

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR

Be (Extra)Ordinary

“In *Be (Extra)Ordinary*, Maryanne’s passion is matched only by her empathy for her fellows. She is the proverbial best friend you haven’t met yet. And so much more than a survivor, she is what I call a thriver. I have always found her writing a joy to read, fluid and infectious!”

—SCOTT SCHIAFFO, Actor, musician, and author

“Maryanne Christiano-Mistretta reveals in detail her unresentful journey through her trials as a child of divorced parents, a target of bullies, and her growth into a strong, self-respecting, confident woman who loves herself (as we all should). I recommend this book as a must read for all parents who are about to send a child, girl or boy, off to school and out from under the protection of the home nest.”

—OLEDA BAKER, Model, author, and entrepreneur

“(This book) forced me to take a deeper look into my own insecurities and how to combat the feelings of not fitting in. ... If we could all be as honest about ourselves as the author, we would have a better understanding of how to navigate the choppy waters of life.”

—ROBYN LANE, Music director, WRAT radio,
New Jersey

Be (EXTRA) ORDINARY
TEN WAYS
TO BECOME
YOUR OWN
Hero

MARYANNE CHRISTIANO-MISTRETТА

THIS IS AN UNCORRECTED PROOF
It should not be quoted without comparison with the finished book.

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Cover and book design by Mark Sullivan

ISBN 978-1-7335462-2-5 (paperback)

ISBN 978-1-7335462-3-2 (e-book)

Printed in the United States of America

Published by KiCam Projects
Georgetown, Ohio

www.KiCamProjects.com

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introduction

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What does the word “hero” mean to you?

Who do you view as a hero? It could be a celebrity or a friend or family member. Maybe you admire first responders, military members, or veterans.

Everyone defines “hero” differently. Personally, I truly believe we all have a hero inside us. That’s why I wrote this book: to inspire everyone to live life to the fullest and be the best they can be.

To do that, it’s important to surround yourself with people who support your dreams, make you smile, and give you a reason to want to be with them. This is the world I’ve created for myself—a world of heroes.

As you read my book and see snippets of my life, you’ll learn about people I view as heroes. I hope this motivates you to think about your own heroes, as well as how you’ve been a hero to others. You probably are already a hero in many ways. I’d like to multiply that by ten so that after you finish this book, you’ll feel like a superhero!

It’s not difficult to be a hero. Sometimes it can mean doing something grand, but much of the time it’s about

simple things, such as offering a smile to a passing stranger in a grocery store. You never know who needs you and who will be touched by you just because you're being your super-cool self. As I like to say, "Be YOUUnique!"

We're all capable of doing great things, and everything we do—big or small—makes a difference. In this book, you'll learn that I've taken cues from so many different kinds of people over the years. Whether it was a beloved person in my life, a rock star, a mentor, a best friend, or a homeless person, each in his or her own way showed me what a hero looks like and how to be one.

From my experiences, I vulnerably share with you my tips and tools for becoming your own hero.

Are you ready?

One...two...three...Become your own hero!

(BE)BALANCED

In today's face-paced world, many of us are saying yes to things we aren't truly connecting with.

We say yes because we want people to like us. We say yes because we want to be part of a group. We say yes because we want to be a hero.

Saying yes sometimes is good. It's great to be giving and to do things for others. But it's not so good when saying yes puts us in a place that's uncomfortable, unhealthy, or unbalanced.

Not too long ago, I worked for a small media company. I loved the job, but there was no work/life balance. I felt like I was a character in *The Devil Wears Prada* trying to keep up with a grueling schedule and endless demands. Saying yes and burning myself out wasn't worth the pay or the professional experience. So, I quit. My mental, emotional, and physical health were more important.

Don't get me wrong—I'm no stranger to hard work, especially since I love what I'm doing. But we live in a time when people see "busy" as a status symbol and fail to see the negatives of sleep deprivation and chronic stress. Without down time to do fun things with those

you love, even if it's just a Sunday off, you can't possibly sustain a successful career.

The bottom line is, we're human beings, not machines. And it's our prerogative to say no when we're running out of gas and/or feeling unappreciated. It's necessary to create boundaries. We must realize our needs are just as important as everyone else's, even in a place of business. If you feel you're being taken advantage of, you probably are.

Happiness is a choice. So, it's vital to move past your fear and learn how to speak up for yourself. It's also key to remember that if something isn't satisfying to you, whether it's your job or a relationship, you can choose to let it go. That can be scary! But if your gut is saying no to something, you should listen. "Go with your gut" became a cliché because it's truly great advice.

Saying no isn't always easy. It takes practice to be assertive regarding what *you* want. But in the long run, putting yourself first is the best thing you can do not only for yourself but for your loved ones. Remember, everyone is in different places in their lives. It's okay to want to connect with those who are on the same page you are. If you have good seats to see a band you've always wanted to see but then a destination-wedding invitation shows up in your mailbox, it's okay to decline. And you don't owe anyone an explanation for doing what is right for you.

One of my best friends declines in a most eloquent

manner. She begins by saying, “I can’t make it,” then offers a different plan on a future date. Compromise and negotiation can be awesome alternatives to saying yes when you don’t really want to.

Saying no to things that don’t suit you is, at its core, about letting go of feeling guilty. It’s about saying, “It’s time for me!” It’s about making choices and putting your needs first.

While promoting her bestselling memoir, *Becoming*, Michelle Obama opened up about the reality of trying to have it all. As she put it, you *can* have it all—just not all at the same time. After decades of balancing a high-powered career, parenting, and public life, the former first lady learned the hard way that you simply can’t excel at—and say yes to—everything all at once. When you try to do that, the best-case scenario is being mediocre at things you care about. The worst-case scenarios include disappointment, resentment, broken dreams, and a feeling of defeat.

Deciding to accept our limits and set boundaries is positively countercultural. Social media is, at least in part, responsible for creating the phenomenon of FOMO: fear of missing out. If we’re doing one thing, we’re thinking about or wishing we were doing something else. We’re forgetting to appreciate what we *do* have, what we *are* doing, and who we *are* with. There’s always something else we need to be chasing, right? Something else to have, do, gain, win, or accomplish.

Ironically, by saying yes to that pressure, we're very often saying no to our real dreams—to the people, places, and things that make us genuinely happy.

One of my favorite success stories is that of Sonny and Cher. As aspiring stars, they were once so down on their luck, their furniture was repossessed. It was then that Sonny Bono wrote one of the duo's greatest hits: "I Got You Babe." He didn't have much else, but he had the woman he loved, and she had him. And that sincere expression of love is a song that has endured for generations—even though their marriage ultimately didn't—making Sonny and Cher icons in the process.

So, as you work on being direct and clear with others, don't forget to be direct and clear with yourself. Understand what really matters to you. Develop a structure to achieve your goals. Make conscious decisions about what you need to do in order to succeed. Be mindful of who you spend your time with, and make sure those people believe in you and your goals.

When you say no often enough to things that don't serve you, you'll see there's so much time to do things that *do* serve you. Suddenly there's time for the gym! Now there's time for a painting class! Now there's time to redecorate your home! How did all that happen? You asserted yourself and made yourself a priority in your own life. It was that easy.

So, do you "have it all"? It depends on what you feel is "having it all." Again, this is *your* life you're living. Don't

define your blueprint by someone else's.

A few years ago, there was a story circulating around Facebook. Whether it's true or not is irrelevant; it's the message that was inspiring. The story was about a bond fund CEO who earned more than a hundred million dollars a year. But the man resigned unexpectedly to spend more time with his ten-year-old daughter. It all happened after they had a fight. She didn't do something he told her to do, and he yelled at her, "I'm your father and you will do what I say!" She then went to her room and created a list of twenty-two important moments in her life, such as birthday parties and school events, that her father had missed because of his career.

That story illustrates that no matter how much you do, something else in your life will suffer. It's all a matter of perspective. Some people want to work for six-pack abs; they enjoy time in the gym and the sense of accomplishment they get from looking great. Other people don't mind having a little extra gut because they'd prefer to be home in the evenings to walk their dogs, devour a new novel, or get some extra sleep. It's not right or wrong—it's just making the choices that are best for *you*.

The thing is, there are so many opportunities to do things for ourselves, to do things for others, and to do things for our careers. We live in a wonderful time when there are many options available to us. It's entirely up to us where we want to put our energies and where we want to sacrifice. It can actually be a bit overwhelming!

The beauty is knowing that our “having it all” doesn’t have to match someone else’s.

Perhaps the best approach is to change our mind-set from “having it all” to “having a sweet balance.” Celebrate your life for where you are right now. Don’t become so busy that you have no time to enjoy the everyday pleasures. It’s impossible to change overnight, but if you keep reminding yourself how important “me time” is, you’ll fall into an awesome pattern of putting yourself first. Everything else will flow from there.

Also remember that almost nothing is set in stone. If you say no to something, you usually can change your mind to yes if you’re feeling up to it later. And vice versa: If you said yes, you can change your mind to no. Try not to worry about disappointing someone else. It’s more important—and more valuable—to be honest with yourself. You’ll know when you’re on the right track to something good.

As with anything else in life, becoming direct and assertive takes time and effort. It’s said that it takes about twenty days to develop a good habit. You can keep track of your good habits by journaling. Write down the times when you communicated clearly what you wanted or didn’t want. Note the exact language you used and how you felt being direct. After about three weeks, look back and see the progress you’ve made. How many times did you say no? Did it get easier as time went on? When you said no to something you didn’t want to do, did you

instead use that time to do something you really wanted to do?

Time spent on yourself is always time well-spent, even if it's just fifteen minutes per day to meditate, take a walk, do something artistic, etc. A friend of mine once shared that she likes to sit alone with her cup of coffee in the morning. Her family knows not to bother her during that time. Personally, I like to decompress by playing games on the computer for a half-hour midday. I turn off my email and Facebook alerts just so I can have that time to unwind. Then, I can go back to the real world.

Nothing feels better than having some extra time for yourself. You can have the best co-workers, the best spouse, and the best family; it's still important to make yourself a priority. You might even build up the amount of time you set aside once you see how good it feels.

If you're having a hard time finding balance in your life, you might not be fully aware of what's important to you. Or, you might feel a bit sheepish about being honest about what you'd like to prioritize. Imagine if you had a day off to do whatever you wanted. What would you place on top of the list? Don't feel like you're a bad relative or a bad friend if your ideal list is more focused on you than on others. It might be a sign that you're currently feeling depleted by the many demands in your life, and you need to get back in touch with your own wants and needs.

On weekends when I was a kid, my mom used to say, "I can't wait to get back to the office—that's where I get

peace.” My mom certainly loved her family. But she needed the time at work to focus on other things and make herself a whole person.

Ask yourself if you’re being consistent about meeting your own needs. If you’d decided you wanted more time for yourself, but then slowly started caving to the needs of others, then allow yourself to start over and change your pattern. Don’t give up! Be direct and assertive about what you need—both from yourself and from others. Don’t allow *you* to treat yourself as an afterthought.

When you realign your life to that sweet balance, you will feel happier, more energetic, and more in control of your life and your future.

Congratulations—you’ve become your own hero!