

GIVE YOURSELF
Permission
TO LIVE YOUR LIFE

"Priya has written an insightful and compassionate book for the individual who struggles with wanting to make everyone else happy, but who neglects their own self-worth and joy."

– **Shawn Achor**, NY Times bestselling author of
Before Happiness and The Happiness Advantage

PRIYA RANA KAPOOR

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Introduction



*The final forming of a person's character
lies in their own hands.*

—Anne Frank



Many people are in careers and lives they feel they never completely chose for themselves. Suddenly, they see that many of the decisions they've made over the years were done in an effort to fit in or gain approval. Some made choices based upon what they believed their parents or society had told them were appropriate or worthy. Somewhere along the line, they stopped following their own hearts. One decision led to another, and they lost track of the hopes and dreams they had in early adulthood. They thought that by putting themselves first they were acting selfishly. They hoped that by conforming they were making the right decisions – maybe the easier ones. However, somewhere deep down, they now battle with the insidious feeling that they are not as happy or fulfilled as they could be. They are in a place

where they no longer even allow themselves to think about what they might want to do or be.

I have been lucky enough to work with a wide range of amazing clients: people from different ethnic backgrounds, professions, and life experiences; men and women, young and old. The issues they've worked through are similarly diverse. They all have their own stories, wants, needs, and fears, and they bring those with them as they travel this life journey. Not one is the same as any other, yet over the years, I've noticed that many share one very interesting characteristic: they're not giving themselves permission to live their best lives. This controversial but simple concept lies at the root of all sorts of other issues that often cause difficulty and stress. This challenging phrase can stand between them and the lives they feel they just might deserve.

In seminars, workshops, and in individual coaching sessions, I regularly address the concept of personal responsibility. I strongly believe that we are all leaders of our own lives, and that we have the power and responsibility to take action to make change. Of course, we have responsibilities to others and to society as a whole, but we have the ultimate say in what happens in our lives. Things out of our control may happen to us, but we can decide how we react to or feel about them and how we move forward. This is not immediately evident to many, and sometimes we give away this personal power.

Ever since I can remember, I have wanted to write a book. It seemed like a calling. I had quite a colourful upbringing, and I often thought that it would make a good story. Of course, I imagined I would write it as fiction, as no one would believe all my family's adventures, and there was no way I was going to air out our dirty laundry.

But after my MS diagnosis and an encounter with a man named Joe Allen, I saw everything in a different light, and things started to change

for me. I formally trained as a psychotherapist and then decided to do a life-coaching course, as I liked the forward focus and goal-setting aspect of coaching. It soon became clear that my life's purpose and work would centre on guiding people to empower themselves and encouraging people to seek their own freedom.

I finally came to understand that by sharing my story and those of some of my clients, alongside a few concepts, tools, and exercises in a personal development book, I might be able to help others.

I knew I wanted to write a book to support people facing the same kinds of hurdles as my clients, but it wasn't until I had dinner with two of my oldest friends and one of their business associates that I got the fundamental concept for this book. I mentioned that I was writing on empowerment but that I was struggling to identify the salient component. Jim, my friends' colleague, asked me what the one thing was that got in the way of people empowering themselves. Without skipping a beat, I said, "They don't give themselves permission." Then my friend Crispin said, "There you have it; that should be in the title." At that point, it all became clear. It was then that *"Give Yourself* Permission to Live Your Life"* was born.

If we listen carefully to those in business, politics, and the self-help and personal development arenas, we hear them tell people to give themselves permission, but I would argue that some of their audience might just not know how to. And that is why I have written this book, which is all about the quiet side of empowerment, or coming into empowerment through the back door.

* Note on why I have capitalised the 'S' in *Give Yourself Permission*. Honestly as I was outlining the book, it just came to me. I shortened each chapter and concept to GYSP to... and it stuck. I like the treatment and I feel that it differentiates the concept from the norm. Also, the 'Self' is a large part of the journey and what I write about, so I wanted to highlight it. Many have said it is jarring; this is why I am only using it in titles, headers, as part of *the Permission Journey* and in other obvious places, but not part of the basic text.

There comes a point when people reach a place where they realise it is time to challenge the status quo. They know that in their heart of hearts that something needs to change, but they have no idea where to start.

Since you have picked up this book, you probably already know that something is not working in your life and that you both want and need to fix it. It may have taken you a while to reach this realisation. Perhaps now you are finally ready to talk about it or to start making changes, even if you don't yet know how. Showing up is a big step and arguably the most important one.

My clients often need to learn how to listen to themselves, value themselves, and do little things to prove to themselves that their opinions and needs matter, before they embark on fulfilling their individual goals and dreams. *"Give Yourself Permission to Live Your Life"* incorporates a step-by-step process called the Permission Journey™ which systematically will guide you through what many of my clients have already experienced. These techniques and concepts have allowed them to flourish and lead much happier lives. Lives where they are also in much healthier relationships.

I do not want to tell you what to do, but I do want to share my experience, education, and knowledge with you. My hope is that some part of what I have picked up along the path as a therapist, life coach, constant student, and inquisitive human being will resonate with you in some small way and that you will learn some skills that will enrich your life.

My vision for you is that you arrive at some awareness for yourself in the hope that you will see things a little differently. Ideally by the end of this book you will think and feel that you have every right to your dreams, goals, and aspirations. You will have given yourself permission to try a few of the techniques described and feel more empowered. In time, the goal would be that you'll unconsciously start integrating a

more supportive and positive mindset into your everyday life until you are wholeheartedly living without guilt, with minimal conflict, and in harmonious relationships with your family, friends, co-workers, and all of the amazing characters you have the privilege of meeting in your lifetime.



CHAPTER SIX

Give Yourself Permission to Know What You Care About



*Happiness is the state of consciousness which
proceeds from the achievement of one's values*

—Ayn Rand



It is really important to know which qualities you care about in life, and it's also very helpful to know which of them you want to live your life in accordance with. This can sound complicated at first, but when you get it, you'll find it's quite simple and immensely freeing. These qualities are often referred to as *values*.

What exactly is a value? The word is generally understood to mean the qualities of life you find important to maintain both your emotional and your physical well-being.

Life coaching puts great emphasis on knowing values. When I first started training as a coach, my mentor coach sent me a round of

paperwork to fill out asking me what my values were. The problem with this was that I didn't really know what a value was. He then explained that a value is a trait that I know to be important in the functioning of my everyday life. Wow! At the time, that could have meant anything for me, so for a few years, I muddled along using this concept whilst not really knowing how to embody it.

Then one day I worked with a fabulous strategist, my friend and mentor Deri ap John Llewellyn Davies. He constantly harped on about values, and I sheepishly went along with him. Rather stridently, I pretended that I knew what he was talking about. We were working on whether I was going to go into partnership with a very prestigious coach and her organisation. It looked like a great idea, but something was wrong, and my gut instinct was troubling me. Deri asked me what about the coach and the organisation was bothering me.

"I have problems with the way they're communicating with me," I told him.

"Well," Deri said, "that's what you hold valuable: communication! If they're not working within one of your core values, you're always going to feel out of sorts or uncomfortable. Now you get to choose whether it's worth powering through because there's something to gain in the long run."

When I examined the situation, I felt that the organisation had a "less-is-more" approach to communication, and I knew that I couldn't work like that. If there is a lack of communication between me and anyone I work with (or, indeed, interact with in anyway) I find I don't trust the situation or the person, my understanding of what is going on is weakened and my security within it is threatened. If my core value of communication isn't met, I'm unlikely to feel comfortable, and in turn, I'll not be at my best.

At that point, the concept of values and their role in my life became very clear to me.

Core Values

In this context, values are more essential to us than our personal or physical needs (although these are important as well) as our values guide what we feel we need from life.

When we find ourselves feeling ill at ease, this is often because we're living in a way that is out of sync with our core values. Only we have the ability and right to construct a life for ourselves that is in accordance with what we believe to be appropriate and healthy for us.

People setting up a business are generally advised to come up with a brief mission statement that succinctly sums up what they want to achieve and what their business's core values are. Google's famous value statement is "Don't be evil". Individuals can come up with personal mission statements too, ones that guide their actions and communicate their desires. Mine might be something like, "Be a catalyst of change." What would yours be?

At the root of all personal or business mission statements are values, which can be accessible or tangible concepts such as family, work, or respect. More often than not, however, they are emotions like love, peace, and grace or behavioural traits and characteristics like communication, nobility, and honour.

When you start getting to grips with your values, you'll more than likely find that they're a mixed bag. Still, it's good to have a list you can call your own that you can work with as you apply it to your everyday life. Values can also be fun, mystical, obscure or frivolous – they don't have to be grand and highfalutin! I remember feeling guilty and full of shame when I started to see that beauty, luxury, and comfort were important

to me. I thought that these were all rather shallow and that one needed to be rich to have such things. Then I realised that beauty need not be equated with a high price tag – beautiful objects and surroundings can be found on any budget; they may not cost any more than opening your eyes and seeing the good around you.

Something to keep in mind is that as we grow, our values change. Our fundamental values tend to remain static, but sometimes as we gain wisdom and information, they evolve and adapt. It's also often difficult to come up with an initial values list, so here's a little help.

Exercise: Know Your Values

I work quite intensively with my clients on values, and they often find this work the most challenging. Knowing your values is the foundation to understanding yourself; not knowing them can get in the way of really giving yourself permission to think big. Usually, I don't like giving people a list to choose from for fear of implanting ideas; however, identifying one's values can sometimes be rather difficult, so in this situation, I feel that a list may have some benefit, and I've included one here. Of course, this list is by no means comprehensive; it's intended only as a place to start. Sometimes it's easier to recognise a value than to dig around and come up with one. In time, however, you will start seeing patterns in your behaviour, traits, likes and dislikes, and you'll be able to come up with a list all of your own.

You may notice that integrity isn't on the list. That's because I believe that when we live in accordance with our values, *then* we live with integrity.

For now, here's a list of potential values to get you started. Pick or come up with five to start a short list of your own:



Figure 6:1: Values

Values as a Road Map

So, as you've seen, your values are traits and characteristics by which you live. They can also serve as a road map for your life. Knowing your values can give you permission to make the right decisions for yourself. By interacting with this list, you'll always have something to guide you.

As in my recent example, I understood the benefit of knowing my values when I needed to make a decision or a structured plan. As a coach, I work within this framework with my clients. It is really important for them to identify their values at the outset, before they try to make any other choices. So, have a go at the exercise below and see how it works for you. If at first you have trouble, keep the exercise in your mind and come back to it when you have finished this chapter.

Exercise: Reading the Road Map

- 1) Write the question or issue you are struggling to make a decision about on a blank piece of paper.
- 2) Write a list of your top five values on a small card that you can keep with you at all times.
- 3) With your values list in one hand and the question in the other, ask yourself if the issue you are deliberating on is aligned with your values.

For instance, suppose the issue is: "Should I take the new job I've been offered?"

Your list of values might include autonomy, communication, learning, and abundance. This job pays quite well, so abundance is covered. You know that you'll be micro-managed because the person who interviewed you, who will be your manager, was very regimented, nit-picky, and particular about the format

of your résumé. His communication style was abrasive and defensive. Your values of autonomy and communication may not be fulfilled, and therefore, maybe the job isn't right for you.

However, another value of yours is learning, and you very much want to break into this new industry. The job offer ticks the boxes for learning and abundance, but not autonomy and communication. At this juncture, you can make a choice. Which values matter most to you? Which do you need to survive in one piece? Are there any you can live without so you can reap the rewards? If making more money so that you can pay off your college loans quicker and breaking into a new industry are most important to you and you can live with being managed intensively and spoken to strongly, then take the job. In this instance, you know what you're getting into, and you will have to take personal responsibility and anticipate how to communicate with your new boss. However, if you simply cannot live with being spoken to unpleasantly and micro-managed, you cannot take the job, regardless of how useful the experience will be and how much money you'll make. The choice is all yours.

By inherently knowing your specific values you can have more faith in your decisions and be better able to stand by them. At the same time, you'll know what you're getting into and may need to adjust to in certain situations.

Values in Relationships

Whenever I meet a new client, a red flag goes up if they state that one of their values is to be loved and respected by others. That means that their happiness, well-being, and very existence depend on other people's behaviour, or on getting others to do what the client "needs"

them to do. Good luck with that! I know from my own experience that this doesn't work. Trying to make others do what I want them to do has only ever left me depleted and frustrated.

When people love, respect, praise, or support you, this is a by-product of *your* behaviour. It is what happens when people see you and want to be around you. It is what you get in return for taking personal responsibility. Like leadership, it's earned, not commanded.

In any relationship, intimate or otherwise, there can be a moment when it becomes clear that the other person's value system is not the same as your own. This doesn't mean that one system is worse than the other; simply that you do not prioritise the same things. Over the years, I've learned that for me, it's very important to know what others' values are and how they stand in relation to mine. Particularly in the context of close friendships, there has to be a reasonable amount of synchronicity. The things that I care about, that make up my core values, include open communication, respect, diligence, and comfort and beauty. In important relationships, it really matters to me that people can communicate well and don't play games. If someone would rather watch a football match than go out with me one particular evening, that is okay – but making up an excuse or lying is not.

Since we all grew up in unique families, each of which with its own mini-culture, and because we're all members of a broader society, it can sometimes be hard to figure out which values are truly our own and which are really the property of the people around us or of society at large. If we have simply borrowed them and they're on loan, we can give them back. You might borrow a friend's jumper because it looks great on her only to realise that it does nothing for you at all. The same applies to values. You can acknowledge and respect someone else's values without feeling that you need to prioritise exactly the same things in the same way.

When I was at university in the UK, I lived in a flat without heating above a dry cleaner's. It was so damp that I often woke to find my hair plastered to the pillowcase and the essay I had written the night before wrinkled from humidity. When I moved in, all my room contained was a small bed, a grimy built-in desk, a wardrobe, and a single light bulb hanging from the ceiling – depressing! Although money had been scarce the majority of my teenage years, my mother always made a point of keeping our house pretty, so this was what I was used to. Faced with this dreary space, I knew I had to do something, as I wouldn't be happy living without a little cheeriness in my surroundings. I had virtually no money at this point, but I had taken out a credit card, so I decided some home furnishings were in order. I found and purchased a blue-and-white frilly lampshade for the hanging light bulb, a matching cushion, and a complementing stuffed toy dog to go on my bed. I valued these three items dearly. They provided comfort, elegance, and beauty and made me feel safe in a very cold, scary, smelly, and lonely room. These values were important to me, but it soon became clear my flatmates did not share them. When they saw what I had bought they told everyone else, who bullied and teased me for being posh and a rich bitch. It was hard for me, and in addition to a multitude of other reasons, it led to my leaving the university. If, at the time, I had only understood that I was living authentically and in accordance with my own values I would have been able to understand that it did not matter what my flatmates thought. I could have either engaged with them, as they were absolutely living in accordance with their values, or I could have turned away. Either way I could have given myself permission to stand behind what mattered to me and life would have been much easier.

Nobody grows up in a vacuum; we are all deeply influenced by the cultures in which we develop and learn, and by the people in our immediate circles. Nonetheless, there can be huge differences between people – even members of the same family! Accepting that we have

our own values and that we are all entitled to an opinion and the right to live as we see fit can be difficult.

Why We Need to Value Ourselves

Regardless of what is going on in our lives, ultimately we are the only ones who can decide how we live. Of course, we'll always have responsibilities and chores to attend to, whether at work or at home, but we can choose to get ourselves to a space where these are what we *want* to do. As we'll see in "Chapter Nine: Give Yourself Permission to be Happy", even when a job is only necessary to pay the bills, we can learn to focus on the aspects that we find fulfilling and let go emotionally of the conditions that bring us down.

People will always feel that doing things explicitly for themselves is selfish, that the only things worth doing are those that make life better for others. I would argue that taking care of ourselves makes us much better equipped to also care for the people in our lives. Certainly, it's important for everyone to use their talents, gifts, and strengths for the good of others as well as themselves, but by giving ourselves permission to quietly value and care for ourselves first, then we can be there for others in an empowering rather than a draining way.

If you want to get involved in volunteering, for example, do so by all means, but get involved with an activity that you enjoy. If you love to garden, you could look into local schemes to help people with their allotments. If you love sports and physical activity, you could look into sharing that passion in a way that will be enriching to others as well as yourself by running after-school physical education programs or helping the disabled or elderly with their mobility.

Many people spend their lives running around trying to do their best for and to impress others. The great irony is that we do our best for others

when we engage with them in a way that is fulfilling and meaningful for us as well. Helping to make the world a better place doesn't have to be about sacrifice; it can be about enrichment, fun, and opportunity. It can be about valuing our true selves and our real strengths and abilities so that we share them with others.

Deciding to honour yourself and your values, and acting upon this decision, gives you the freedom to give yourself permission to do what it takes to make sure that those values are met.

Other Ways to Explore Your Values

As you may have seen, it can be very difficult to figure out what your values are. As you've been working on self-worth, taking care of yourself, and listening to yourself, let's now try another way to identify your values.

You can work on this alone, but you might find it more productive to brainstorm with a coach, therapist, trusted friend, close family member, business mentor, or a religious or spiritual leader.

Exercise: Which Films Inspire You Most?

A private way to start exploring what your values are is by listing a few films that have inspired you over the years. Once you've identified the films, make a list of the qualities that you relate to in each film.

If films aren't your thing, you can carry out the exercise with TV shows, books, songs, or whatever touches you the most.

For instance, here is my honest list:

Monsoon Wedding: heritage, respect, beauty, honour

Platoon: honour, nobility, tenacity

Alice in Wonderland: free abandon, freedom

The Blind Side: resilience, persistence, love, family

Cars: friendship, loyalty, fun

Schindler's List: respect, compassion, vision

Argo: triumph, honour, creativity

Rocky Horror Picture Show: fun, edginess, kitsch

Lawrence of Arabia: maverick, grandeur, spectacle

Now take a look at your list of films and qualities. Do any of them resonate with you? Could they be your values? Pick and choose from them wisely and carefully, but also be honest and stretch yourself.

Know Your Values

When you know and understand your values, you gain insight into yourself. Most importantly, you have a road map that will help you make decisions. You can use your newfound understanding to gain deeper insight into why you feel the way you do in any given situation. You can honour those feelings and work hard to make sure that you act and live in a way that is consistent with your values and that your values, and, by extension, *you*, are worth as much care and consideration as anyone else.

The Permission Journey: Stage 2

So here we are at your second stop in the Society Islands in the South Pacific Ocean having travelled the journey of giving yourself permission to know what you care about. During this time, you've recognised and engaged with your values. The journey itself is the process – everything you have become aware of, everything you have learned, and everything you have started to implement in your everyday life.

Here are the same questions you saw at the end of the last chapter, but this time, hold your values in the forefront of your mind as you answer them. As before, these questions allow you to gauge where you are and what you've learned. As always, it's good to take stock of how far you've come, and your answers to these questions will act as a celebration of sorts. Remember, it's all about taking souvenirs with you and leaving behind items that just weigh down your suitcase.

- 1) What did you learn for and about yourself in this chapter?
- 2) What tools or realisations are you going to take with you on your journey?
- 3) What traits, behaviours, thoughts, or memories are you going to leave behind?

Armed with your newfound values, you're now able to embark on the next stage of your journey.





Through her work, Priya offers a guiding hand as you make your way through the Permission Journey™ – remember that you are not travelling alone. If you wish to delve deeper into each stage, or need added support, visit www.GYSPermission.com. Here you will find supplementary materials, e-courses, video and audio downloads, and more. More information and material will be added all the time, so come back and visit often. You will also find information on group workshops, public speaking, and private sessions.

Happy Travels!

WWW.GYSPERMISSION.COM



About the Author

Priya Rana Kapoor is a life coach and the founder of Give Yourself Permission™, a program designed to foster foundational and long lasting self-awareness and empowerment.

Priya grew up in London, England and then spent over a decade in California mostly earning an undergraduate degree in theatre and a master's in marriage and family therapy, both from the University of Southern California (USC). Her post-grad research was in Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease along with providing therapy to patients and their families at USC University Hospital's Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery. She is also a graduate of the Coach U Core Essentials Program.

Priya speaks to corporate and non-profit groups, facilitates workshops, and has appeared on NBC's Today Show where she was invited to discuss women's health issues.

As a vocal advocate for MS research, Priya is dedicated to helping the community through her work with the National MS Society. Additionally, her philanthropic commitment includes involvement with Aids Project

Los Angeles and the Junior League of Los Angeles and London. She also serves on the board of the USC Alumni Club of London.

Priya currently lives in London, but commutes to Los Angeles to speak, work with clients and visit with family and friends. She hopes to travel more, visit new countries and learn as much as she can from different cultures.

Whose life are you living? Though of course you would love to believe that it is fully your own, you might want to think again. Do you find yourself tip-toeing around the feelings of others? Do others' desires often precede your own? Do you wish you knew how to balance it all, have healthy relationships, and end up feeling truly happy?

Priya Rana Kapoor takes you on The Permission Journey™, a step-by-step guide that will equip you with the strength and courage to:

- have newfound self-confidence
- realise your dreams
- know you are not alone on your journey

Give Yourself Permission to Live Your Life is complemented with candid anecdotes from Priya's personal experience. She leads by example as she tells her story of illness, self-doubt, and a chronic need-to-please, how she got through it all, and how you can do the same.

The breakthrough techniques outlined in The Permission Journey™ have benefited a wide range of people, from executives of large international corporations ironically suffering from low self-worth, to recent school-leavers struggling to find their feet. Their inspirational stories mirror scenarios that we all commonly find ourselves in, and will serve as a reference point for you in similar situations.

Are you ready to take the journey yourself? Pack your bags and prepare to embark on an adventure to give yourself permission to take back your life!



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