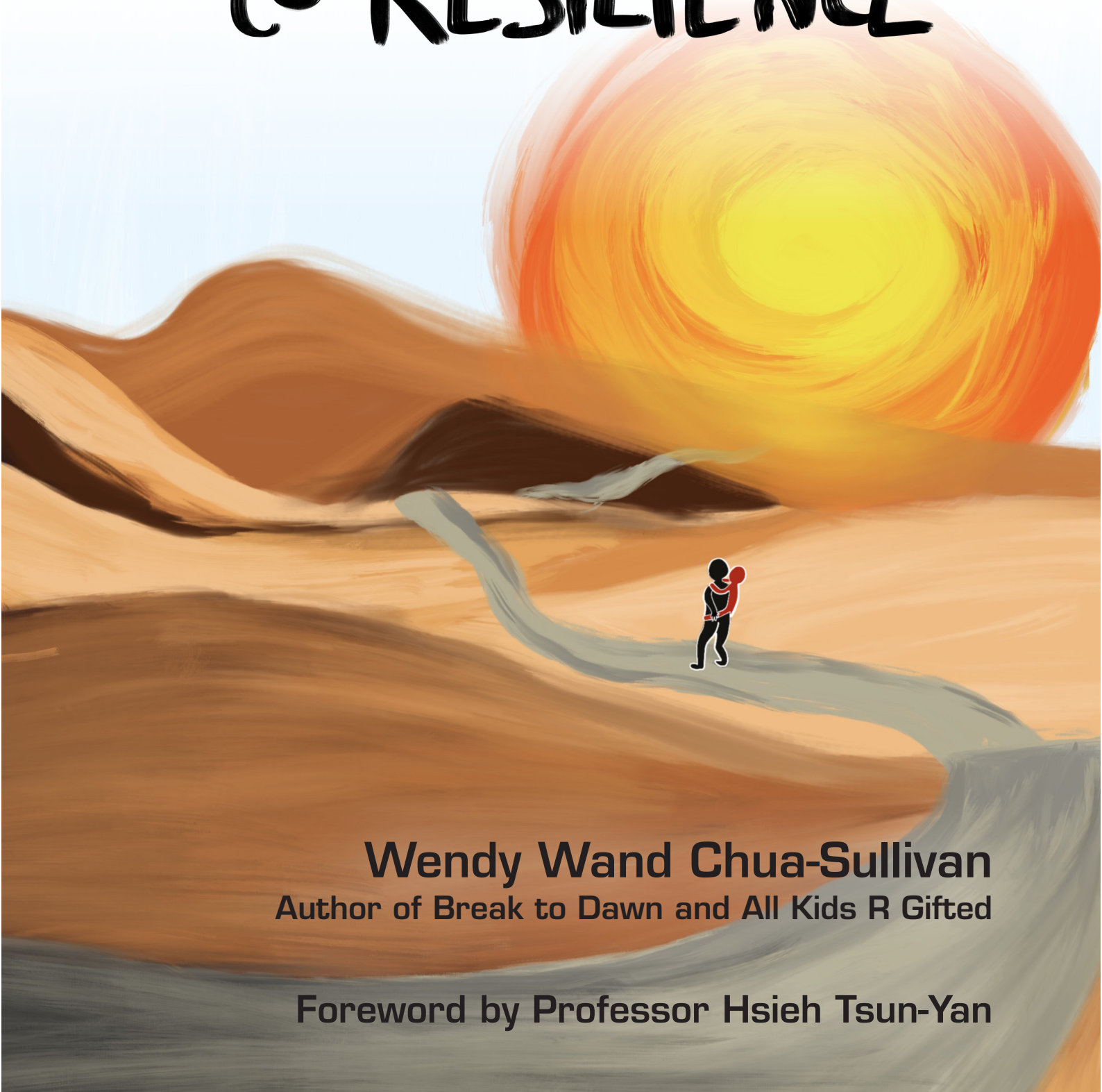


# The WAND WAY to RESILIENCE



**Wendy Wand Chua-Sullivan**  
Author of *Break to Dawn* and *All Kids R Gifted*

Foreword by Professor Hsieh Tsun-Yan

# The WAND Way to Resilience

Resilience after divorce, illness and self-doubt

Wendy Wand Chua-Sullivan

Thank You for  
reading my book.  
I hope it inspires resilience  
in you.  
You may email me your feedback  
and thoughts to  
wandresilience@gmail.com  
Sincerely,  
Wendy  
28 March 2020

Wendy has shared her journey in such an authentic and generous way, in the hope that her pain and healing process can help others. This practical book is full of hope, amidst accounts of truly difficult times. Reading this has helped me identify areas in my life that I want to work through, my barriers and fears but also to define my purpose and vision in life.”

**Wen Li Lim**

Managing Director

The Platform, Western Australia

The Wand Way to Resilience provides insightful and pragmatic approaches that help us recover from difficulties. Wendy writes deeply and honestly about the issues she faced in childhood, love, family and work. And Wendy shows that “challenges and setbacks are part of the purpose of life”. The questions at the end of each chapter help us to face our realities in a meaningful way. Having spent more than 40 years working with leaders in international businesses, I know that resilience matters...a lot! This book is now part of my toolkit.

**Aad JCM van Vliet**

Global Lead

Avvartes

## THANK YOU AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I started this book in 2016, writing with a pen and a notebook. Every few days, I would take photos of what I had written and send them to Shila Das and Rina Koh, for safekeeping in case I lost my notebook or spilled coffee on it. Both would read my handwritten stories, and Rina conscientiously typed them out. She told me she cried while typing, and I thought “either it is that bad, or that good”. Their initial feedback and encouragement kept me going.

My team at Wand Inspiration Network continued to serve our clients with dedication and excellence, thus allowing me to take time off in 2016 to write. I am also thankful to my editor Eve Yap, who patiently and wisely kept me going.

Friends contributed - Kai Tan hand-drew the illustrations, Ana Ismail-Ow wrote the summary in the back cover, and Rachel Kee spotted details that needed to change in the last few versions. I also want to thank Sara Yik who first introduced me to Tsun-Yan Hsieh in 2004. That one act opened doors to many new experiences and learnings, including his foreword for this book.

Roger Lehman and Erik van de Loo were my professors at INSEAD's Executive Masters in Coaching and Consulting for Change. I thank them for teaching me to look at people and organisations with “night vision” and for introducing “right-brain” processes that I now incorporate into my workshops, some of which I had also included in this book.

This book is a family business - husband Matthew Sullivan worked on the initial layout of the book, and daughter Nicole Tong designed the painting for the book cover. This book, and my resilient life, would not have been possible without my grandparents and parents – they taught me to believe in God and unconditional love, and gave me my name Kok Wand which means “Nation is gentle and gracious”, reminding me that the grace of Christ will sustain me through all of my trials.

Finally, I want to remember my dear friend Jane, who passed away in June 2018. She inspired me with her fighting spirit and love. I end this book with her favourite verses from Psalms 23 - “the Lord is my Shepherd... surely goodness and mercy shall follow me, all the days of my life.”

*For more information about Wendy and her books and workshops, please check out [www.wandinspiration.com](http://www.wandinspiration.com)*

*Her previous writings can be found in [wendywand.wordpress.com](http://wendywand.wordpress.com)*

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## FOREWORD

At times, it seemed to me Wendy Wand Chua-Sullivan has met more than her fair share of life's trials. Yet she bounced back triumphantly and is devoting a big part of her life to helping others do so. I have been inspired by how she dared to dream again and trust herself to be giving and loving again. I hope you will find her story, rippling briskly through the pages, an uplifting lesson on how one can grow more resilience with setbacks.

And Resilience is that human quality that enables a person to recover from difficulty more quickly and with less damage than someone who has less of it.

So when adversity seemed to rain on in life, how did she cope and adapt herself? Why did she bounce back from her losses and setbacks much more quickly than others? Why do some people seem to get “stuck” in a particular state, whereas Wendy pulled herself up from the doldrums and moved on purposefully?

Wendy believes from her personal experience and psychologist training that everyone can hone more resilience. And she showed us how with simple reflection questions and principles codified in easy-to-remember acronyms.

Building resilience takes strong commitment and time. It will not happen to you just because you read her book, or for that matter, start working with a therapist. It's a learning process that will need to turn into a journey to mastery. That said, it may just inspire us all to persist in this fruitful training before life's going gets tough.

Professor Hsieh Tsun-yan  
Chairman LinHart Group  
Counselors, Advisors and Mentors to Leaders



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## PREFACE

Born into a Chinese business family in Singapore, my grandfather named me Kok Wand. The term “Kok” in Chinese means nation and “Wan” means graceful and gentle. My father, however, thought that “wan” in English made me sound sickly. So, he added the “d” to the “Wan” and made me “Wand” — magical.

As it turned out, the “Wendy” part became appropriate: my favourite cartoon as a child was Wendy the Good Little Witch, so my aunts began calling me Wendy. When I turned 16 and was baptised, Wendy became my official name.

Given names are an important part of our identity. I have come to treasure the significance of my given name.

Firstly, it is unusual for females to be given the name “nation” as it is considered masculine and reserved for boys. However, my grandfather believed that women were as capable of serving the nation as men. So, my brother (Kok Khung meaning “nation is healthy”), younger sister (Kok Ju meaning “nation is prosperous”) and cousins have “nation” as part of our Chinese names.

Growing up, I was made fun of because of my masculine-sounding name. But when I became an adult and started my work in psychology, I grew to appreciate that my grandfather had the foresight to see that I would bring grace and gentleness to my country, and that I was as capable as men to lead and create change.

There were both responsibilities and privileges of growing up in a business family. From young, I was exposed to the importance of serving others, of taking care of employees and customers and of the lack of boundaries between work and home



life. For instance, work matters overtook personal chatter in dinner conversations among family members.

On the flipside, the benefits were tremendous. I learned leadership, strength and tenacity. Hence, I have great admiration and empathy for leaders in business, especially women leaders, because of my own experience as one. This book is a salute to all women leaders.

On a more intimate level, this book is also for every woman and man who have overcome setbacks in life or who might be facing trials. It's my story of how — with nudges or knocks from family members, experiences at work and my faith (I am a Christian) — I overcame despair. Through a raw and wry look at my experiences, I hope that this book will inspire you to be resilient too.

## MY WAND APPROACH

In a therapy session, counsellors may ask: “If you believed in miracles, what would you ask for?” Or, they may say: “Imagine waking up tomorrow and all your troubles are gone. What would your life be like?”

I like my magic-wand version, where I ask: “If you had a magic wand, what would your life and work be like?”

The purpose of these questions is to spur you to narrow your issues down to possible solutions in brief therapy as opposed to chronic psychoanalysis on the therapist’s couch (which has its place in other interventions).

The magic-wand question disciplines you to free your mind from statements that say “I cannot because” to “I can because” assurances. Go from “I can’t do that because I am too old / young / fat / stupid”, and so on to “I can do that because I have experience, I am willing to learn, and I am disciplined and determined.”

Junk the limiting and disempowering thoughts. Look to positive images of what’s possible. Focus on tapping into your strengths.

When I was school counsellor at Raffles Institution (RI), I coached and counselled students who were top of the nation academically, but who at times felt anxious about failure or faced high expectations to perform. I coached them to win competitions after an injury or a string of losses, to achieve straight As after failing an examination and to lead a team despite a family crisis. My then-colleagues were curious and often asked me: “What did you do with them?”

## Wave a Wand

Initially, I was unable to explain the influence of many psychological concepts that had been ingrained in me from years of study and practice. Looking back, I would say that developmental psychologist Erik Erikson played a part as did family therapist Virginia Satir. I also credit my training in cognitive coaching in Massachusetts (in 1997) for honing my craft of asking the right questions of my students to get them thinking of possibilities.

So, I decided to create a simple approach to explain what I did and how I did it. Using the initials of my name, which would be easy to remember, I called it the “WAND approach to maximising the performance of high achievers”.

The WAND approach, which I have infused into this book, stands for:

### W

These are the open-ended what, who, where and when questions that I ask to get the other person to think through an issue and to be responsible for taking actions. Instead of “why”, I ask, “What is the purpose or importance of this goal?”

### A

At the end of each session, I ask for a list of actions the student will take before we meet again. A is also for acknowledgement. I acknowledge him for actions taken and values shown. I ask him to acknowledge himself. This raises self-esteem and cultivates a good habit of acknowledging self and others.

## N

Being neutral and non-judgemental. This is an important way of being that therapists and coaches (and good leaders and parents) must adopt. It is about focusing on the student's (or client's) goals and not on my own assumptions and expectations. It is to accept the individual for who he is — mistakes, fears etc.

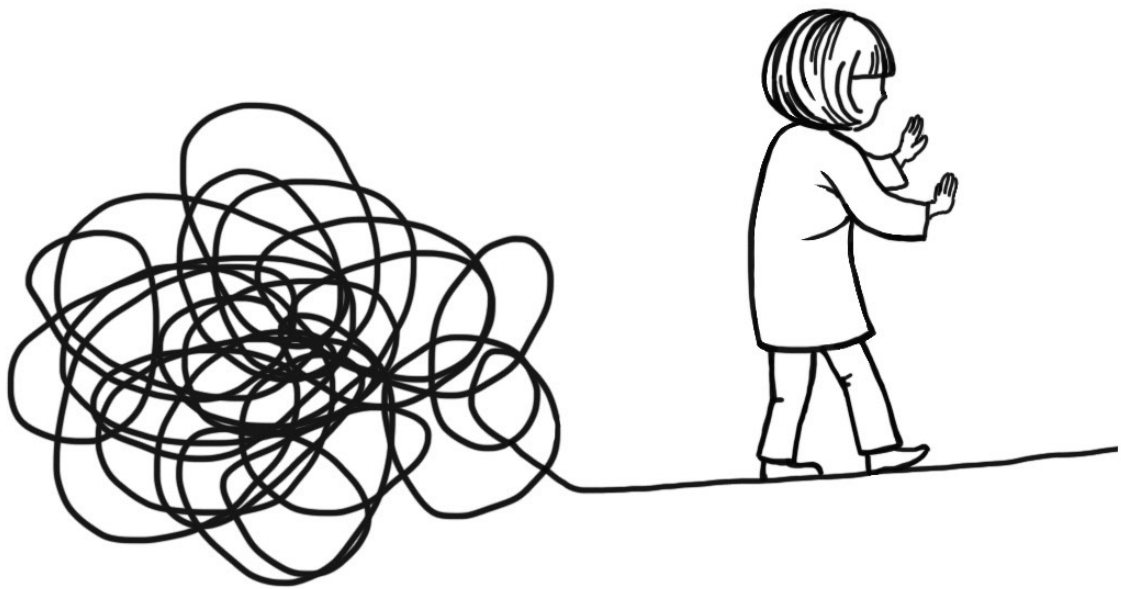
## D

This recognises the individual. No two students or clients are the same. The solutions and resolutions for one may not work for another. I am aware of the individual's personality preferences and other diversity issues and appreciate him for who he is.

Finally, and most importantly, D is about making a difference. It embraces my philosophy that “despite and because of the setbacks I face, I will make a bigger difference”. Each session, each conversation must make a difference, no matter how small, to the other person.

Coming up with the WAND approach when I did was timely as I would later present it at an International Congress of Applied Psychology held in Singapore in 2002. Since then, I have used and shared this approach with thousands — young and old, in private and public organisations, and with parents and teachers.

Are you going through a difficult situation? Ask yourself: if I had a magic wand what would my life be like? What positive outcome do I want?



## CHAPTER 1

# *What Do I Make Out of This Mess?*

**I**t was the early 1999. I was 29, eight months pregnant with my third child and retrenched as principal of a preschool that was closing down.

Ruefully, I wondered if I had given up the last part of my graduate programme in 1994 to return home for nothing. I thought I had made the right choice to put my studies on hold while I created a new curriculum for preschoolers. To me, it was an opportunity for a young graduate to merge western early childhood education concepts with Asian practices. For instance, to bring more creative and engaging processes to the curriculum while maintaining the Asian values of practice and academic discipline. I had a dream job — or so I thought.

As it turned out, I had to axe the jobs of 120 teachers in mid-1999 when the company decided to close its centres. Being a straight-A student and a first-class honours graduate, I never thought I would lose my job and be told to fire the people reporting to me. Academic success did not prepare me for this setback. I felt like a career failure.



Anxiety was the byword: how was I to support my family financially, emotionally and spiritually?

But that was not the most difficult part of the year. Two months after I had given birth to my youngest child, Nicole, I went into postnatal depression. (My two older children, Brandon and Lorren were barely four and three years old, respectively.) My husband was hardly around physically and emotionally for my new baby, Nicole, and me. I was lonely and miserable. My aunt Iris saw how depressed I was and told me, “I know you studied psychology but you can’t help yourself now. And no one can tell you what to do. Go and see someone.”

## **Hardest decision**

She urged me to receive counselling from a pastor and his wife. When the counsellor pointed out that I had developed battered women syndrome, I was shocked. I had been a research assistant in a couple-abuse project in 1993, but when I experienced battered women syndrome myself, I was in denial for years. I was advised to spend some time apart from my husband to think about what I wanted and how to rebuild the marriage, if that was possible.

I spent three months trying to save the marriage — arranging for dates with my husband, taking our three kids to meet him and asking him to join me in counselling. Finally, he told me in March 2000, that he did not love me any more and would stay in the marriage only “for face sake”.

Such a loveless marriage was not what I wanted. I knew that if I stayed on, my children would not be seeing their parents as a loving and faithful couple. What they would see: a loveless, dysfunctional marriage, which would have been worse for them emotionally.

I decided to file for divorce: it was the hardest decision I had made. I come from a conservative Chinese Christian family — no one had ever had a divorce.

The six months or so from November 1999 were challenging emotionally. There were mornings when I woke up thinking, “My husband does not want me. I failed in my last job. I look fat and feel ugly. And I have three kids.”

I could feel myself falling into depression and hopelessness. I began to question my worth: how can I make a difference now? But I also reasoned internally that wallowing in self-pity and pining for what I did not have was not an option. Besides my family to fend for, I did not want to become a suicide statistic — did I?

## **Pull yourself up**

I began to turn those questions into a conviction: despite and because of my failures, I will have the courage, wisdom and strength to make an even bigger difference. I pulled myself up from the brink of despair and asked myself: “What do you want?”

My self-reply was: “I want to do well in my job. I need to feed my kids. I want my kids to have a happy mum. I want my kids to be loving and have fun, to be responsible and resilient. I want to be happy again.”

**“So do not fear,  
for I am with  
you; do not  
be dismayed,  
for I am your  
God. I will  
strengthen you  
and help you;  
I will uphold  
you with my  
righteous right  
hand.”**

— Isaiah 41:10

With grit drawn from my faith, I forced myself to turn my problems into possibilities. In resilience-building workshops facilitated by Wand Inspiration, I designed the ‘Problems Versus Possibilities’ core process to be tackled at the beginning of the day.

Here is how it worked out for me.

- **Problem: no job. | Possibility: find a job**

That I did when my sister-in-law, Li Soon, opened up the Jobs Classified section in a newspaper one morning and showed me two listings she had circled — school psychologist at Raffles Institution (RI) and researcher in psychology at the National University of Singapore (NUS). I was qualified for both. So, I cleaned up my face, put on nice clothes — that still fit — and went for the interviews. Eventually, I chose RI’s offer because I could make a direct impact on the lives of 1,800 students.

- **Problem: postnatal fat. | Possibility: get fit**

My youngest sibling, sister Kok Ju (her Christian name is Julia), came into my room one morning with a video (those things were still in use in 1999) of tae bo (a combination of muay thai and kickboxing exercises). I looked frumpy and felt grumpy. I did not want to move my body.

Julia was relentless. She dragged me to our parents’ room where the video player was, and said: “Do this and you’ll feel better. Pretend that you’re punching him.” (She meant my soon-to-be ex-husband, of course.)

Soon, I was punching and kicking after work to the amusement of my young sons who followed suit. We worked out our frustrations. Slowly but surely, I lost the postnatal fat. And got fitter.

## **See possibilities**

Over the years since 1999, whenever I find myself facing a problem, I reframe it to: what is possible here?

If you wake up in the morning and focus only on your problems, they will seem to grow bigger and bigger until they overwhelm you. Your energy level drops, the light in your eyes grows dim and you become negative and pessimistic.

If you focus on what you can create for the day, then you fill yourself with positive energy, a smile comes on and it infects others. For instance: “I will have a connecting lunch conversation with my team. I will exercise after work. I will create a fun time with my kids.”

In those early days at RI, while I was still battling my grief over my failed marriage, I would wake up and think of the students who needed my counsel that day. Instead of falling into the “no husband and how pathetic I am” trap, I trained my mind to focus on the difference I would make to my students and the fun exercises I would do with my children. Visualising the faces of those whom I could impact positively helped.

Since my divorce, I have helped many single-parent families and youth-at-risk (many of them come from single-parent families), often as a pro bono service.

**Self-pity is our worst enemy and if we yield to it, we can never do anything good in the world.**

— Helen Keller

The failure also got me to focus on parenting my children and making career choices that best benefit my young brood. From my academic training, I knew the score: children from “broken families” often got into trouble.

So, I was conscious of how I disciplined them, taught them values and, importantly, how I showed them love. I surrounded them with mentors from my family, school and friends. I turned down a full-time position at McKinsey & Company in 2004 because I could not bring myself then to be working possibly four days away from Singapore. (I negotiated for a 10-days-a-month, in-Singapore-only contract instead.)

In my personal space, this failure led me to work on my beliefs and assumptions about men and marriage. I was so hurt by the betrayal that for at least two years, I kept telling myself, “You cannot trust men. Who needs a marriage anyway? I do not need to rely on any man.”

But over time, I learned to trust myself and others again, men in particular. Being a single mother for eight years has taught me a lot about parenting and the challenges of doing it solo. I have paid the tuition fees, so you don’t have to.



*If you wake up in the morning and focus only on your problems, they will seem to grow bigger and bigger until they overwhelm you. If you focus on what you can create for the day, then you fill yourself with positive energy, a smile comes on and it infects others.*



## ***Reflection***

Think of a situation that upsets you.

1. What is it about the situation that upsets you, making it a problem?
  2. How can you reframe it from a problem into a possibility?
  3. Who can you ask for help to turn that possibility into action and bring about a positive outcome?
-

## CHAPTER 2

# *How Do I Grieve the Death of a Dream?*

**I**n 2000, even as I was counselling students at Raffles Institution, I was receiving counselling from Dee, a pastor's wife. During one of the meetings with Dee, she asked me about the dream I had when I first got married.

"I dreamed of being happily married, with my husband loving me, and our children, happy."

It was all-white picket fences in my dream marriage.

"Well, your dream has died," Dee bluntly but gently said.

I looked up, shocked.

"Since you studied psychology, do you know the grieving process?" Dee asked.

I nodded feebly.

"Good, you go home and grieve the death of your dream marriage."

I went home and began to write.

I wrote about the years of denial, when I refused to see that my marriage was on the rocks and why I had run off to Canada

in 1998 with my young sons “to do research”. I wrote about the shock when I finally saw him with his girlfriend. I wrote about my anger: “I thought you were meant to protect me...”

I wrote about my sadness of being rejected and abandoned. I wrote about my fear of being stigmatised as a divorcee and of being criticised and rejected, and the fear of being worthless and unloved. I wrote about how frightened I was to raise my children alone — of not making enough money for them.

I wrote every night for two weeks till my tears ran dry and my anger dissipated.

## **Define the feelings**

One day, I attended a class on emotional coaching as part of my professional development, and I relearned American therapist Virginia Satir’s iceberg model — that feelings run deeper than the behaviours observed on the surface or the tip of the iceberg. I was reminded that many people’s problems stemmed from being disappointed with unmet expectations (the unseen part of the iceberg). How true: I had unmet expectations of what my marriage would be like. I was in deep disappointment.

In that class, I was introduced to the Body Outline exercise that I then used with my students. This was to help them express their emotions. Over the years, I have used this in one-on-one sessions and adapted it into a process which I use when I facilitate a group. (See the exercise under Reflection at the end of the chapter.)

To have the capacity to move on from a setback dictates that we don’t walk around with a ton of emotional baggage. We must work on lightening the emotional load — the grief that’s in the baggage.

Whenever I face a setback, change or challenge, I pause and ask myself, “What am I feeling Angry about? What am I feeling Sad about? What am I feeling Scared of?” I call this expressing your “ASS”. (Some humour is good, yes?)

Note that I am encouraging you to express your feelings from the “I feel...” statements — your point of view. If you say, “You made me feel” or “My mother made me angry”, you give your power to others, whether they are your parents, spouse or boss. If you say, “I feel angry when my mother criticised me about my parenting”, you can ask yourself, “What can I do or say to assure my mother that I am being a good parent?”

In challenging times, rather than bottle up your anger, sadness and what you are scared about, pretending they don’t exist, try to express those feelings in a healthy and functional way. Write about them, tell someone you trust or talk to yourself in front of the mirror in the privacy of your own room.

Bottling up what you feel angry, sad or scared about does not make those feelings go away. You are merely creating tension within. And one day, you might explode in anger and aggression, or harm yourself by over-drinking or other self-harm, or you might withdraw from society, or avoid new opportunities because you are afraid.

**“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”**

— Hebrews 4:16

## **Grief work takes time**

There is no recipe for how long it takes. I released a big part of my grief in those two weeks of writing, but I kept discovering new fears, and new sources of anger and disappointment.

Little things triggered my memory of the loss at hand (my marriage) and, suddenly, I would be filled with tears of sadness about other past events. For example, both my grandparents died when I was in university in Canada: my grandfather passed away two weeks after I started school in 1989 and my grandmother died a few months after I began graduate school. Not being there at their funerals and without family around me was tough. And being just 19 when my grandfather passed on — he’s my role model and the inspiration for this book — I didn’t know how to grieve. Which is why I now use this book as my way of teaching young people to handle setbacks and grief.

Don’t judge yourself for feeling angry, sad or scared. It is not childish to feel so, and you are not meant to “suck it up and move on”. Love yourself, with all your emotions. They are what make you human after all.

Acknowledge your emotions and be okay with them. As you express them gently, you will be kinder to yourself. Such expression also gives you an outlet, preventing you from going crazy.

## **Derive meaning from grief**

A good thing that happened as I expunged my grief in text was rediscovering my love for writing. From 2001 to 2002, I wrote the series *All Kids R Gifted*. More importantly, I found meaning in my grief: I turned it into writing to build youth resilience. I used my empathy to write *Break to Dawn* in 2003. I also used

the expressions of personal grief as material for ‘Life Lessons’ — a mental wellness column in *Mind Your Body*, a bi-weekly pullout then published by *The Straits Times*, Singapore’s flagship newspaper.

You, too, can have good grief. Take your time to grieve when you face a loss, failure, mistake or disappointment, and allow someone you trust to listen and not judge.





*Don't judge yourself for  
feeling angry, sad or scared.  
It is not childish to feel so,  
and you are not meant to  
"suck it up and move on".  
Love yourself, with all your  
emotions. They are what  
make you human after all.*

## ***Reflection***

The Body Outline exercise may sound simplistic. But it is an effective way to direct your emotions towards a positive path.

Draw a body outline with space within to colour in. Imagine a gingerbread man. The next steps require you to:

1. Close your eyes and think of the part(s) of your body that feel(s) the specified sensation or emotion. For instance, you may clench your jaw when you are angry. So, the jaw is the part of your body where you feel anger the most.
2. Then, open your eyes and colour the part(s) of your body where you feel the emotion most.

Do steps No.1 and No.2 for these emotions:

- Angry
- Sad
- Scared

As you look at your coloured body outline, write about the following. Give yourself 1 to 3 minutes to express each feeling.

- I feel angry when...
- I feel sad when...
- I feel scared when...

Vary your statements, if you like. Examples: "I feel afraid that..." or "I am worried that..." or "I fear..."

Now ask yourself what healthy and constructive things you could say or do when you feel:

***Angry***

Example: instead of calling my friend names when I am angry with her, I will cool down and have a heart-to-heart talk about what happened.

***Sad***

Example: instead of wallowing in self-pity and victimhood because of the break-up, I will spend time with my best friends and have a good laugh or cry over coffee.

***Scared***

Example: instead of avoiding all opportunities because I am afraid of failure, I will ask for help from others to improve myself and develop my capabilities.

---

## CHAPTER 3

# *And How Am I Responsible For This?*

**I**n late 1999 to mid-2000, I thought that all men were scum (and that's putting it mildly), that they could not be trusted and that marriage was for losers.

“Who needs marriage anyway? Who needs a man? I can't trust them,” I told everyone who would listen.

These were dangerous thoughts given that I was school counsellor and coach to 1,800 teenaged boys at Raffles Institution (RI) and the mother of two young sons. If I believed that all men could not be trusted and that they were all jerks, how would those beliefs affect my treatment and relationships with my students and my sons?

By being aware of my own assumptions (okay, it is not a fact that all men cannot be trusted), I was at least able to contain myself, and see my students and my sons with enough neutrality, not foisting my judgement on them.

I reminded myself not to jump to conclusions that the students were lying when they told me why they had not completed their homework. I took deep breaths when a student

was late for his appointment and refrained from thinking, “He is so untrustworthy.”

I think I was doing okay in trusting sons and adolescent boys. But I was relentlessly self-righteous about the adult version of the male species.

## **Beware biases**

Let a guy be late for a meeting, and I had my claws out, ready to inflict verbal harm, “How can I trust you to be punctual? Men!” I took notice if a male friend so much as glanced at a woman walking by. Never mind that he was not my boyfriend: I was ready to dig his eyes out for just looking at another woman when he should have been listening to me. “See? Men can’t focus on one woman at a time.”

I was collecting evidence at every opportunity to prove my premise: that all men could not be trusted, that they could not be faithful and that they were all... (well, you fill in the adjectives). If I saw one guy who was faithful and committed to his wife, I called it a fluke.

Amelia Rosenberg, a wonderful leadership coach, told me bluntly, “Wendy, if you think all men can’t be trusted, you will always end up with men you can’t trust.”

Her point was this: if I were to meet a good man, I would test him with so much suspicion and doubt that he would eventually prefer to be with someone other than me. Then I would be “right” again: “There you go, men cannot be trusted.”

So, yes, I was not in a good place where the opposite gender was concerned. If I was invited to a wedding, cynical thoughts crept in: “Let’s see how long this one lasts.”

Not wishing to bring my gnarled thoughts into a happy occasion, I declined many an invitation during my men-bashing,

marriage-burning days. Until, my baby sister Julia tied the knot in 2003.

I could not well escape *her* wedding. And I needed to be positive for her. Certainly, my experience need not be hers.

As Julia waited to walk to the wedding chapel from the dressing room, a sudden storm broke out. She was upset and told me it was a horrible sign for her marriage.

I said, “Nonsense. It’s just rain. You have a wonderful man waiting to marry you. He’s more likely now worried about how you feel and wondering if you are upset. You go out there and smile. You’ll have a lovely wedding and, more importantly, a loving marriage.”

**“... a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance”**

— Ecclesiastes 3:3-4

## **Revise versions**

After saying that, something in me changed. I found myself believing what I had said to my sister. I allowed myself to see again that not all men were heartless and unfaithful. I acknowledged that marriage, when it worked, was a beautiful commitment.

I began to train my eyes to look not for perfect marriages, but for those that were enduring and endearing: I wanted to see old men still holding their wives’ hands. I believed the men in my workshops who told me that they loved their wives.

I began to change my dark thoughts about men and marriage. Importantly, I needed



to change my mind about myself — from “unlovable” to “I am loving and lovable”. I began to harbour a secret thought that I would “make a good, loving wife”. I found myself allowing myself to wish for a man who loved me enough to want to marry and cherish me.

I knew that if I wanted to be married again, the negative thoughts and men blaming had to stop. That decision called for resilience. That’s the ability to stop blaming others for your setbacks — rather to be willing to learn from a raw deal and to heal your thoughts.

Let me introduce my DROP process. It is something that I use in work disappointments but is as applicable to divorces and other setbacks.

- **Disappointment**

The goal I had was a happily-ever-after marriage, to love and be loved, for better and for worse, in sickness and in health, and so forth. That goal had perished.

- **Reality**

My victim version: he was bad. He betrayed me. He let me down.

A responsible version: I had kids immediately and I focused on my kids and career. I did not want to join my ex-husband when he went to the pub. I lost my respect and love for him. I started to put my kids and my career ahead of him.

- **Option**

If I have a chance to be married again, I shall give priority to my husband. I shall also keep respecting myself, be loving and keep fit.

- **Progression**

As time goes on, I shall learn to trust men. And I shall find a man whom I can trust. I shall remember that marriage takes effort and that I'm a loving, trusting and confident woman.

It was a difficult reflection when I first did it in early 2004, just months after my sister's wedding in September the previous year. It was hard to face up to the fact that I, too, was responsible for my marriage breakdown. It was hard not to retreat into self-blame.

There is a delicate line between claiming responsibility and heaping on self-blame and shame. Do note the distinction. Responsibility is about: "What I did and did not do, and what I can do better next time." Blame and shame focus on: "What's wrong with me?"

Nevertheless, after I took a hard look at myself via the DROP process, a weight lifted off my shoulders. I felt a little readier for remarriage — if, at all, the opportunity presented itself. Meeting a man willing to marry me, a single mum with three kids? That would be hard, I thought. Could I dare wish?



*There is a delicate line between claiming responsibility and heaping self-blame and shame.*

*Do note the distinction.*

*Responsibility is about:*

*“What I did and did not do, and what I can do better next time.” Blame and shame focus on:*

*“What’s wrong with me?”*

## ***Reflection***

Think of a deep-seated disappointment.

1. What does your victim version say? What's the responsible version?
  2. What options do you have?
  3. How will you work towards the options?
-



## CHAPTER 4

# *How Do I Learn to Trust Again?*

**T**here was in the interim years, between my man-bashing phase circa 2000 and remarrying in 2008, a period when I allowed myself to believe in men and marriage again. David came along and taught me to find love again. Someone whom my mother would not have imagined existed.

One day in October 2000, as I was still adjusting to my new status as divorced, rejected first wife and single mother of three kids, my mother said bluntly, “Who will marry you now? You have three kids.”

My mother is a Chinese Hokkien woman. She does not mince her words. In her kind, motherly eyes, I was “damaged goods”, with excess baggage. “What man would want to raise someone else’s children?,” she continued.

I love my mum and I know she loves me, but sometimes our conversations sound like they come straight out of Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*. I did not care about getting married again. Her question served only to make me laugh at the absurdity of marriage.

“But mum, I don’t need a husband,” was my usual reply. I did not tell her that I doubted I would be a lovable wife — in fact, that I would be good enough to be anybody’s wife.

Then I met David at a coaching workshop. We dated. He made me laugh. That was important given that I was still bruised from being unmarried and that I was drifting in and out of my “all men are a\*\*\*\*\* and cannot be trusted” phase.

But my state of flux made it difficult for David. When he travelled abroad for work, I immediately suspected him of cheating on me. Poor guy. He was the most decent man I knew and he cared deeply about me. Yet, I tested him every time I had a chance.

David helped me to see that I was not damaged goods but a beautiful woman with a big heart. He showed me that there were men who could be trusted and, importantly, that I could be loved.

I began to love again, starting with myself. I saw that I had many strengths and would make a supportive and loving helpmate to a man.

Although I had been against marriage when we first dated, I began to see how beautiful marriage could be when two people were devoted to each other. Like how loving and committed my parents were to each other. (I secretly wanted that for myself.)

**“A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.”**

— Proverbs 31:10

## **Beautiful break-up**

Unfortunately, David did not share my marriage goal — he was not ready for marriage to me. My mother had a point: with three children, who would marry me?

My relationship with David lasted for three years. It was a painful break-up. We were a beautiful couple: two funny, loving individuals and our friends were shocked. Why could we not just live together and not be married?

I could not do that for integrity's sake. As long as I was seeing David, my heart would not be free to date anyone else.

Besides, I had three young children and I wanted them to see what a real marriage was about. I did not want my children to see their mother as a serial dater. I truly believed, by then, that I was meant to be married again — despite and because of my three children.

It was also a beautiful break-up. David and I cried and laughed together. We even went for break-up counselling together, so that we could part ways graciously.

I called David one day in February 2017 to ask if I could write about him. We talked about my daughter, Nicole, and I told him what I was writing about. He gave me his trust and permission to write about our relationship.

I include this story because my relationship with David was a significant part of my bouncing

**“... a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose.”**

— Ecclesiastes 3:5-6



back from heartbreak. I believe that David came into my life to restore my belief in myself as a woman and a life partner. I was so low in confidence and felt such rejection that I thought no one could ever love me. But I grew to trust David and to love myself.

Sometimes, a romantic relationship does not work out, no matter how beautiful, because values or goals do not align. Don't bash the relationship or the person. That person comes your way for a reason or a season. Perhaps, it is to help you to find your passion and purpose.

If you have given your best to the relationship and the person, you have left him better off than when you first met him. Hopefully, you can appreciate that this person has also left you better off — a wiser, kinder or braver person.



*Sometimes, a romantic relationship does not work out, no matter how beautiful, because values or goals do not align. Don't bash the relationship or the person. That person comes your way for a reason or a season.*

## ***Reflection***

Think of a previous relationship. Even if it was not a romantic relationship, reflect on it.

1. Vent out the disappointment you had in that relationship during, and / or when it ended or changed. What bad feelings did you have?
  2. Relook at the relationship and see the good that came out of it. (Even I can be thankful that my ex-husband gave me three lovely children.) What forward-moving lessons did the relationship teach you?
  3. How did you leave this person better off than when you first met him (or her?) And vice versa.
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## CHAPTER 5

# *Project Love*

I have friends who are nice and good-looking, with careers that are functional to successful. But they are not married. And during family gatherings such as Chinese New Year, they are often quizzed about their marital status — or lack of it. The usual grilling: “Why are you not married?” or “When do you want to get married? You are not so young any more.”

It does not matter that they are not even dating. In fact, it is because they are not in a relationship that’s serious enough to bring a date to the family gathering that they are interrogated about their singlehood.

Spurred on by my observation of such recurring questions, I launched an informal coaching and research project in 2008. I called it Project Love. I wanted to find out what the psychological and social obstacles were to tying the knot. Through my coaching process, I hoped to discover what actions the still-single person could take to move closer towards a nuptial goal.

I offered male and female friends — married and divorced, with or without children, and singles — to be their life coach for free. They had to be wanting a committed relationship and interested in getting married (at some point). Friends who just

wanted a fling need not apply. Participants had to be prepared to meet me between three and six times over nine months to discuss their relationship goals, dissect past ones and be determined to take actions and risks to create a committed relationship.

Seven friends, in their mid-30s to mid-40s, agreed to be my case-study participants. Names have been changed to protect their identities. The table shows their gender and marital experience.

### **Project Love @ start in 2008**

| <b>Gender</b> | <b>Not married before</b> | <b>Married before, no kids</b> | <b>Married before, with kids</b>               |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Male          | Thomas                    | Kenny<br>(divorced)            | Andrew<br>(divorced)<br><br>Colin<br>(widowed) |
| Female        | Sue                       | Mary<br>(divorced)             | Kathy<br>(divorced)                            |

### **Project Love @ end in Feb 2017**

| <b>Gender</b> | <b>Not married before</b> | <b>Married before, no kids</b> | <b>Married before, with kids</b>                        |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Male          | Thomas<br>(married)       | Kenny<br>(married)             | Andrew<br>(engaged)<br><br>Colin<br>(in a relationship) |
| Female        | Sue<br>(married)          | Mary<br>(married)              | Kathy<br>(single)                                       |

## **At the heart of it**

Several key themes emerged from the nine-month coaching experiment.

- **Fear of being vulnerable again**

Thomas was engaged and about to be married when his then-fiancée returned the ring. Sue had boyfriends, and the last one left her three years ago and broke her heart. The others who were married before felt betrayed or abandoned. Colin, whose wife died when their son was a toddler, could not fall in love again as he felt he had had “the perfect wife. Who will ever be as good as her?”

Falling in love is a vulnerable thing. You could be opening yourself up to someone, sharing yourself intimately, then get your heart smashed. Who wants a repeat experience?

However, none of my friends had revealed their fears to anyone or had received any counselling to deal with their grief. They had buried their disappointments deep down, joking about their insecurities. They had not faced the fears head-on — or rather heart-on.

When relatives and friends asked about their singlehood, they simply gave the default answers: “I have no time and I’m very busy at work” or “I am still waiting for the right one”. These were easier lines to say than “I feel very afraid to be hurt again” or “Seriously, would you like to be jilted twice?”

- **Inadequate communication**

Andrew had not thought it necessary to communicate with his girlfriend when he travelled for work. (She was his ex-girlfriend by the time he was in Project Love). He had wanted to save on the cost of calling or texting. He realised a similar pattern of (inadequate) communication with his ex-wife. Thus, the real cost: two broken relationships.

Sue realised that she had never told her ex-boyfriends that she cared about them. “I had never said, ‘I love you’ to anyone,” she mused. Her professional role required her to communicate business ideas and solutions every day, and she was fantastic at it. But she was inarticulate when it came to her feelings.

When I set Thomas some homework — to gather feedback from his friends about his social and relationship potential — he found people telling him that he was a great joker but that he was not good at talking about “serious relationship” stuff. He wondered what that meant.

Under the Project Love microscope, he realised that he was not great at expressing his emotions. For instance, if he was upset about something that his ex-fiancée did, he merely bottled it up. But he would lose his temper a few days later over the smallest thing because the earlier issue was still bugging him. He needed to learn how to express his emotions in a calm and loving way.

- **Feeling “not good enough”**

Three of the male participants felt this way about themselves. One of them gathered from his female friends that he did not have a career and income that would attract women to be his wife. That his laissez-faire career could be an obstacle to his

finding someone dented his ego, but it was also a wake-up call. If having a lasting and loving marriage was in his plans, he had to start planning to get his career on track and growing.

On the other hand, the female participants revealed that the men whom they dated worried that they (the men) were not good enough. Apparently, the women were “too successful”. Their professional and financial success — all three women had bought their own apartments — made the men uncomfortable, intimidated even. The women told me that they were fine with dating and marrying men who made less money than they did. Why, they asked, were the men not willing to marry them?

## **Love capacity**

I don't have all the answers to the questions that came up during Project Love. But here are a few things the participants did that helped them build their love capacity.

1. Since Sue was not dating, she decided to write notes of affirmation to her mother and siblings for Valentines' Day. Expressing her love and appreciation to her family was a great start to the art of affirming and expressing love. This must have worked because when I see her today with her husband, she addresses him as “babe, sweetheart” and is both adoring and adorable.
2. Thomas worked to get his career flying high, so that he would be ready to be a responsible provider to whomever he married. Today, he is successful and is able to provide for his wife. Well done, Thomas!



**“Cast all your  
care on Him  
for He cares for  
you.”**

— 1 Peter 5:7

3. All of them spent one-on-one sessions with me, talking about what they felt angry, sad and scared about when their hearts were broken. They cried, if they needed to, in the privacy and safety of our time together. They vented as well. They forgave themselves and let go of the past, casting aside the burden of their (until-then) unspoken grief.
4. One common homework I assigned them was to think about the strengths and values they wanted in their partners. After they had written or told me their lists, I asked them to rate themselves on how they fared on each attribute — from one (low) to 10 (high). The participants realised that to attract and create a life together with someone who had those strengths, they had to have or develop those traits too.
5. The person who chose to remain single, Kathy, accepted her choice of singlehood graciously and with a lot of love for herself: through our coaching sessions, she stopped beating herself up about her status. She looked at the love she had and the love she was pouring into her family and community. Today, she knows with certainty that she is loving and much loved. That is good enough for her.

Project Love taught me that to love others, you must first love yourself. Forgive your past, forgive those who have hurt you and forgive yourself of your foolishness and failures. Embrace your strengths and values, and tell others how much you love them. Today, as I catch up with these participants again and see how they are loving individuals, loving others, I know that I have made a small difference.

**“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”**

— Ephesians 4:32



*Project Love taught me that to love others, you must first love yourself. Forgive your past... Embrace your strengths and values, and tell others how much you love them.*

## ***Reflection***

1. If you are married, think of your relationship goals – what would be important and valuable for your marriage in this season? Ask your spouse and appreciate the common goals you both share for your relationship.
  2. What are negative thoughts about yourself and/or marriage that might sabotage yours? What can you say to yourself to overcome these?
  3. What are your values and strengths? Celebrate and bring these into your relationship.
-



## CHAPTER 6

# *For Better or Worse*

**W**hen in late 2004, I realised that I wished to get married again, I had to work to shift my beliefs to: “I can trust some men. Marriage when it works, is beautiful. I am loving and I am lovable.”

I reminded myself that having a failed marriage did not make me a failure. And it did not mean that I would fail again.

So, when I met Matthew in October that year, we both made the effort to be ready emotionally for marriage. I was determined that I would succeed this time, defining success as loving, resilient, “for better or for worse”, intimate, vulnerable and supportive.

Matt was a single father, worried about his young daughter. I was a single mother concerned about my three children. He never thought it strange to marry a single mother. In fact, he told me that if he were to marry again, he’d thought that a single mother would be a good choice because she would understand what he was going through.

Well, he had hit the jackpot. Not only was I a single mother with, not one but three children, I was a qualified early childhood educator and author of 20 books on multiple

intelligences. There. I found someone willing to marry me for my brains, kids and good looks.

We tied the knot in 2008 and called it “merger of the year”. You might have thought the book would end with, “Wendy grew her business, raised her brood and lived happily ever after.”

## **Three crossroads**

That would have been the ending if I had written this book right after marriage to Matt. Since I wrote this book in 2017, there have been nine years’ worth of setbacks, changes and resolutions to learn from. Each event presented choices: how and what choices Matt and I made at each crossroad required wisdom, courage, compassion and grace.

### **Crossroad No.1**

In December 2011, three years after we married, Matt’s father passed away. The death of a parent is a catastrophic emotional event. If you are close to your parents, their departure can create a big hole in your life. If you are not close or have drifted apart, a parent’s death can create an overwhelming sense of guilt and remorse.

I wanted Matt to spend time grieving. But he threw himself into work. He wanted to work harder than before even though he had lost his sense of purpose in his work at the bank: his father was not around any more to be impressed by his success.

One day in May 2012, Matt came home from work, and collapsed. I called the ambulance and rushed him to the hospital. Matt was diagnosed with excessive cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). The neurosurgeon told us that he needed to insert a tube into Matt’s brain to drain out the excess fluid into his stomach. That

event marked the beginning of eight surgical procedures over eight months in three hospitals. By the end of the year, Matt decided to quit his job and focus on recovering at home.

## **Crossroad No.2**

The following year, 2013, was difficult to say the least. As Matt battled a neurological illness, his mood swings and the fact that he was not employed, made it worse for him. The wedding vow “for better or worse, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer” was tested constantly.

Financially, we were challenged without Matt’s income. So, I prayed and I stepped up in my work. Miraculously, demand for my facilitation and coaching increased. I was able, by God’s grace, to pay the bills, support the kids and see to Matt’s medical expenses.

Matt improved physically. But his emotional health was at a low. One day in January 2014, he told me he felt like such a burden to me that he wanted to leave and give me a chance to find someone else. He wished to return to his mother’s home in Perth.

The statement came out of the blue. Was I so focused on working, frustrated and anxious, that I did not see this storm coming? It was a difficult two weeks as I cried and wondered, “Am I getting another divorce?”

**“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”**

— 2 Corinthians 12:9



My husband did not want me. He wanted to set me free from his illness. There were moments when I felt so rejected and resentful that I thought, “Fine, go! See if I care.”

Then I collapsed into tears and asked God, “What do you want me to do? I don’t really think You want me to get divorced again?”

Matt had been a devoted husband. He had just gotten very, very sick. I went to church, New Creation, and the songs and message spoke to me. Pastor Joseph Prince preached about Jesus turning water into wine. He asked if any of us was having marriage difficulties and said that if the passion had gone from the marriage, to put our marriage into God’s hands. Wine takes a long time to make but Jesus turned water into wine in seconds.

I believed that if I trusted God, entrusted this situation to him, water would be turned into wine in my marriage. I felt God saying to me, “This time, you stay in this marriage, even if there is little passion, I’m enough for you.”

I went home and told Matt that I wasn’t giving him a divorce. That I was willing to wait for him to be restored in his body, mind and heart. It was the hardest command from God to obey.

**The account of Jesus turning water to wine (at a wedding) is found in John 2:1-11.**

### **Crossroad No.3**

A few days later, it was Valentine’s Day. I was at INSEAD for a class. Matt texted me to see

if I needed a ride home. I was stunned. After he drove me home, he turned to me and whispered, “If I have not damaged us too much, will you take me back?”

Water into wine. I trusted God. I obeyed him and I loved Matt, even when there was no assurance of receiving love. Within a few months, the passion returned to our marriage. Matt went on a special diet, his pain went away and his energy returned.

By the beginning 2015, three years after Matt collapsed, he was restored. He went on to be coached by my trainer in family constellation\* and made resolutions to his health. He finally grieved the death of his father and was able to move on emotionally. He still wanted to work in Perth, and so he got a job there and moved in January 2016 while I remained in Singapore and commuted each month.

## **Three facets of a strong marriage**

What have I learned about marriage and resilience? And how do you build a marriage that can face uncertainty, changes and setbacks again and again — and become stronger? I believe there are three components.

### **1. Self-awareness and support**

Look within for the expectations that you bring into the relationship. If you need professional help to acknowledge those issues and find resolution, seek a coach or a therapist. Or, participate in a group workshop.

\*The family constellation approach examines how family-of-origins influences our beliefs and habits regarding finances, career, health, relationships and parenting. The approach gets you to examine deeply how the family system impacts marriages, among other things.

Don't wait until the issues overwhelm you. Address them individually or as a couple. Or, turn to trusted friends who won't judge you. I have Shila Das, my best friend, who would drop everything to be with me while I cried my eyes out. Who is your "Shila"?

## **2. Couple dates and holidays**

My parents, both 73, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 2017. Once, I saw my father checking out travel packages on his computer. He wanted to take my mum on a holiday. I was divorced then and living with my dad. I teased him, "You are so romantic, dad."

He turned to me and said solemnly, "That's the problem with you — you don't believe in romance any more." Ouch.

It takes planning, discipline and determination to create romantic couple time. Sitting together at a café while each of you texts on your phone is not couple time.

## **3. Adjust expectations**

While I hope that my marriage will last like my parents', I also need to adjust my expectations. That's because my marriage is not my parents'.

Resilient marriages need to adjust to the changes that the couple go through as individuals or together. When changes happen, you must be agile enough to let go of your historical or cultural expectations, and create new beginnings.

- Expectation No.1

My original expectations painted a traditional picture of marriage: husband is the main breadwinner. Wife works if she wants to.

When Matt fell sick, I became the sole breadwinner. Not only was I adjusting my expectations and changing my role from secondary income earner to main (in fact, only) provider, Matt was also grappling with his loss of the provider role. He had taken great pride and satisfaction in bringing home the bacon.

- Expectation No.2

Another traditional expectation of mine: man and wife live under the same roof. Children follow.

When Matt and I agreed that he moved to Perth for work and that I stayed in Singapore for mine, I needed to take a good look at my belief system — that a couple would not make it unless they lived under the same roof.

## **Other angles**

Someone who gave me a different take was my INSEAD professor Roger Lehman. He said that he and his wife were able to live and work in different cities, and still be happy together.

The message I got: you make your own rules as a couple. Do take on board wise counsel from your parents and family members. But don't take on board wholesale their rules and expectations. Certainly, feel free to ignore the views of non-significant others.

I'm not advocating that couples live separately. I'm only illustrating how, as circumstances and needs change, couples should talk about their old and new expectations, and be creative, bold and committed in making the changes together.



*Resilient marriages need to adjust to the changes that the couple go through as individuals or together. When changes happen, you must be agile enough to let go of your historical or cultural expectations, and create new beginnings.*

## ***Reflection***

Think about what the words, “for better or worse, in sickness and in health”, mean to you?

1. If your life partner experiences illness, failure, mistake or loss, what are your values that will see you through — and help you to stand by faithfully, lovingly and courageously?
  2. What do you expect of your life partner and marriage? If life brings changes, how would you adapt and improvise so that you can move forward?
  3. How are you keeping yourself emotionally, mentally, spiritually and physically healthy so that you are “your best self” for each other? For example, what agreements do you have with your life partner about couple time?
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## CHAPTER 7

# *Rediscovering Purpose*

**B**acktrack with me to 1999, when I had lost my job as principal, was divorced and on the cusp of depression. A shout-out and thanks to my sister-in-law, Li Soon, who likely had seen enough of my despair and had circled two job openings in a newspaper: school psychologist at Raffles Institution (RI) and researcher in psychology at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

Long story short, both roles were offered to me. True, the roles at RI and NUS paid less than the education director role I had before, but they also freed me from big accountabilities. For instance, at the preschool, I had a profit-and-loss responsibility, with 120 people reporting to me. With some relief, I reasoned that I was not ready to lead anyone, anyway.

Next step: how do I choose between the RI and NUS roles? At the school, I would be responsible for the socio-emotional development of 1,800 students, not counting teachers and parents. At the university, I would be conducting research, analysing data and writing papers.

Considering the state of my marriage (failing), my mind (in shambles) and my heart (broken), I felt weak and unworthy



**Besides, once I accepted the reality of my failures, I was certain that I would make a difference to the students. Being able to dust off those setbacks meant that I would be in a stronger, wiser and kinder place to advise my young charges.**

to be counselling. I felt that it would be easier to be dispassionately crunching data. Nevertheless, when I looked deep within me and asked myself, “What is your purpose?” I knew that I was aligned to helping students directly through counselling.

I had gone to Canada to study psychology so that I could help my fellow citizens to better deal with stress. I had the gift of teaching, listening and counselling. To turn my back on the RI role as school counsellor would be against what I stood for — my purpose.

Besides, once I accepted the reality of my failures, I was certain that I would make a difference to the students. Being able to dust off those setbacks meant that I would be in a stronger, wiser and kinder place to advise my young charges.

## **Being raw**

As it turned out, my three years at RI were a godsend. As I grappled with my new, personal role as a single mum, the stable environment of the school gave me a safe place to regain my professional confidence.

It also gave me personal time. I minded the emotional and mental well-being of the students, did what I did well and went home to my children at 6pm. At RI, I was going at 100 per cent. Instead of wallowing in my

career failure, I focused on my new responsibilities. I learned a lot about rebuilding trust.

But there was something I had to be upfront about: my personal crisis. I went to the headmaster three months into my job and told him, “I’m getting a divorce. I promise you that I won’t let it affect my job, but if you think it will, please let me know.”

I was scared. How would he react to the news that his newly hired psychologist was going through a split? Would being divorced reduce my credibility as a counsellor?

Bless his heart. Mr Wong looked at me and said solemnly, “I trust you, Wendy. You’ve been good with the boys and I know you won’t let anything affect your work.”

And he offered his support, “If you need time to see a counsellor, lawyer, just take your time and go.”

In their book, *The Trusted Advisor*, authors Maiser, Green and Galford talk about the “trust equation”. That includes, the authors advocate, credibility, reliability, intimacy and low self-orientation. In my case, I had professional training (credibility), I was always present for my students (reliability), and I put them above myself (low self-orientation).

But what does intimacy mean in my role as a school counsellor and, eventually, as a leadership coach? The authors believe that intimacy is “driven by emotional honesty, a willingness to expand the bounds of acceptable topics, while maintaining mutual respect and by respecting boundaries”.

Simply put, it means making myself available and accessible to them. Let me explain: I knew that teenage boys would not saunter into the office of the “School Psychologist” and readily talk about their personal issues, aspirations and challenges. So, I created talks and community projects with the students that put me within their reach.

And being “willing to expand the bounds of acceptable topics” meant that I would be upfront with them, even at the risk of having them test my emotional honesty.

## **Being real**

That test came one day when I was giving a talk on relationships to a Secondary Three cohort, around four hundred 15-year-olds. I asked them to write down their questions and pass the slips of paper up to the front. As I flipped through the questions, one read, “Is it true that you are getting a divorce?”

My heart stopped. Somehow, someone knew. I could ignore the question but if I pretended not to see it, at least one student would know that I had chosen to hide. I had, after all, taught them to be open and real. I was being tested.

Would it be “more professional” if I kept my divorce a secret? Would people judge me as being less credible because I was a divorcee? A self-accusatory thought said, “If you are a psychologist, should you not have used your expertise to save your marriage?”

Maybe some might even judge that being divorced, I was not “pro-family”, setting a bad example to the impressionable young men. These thoughts swirled in my head as I responded to questions like, “What if I like a girl and she doesn’t like me?”

Finally, I opened that question and read, “Is it true that you are getting a divorce?”

You could hear a pin drop: 400 boys wanted to hear my answer.

“Yes, it’s true. I’m getting a divorce,” I answered. I heard gasps.

“This is why I tell you, boys, treat your women well. Be responsible and kind. Because when you grow up, your wives

are not going to sit around and accept bad treatment from you,” I blurted out.

My voice cracked and I ran out of the lecture hall, fighting tears. As I walked hastily away, I heard someone run after me, calling out, “Ms Wendy, Ms Wendy. Stop.”

I turned around and saw a student whom I had been trying to reach running towards me. He had been sent to me for counselling a few weeks ago but had refused to open up.

“Please tell me it’s not true,” he said.

“It is true. It is true.” I replied softly.

He swore, stomped his feet, turned and ran off. A few hours later, the young man walked into my office.

He was finally ready to talk about himself. He sat down and said, “Ms Wendy, I’ll tell you what is really happening at home.”

He confessed to being physically abused.

Being raw hurts: it tears open the wounds. But being raw works: your honesty makes you real to people. My being vulnerable that morning gave the young man the courage to trust me and to finally open up and seek help, putting himself in the same vulnerable spot he had seen me in.

### Corporate application

Let me divert this application to your corporate life. You may baulk at the idea of talking to your colleagues about personal issues, fearing

**Life is not easy for any of us. But what of that? We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something and that this thing must be attained.**

— Marie Curie

that such sharing will put you in a vulnerable spot. Certainly. I'm not advocating that you wear your heart on your sleeve. Also, be selective about those you take into your confidence.

But when you do choose to divulge something about yourself to someone — say, a trusted colleague — you build an emotional connection with that person. You are giving the message, “I trust you enough to share this with you.”

If you are a manager and wish to develop your team, you need the team members to feel that you are approachable and empathetic. By revealing a little of your own challenges — for instance, how you recovered from a setback — you are saying, “I've struggled too. So, I shall have empathy when you talk about your struggles with me. Tell me how I can help you to do your job better.”

In my leadership workshops, I've facilitated thousands of leaders to build trust with their teams and their clients by having the courage to bring a bit of their true selves into their interactions. Many have learned that wisely integrating their personal lives into their professional work nurtures team bonding, trust, openness and better performance.



*My being vulnerable that morning gave the young man the courage to trust in me and to finally open up and seek help, putting himself in the same vulnerable spot he had seen me in.*

## ***Reflection***

Think of a few people in your work with whom you would like to build greater trust in the next weeks. Think about what being trusted by others means to you and why that is important.

1. What areas can you be emotionally honest about? What boundaries do you wish for others to respect? How can you increase your emotional connection with others?
  2. How would others rate your level of care for them? How humble are you? How empathetic are you?
  3. In the longer term, how would you rate your credibility and reliability? What will you do to increase the ratings of those traits over the next two years?
-

## CHAPTER 8

# *Rebuilding Self-Trust*

**H**aving my own business taught me to face financial and commercial challenges. Around the time that I registered my company, Wand Inspiration, SARS broke out.

SARS or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome saw Singapore's first patient being admitted to hospital for suspected pneumonia on 1 March 2003. I had registered Wand Inspiration on 3 March 2003 (easy to remember 030303), not expecting a national epidemic.

A few schools had already engaged me to deliver workshops for their students in the next few weeks, and a group of executives were to attend a workshop on emotional intelligence. I was excited.

But on 25 March, the nation had its first SARS death. By 27 March, all schools were shut and people were discouraged from gathering in groups. Overnight, the engagements that I had were cancelled.

“What have I done?” was my rhetorical question. “Have I given up a steady income to get no income?” (I had quit my secure job at RI in January to start my company.)



**“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”**

— Joshua 1:9

## **Muster strength**

I needed every ounce of hardiness, courage and determination to stay resilient. One characteristic of resilience is the ability to face reality and improvise to make the best out of a difficult situation.

Let me use the Challenge, Actions, Results and Strengths (or CARS) checklist to illustrate.

## **Challenge**

- Started my business in March, with \$4,000 savings.
- SARS happened, schools closed and gatherings were disallowed.
- All workshops for March and April were cancelled.

## **Actions**

- Reduced spending in every area, telling my kids that we would skip treats for two months.
- Changed focus: I used the two-month shutdown to complete my book, *Break to Dawn*. I interviewed five young people who had faced setbacks, including the death of a mother, leukaemia and imprisonment, wrote their stories, and

talked about ways youths could bounce back and achieve new goals.

- Contacted teachers I knew to talk about my book.

## Results

- *Break to Dawn* was completed and printed by the time SARS was cleared. (It became the book I used with youths to explore resilience in the face of failure, loss, illness and betrayal.)
- Ready to launch the book.

## Strengths

- Dug deep to use my agility (switch from group workshops to solitary writing), resourcefulness (find interviewees) and determination (complete the book).
- Frugal at crunch times.

When I facilitate the CARS process in workshops, I get participants to acknowledge their strengths. We are used to criticising ourselves for making mistakes and for being stupid and inadequate. Rarely do we pause to appreciate our strengths. But when push comes to shove, and in a real test of our wills, I dare say that most of us will rise to the occasion.

We don't need determination, resourceful and frugality when times are easy and money is plentiful. Our strengths are brought to the fore when we are challenged.

Reflecting on CARS regularly recharges your energy, and affirms your self-esteem. Being an inexperienced entrepreneur, I was constantly challenged with rejection, inconsistent cash flow

and self-doubt. But when I went through my CARS checklist, when I remembered my strengths — resourceful, bold, caring, creative, agile, determined and disciplined — I knew I could face the next challenge.

Add purpose and values to strengths, and I knew I could not give up on myself and on my work. My purpose is to inspire and build resilience, and to love and to be loved. My values are service, self-development and resilience.

These aspects kept me going in the business, preventing me from throwing in the towel. What about you? What keeps you pursuing your goals, despite the challenges?



*Being an inexperienced entrepreneur, I was constantly challenged with rejection, inconsistent cash flow and self-doubt. But when I went through my CARS checklist... I knew I could face the next challenge.*

**Reflection**

Think of a recent accomplishment you are proud of.

**Challenge:**

1. What was challenging about the situation?

**Actions:**

2. What actions did you take at that time?

**Results:**

3. What results did you create? (For example, bettering a relationship.)

**Strengths:**

4. What strengths did you demonstrate?
-

## CHAPTER 9

# *Rising to Lead Again*

**I**n late 2003, Kai approached me and asked if I would mentor her so that she could learn to facilitate youth leadership programmes. In her mind, I was a leader. In my mind, I was not.

I hesitated. I was afraid. I wondered if I was ready to mentor Kai. What if I didn't even know where I was going? How was I to lead her?

Have you been afraid of your own potential? I remember my earliest fear to lead. I was 16 and studying in a co-ed school. I was the deputy head prefect (student leader), about to be made the first female head prefect. Outwardly, I looked confident. Inwardly, I was terrified. I was not sure if I was ready to helm the student population.

I went to the teacher-in-charge of prefects and pleaded to be relieved of all my leadership duties. I gave him many reasons, including, "I would like to focus on my studies."

**"The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be."**

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

He said my studies were fine.

“I don’t have time. I have ballet and dance classes after school three times a week.”

He told me that being a prefect made a difference to others.

“I know, sir. But I’m already teaching little children in weekly Sunday School classes, and running free drama workshops for kids,” I added.

I was already making a difference, I justified.

And, the ultimate statement: “I don’t need to be a prefect to serve others. I will keep serving and helping others, sir. I just don’t want to be a prefect any more.”

Since no one could force a teenager to lead, they let me go. I returned the prefect tie and badge, and stepped down.

## **Embrace leadership**

Years later, as I reflected on this episode in my life, the light bulb went on: I had been terrified to lead because I had been afraid to fail. Subconsciously, at 16, I was worried that the higher I climbed, the harder I would fall — and I must have expected myself to fail. I must have thought, “What if I fail as the first female head prefect?”

I wanted to stay safe. I wanted to be sheltered from failure. I gave up the leadership role because I was not confident of being good enough for those I led and terrified of not living up to expectations.

The fear of failure and not realising my potential did not end there.

In 1992, I was accepted into the graduate programme at Teachers’ College, Columbia University in New York, a well-recognised graduate school. My parents told me that Columbia University was too expensive and too far away.

In the meantime, three Canadian graduate schools also accepted me but I chose to stay the same university that I had done my undergrad in. My reason was that Simon Fraser University offered me a scholarship. I was, at 22, too afraid to venture out of my comfort zone.

I did not assert that Teachers' College was the place for me. I did not try to find any other scholarships. I gave up a great opportunity to learn at a great institution because I was afraid I would not be good enough for such a programme — that I would not live up to its expectations. Instead of stretching myself at a more demanding environment, I settled for what was less threatening. I ignored the opportunity to be at my best.

I also thought back to when I was fired and had to fire others. I still felt the shame and guilt of not being able to fend for those whom I was leading. From 2000 to 2003, while I was school counsellor at Raffles Institution (RI), I was content to merely support my head of pupil welfare department: I had no one to lead. I was not accountable for someone else's performance, payroll and development (except my students' and my children's). It felt rather liberating.

But back to Kai and a decade on. When, in 2003, she asked me to lead her, did I step up to lead and embrace the role? Or did I run away again? I reluctantly said yes.

Then, she brought others to me — Paul, Bee and Thaddeus. They did not ask outright, "Will you lead me?" If they had, I would have howled, "No way!" They just wanted to learn from me, they said.

I did not see myself as a leader of Wand Inspiration. Yes, I founded it in 2003 but I did not see myself as boss of anyone. I gave this spiel to everyone who was interested to join me, "I don't promise you any certainty. You get paid if we get a paid programme. And if we don't get much, you don't earn much."



**“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”**

— John Quincy Adams

In effect, I was trying to dissuade people from following me.

Someone told me that if you think you are a leader but find no one behind you when you turn around, then you are not a leader. I was, at times, very afraid to look behind me. What if no one was following? More frightening, what if there was a group following?

Today, I lead a team of nine coaches and facilitators.

How did I grow to embrace the leadership role? When I was studying in the Executive Masters in Consulting and Coaching for Change course in INSEAD, I realised through a process using family genogram, that I had been a leader since childhood. I was the oldest granddaughter, caring for 23 younger cousins and one younger sister. I had been bossy since I was six years old. Why deny it?

Another exercise in the same programme, a leadership role biography facilitated by Professor Susan Long, led me to realise that I had been leading in many previous roles. We were told to draw pictures that showed us leading at age six, 16, 26, 36 and today.

I realised that by preparing lessons and leading young kids as a Sunday School teacher at 16, I had demonstrated the leadership value of responsibility. And despite my avoiding a leadership role when I turned 30, the fact was that I was still leading — as a single mother of my small family of four.

It was affirming for me to embrace my strengths as a caring person since I was six, as a responsible and creative teacher at 16 and as a resilient and loving mother from my 20s. I bring to my leadership of the Wand Inspiration team my ability to care, nurture and challenge, my creativity and resilience, and my capacity to achieve results.

Since that INSEAD class in 2014, I have incorporated this leadership role biography exercise into many of my leadership coaching and workshops, and taught my team to facilitate it.

I have countless participants realising and appreciating how their past roles had involved qualities of leadership, care for others, encouragement, good role modelling and resilience.

## **Make a positive impact**

Leadership is *not* a position. It is not about being called “boss”. Leadership is an opportunity to impact others positively.

There are bosses and managers who do not lead. And there are people who lead without a title. Not everyone can be a CEO or a head of department. But we all can lead our lives with great compassion, passion and purpose. Without an official title, we can still lead others by showing care for them, believing in their greatness, and bringing their greatness out of them.



*It was affirming for me to embrace my strengths as a caring person since I was six, as a responsible and creative teacher at 16 and as a resilient and loving mother from my 20s.*

## ***Reflection***

Do not restrain your potential. Think of past experiences and roles — as a child, a teenager and an adult — that brought out your strengths and positive values?

1. What role did you excel in?
2. What were the values you showed?
3. How did you influence people or what results did you create?

Now think of your different roles at home and at work.

1. What similar values and skills do you bring to your roles?
  2. Imagine yourself leading at your best over the next two years. What difference will you make to people you lead and to the organisation or community?
-



## *Realign Career Choices*

**M**aking career choices that align with your professional and personal needs, resulting in a win-win situation, is certainly possible. As I have learned, you need to customise the choices and needs according to each stage of your life.

For instance, when my children were young, they needed me around to play with them. I spent a lot of time disciplining them with timeout and debriefs such as, “What did you do that got you into the timeout corner?” I taught them the values of delayed gratification and gratitude. My sons and I wrote about what we were thankful for every night for six months, so they inculcated the practice of being thankful.

When they were in school, my three children needed me to encourage and coach them to set goals and monitor their progress. I taught them self-discipline in homework. I taught them to value diligence and effort. As they did their homework at the dining table, I sat with them and did my work on my laptop.

When they became teens, they did not want to be seen holding hands with mum when we went out. It was time for me to let go of some control. I was a bit sad that they had grown up.

## **Where goals align**

How did my career path and work choices segue with those stages of my life? Let me highlight a choice I made that accommodated my needs both as a single mum and as a career woman.

Economic security was an unmet need after my divorce, especially after I started my own business. One day, I met Sara Yik, a consultant at a global management consulting firm (McKinsey & Company) — the best of the best. She thought that my work in developing resilience in leaders would interest her boss. She introduced me to Tsun-yan Hsieh.

He was in charge of the leadership practice and wanted to explore what role I might be interested in, whether full-time, ad hoc, per project or on retainer. He was that flexible.

I was tempted. Here was an opportunity to join a prestigious firm, earn a stable income and make a difference.

But wait. My life was being a single mum to three young children. If I worked like Sara, four days out of the country, how would I raise my children? How would I spend time nurturing their character and my relationship with them? This was a significant point in my career that would set the tone for my work-life balance in subsequent years.

I told Tsun-yan about my concerns as a single mum. He told me to consider a retainer role for six months. We discussed a contract that put me in the Singapore office 10 days a month, writing about leadership from a psychological angle.

So, I was paid fairly for the part-time role. I had time with my kids. I could carry on building my own business. Plus, I had the privilege of working with and learning from a leading consultant.

It was a win-win situation.

## **Right for seasons of life**

I made my children the priority, not the money, though some money came my way. If I had gone for a full-time role which required travelling, my relationship with my kids would likely not be as strong as it is today. Perhaps, I would have come out of debt sooner or been able to buy more handbags (I'm kidding), but I would not trade the world for what I had with my children.

When my kids grew older, I agreed to travel overseas to facilitate client workshops. Even then, I built schedules around my family. I would take the first flight out on a Monday (it required waking up at 4.30am) and the last flight back on Thursday or Friday to be home in time for breakfast with my kids the next day.

Today, my emptying nest leaves me with more time to travel globally to facilitate and coach. My career has fewer limits and I am ready to embrace more opportunities.

Brandon is in University of British Columbia in Canada, Lorren is in Nanyang Technology University in Singapore, and Nicole has completed her International Baccalaureate programme and is taking a gap year. When I am away for work, keeping in touch with them is a breeze via smartphones, Skype and other road-warrior tools.

But we still make it a point to have our one-on-one dates. For instance, Lorren and I have meals together. Nicole and I enjoy going for walks. And Brandon calls me every week.



**“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.”**

— Ecclesiastes 3:1

So, we make our choices. It’s okay that our choices change with our needs in the different seasons of life. I have learned that we must be clear about what we want, what our non-negotiable needs are and to be bold in articulating them.

Health, relationships, career and dream goals can be achieved when we have the self-discipline to plan, the agility to adapt those plans, the courage to speak our needs and the humility to receive feedback and advice.



*It's okay that our choices change with our needs in the different seasons of life. I have learned that we must be clear about what we want, what our non-negotiable needs are and to be bold in articulating them.*

## ***Reflection***

Think about your current stage of life.

1. What are your career/profesional goals? What personal goals and needs do you have?
  2. What options are open to you to align those goals and needs?
  3. What steps can you take to move towards that win-win alignment? What might you need to let go off (for now)?
-

## CHAPTER 11

# *My Resounding Applause*

**N**o one is an island, especially in crises: when the going gets tough, you want tough people on your side. I would not have bounced back from my personal setbacks nor solved my career challenges without my “village” of mentors, friends and family. Needless to say, I am forever grateful to them for their generosity in time and kind.

So, kudos to the people who populated my village; some still do. They saw the potential in me when I doubted myself or was ignorant of my abilities.

First up: Shila Das. We knew each other from our days in Temasek Junior College (Singapore). I used to copy her Chinese homework. (Ironically, she is Indian.)

When I had very little money in the early days of Wand Inspiration, Shila bought me dinners and helped me to sell my books during my workshops. Today, she reads my handwritten drafts and gives me feedback. She continues to encourage me.

Next: Lavinia Thanapathy. She gave me free public relations advice when I started Wand Inspiration, and linked me up with journalists, giving me vital media exposure.

There's also Ruby Chen, then managing director of Right Management Consultant, who offered me a role as an associate in 2002 to facilitate career transition workshops. She saw that I had empathy. She took me under her wing and groomed me.

Meet, too, private banker Karen Tan, my clothier. When I was asked to give a talk to women executives in the banking sector one day in 2004, I asked Karen, what I should wear. When she found out that I did not have even one business suit to my name, she gave me two. I gave my first talk at a bank in a hand-me-down suit.

## **Networking circles**

Professor Herminia Ibarra advocates in *Harvard Business Review*, ('How leaders create and use networks', Jan 2007), that emerging leaders need three distinct but interdependent forms of networking.

1. Operational — this network helps you to get your work done.
2. Personal — this group enhances your personal and professional development and provides referrals to useful information and contacts.
3. Strategic — this connection “opens [your] eyes to new business directions and stakeholders [whom you] need to enlist”. It orients leaders to the future.

I am grateful for how the Wand Inspiration team is my excellent operational network. My team members deliver the programmes responsibly and passionately to our clients. My assistant Rina is invaluable to our company's smooth operations. She ensures that each facilitator knows where to turn up and that we have

our security clearance for military sites. She raises invoices so we get paid. She typed out my handwritten drafts for this book. Treat your operation network with care, appreciation and trust.

Karen and Ruby are people in my personal network, merging into my strategic circle. I have many calls from potential clients that start with, “Karen Tan referred me to you.” Karen has a big network, and she generously points people my way. In addition, these two mentors advise me on my business, asking me tough questions about my life and future directions.

Another mentor, who is both in my personal and strategic network, is Tsun-yan Hsieh, whom I worked for in 2004. He was a feminist before it was fashionable to be one. When I told him I had three young kids and would not spend all week away overseas, he offered me the 10-day-a-month option, where my abilities could be tapped without the travel.

That role at the global strategy consulting firm exposed me to issues faced by corporate organisations and leaders. Tsun-yan advocated me for an external facilitator role in 2005.

His influence and support did not end in the professional sphere. When my husband fell ill in 2012, I confided in him. He immediately introduced me to his wife Siauyih, who prayed with me. When I need advice about being a good wife, I ask Siauyih.

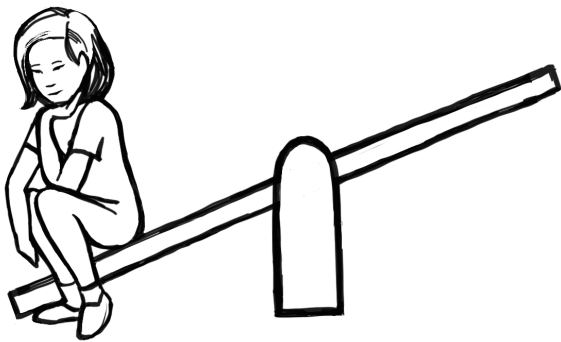
**“We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.”**

— Sir Winston S. Churchill

**And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.**

**— 1 Corinthians 13:13**

Ensure that your relationships are not one-sided: you need to give as well. Do that while you are in a good state. I have spent hours listening to Ruby and Karen unburden their work and life troubles. Being vulnerable with one another builds up trust.



*Ensure that your relationships are not one-sided: you need to give as well. Do that while you are in a good state.*



## ***Reflection***

Think of five people whom you can count on when you are in a crisis.

1. How will you support them or show them your appreciation this week?
  2. Who will challenge you in a loving manner towards your future? What potential do they see for your future (that you may be too modest or afraid to see)?
  3. Looking at your current goals, who are the people you need to bring into your network?
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## EPILOGUE

If you strip it all away and think about the one thing that's important in life, what is it? For me, it is: purpose.

In his book, *How Will You Measure Your Life?*, well-known business consultant and author Clayton Christensen writes, "Purpose must be deliberately conceived and chosen, and then pursued.

"When that is in place, [how you get] there is typically emergent — as opportunities and challenges emerge and are pursued. The type of person you want to become — what the purpose of your life is — is too important to leave to chance."

It is important to know your purpose: what are you here for?

Challenges and setbacks are part of the purpose of life. The difficult experiences do not have to break us. If we get hurt emotionally, those hurts can heal. The scars may not go away but the scars hold wisdom and we can wear them with pride.

There is a dawn every morning no matter how dark and stormy yesterday was. What is your dawn? What new goals and beginning will you create now?

**"You turned  
my wailing into  
dancing; you  
removed my  
sackcloth and  
clothed me  
with joy."**

— Psalm 30:11

Certainly, going back to school would have seemed like a pipe dream in my 20s — what with my divorce, three kids and a major retrenchment. A decade on, and a tad stronger in my 30s, the setback of SARS, soon after I founded my company, served only to steel my resolve to learn continually.

In my 40s, I had the luxury of going back in school. I chose INSEAD and the Executive Masters in Consulting and Coaching for Change (EMCCC) programme. It was affirming, intellectually stimulating, mind opening and I learned a lot from professors Erik van de Loo and Roger Lehman and my classmates.

Besides the academic learning during the 18-month programme, I had the time and support to look at pain points that I could no longer ignore, I received empathy during Matt's illness, and grew more aware of myself. Very importantly, I learned that leaders need to practise "containment" — keep in check the anxiety of their people during organisational changes. I was able to view myself, others and organisations with "night vision" (read: incisively). I wrote my thesis about an intervention that I designed for women who were daughters in family businesses, and graduated from INSEAD in September 2015.

Every year, I create a Life Map for myself. I draw and write out the goals that I have for my marriage, finance, learning and community service. I include the goals that my children and friends have for the year, and the goals I have for our career and business. I also include dream goals, which are goals that may not be achieved within the year, but one day in the future. My Life Map guides and inspires me throughout the year.

In January 2016, I decided to take a semi-sabbatical to recharge and write about resilience and my life, and to pursue a

few personal dream goals (like learn flamenco dance). This book is one of the outcomes of that semi-sabbatical.

Look around you. What dreams are within your reach? Or, is there someone who needs an encouragement, an affirming word or a listening ear? Perhaps, someone who may be going through a setback and needs to know that it is okay to feel angry, sad or scared. The person may need to hear your story or mine and to be assured that he or she can look forward to new dawns.

Despite, and because of, your setbacks and challenges, use your resilience and make a difference to others. Make a difference.

**“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”**

**— Eleanor Roosevelt**



*Despite, and because  
of, your setbacks and  
challenges, make a  
difference.*



Having a First-Class Honours in Psychology did not protect Wendy Wand Chua-Sullivan from the pain of retrenchment and divorce at age 29. As she picked up the pieces, she found the strength and resilience to find new opportunities in life and love. Wendy became the School Psychologist of Raffles Institution in 2000 for three years. In 2003, she founded her company Wand Inspiration, where her signature curriculum helped to develop leaders, teams and individuals to have personal resilience. Her work became known in the coaching space and made her radio 938's "Aunt Agony in the Living Room". In her spare time, Wendy wrote and published books and is still a volunteer counsellor and coach.

Wendy eventually remarried and returned to school to complete an Executive Masters for Consulting and Coaching for Change at INSEAD.

She took a sabbatical in 2016 to write this book and learn flamenco dancing.

## ***The WAND WAY to RESILIENCE***

A heartfelt and extremely human approach to the topic of personal resilience, "The Wand Way to Resilience" by Wendy Wand Chua-Sullivan is a necessary read for anyone seeking to reconnect with their inner strength in the face of life's adversity. The author briskly takes you through episodic chapters, each accompanied by a valuable lesson and specific tools to adapt and apply to your own goals and challenges. As she shares openly, with vulnerability, about her struggles, you will find yourself in turns, sympathising, relating and cheering her on, perhaps even ending up with a similar spirit of dedication and hope which she inspires. With her professional background of over 20 years in Applied Psychology, counselling, coaching and mentorship, Wendy's compassionate voice is a soothing, reassuring guide that you need in your journey of discovery and healing to triumph.

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