinforced the feeling I'd had growing up that I was special. I put myself in a position that fortified that. I was like a hen in a rooster house. I felt exhilarated by it all. I felt powerful.

Then reality hit. It was called the first job.

My first job out of law school was with Cosmair, Inc. They had just gone into retail drugstores with L'Oréal of Paris. They hired two new lawyers out of school, a guy and myself. The guy began his career in product liability. They brought him into the legal unit right away. Me they gave a little office and a stack of papers and told me to call Carlisle Chemists and ask, "How many bottles of L'Oréal conditioner would you like? How many bottles of L'Oréal shampoo would you like?"

Wait a minute, I thought. I was a lawyer—the same as my fellow employee, but there I was. There's really no other

way to look at it than to say he was treated as a *lawyer* because he was a man. I was a *phone solicitor*. It was humiliating. I stuck it out, hoping things would improve. After about a year I left. At that point I very clearly said to myself: "Never again. My next job is going to be something I love to do."

In retrospect it was a positive experience because I learned a lesson. I strongly believe that if you are smart, there are no terrible experiences. There are only learning experiences. As long as you're willing to forgo the pity party, you'll add a valuable piece of information to your life's handbook.

If you hate going to work every day, you should be somewhere else, but how do you know what to do? Most people don't have the luxury of walking away from their jobs—which is why I lasted a year at L'Oréal. The key is to find something you're adept at doing, an area that isn't a daily battle and frustration. Then become indispensable doing it.

CHAPTER THREE

Priority YOU

Some women are natural born mommies. They can spend hours playing Tinkertoys with their kids. They enjoy making pancakes with smiley faces. For them the stay-at-home-mom designation really resonates. I have nothing but admiration for those women, if that's what they truly want. As I said, my mother was such a woman. We all benefited from her nurturing spirit, and more important, she was fulfilled.

Truth be told, some women do not thrive being caregivers. They are just not naturally adept at it. There's no shame in that. Men are not naturally caregivers, and at last look they were doing . . . just fine. *Know yourself and lose the guilt.*

Today when I look back on my life as a young mother and lawyer, I can't say I did everything right. It was a learning process. What I was learning was not to live someone else's idea of what my life should be. Men always had the birthright to be themselves. Not only the right, but the *expectation*. Being a man meant independence, the drive for success, chasing a career up the ladder. Women took sewing

and cooking classes in elementary school. Men chose careers. There were no stay-at-home dads then—or if there were, they had a title for them: unemployed. Imagine the shame. To my amazement, this hasn't changed much in the last thirty years.

I never pictured myself as a full-time homemaker like my mother, but early in my marriage, frustrated by the dead-end job at L'Oréal, I decided to start a family.

I wanted a family, but if I'm being honest, I chose pregnancy at the time because it was the easy—and acceptable—way out. Nobody would say, "But Judy, you're a lawyer. How can you give it up?" It was a free ride. Today when I talk to women about having children for the right reasons, I'm remembering myself. I had two children within two years, followed by a move to the suburbs—from New York City to Hartsdale in Westchester County. We were a typical family. Ron worked at a good job and I chased the kids around.

Personally, those weren't my happiest years. I loved my babies, but my brain was atrophying. I wasn't a bra-burning Betty Friedan feminist. I wasn't a rebel. I was just me—a woman who wanted more to her life than conversations with three-year-olds and songs by Big Bird. I remember the three years I spent at home with my kids. There was never a quiet moment. There was always a question, there was always a shadow, there was always an obligation. And none of it had anything to do with me. I looked forward to Wednesdays and Fridays, when my folks would visit. My mother

watched the kids, and I got to discuss some of my goals, some of the world, and some of life with my father. I remember the friend who said to me, "Why have children if you're not going to stay home with them and raise them?" I sensed it wasn't the right question, but I didn't know how to ask a different one. I did know that nobody asked my husband the same question!

It was my big secret. I had always been so self-assured and directed. For the first time in my life I felt trapped. I looked around my pleasant suburban neighborhood and realized that in the eyes of everyone around me, I was exactly where I was supposed to be. The women I knew all had children. They had all stopped working and seemed happy as clams. Their idea of success was having husbands who made enough money so that they didn't have to work and they could stay home. Some even had help with the kids and the house. Being stay-at-home moms was their measure of success. Were they really happy? Who knows? No one was talking.

Sometimes I tried to reorient my priorities, to remind myself of my life's gifts—my beautiful kids, my nice husband. What was there to complain about? Wasn't I supposed to want this? But it wasn't my dream.

It wasn't that I didn't love my children. I did—above all else. And it made me feel guilty that I didn't want to spend every waking moment in their company. But I couldn't escape the truth. So one day when my children were three and four, I did a very small thing that changed the direction

of my life. I took an afternoon off to attend a bar association luncheon. I'm not sure what I was thinking at the time—I probably just craved adult company. Being in that room full of lawyers was wonderful and stimulating. I wanted that feeling to be part of my everyday life.

As fate would have it, at the luncheon I started a conversation with an old classmate who was running the Manhattan office of the family court. He politely asked what I was doing, and I told him about my kids. I also mentioned that I was going a little nuts in the burbs.

He brightened. "You're exactly the person I need. Want a job?"

My heart lifted. I said yes on the spot. I practically floated home. Even today, thinking back, I can remember that feeling of joy, the sense of fullness, like I was myself again. No one was going to take it away from me.

So that afternoon I got on the phone and started networking for caretakers who would also be willing to help with the housework and maybe cook an occasional meal. I needed the ducks in a row when Ron and I had The Conversation.

Today, it sounds ridiculous that I had anxiety about telling my family that I was returning to my profession. Isn't that why I became a lawyer in the first place? Truth is, everyone—except my father and me—just assumed that it was a passing phase.

I started working in Manhattan, and Ron and I commuted from Hartsdale together every day. The kids seemed

relatively happy. However, I discovered that going back to work meant, as a woman, embarking on a wild juggling act. The kids wanted at least one parent to be present when they tried to do a backflip or performed in a school play. I was in the having-it-all mentality, so I began to arrange my days around an impossible schedule. I'd leave the house about quarter past six, get to court at seven-thirty, work my tail off until noon, and then sneak out. I'd jump in the car and drive like a bat out of hell to Hartsdale, make an appearance at the day care, ooh and ahh over their performances, and then speed back to court in Lower Manhattan, arriving minutes before it reconvened at two-thirty. This was definitely not a healthy schedule. It lasted about two months, until the day the judge announced that we would be reconvening at two the following day. This was a problem because one of my kids happened to have a very important (to a four-year-old) swimming exhibition that day.

I said to Ron, who was in private practice and could set his own hours, "I have to be in court tomorrow afternoon. *You* need to go to the swim meet."

He had a look of incredulity. "That's not our deal. If you want to work, that's fine, but your job is a hobby."

I still remember that moment. Women remember everything—every slight, every argument, *everything*. Ron and I have enjoyed a lovely, healthy, "ex" relationship for the past thirty-five years. I'm sure he doesn't remember that moment. I didn't confront him. I didn't argue with him. But in my mind I thought, "This is not going to work."

I realized that he had defined my worth and assumed I would accept it when he told me, in effect, that my work didn't matter.

Defining yourself is what *you* do. You're a jerk if you let somebody else do it. *Follow your dreams. Work hard. Set realistic goals. Find your natural talent. Let no one drag you down.* I realized that I could never be a happy, successful human being unless I defined myself.

We were divorced within a year, and I vowed to never again let another person define me.

As my kids got older, and later when I was a stepmother to Jerry's kids, I tried to inculcate that spirit in all of them. It was the greatest gift I could give them—to show them a woman who loved them, but loved herself just as much. Did I make them a hot lunch every day? Did I bake them cookies after school? Was I at the playground with them at three in the afternoon? No. But I did the best I could.

You've got to lose the guilt, but you also have to be smart about evaluating the trade-offs. You're not Superwoman! Not long after I was appointed to the bench, while I was still juggling career and parenting, I was approached by a very successful matrimonial law firm in New York City. They were anxious to have a family court judge on their letterhead, and offered me a position for considerably more money than I was making as a family court judge. It was tempting, but I had to realistically evaluate what kind of commitment I'd be making—client meetings on the weekends, trial preparation until midnight, hustling for business. I

recognized that the demands of that job didn't align well with my family obligations. So there was give and take.

It wasn't perfection, but perfection is impossible for anyone. We all know women who stayed home, baked bread, were class moms, drove to soccer matches—and their kids turned out to be bums. There are no guarantees. But as one gal wrote on my Web site, "If Mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy!"

She described how she went to grad school and became a teacher when her kids started school. Her husband didn't participate much, so in addition to her job, she had to juggle the majority of the household tasks. She had, however, such a clear sense of self. She had her priorities straight. She wrote, "I became protective of what little free time I had, and learned to say no to requests I really didn't want to do. I took shortcuts with convenience foods such as premade cookie dough and a bread machine. The kids learned to do for themselves a lot. But I think I was a better mother because I had a life of my own."

Another woman who wrote in caused me to laugh out loud with her suggested shortcuts, which she called survival strategies: "Put the kids to bed in school clothes to make mornings easier, set the clock ahead an hour to get the small fry in bed faster, treat yourself to an ice cream on a regular basis, completely guilt-free." Tongue-in-cheek, but she has a point.

I have to admit it surprises me that our culture is still debating the work versus stay-at-home choice as if it were

a crushing dilemma. The so-called mommy wars are raging, as if there were a right or wrong way that suits everyone. We all want what is best for our children, but to assume there's only a single perfect path is to deny mommies self-determination. You might think that staying home with your kids is a higher calling, and maybe it is for you, but that's not true for everybody. The woman who sacrifices her own worth out of guilt or peer pressure or laziness is not going to be a happy mom—or a happy human being.

So what is the right answer? It begins with knowing yourself, considering yourself a person of value in your own right, apart from your husband, kids, or anyone else. It means letting go of the idealistic image of family perfection. It means realizing that parental love takes many forms.

I'd be the first to admit that the reason I stayed at home with my kids was because I was unhappy in my job and didn't feel confident about my career prospects at the time. It was easy to hide behind the kids because it was such an overwhelmingly acceptable choice. I didn't have to look too deeply into my own psyche or evaluate my needs and prospects. I had a pass on that.

Here's a radical thought: maybe it's the case in some circumstances that having two working parents is the best thing in the world for kids. Maybe being that kind of role model for your daughters—and also your sons—has a lifelong value that is unappreciated.

The point is, don't leave yourself out of the picture.

Don't assume there's only one way to live successfully. Push the envelope a little. Be yourself. Love yourself enough to pursue your dream. The kids will ultimately benefit. I can guarantee that none of my children would say I chose wrong when I took that job in the family court. Adult children worry about their nonworking mothers. *What is she doing? Maybe we should invite her to spend a week or two with us. Is she happy? Is she okay?* My children never worry about me, and it's wonderful. When they do, it will be that role reversal of parent and child—and I'm not ready for that!

Life is full of inevitable stressors, but we also have areas we control. One of those areas is deciding how many children to have. There's a cultural pull to have at least two or three kids. Parents worry that an only child will be shortchanged in some way, but they still have to take into consideration the emotional and financial stresses of having multiple children. I have a friend who gave birth to her first child in her late thirties. She's a very successful writer with a career she enjoys, and she never considered not working. But when her child was a year old, she said to me, "I worry about my daughter growing up alone. I feel it would be best for her to have a sibling." I told her to get a dog—and I was only half joking. She barely had time for one child and she wasn't planning on cutting back on her work. Did she think that having two would be better for her husband and the family? Did she think the magical having-it-all fairy was going to descend and make every-

thing go smoothly? She later told me it was the best advice she ever got. It's twenty-one years later. She has a fabulous daughter—and a Pulitzer.

There's a certain insanity in pressuring women to keep having children—not because they want them, but because everyone is convinced it's the "right" thing to do. I know a woman who was content to stop at one until her mother-in-law scared the hell out of her by asking, "What if something happened to him?" In royal circles they call that having "an heir and a spare." Not a particularly great reason to have a second child.

And then there are the couples who are childless by choice. In August 2013, *Time* magazine ran a provocative cover story titled, "The Childfree Life: When Having It All Means Not Having Children." The article, by Lauren Sandler, describes how our society regularly says womanhood hinges on motherhood. Sandler writes, "The decision to have a child or not is a private one, but it takes place, in America, in a culture that often equates womanhood with motherhood. Any national discussion about the struggle to reconcile womanhood with modernity tends to begin and end with one subject: parenting. If you're a woman who's not in the mommy trenches, more often than not you're excluded from the discussion." Sandler explores the familiar tropes about childless women—that they're selfish and flaky. But she also points to a new acceptance of childlessness as a legitimate personal choice.

I enjoyed reading an open letter to the childfree by

choice, written by Kasey Mullins, a mother of two. She wrote, "If you're childfree by choice, GOOD FOR YOU. Way better to know such a thing, go on living your life and doing amazing things with it rather than have kids out of some sense of biblical or maternally induced guilt and realize that they're a whole lot of work you weren't quite prepared for. Is motherhood the greatest thing you can do with your womanhood? NO. Absolutely not. Loving is the greatest thing you can do with your womanhood and anyone that tells you that you have to raise a child of your own to earn a mother heart is a liar and their pants are probably on fire. Was Mother Teresa any less compassionate because she never passed a mucus plug? Is Oprah's empire any less because she never soothed a newborn through colic or argued with a teenager about poor life choices?"

Funny story. One day Jerry and I were browsing in a department store in New York when a youngish woman walked up to me carrying a cute little dog. "Judy, you probably don't remember me, but we went to school together . . ."

I stared at her youthful, wrinkle- and stress-free face. I was confused. "You're Jody Smith's daughter?"

"No," she said, "I'm Jody Smith."

"No children, right?" I said.

"Right. How did you know?"

"Because we wear our children on our faces."

The point is that every woman is first a *self*, with her own desires, needs, talents, and ambitions. The choices

about marital status, career status, and motherhood status are hers alone to make. No one can take that choice away from you unless you let them.

If motherhood is your choice, go for it. But don't forget that if Mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.

CHAPTER FOUR

Work You Love

I've said throughout this book, choose work that fits your style and natural abilities. That's what I did, and it's how I got into TV.

I knew I had a unique personality. I knew I had good comedic timing, which I got from my father. (Dentists are notorious for being joke tellers.) I understood that if you're going to dress somebody down, you have to add a spoonful of sugar. I understood storytelling. I understood people. If somebody was trying to sell me a bill of goods and it didn't square with my life's experience, it was suspect and usually not true.

At the time, I was a worker bee whose favorite lunch was a Wendy's chicken sandwich. Saturday nights my kids and I went shopping at the A&P and then to Fuddruckers next door for a burger. That was it. But I knew that I had something, and when the opportunity came I took it. I didn't land on *Judge Judy* by accident. It came to me because I fully understood who I was.

Here's the story. It was 1992 and I was a supervising judge in the Manhattan family court. I believe that all

courts should be open to the public and the press. It was a subject of debate, but I thought that closed courtrooms only protect bad lawyering and bad judging. That was my experience. As a young lawyer in family court, I found that because it was a closed court with no public or press, it was a perfect dumping ground for incompetents who were owed a political favor. When I came to the family court as an attorney, there were no cameras in the courtroom and the public was excluded. When I became a judge, there were no cameras. When I was appointed the supervising judge, I said, "I'm going to have cameras in my courtroom. You don't have to have them in yours. I'm going to have them in mine." I figured, as our grandmothers used to say, I would shame them into it. I had nothing to hide. The public has a right to see that the law is being dispensed appropriately, whether it's criminal court, civil court, or family court. A judge who doesn't allow cameras in the courtroom is a judge who is unwilling to bear up under public scrutiny.

I wasn't afraid of the scrutiny. I already had my fair share of critics—people who said my judicial temperament wasn't conciliatory enough. It didn't matter because I was a successful family court judge.

Years later, Larry King asked me, "What makes a good judge?" I responded, "Common sense and street smarts, and the ability and the desire to gather all the information you can. A trial is supposed to be the search for the truth, not about who's wearing a nicer tie. And unless you're willing to shun everything else—politics, whether it helps your ca-

reer—and just devote yourself to that search for the truth, don't be a judge." That's still my belief.

So my courtroom was open to reporters, and one of them who came quite often was Heidi Evans, who worked for the *New York Daily News*. Heidi was married to Josh Getlin, who worked at the *Los Angeles Times*. In late 1992 Josh was working on a three-part series about people from different parts of the country who shake up the bureaucracy. Heidi suggested he sit in on my courtroom, and he did over the course of a month. His article appeared on Valentine's Day, 1993. It had one of those long headlines—"Law and Disorder: Tart, tough-talking Judge Judith Sheindlin presides over the grim pageant of dysfunction known as Manhattan's family court. 'I can't stand stupid, and I can't stand slow,' she snaps." It was a fair, colorful, and very accurate portrayal of what went on in my courtroom. It got a lot of play, and I liked the piece, although I wasn't used to being in that kind of spotlight. The article received national attention, which I thought was a very positive thing for family court.

Soon after Josh's article was published, I got a call from *60 Minutes*. They wanted to visit my courtroom and see for themselves. Well, if you're going to talk the talk you have to walk the walk, so I said they were welcome just like any other press, as long as they followed the rules.

Was I nervous about having *60 Minutes* in my courtroom? A little. You never know how they're going to portray you, and as I've said earlier, my courtroom was not

without controversy. But it was a risk I had to take. I certainly wasn't going to change the way I did business because *60 Minutes* was in the room.

Morley Safer was the correspondent. He sat in the courtroom for a month and he also interviewed me. I liked Morley. He seemed to get me. However, I had no idea what angle he'd take for the program. I thought, how bad could it be?

If you watched me work, you certainly couldn't deny that I knew what I was doing. You couldn't say I lacked perspective, and while you might not agree with me (and many didn't), there was always a rational basis for my decisions. You couldn't fault me for being inept, dishonest, or lazy. Mind you, not everybody worked hard in the family court. There were some people who viewed it as a rest home, but I worked hard from early in the morning until they shut the lights out.

The night *60 Minutes* aired, Jerry and I did not have a viewing party with our family and friends. I remember that we sat in our bedroom with the door closed—just the two of us watching. When it was over and we thought it had been favorable, we gave a sigh of relief. Then we went out to the Silver Spoon Diner on First Avenue and had a tuna fish sandwich to celebrate with our best friends, Elaine and Barry.

A couple of days later I got a call from Jane Dystel, a literary agent who thought I should write a book. I liked the idea of showing an honest view of the human drama

that took place every day in family court. So I worked with Josh, and the next year my first book, *Don't Pee on My Leg and Tell Me It's Raining*, was published. I loved having a platform for my perspective and ideas. While I got a lot of positive feedback, not everyone within the court or political system was happy. I didn't pull any punches. Some people were offended. If I'd wanted to sugarcoat it, I would never have written a book. Being politically correct was by no means my strong suit. PC had become the biggest bully of the twentieth century. My term was up in a couple of years. I wasn't particularly worried about re-appointment, but you never knew.

Then one day I was eating lunch in my chambers when I got a call from a young woman named Sandy Spreckman, who had been a segment producer for the TV show *The People's Court*, which had gone off the air a couple of years before. She told me that she and her friend Kaye Switzer, who had also been a producer, had watched the *60 Minutes* interview many times. They thought that I would be a great television judge.

At that point I'd been in the family court for twenty-five years, and while I wasn't even thinking about stepping down, I was getting tired. I worked at an intense pace. It showed. I didn't have the time or money to pamper myself. Jerry and I didn't take many vacations. I loved my work, but it was grueling. That evening I told Jerry about the call and asked him what he thought. Jerry's a cautious guy, but he said what he always said: "If that's what you want, go for it."

Maybe I was ready for a new adventure. Never being one to close doors before seeing what was on the other side, I flew out to California. I only had time for a short trip and I stayed at a modest hotel. This was not a glamour trip. Sandy and Kaye schlepped me around, pitching the idea, which was basically *People's Court* with personality.

In one of the meetings I met Larry Lyttle, who had just started his own company, Big Ticket Television, under the Spelling Television umbrella. Larry *got* me. He was direct and firm: "If you sign on with me now, I will guarantee that we'll do a pilot. You have twenty-four hours to decide."

So I said yes. It was that simple.

However, producing a pilot wasn't simple at all. The pilot was a disaster. They really didn't have a sense of who I was. They thought I was an actress who should read a script. The cases were ridiculous. They didn't have the ring of truth because the litigants were actors, too.

I knew it could only work if they let me be *me*. No script, just working with the facts of cases and the real people who appeared before me. So how were we going to sell the show? They finally decided to scrap the pilot and create a sales tape with snippets from *60 Minutes* and other interviews. I went to NATPE, a conference at which TV programming is sold, and schmoozed with the station managers. We managed to get picked up by enough stations to get on the air for the first year. We didn't have great time periods or the best stations, but we were on.

Choosing a title was an interesting experience. *Judge*

Judy wasn't my first choice. That shows you I wasn't thinking straight, because if you're smart, you name the show *Judge Judy* and then they can't replace you.

I considered *Judy Justice*. In family court, sometimes the court officers would be dealing with a guy who didn't bring his child support money as he was required to do, and they'd say, "Better get the money or you'll be in for a dose of Judy justice." So I thought it might be a fun title. I was overruled. *Judge Judy* it was.

The first time someone introduced me as "Judge Judy," I was offended. I have a last name and it's Sheindlin. I thought "Judge Judy" sounded too much like a cartoon character. But I got used to my fans referring to me that way, and now I even like it.

In the beginning I didn't have much input, because I didn't have much power. I was a novice. But I was learning. My learning curve was rapid. I wasn't a kid, and at fifty-one I had to be a quick study. As soon as I made the show my own, my influence grew stronger. Of course, everybody had a different vision for what *Judge Judy* should be. *I* knew what I should be, which is just who I am. I hear cases. I gather information. I try to have the right thing happen at the end of the case, try to offer a moral lesson, try to do a little teaching while I'm at it. Yes, I can be a little rough on people. Sometimes you have to shake somebody by the scruff of the neck (figuratively, of course) for them to get it—and even then they don't always get it, but I try.

Judge Judy has what you could call a subversive effect.

The cases might seem lightweight, but the message is not that different from the one I was dishing out to women in family court: *don't be a victim*. Victims abound, and I've especially seen this with women who attach to men who beat them—physically, emotionally, or both. They finally get up the courage to leave and immediately pick the same man, only with a different name. They're serial victims.

Then you have the women who are economically victimized by men. They are so desperate to be mated that they will share their credit card, the key to their apartment, and the second set of keys to their car with the first character they meet in a bar. They get burned. Without missing a beat, they find another bum. A good mate will enrich your life. A bum will destroy it. It's not complicated.

The message: *create an independent you*. Profession, career, sports, hobbies, interests—a whole lot of things go into making you a complete and independent person. A substantial person will seek out a substantial mate. If you have nothing to offer, chances are you will attract a whole lot of nothing.

I was very fortunate in my choice of a second husband. Jerry Sheindlin has always thrilled at my success, and supported my choices. He has a great sense of humor about being "Judge Judy's husband." When I started doing the show, Jerry was a judge in the Bronx Supreme Court. He still enjoys telling the story of what happened one day. A group of female high school students were sitting in on a murder trial where the details were particularly gruesome.

At the lunch break, Jerry ate with the students, explaining the intricacies of the case. He was pleased to see that the girls were especially attentive. When he asked if there were questions, every single girl raised her hand. He thought this level of interest was amazing. He called on the first girl, and flushed with excitement, she asked, "Are you really Judge Judy's husband?"

He smiled, just a little deflated. "Yes," he said. "Another question?"

The hands went up again and he called on a second girl. "Does Judge Judy film her TV show in New York or California?" she asked.

And so it went around the room. As they were preparing to leave, the girls asked Jerry if he could autograph their notebooks. As he gladly took up his pen, one of them said, "Could you just sign it 'Judge Judy's husband'?"

Jerry enjoyed coming home that night and telling me this story, laughing all the way.

CHAPTER FIVE

It's Never Too Early

Judge Judy is still fun for me. I still get a kick out of coming to work every day, and it's been close to twenty years. I never expected the show to last that long. In 2003, when I did a second *60 Minutes* interview with Morley Safer, I told him I'd be satisfied with a good ten-year run. I said, "It would be lovely if we could end on a high note and for me to say, 'Ten years and I still had people watching and I had a second career that was a blast.'" Eleven years after that interview, I'm having a blast, and people are still watching.

I'm one of those really blessed people. I have never had a job that I hated to go to on Monday morning—except the first one, which was short-lived. I've always looked forward to going to work. It has always been an adventure, whether it was trying cases in the family court, going to work as a family court judge, being a supervising judge in a family court, or this almost-twenty-year TV gig. What could be better than enjoying what you do every day?

That's the reason I tell people that the greatest gift that a parent can give to a child is figuring out what that child is naturally adept at. Whether it's science, math, art, or com-

munications, target that skill. When a child excels in something, it creates confidence that lasts a lifetime. Once you've tasted success, you want to replicate that feeling.

A well-known old song poses the question of what makes one person a hero and another a zero. The lyrics conclude that the trait is confidence.

Children need to be shown how they can be heroes, not zeroes. When my granddaughter Sarah turned seventeen, she asked if she could spend a month going to work with me on the *Judge Judy* set. I immediately agreed, hoping that she'd get a rush from doing something she loved. She was a smart girl, but she lacked confidence and was a little bit stuck in a routine.

On the set Sarah didn't get any special treatment. The show made her a stage PA and gave her a walkie-talkie and responsibility for helping move litigants from one place to another during cases. She also helped review the cases pouring in and choosing the most promising. She became completely involved in the work and did very well. At the end of the month, she had a whole new sense of herself as somebody who could find a passion and a purpose.

For Mother's Day, Sarah gave me a lovely card, in which she wrote:

> *Dear Nana,*
>
> *I just want to take the time to truly thank you for everything you do for me. You have opened so many doors for me that I never would have been able to open on my own.*

You have been a very strong influence on all the choices I make in my life, and are my biggest role model. When we are together, I feel like we're unstoppable. Happy Mother's Day to the best Second Mother around.

Love,
Sarah

That kid's going to go far.

When you're building confidence, don't challenge your children with things that would make *you* happy. Allow them to find what makes them happy. I saw this demonstrated with my grandson Casey.

Casey is my oldest grandchild, and I was pretty insistent that he go to law school. He's one of the brightest young men I know, with great social skills and an in-depth understanding of a wide range of subjects. I thought law school would help him focus and structure his thinking. Casey went to law school. He did learn focus, structure, and a business perspective.

After he graduated, he came to me and said, "I want to have an important discussion with you. I would really like to try my hand in the social media business. That's where I think my skills lie." At the time, I didn't really appreciate the massive impact of social media. It sounded kind of vague. He had a proposal: "Give me a chance to do social media for your program."

My initial instinct was to say, "No, you've got to go find a job as a lawyer and use your education." Then I stopped

myself and thought, "If you're going to talk the talk, you've got to walk the walk." If my twenty-four-year-old grandchild was telling me that he thought his natural ability was in social media, why would I insist that he go find a job in a law firm filing papers and serving motions and doing whatever you have to do as a first-year graduate lawyer?

Judge Judy had not yet become involved in social media, so I gave him a chance. I didn't understand the whole process, and I needed someone like Casey who really got me and got my brand to be my voice out there.

It's paid off for the show. The viewing audience has been up 6 to 10 percent a year since we started a heavy involvement in social media. I suspect a part of that is due to Casey. But more importantly, it's another striking example of what is possible when we allow our kids to follow their own dreams rather than our dreams for them.

We should start building confidence in our kids from day one—when they're still infants. Allow them success, one building block at a time, and watch them construct themselves into beautiful, strong people.

Judy's 10 Laws of Success

Being successful and happy in life isn't like falling off a log. It takes consciousness, skill, and the willingness to work for it. In my life I've found myself returning again and again to some key principles. They're very simple, and they might even seem self-evident, but if you adhere to them, your prospects for happiness explode exponentially. They are:

Be indispensable.
Think fearlessly and strategically.
Use your assets.
Don't blow the first impression.
Lighten up.
Practice punctuality.
Create an interesting person.
Demand your worth.
Do the right thing.
Leave a footprint.

#1: Be Indispensable

This is a book about finding success and happiness in life, but how do you measure success? In our society, success is often considered synonymous with making a lot of money. But let's face facts. Not every person is going to climb the corporate ladder or become a multimillion-dollar entrepreneur. Nor does everyone aspire to that. Self-esteem and contentment are achieved by knowing you are making a unique contribution, no matter what you do. There isn't a person alive who doesn't feel empowered by hearing, "We couldn't have done it without you."

If I were going to give one basic piece of advice that every woman, young or old, can put in her hip pocket as a guarantee for success, I would say this: in any endeavor, always strive to become indispensable. Being indispensable gives you job security. It also gives you a sense of accomplishment that no one can take away. Feeling needed and relied upon is good for your soul—and for your career.

A friend in real estate told me the story of her assistant, a single mother who started working for her and set out to learn the business as quickly as possible. Little by little my friend began to delegate more and more responsibilities to her assistant—to the point that the assistant had

details at her fingertips that my friend didn't. She was indispensable.

There are a lot of jobs like that, and when you become indispensable, that leads to more flexibility and independence. I know an attorney who started her career as a law secretary to an appellate judge. She did her job so well that when she had kids and could only work part-time, the judge bent over backward to keep her, allowing her to work two days a week at home. That's power—to make such a vital contribution that your job accommodates you.

A successful woman is smart enough to understand that meeting the needs of others will get her far. It's important to be the person who is trusted, admired, and who provides something that no one else can.

When I started in family law, I was intent on fine-tuning my skill to become the top trial lawyer in the place. I wanted the best and most important cases directed to me. I wanted the supervisors to think of me first when there was a serious case. Being good was a way of becoming indispensable.

It's a very satisfying feeling to know you're indispensable. Being indispensable builds skill and it also builds confidence. Confidence builds success. It's a totally positive cycle. The great rush you get from success is an emotion you want to replicate.

What else can you do to be indispensable? You can have information. I got some flak when I wrote in a book about developing my Hoover File.

Maybe it was the name that threw people. J. Edgar Hoover always kept a file on people, which he used for blackmail. Not a nice thing. My concept of a Hoover File, which I developed early in my career, was not so ominous. It was just common sense. It was a survival tool. I had my eyes and ears open at all times, and I took note of what people said and did. Face it, life can be treacherous out there, depending on the business you're in. Having your ear to the ground and knowing what's really going on gives you power. I only had to use my Hoover File once while I was in the family court, but it was for a good cause—the well-being of a family. Enough said about that, except to underscore the importance of being alert and aware. Don't just be a potted plant.

#2: Think Fearlessly and Strategically

In the family court I realized that my decisions wouldn't necessarily be popular—and that's an understatement. I decided early on that I couldn't worry about being embarrassed or making an occasional mistake. Criticism came with the job title. Second-guessing myself was futile. I had to focus. I also realized that I had to be very strategic in order to advance. When I started practicing, the court system was a man's world. I had to figure out how to make an impact. I had an early opportunity to test my strategic chops when I came up with an idea for how the court could solve a big problem and save a lot of money, too—a bureaucrat's dream. I went to my boss and told him my idea. He loved it so much he presented it to his superiors—as *his own* idea!

After the powers that be expressed enthusiasm, my boss came back to me for the specifics, because, of course, he had no idea how this plan was supposed to work. I knew I had to appear cooperative, but at the same time I wanted to get credit for my idea. "It's hard to explain," I said seriously. "Let's set up a meeting. I can always outline the specifics myself." He gave me a look that roughly translated to "Not on your life." He was confident that he could pull it off.

He set up a meeting, which I attended. There were some high-level people in the room, including Mayor Ed Koch, who would subsequently appoint me to the family court bench. With his captive audience, my boss tried to explain *my* idea as if it had sprung fully formed from his own brain. The more he talked, the deeper the hole he dug for himself. It was becoming painfully clear that he didn't know what he was talking about. He finally turned to me to supply the details. My idea. My credit. My future.

Being fearless means standing up for yourself. Timidity does not make you happy. Women are notoriously bad self-promoters. I always understood this about myself, so I let other people toot my horn. I figured that instead of concentrating on ways to promote myself, I'd concentrate on excelling so that others would do the heavy lifting of praising me. That's a good policy up to a point. It doesn't mean allowing yourself to get stepped on. Sometimes you have to speak up because no one else is going to do it for you. I have a friend who worked her tail off, and her boss kept promising her a raise, but it never came through. She kept making excuses for him, trusting that eventually he would see her worth. The last straw came at Christmas, five years after being promised a raise every year, when her boss handed her a cassette with his favorite Christmas music. He said, "I can't give you any money, but I want you to know how much I value you."

You've got to speak up for yourself. Funny story: A man wanted to get his mother something special for her birth-

day, but she was elderly and couldn't take care of a dog or cat. He decided to get her an exotic bird. He purchased a $5,000 parrot who could speak five languages. He sent the bird as a surprise, and called the next day. "Mom," he said, "how did you like the bird?"

"It was delicious," she replied.

He was shocked. "Mom, that was a $5,000 bird. It spoke five languages."

"It should have said something."

#3: Use Your Assets

When I was a young lawyer in family court, there was a judge who enjoyed ogling. He'd look at me and say, "Nice legs." (Because my legs were my least impressive physical attribute, I suppose even he couldn't bring himself to say, "Nice tits"—although that's what he meant.) Was I offended? Was I outraged? No, I'd give him my brightest smile. It was okay with me if he stared at my legs until his eyeballs fell on the floor—as long as I got the ruling I wanted.

That probably sounds shocking to those living in our current politically correct universe. Let's be real. I understand that as women we want to be respected for our abilities and our intellects. But the idea that we should all treat each other as if we are neutered, genderless creatures is just plain silly. I say to women—and to men, too—use *all* of your assets. I find it disingenuous for women to wear short skirts, high heels, and flattering sweaters and then complain because men look at them.

I figured this out as a lawyer because there are few places that so rely on personal appeal as a courtroom. Use my feminine wiles? Damn right! It's not just women who do this. I remember going to see Jerry when he was a law-

yer. He was delivering his summation to the jury—six men and six women. Jerry cut a cute figure and I saw him unbutton his jacket, put his hands in his pockets, and strut back and forth. He was working that jury like a hooker on a street corner. He probably would have won anyway, but he was using his assets—*all* of them.

I often hear women lawyers talk about feeling as if they should be revered solely for their intellect. I say, if you want to wear a shroud, put a shroud on, but as long as you are dressing yourself up and putting on jewelry and lipstick in the morning, you really want somebody to say that's a nice package—and there's absolutely nothing wrong with that. For me a woman professional using all her attributes is no different from basketball or football players using all of their attributes. You wouldn't say to a basketball player, "We only want you to jump six inches high. We know you can do twelve, but tone it down." It's the same with a woman professional. Use all your God-given assets. Be smart and clever. You are a whole package.

Women have a gift for putting a little honey on the spoon even when they're being professionally strong. Instead of hiding that gift of femininity, I say we should use that natural ability to nurture and be appealing. The most successful women I know are tough as nails, but they know how to spread the honey around. If you walk out of a challenging business meeting with people smiling, you've accomplished something priceless. In success, you don't burn bridges.

Women often have certain innate abilities, and one of them is that they're natural nurturers. If that's a quality you bring to your job, it's a good thing. Don't shy away from it. I have made it a habit throughout my career to always remember people's birthdays. I have a little book and I write them down. I always send a card or gift or make a call. These days, since I'm the boss, people always remember *my* birthday. It's a given. The Associated Press remembers *my* birthday! *Entertainment Tonight* and various news broadcasts eagerly report another year gone. But I make a point of directly acknowledging people who are part of my personal and professional life. If you start doing that when you're an underling, it builds goodwill as you advance. I've noticed that men don't do this. They might have their secretaries send a card or gift, but it's not the same thing as a personal acknowledgment. In these small ways, women use their natural assets.

Using your assets as a woman also means using your *brain*. Mark Gungor runs marriage seminars. He gave a very funny but all-too-true description of the difference between men's and women's brains, called "A Tale of Two Brains." Men's brains, he said, are composed of many little boxes. There's a box for the car, a box for money, a box for the kids, a box for the job, a box for the marriage, and so on. The rule, according to Gungor, is that the boxes don't touch. When a man discusses a particular subject, he pulls that box out, opens it, and discusses only what is in that box. Then he closes the box and puts it away, being very careful

not to touch any other box. Gungor added that men have one very special box, which is their favorite, and it's called the nothing box because there's nothing in it. That accounts for how they can sit motionless in front of the TV for six hours. In contrast, women's brains are like a big ball of wire, and everything is connected to everything else. It's like the Internet superhighway. The job touches the car, which touches the house, which touches the mother-in-law, which touches the job. Women remember everything because everything is connected and is fueled by emotion.

When I heard this description, it occurred to me that this quality of emotional interconnection gives women a terrific benefit in business. We can put it all together and figure out solutions while the men are packing and unpacking their individual boxes.

#4: Don't Blow the First Impression

Eleven-year-olds aren't the most self-aware people in the world, and I was no different. I still remember the birthday party at Lucy Gleicher's house. I was wearing a big Mexican skirt. At one point, as I sashayed through the room on my way to the bathroom, my flouncy skirt knocked over a bowl of potato chips lying on the table. I didn't even notice, just kept on walking. When I came out of the bathroom, I noticed that nobody would talk to me. I had no idea why I was getting the cold shoulder.

I finally got the story from a girl at school the next day. She explained why nobody was talking to me: "You knocked over a bowl of chips and just totally ignored it for somebody else to pick it up."

I was oblivious. "When did I do that?"

"At Lucy's birthday party."

This happened sixty years ago, but I still remember the pain of being shunned. I also remember how oblivious I was, which is why this is also a story about first impressions. It's a fact that many young people go through their lives with no idea of the impression they're leaving. That's especially true of the first impression.

I've had years of speaking at different kinds of com-

mencement exercises, some for junior high schools, some for high schools, some for colleges and law schools. There's always been a recurring theme, although I say it in many different ways. That is: "Kids, if you remember nothing else of what I say here today, remember this. You only have one chance to make a first impression."

Many young people today go out to interviews at schools, a first job, and even a first date, and they don't understand the importance of that first meeting. The strong handshake. The looking directly in the eyes. The not taking a phone call when your prospective employer is interviewing you. And not sitting at a table and watching your phone in your lap either, when you're trying to make a first impression on a prospective employer—or a young man or a young woman.

You only have one chance to make a first impression. That's in an interview for college, for a specialized high school, for a first job. There was a time when if you were a college graduate the doors were open for employment opportunities. Now the doors are open to any fast-food place, where you can get a job for $9 an hour as a college graduate. Something has to set you apart from everybody else. Make a checklist for yourself. Make sure you're clean. If you're a man you're shaven. Your hair is appropriate. If you're a woman there are no stains around your collar, the cuffs are clean, you're wearing makeup for daytime. You're not going to a disco. You're going for a job interview. Take out the gum. Be prepared. In your pocketbook you should always have a

packet of tissues, a little box of mints, a lipstick or lip gloss, and aside from your phone (turned off, not on vibrate), a pen, and a pad of paper. Don't forget to include a business card with your phone number and e-mail address on it.

After the interview, write a note: "Thank you very much for your time. I know you have many applicants, but I want to tell you it was a pleasure meeting you and I hope you will seriously consider my application." Simple courtesy sets you apart. It's a life skill.

The Internet is something that's wonderful and educational. It can bring the world together. It can also memorialize every dumb act that you've ever done, so think it through before you post pictures of that famous drunken party. Bottom line: If you don't want to see it again or visit it in twenty years, don't take it. If you would be uncomfortable watching it with your children or having your grandmother see it, don't post it. It's like a footprint that never fades. Take your bra off. Smoke from a bong at a party, and then go for your interview at Harvard and see how far you get. Those are your first impressions. By the way, I don't think that those first impressions are different for men, except for the lip gloss.

The Internet has had an equalizing effect on our communications, but I have to admit I still get shocked when I receive a text message or an e-mail from an otherwise intelligent professional person that reads: r u going to the dinner? LMK. (Translation: Are you going to the dinner? Let me know.)

When it comes to the power of first impressions, I thought the experience of a gal on my Web site said it all. She wrote about an assignment years ago for her college sociology class. Her group decided to test how they'd be treated if they dressed differently. First they went into a high-end retail store dressed very conservatively. The next day they returned dressed in what would have been considered rebellious clothing of the day. They didn't change their behavior at all. This woman wrote, "I don't have enough space here to describe how differently we were received on our second visit, by shop employees and security alike. Finally a security guard actually asked us to leave! As we went to walk out he stopped us and made us go out the *back*! The funniest part? We were all law enforcement seniors, each having a 3.9 or better GPA. Today, as a business owner, I have been appalled at how some job seekers present themselves. Really? You thought I'd find that shirt with 'Got Pot?' on it amusing? Next!"

There was a young woman who appeared as a litigant on my program who was also a lawyer. I was totally taken with her personality and her confidence. After the case was over, I did what I had never done before and have never done since—I had producers contact her because I believed that with the right support she could do something special. It turned out she was interested in writing a book, and she had a compelling story to tell.

I introduced her by phone to my literary agent, and they set up a meeting. This was quite generous on my

agent's part, because the woman was completely unknown. However, we both felt that she was worth encouraging. My agent set up a lunch meeting at a very nice New York restaurant. After the lunch she called me. "You're absolutely correct," she said. "She's very smart, and her opinion is interesting. She communicates very well." Then she added, "I think she might be a problem, though." It turned out my potential protégée had come to the meeting at this fine restaurant wearing a T-shirt that read, "Fuck Yoga." I would say that's the very definition of a bad first impression. It might have even been an unrecoverably bad first impression—and I let her know it.

Fortunately for her, the young woman did get her act together and she eventually wrote a book. She sent me a copy with a lovely inscription and a PS that said, "I really do love yoga."

First impressions are *important*. Knowing your audience is *important*. The way you carry yourself is *important*. I casually met two young women recently. One of them took my hand with the tips of her fingers and sort of moved it up and down without any sense of confidence and connection. Learning how to shake a hand, extending it properly with confidence—it makes a difference. Speaking clearly makes a difference. As I often chide those who appear before me on *Judge Judy*, "*Uh* is not an answer. *Um* is not an answer."

If you're not teaching those things to your children, you're not appropriately parenting. Jerry and I had the unique opportunity of being invited by Randy Levine,

president of the Yankees franchise, to bring our grandchildren to a Yankees game and watch it from the box. We also brought my friend Elaine's grandson, who is an avid baseball fan. After the game we went down to meet the players, and the kids were all given baseballs to be signed. I watched them approach the players. My grandchildren, as lovely as they are, were completely flummoxed. They approached the players with their heads down and their arms listless as they handed them the balls to sign. Elaine's grandson, on the other hand, walked up to the players and looked them squarely in the eyes. "Hello, I'm Ben Sussman," he said brightly. "I really admire you. Could I have your autograph?" I could see immediately that the players were drawn to this young man.

I came home and I said to my children, "Your children need lessons. They're wonderful, they do well in school, but they need some social skills. Get them some social skills."

Children need nurturing in areas other than algebra and chemistry and getting the best scores on their SATs. There's a whole other side of life that is important out there in the real world. It's a social side that can mean more to success than being able to add columns of numbers.

This understanding was the reason I got involved in backing a program called Her Honor Mentoring, which was the brainchild of my stepdaughter, Nicole. It's a terrific program that matches young high school girls with professional women who provide hands-on experience, advice, and guidance about succeeding in the workplace. The pro-

gram has been a big success, and both the girls and the mentors appreciate the opportunity. In seven years of operation, I've seen how eager the young girls are to connect with mentors. They want to make those good impressions. They want to be exceptional and independent. They just need a helping hand from adults who know the ropes.

#5: Lighten Up

I remember the first day I took the bench. The court officer said, "All rise," and I stood up because I was accustomed to doing that as a lawyer. Finally the court officer leaned over and said, "You can sit down now, Judge. They're standing for you." I laughed. I've never had a problem laughing at myself, and that was a funny moment.

Self-deprecation is a quality that can be very appealing. It means you have a sense of humor and don't take yourself too seriously, and people like that. Humor can be an excellent way to make a serious point.

When I was first appointed to the bench in the family court, my second assignment was in the Bronx, in New York City. We shared a building with the criminal court judges, who always thought they were one step above the family court judges. Why, I don't know, but they did. This was in the early eighties, so most of them were men.

They used to have a good old boys' lunch where one judge was responsible for bringing lunch every day. This was strictly for the criminal court judges. Not only were family court judges not welcome, but women certainly were not welcome.

One day I had the occasion to go into the lunchroom

because I had to ask one of my colleagues if he could release a lawyer after lunch for a trial that I had with many litigants. I walked into the lunchroom and one of these Neanderthal criminal court judges was there and he had brought the lunch that day. I was sitting there having a conversation and he came over to me and said, "Little girl, this is a judges' lunchroom."

Little girl? Really?

I could have got my hackles up and made a big deal of the insult. I could have said, "I am *Judge* Sheindlin. I'm not your *little* anything." But I didn't. Instead I got up and said, "Oh, excuse me, sir, I'm just here to clean up." Then I walked around the room and gathered up everybody's dirty plates. From the corner of my eye I saw the judge who had challenged me looking very smug and self-satisfied. The judges who knew who I was were grinning and enjoying the moment. The joke was on him.

After doing the cleanup, I returned to my chambers. And waited. Sure enough, after about five minutes, the old judge came storming in, furious. "Why didn't you say you were a judge?" he demanded. "You embarrassed me!"

I'd had fun with him, and perhaps I taught him a lesson. Humor is a powerful weapon.

A humorous touch goes so much farther than an angry glare. If you watch my show, you'll often see me laughing. *Judge Judy* has perfected the use of humor in tough situations. My viewers love the cases, but they remember the quips.

I brought humor with me to Hollywood, because the business side of things can be just as uptight as the court system. I knew if I was going to make my mark I couldn't come off as too bitchy. The first year I attended NATPE, they put me in the *Judge Judy* booth signing autographs for two hours. It was grueling. The second year I told them I'd only sign autographs for one hour. It was still grueling. By that time the show was a hit, and I was in contract negotiations. While I sat in the booth and signed, I noticed that the three top executives involved with the show were standing to the side having a very "important" conversation. I decided to have a little fun with them. As each person came to the booth and told me how much they loved the show, I said, "See those three men over there? If you really like my show, it would mean a lot to me if you would go over and tell them." So one after another, the people lining up for autographs went over and interrupted the conversation to tell the executives how much they liked the show. Finally, the executives gave up on having a conversation, and they suspected I was behind the parade of admirers. They came over to me, and Larry Lyttle said, "What's the matter? Don't you like to sign autographs?"

"I prefer to sign my name immediately following the words *for deposit only*," I replied. They got a big laugh. I made my point.

Humor can be an effective tool in the workplace and in life. Look at our presidents. It's no secret that our favorite presidents have had the best senses of humor—the ability to

make that human connection. Whether it was Harry Truman—"If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog"—or Ronald Reagan, who quipped after an assassination attempt, "Honey, I forgot to duck," we admire leaders who can add a light touch in the worst of times.

Properly used, humor has the power to ease the most difficult and awkward situations. The most effective individuals know how to kibbitz. (That's a Yiddish word roughly meaning chit-chat.) They come off as human and approachable. They don't take themselves too seriously. They understand that humor can be a bonding experience. Many women have told me they're reluctant to use humor at work. They're afraid they'll come off seeming sarcastic or that their attempts to be self-deprecating will diminish them. They're also worried that they'll make a funny comment and none of the men will laugh. Humor in the workplace has typically been a male domain—there are even studies about it. That doesn't mean women can't practice using a lighter touch. Humor implies confidence, and that's a good thing. Use humor, even if you have to practice in advance in front of a mirror.

#6: Practice Punctuality

I'm sure you've heard this advice before: "Always be on time." Tardy equals ditzy. If you can't get to the appointment on time, why would I trust you with my children, business, money, reputation, dog, cat—you get the picture. I remember a litigant on *Judge Judy*. When I asked her what day the incident in question occurred, she responded, "I don't actually have a job. I'm a musician, so the days kind of blur together." Ditzy.

Timing can also be your secret weapon. Let me explain.

I was in New York for a meeting with some top TV folks to whom I was pitching a concept. Lunch for six was scheduled for twelve-thirty at the Sea Grill at Rockefeller Center. The executives were a block or two away. I was driving in from Connecticut.

I arrived at the restaurant fifteen minutes early, and then I went about setting the scene so it would be clear to them that I'd been there for a while. I ordered a nonalcoholic drink. I broke up a piece of bread on my bread plate. I settled in.

Every single executive who arrived noted the scene and said, "Hello, Judy, I'm sorry I'm late." Well, they weren't late. I was early. But the tone was set.

I said, "You're not late. I've only been here fifteen minutes. Let's get down to business. Then we can eat and relax." Being early, being prepared—all strategy.

Being punctual is not just about respect. It's about being ready. It's about putting yourself in a position where you have the edge of preparation. If you're late, you're already giving away your power. Punctuality makes you very present in the conversation. Had I been the one apologizing for being late, it would have weakened my position. Instead, I was relaxed and ready to start the conversation.

It should be obvious that being late to a job interview is the kiss of death. You might feel you have a legitimate excuse—an accident on the freeway, a car battery that dies—but it won't really matter to the person interviewing you. Always build extra time into your schedule. If you arrive too early and have to go buy yourself a cup of coffee, it's a small price to pay for the right first impression.

Being punctual and being prepared have always been at the top of my list of success strategies. Not everyone gets it. When I was the supervising judge at family court in Manhattan, I always got there early. People were waiting, and I was very conscious that the public was paying for an expensive court system. I was a public servant. They paid my salary, and they were entitled to a day's work for a day's pay. Court started at nine-fifteen. I was on the bench at nine, ready to get going.

However, I had a judge who didn't take the bench on time. He had a house in the Hamptons, and because he

didn't want to deal with early-morning traffic, he didn't get to work on Mondays before eleven. I constantly told him, "It's not right. You have people sitting outside waiting. Your staff is ready, your clerk is ready, and it's a problem that you're not there."

He replied, "They can't do anything until I'm there."

"But you're a public servant," I argued. "The public is not there to serve your needs. It's vice versa."

He just shrugged his shoulders and ignored me. Nothing changed. I finally decided that I needed to take drastic measures. As soon as my nine-fifteen calendar was finished, I went to his courtroom and began doing his work. When he finally showed up, I said, "There has to be a judge here at nine-fifteen. If it's not you, it's going to be me, and I'm going to be here every Monday morning until you get here on time." I shamed him into it.

When I first started my TV program, I was dismayed by the Hollywood culture where the idea of punctuality didn't exist, especially for the talent. There would be an eight a.m. call time, and then everyone would sit around waiting for the talent to arrive, and maybe if they were lucky they'd get going by ten-thirty. I immediately set them straight. When we had an eight o'clock call time, I got there at seven-thirty so that I would be the first person on the set. Nobody ever waited for me. I had hair and makeup done. Everything was ready to go by nine. Then they'd tell me, "We have to wait for the litigants. They haven't showed up yet."

"You don't understand," I said. "Judges don't wait for

litigants. If you don't have a case ready at nine-fifteen, I'm leaving." I meant it. They saw that I meant it. A litigant would call and say he was stuck on the freeway, and I would tell them, "I'm not waiting." They got into the routine of starting on time.

I imposed this discipline not to be difficult, but out of respect for my entire crew. Instead of waiting around until all hours, they can get in their cars at three-thirty, avoid rush hour traffic, attend their kids' games, and have a life.

By imposing a rule of punctuality I set a tone—and also saved money on overtime. It just makes sense as the way to run a business.

#7: Create an Interesting Person

Jerry and I taught our kids: You've got to be interesting. You've got to bring something to the table. That's still true, and maybe more true than ever now that we have electronic devices to contend with.

At our dinner table, we laugh, joke, argue, tell stories, kid around. We'll go on this way for hours. Our kids learned to argue legal theory at our table. They learned to tell stories at our table. They learned to express their personalities at our table.

I recall a guest who visited our home and was treated to one of our dinners. He joked a bit sarcastically, "This is sort of like the dinners in my family where you get a plate of food and you go and sit and watch television by yourself." Of course, we all felt sorry for him. Who could imagine such a thing?

If you're not an interesting person, success will elude you. That's a very important life lesson. You can't tell a great story unless you have information, experiences, work, hobbies—create something. Always have an interesting story on tap about current events.

Contrary to popular belief, the American people thirst for quality. This is something I try to persuade the execu-

tives of daytime TV. I suggest that they undervalue Americans and the viewers. Everyone wants to be smarter. No one starts the day thinking, "Let's see how much dumber I can get." Women who watch daytime television are interested in ideas. They're looking for information. Yet a lot of daytime TV is a wasteland. Viewers have been made over, slimmed down, moisturized, and pampered. They want more.

Part of being an interesting person is defining yourself—not by some convenient label, but by who you are. I have encountered criticism over the years because I've been outspoken about not wanting the label *feminist* attached to me. I've never defined myself as part of a group. I define myself by the extent of my capability, my desire to work hard, my unique way of relating in the world, and all the other characteristics that make me Judy Sheindlin. I resist labels because for me a label has a diminishing effect on my own individual achievement. There's nothing wrong with saying you're a feminist, if you embrace that label. But take care to define yourself beyond words that other people use to put you in a box. The best way to be an interesting person is to be yourself.

#8: Demand Your Worth

In 1980 there had never been a woman heading a major motion picture studio in Hollywood. Then came Sherry Lansing. For those of you who don't know her name, she is a giant among women and men—a larger-than-life lady who epitomizes everything good and honest in the entertainment business. Her talent is legendary. But back when she was offered the job as president of 20th Century Fox, she was a senior vice president earning $75,000 a year. Her attorney advised her that she should settle for not a penny less than double that for the new position. At the negotiation meeting with Alan Hirschfield, her attorney demanded just that figure.

Alan Hirschfield was a very smart man. He said absolutely not. The figure was out of the question. He said that nobody in the business would take her seriously at that figure. Every other studio president made $325,000. *That* was the figure.

Lesson: if a company is in the business of making money, what you earn is important. It represents your value to the company. It represents a piece of your power. Too many women are lousy at determining their economic value. *Define yourself. Know the turf. Set your price.*

When my longtime executive producer retired from the show, they wanted to bring in a great guy. They were prepared to pay him top dollar. That didn't work out, and I decided on a wonderful woman from within the program. Everyone agreed, except they were only prepared to pay her half as much.

"No," I said. "You're going to pay her the same amount."

"Don't be ridiculous. That's more than doubling her salary."

I said, "You're absolutely right. She's been with the program sixteen years. You were planning to bring in somebody new and pay him more. You think I'm going let you pay her less? That's not going to happen."

I understood something they did not: her salary was a measure of how much we valued her.

Demanding your worth is not the same as being entitled before you've earned your stripes. In the news recently, a rebellious high school senior walked out of her parents' home because she didn't agree with their rules. She then sued them for financial support. The case engendered a groundswell of backlash against the teen and her misdirected sense of entitlement. Many young people today expect to be winners just by showing up, because they grew up in an era where everyone gets a trophy. They've never been forced to understand what it takes to be a real winner. I love to play gin rummy. My maternal grandmother taught me the game, and she never let me win. When I play with my grandchildren, I never let them win either. You've got to *earn* the victory.

My final point about worth is that sometimes money isn't what matters most. It is not the measure of your contentment, success, or contribution. No one ever defined the president of the United States, the governor, the Supreme Court justice, the mayor of a city based on his or her earnings. These individuals are known for their accomplishments. To define success only in terms of money is a big mistake. Success is the satisfaction you get every day in the knowledge that in some way, small or big, you've mattered.

#9: Do the Right Thing

I have a simple principle: Do the right thing and the right thing usually will happen. Do the wrong thing and the wrong thing is going to happen. I learned this from my father at a very early age.

As a judge I would often rattle the cage and make people uncomfortable. I didn't do it for the sake of being a thorn in the side of the system. I did it because I saw places where the system wasn't serving the people and needed to change. You can't always go by the book if you want to do the right thing, because the book wasn't necessarily written by people with the highest ethical standards.

When I was in family court, I realized that I had to set my own high standards, and sometimes they chafed against the rules. The common attitude was that, no matter what, we reunited kids with their mothers. I would say, "Unless I'd be comfortable with that mother taking care of my child without supervision, I'm not returning her child to her." Or "Unless I'm prepared to ride in a subway car with the fifteen-year-old who just got arrested on a second gun charge, I'm not releasing him." I got a lot of flak for that, but I slept well at night.

Some years ago I wrote a book for kids called *Judge Judy*

Scheindlin's Win or Lose by How You Choose! It was an effort to help kids start young understanding how to make moral judgments. In the book I posed questions that a child might face in everyday life, and then provided a series of multiple-choice answers and asked them to decide which was the right response. For example:

> *You just got your ice cream from the ice-cream man, but he was so busy that he forgot to take your money.*
> *You should:*
> *A. Put the money back in your pocket and eat your ice cream.*
> *B. Get his attention and tell him that you didn't pay yet.*
> *C. Eat your ice cream fast and tell him you never got it.*
> *D. Tell him you gave him a five-dollar bill and you didn't get any change.*

It was my intention that parents read this book along with their children. I wasn't preaching about the right thing to do, but helping kids choose for themselves and learn a lesson. I was gratified to hear from many parents who used the book for conversations around the dinner table. It was a fun and meaningful way to talk about doing the right thing. My second children's book, *Judge Judy Scheindlin's You Can't Judge a Book by Its Cover*, followed the same format, helping kids explore moral choices and hopefully figure out how to do the right thing.

It's a matter of having a moral compass. When I was a child my grandfather used to walk up several flights of stairs

instead of taking the elevator on Yom Kippur, the Jewish holy day of atonement. I said to my father, "Why is Grandpa walking up the stairs instead of taking the elevator?" My father told me that this was in order to atone for his sins of the previous year. In my young mind I figured this meant that if I didn't do bad things, I'd always be able to take the elevator. It's a cute story, but in its way true. If you want to be able to take the elevator, do the right thing. The price of exercising poor moral judgment is that you have to take the stairs.

#10: Leave a Footprint

I've been lucky in my second career, but it wasn't just luck or even mainly luck. When opportunity came to me, I took the risk. I chose to take on this new adventure at a time when most people would be winding down. I don't believe in winding down. Life is a journey. We're going to live from age zero to seventy-five, eighty, eighty-five and beyond. The life span of people is extending all the time. You can have a journey that's fulfilling, or you can have a journey that you can't wait to end. I'm opting for a fabulous journey every step of the way.

I've always said what's on my mind, but there's a certain liberation that comes with turning seventy. A lot of younger women tell me they can't breathe because they're so worried about the pressures of jobs and family. Growing older gives you some breathing room. The truth is, life is a journey, and it's really not a long one. Maybe you have forty or fifty or sixty years to make your mark as an adult. Realistically, out of that, you probably only have thirty years to set your template and cement your footprint. If you waste that time being worried about what people think or being afraid to stand up for yourself, it's a big loss.

What I've learned at this stage in my life is to focus on

what really matters. What footprint will I leave? Every person alive leaves a footprint of some kind. Not everyone will have a mark of worldwide magnitude. For example, my mother left a mark of unselfish giving. That was enough for her. It was her identity. If you procreate, that's part of your footprint, and you really can't neglect that part of your footprint if you choose to have kids.

There will always be people who are drains on society and others who are worker bees. There are those who build the pyramids and those who get buried in the pyramids. There are those who hone their gifts and those who play video games. This has been the story of human history. Each of us has this choice. You may not set the world on fire, but you have a choice not to be mediocre, to refuse to go along with the pack mentality, to set yourself apart, to be the hero of your own story.

EPILOGUE

A Final Word

It would be dishonest for me to promote the fantasy that through hard work and effort every person can catch that star. For many these are empty words. This is their reality: they have families to support, health challenges to face, and a changing job market that has never been more difficult. For them the concept of passion in their job is laughable, and a footprint illusive.

However, every person has a passion: a sport, a hobby—dance, theater, skating, mentoring, reading, painting, sewing, carpentry. Well, you get the point. If you can't make your career your passion, pursue your passion when not working. Carve out a block of time that is just for you. You never know when a door will open for you while you are fulfilling your passion. And if the door never opens, you have created a richer life for yourself while etching that footprint.

A Note to Readers

During my working life the public has been very good to me. This little tome is a small measure of gratitude for embracing not only the message but the messenger. But while the book is free, I ask you for a bit of paying it forward. If you took away any useful advice from my effort, please make a donation to Stand Up To Cancer by going to SU2C.org/Judy and giving today. Stand Up To Cancer is a groundbreaking initiative created to accelerate innovative cancer research that will get new therapies to patients quickly and save lives now.

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