



“The easiest thing to sell is truth.” -Daymond John

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR HEART IS CALLING OUT FOR SOMETHING NEW

I am a believer. I have Faith in people, processes, and invisible forces. I spend my mornings praying at 5:30 am while running up to 5 miles on a well-lit sidewalk perimeter around my city before school and work traffic fills the roadways. And then, I spend the entire day looking for “signs” that my prayers are being heard and answers are being shot put from the heavens. I believe if I stay aware and honest, clarity will come naturally, I just have to be willing to listen, see, and accept.

Acceptance however is not always simple. The natural tendency can be to close our eyes and wish on a star far away from where we are. In other words, even when we ask for answers, the ones we receive may look vastly different from the ones we expect, which prompts us to wish for something different, because maybe we weren't specific enough when we asked the first time. But hardened truth accelerates fear and being afraid causes us to rationalize truth as our own misunderstanding.

So, what should be done when your heart calls out for something new?

And by new, I mean unintended from the start, something other than contemplated in a moment of time prior to you calling out to the universe for clarity.

To prepare you for the influential punchline of this open letter, I need to provide a timeline of events from June until now.

I travelled to Jamaica to participate as an observer in the Special Olympics opening ceremony to see if there was enough interest for me to get involved as a volunteer in whatever capacity needed. Being the mother of a child diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, it took no effort to peak my interest. My personal connection to the community of gifted individuals began in 2014 when my first-born son began reading at age 2. I expected to attend the games and happily celebrate Jamaica's Special Olympics community, but I was unprepared for the emotional whirlwind the short time in Jamaica would create in my heart. Not only did I cry during the ceremony, I photographed meaningful moments that I'll cherish forever. This is when the heart strings started pulling and the call for “something new” began. Days later, I found myself in the mountains of Montego Bay for a brief tour only to stumble across a perfectly positioned building with the words “Montego Bay Autism Center” aligned across the front. I thought, “Wow, what are the chances?”

When my son was diagnosed with autism, I contemplated how to increase my awareness, access to resources, and educate myself for his benefit. Over time, I realized the public promotion for awareness about autism is heavily focused on children who are low-functioning, non-verbal, engage in self-harm, and have limited independent

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functioning. There are a multitude of organizations focused on the needs of these children and they work tirelessly to help them. But my son's diagnosis as high-functioning seemed to place him in an overlooked class. He's gifted in areas most people dream to have proficiency, like reading, foreign language retention, and mathematics concepts. He is verbal, communicates his thoughts and feelings well, and has no problem telling them to you when you engage in genuine efforts to communicate with him. He is athletic and coordinated, and emotionally aware (both of self and others). If you've ever met him and didn't know he had a diagnosis, your statement to me was likely, "he's a genius." He started writing books at age 4, and as a newly minted age 6, he is a self-proclaimed filmmaker. And I'm talking movies created with iPad apps like Sketchbook and iMovie, fully self-taught, and edited with voiceover and dancing Arabic and Hebrew letters. But he doesn't qualify for certain benefits or instructional accommodations as a special education student because he is high-functioning. Therapy is extremely expensive for us, even as high-earners. And to elevate our concerns, my husband and I discovered there are unnecessary challenges in relationship-building with the public school's designated advocates for the hours he is under their care. Imagine starting the first day of school and not knowing where your classroom is, what it looks like, and what schedule you will have to follow. For most students, this is scary. Now add in the common triggers for children diagnosed with autism to become frustrated and you now have one hell of a tough first week of school, including refusing to get out of the car and having to be bribed with candy at 7:30 am for compliance.

When I returned from Jamaica, the summer months quickly dwindled and my law firm didn't sign-up a single new client. In other words, my business wasn't providing me what I needed to live the life I wanted to live. I was hitting the ground heavy, meeting incredible people, networking, and having meaningful dialogue. They say networking takes time, but I was worried, was there not anyone I could help?

The school year began one day after my 33rd birthday. I was immediately confronted with push-back from the school where my son attends, after making several attempts to get ahead of any issues at the start of the year. On day 2 I was aggressively told my son almost got a disciplinary referral for hitting his teacher. He kept telling me, "Mommy, I didn't do it. I didn't hit my teacher." And as it turned out they were mistaken, he hadn't hit anyone at all. It was frustrating, but I had to stop seeing our story as one of victimization and start praying for guidance. I kept thinking, "There must be a better way."

I started working through a book called, [The Steal Like An Artist Journal](#). As a part-time artist, I think it's important to make time for creativity. One morning, I was scheduled to meet at a specialty coffee shop with a man who approached me after I presented at an event for Raw Storytelling. Before he arrived, I randomly selected a page from the journal and the writing prompt was this: "Ask somebody to coffee. Afterward, write down everything you remember about the conversation." The intention of our meeting was to discuss our businesses, but the conversation quickly shifted to the topic of "awesomeness." I pitched a few of my art show ideas for an autism exhibit and he influenced my perception in ways I only prayed for. He walked me through a mind-boggling exercise

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that illustrated my gradual emotional progression from accepting failure, appreciating the occurrence of something good that seemed only meant for me, and relishing the incredible joy of awesomeness.¹

I filled up the pages with notes from our conversation and finally understood that blessing others with my light is a gift that doesn't take away from my own brightness.

I prayed on a Thursday and asked a friend what she thought of me changing my practice area to something related to autism, integrating art and non-profit goals. I wasn't sure if it was the practice of law I wanted to give up, the desire to start a different business, or just a change in my professional direction. On my way out the door, I stopped to say hello to another friend whose wife is a behavioral specialist. We talked about autism, passion, and money. As I left his office, I noticed The Young Lawyers magazine laying on his table by the door. The most notable editorials were, "Navigating Change: Finding the Career Shoe That Fits," "Stories of Nontraditional Legal Careers," and a Q&A segment inclusive of questions like, "What influenced your decision to change career tracks...?" and "Did having a child change your perspective as a lawyer and change how you work?"

After reading each passage and mentally reviewing the content of my conversations, I couldn't resist feeling the incredible gift it was for me to walk into that office and receive all that was waiting for me.

One afternoon, I attended a networking event where my friend reminded me that I have to follow my passions, which she believes are autism awareness, advocacy and art. I struggled deeply with this because what would that mean for my domestic violence and criminal defense law firm? What would that mean for the business I am building and the people I'm trying to help? As we parted ways for the day, I prayed on the way to my next destination, an office building I visit frequently. Upon arrival, I met this beautiful young boy and his grandparents. I held the door for them, but the boy was shy and hesitant to enter without holding his caretakers' hands. As we finally entered into the elevator, the little boy selected the button for the 3rd floor and he looked at me and smiled. I said, "Hello! Great job! How are you?" He looked away and his grandfather smiled and said, "He's my grandson, and he's autistic." My heart sank. Not because of his diagnosis, but because his grandfather felt necessary to offer up some explanation for seemingly common childhood behavior. I kindly replied, "I understand, no worries at all. He's perfect. I have a son with autism, too." As they exited, I waved goodbye and gently wiped the tears rolling from my eyes underneath my sunglasses. For as many times as I'd been in that building, I never knew until that day that an autism behavioral therapy office existed in that space.

¹ Question 1: What does failure feel like to me? Ok, I'm good knowing that failure happens because I accept it has a purpose.

Question 2: Describe a time I felt "wow" and appreciation when something good happened and I felt like it was perfectly meant for me. The time I found a crocheted, white halter top dress at a thrift store I was visiting for the first time. It only cost \$12 but when I wear it, I feel like a beautiful and sexy woman who you'd never guess carried three children with two pregnancies.

Question 3: Describe a time I felt complete awesomeness. I was helping my son with his first homework assignment of the new year called, "Brown Bag Biography." He was asked to put three things inside the bag that were special to him. When I asked what he wanted to put first, he replied, "You, Mommy. A picture of you and me."

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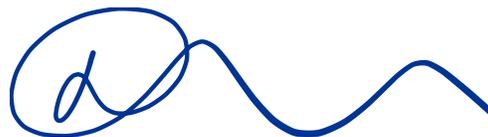
The signs have been too many. The answers have been abundantly clear. Having a child diagnosed with autism has changed my perspective as a lawyer and it is changing how I work. I believe I am meant to creatively and innovatively merge autism advocacy, special education law, and art into a meaningful business that will serve children and their families in a way we've never seen before. In a way that serves to highlight the giftedness in children without relying on their diagnosis to *see who they are*.

When I committed in November 2016 to become an entrepreneur, I elected to grow a business from nothing. To build a successful business I have to remain clear about WHY I'm doing it and WHO I'm seeking to help. And from there, I have to provide value to those who have a vision to live the life they desire. The only question I must continually ask to evaluate my commitment as an entrepreneur in service to others is this: *What is more valuable than the truth?*

My truth is that I have a passion for doing things differently. And I am committed to exploring how to improve the lives of others using truth, relatable experiences, and unique perspectives that can influence all of us.

As of today, I am building upon my knowledge as a special education advocate and attorney and I look forward to spreading my light to brighten the futures of families who see the giftedness in their children.

I am excited to see where this journey leads me, but I am most encouraged by the inspiration this journey will create in the lives of others.



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