

The background of the book cover is a vibrant, stylized illustration. A woman with long dark hair, wearing an orange sleeveless dress and black shoes, is walking away from the viewer on a path that leads into the distance. The path is flanked by large, flowing shapes in shades of teal, orange, and purple. In the upper left, a white airplane flies against an orange sky. In the upper right, a large yellow sun sits above a dark purple hill. To the right of the woman, there is a signpost with several green directional arrows. In the lower right, a small white house with a red roof is visible on a green hill. The overall style is modern and artistic, with a focus on bold colors and simplified shapes.

REBEKAH BASTIAN

Foreword by Sarah Lacy, Author of
A Uterus Is a Feature, Not a Bug

BLAZE YOUR OWN TRAIL

*An Interactive Guide to Navigating Life with
Confidence, Solidarity, and Compassion*

Praise for *Blaze Your Own Trail*

“The intrapersonal journey described in this book gives the reader insight into the world of choice, especially for women who are working to find or create balance in their personal and professional lives. The stories shared in this work encompass the challenge we all have as human beings in wondering ‘what if?’ in our daily lives. This book will have an impact on the perspectives we hold when evaluating our privileges and struggles. It brings to life the reality that our journeys are multidimensional and that the dimensions are defined by our identities, decisions, and the actions of others. It is intriguing how the author speaks to readers as if they are directly experiencing the events taking place in the book, making the realities felt through the character’s thoughts relatable and powerful.”

—Cheryl Ingram, founder and CEO, Diverse City LLC

“*Blaze Your Own Trail* provides valuable insight into the experiences and choices that a woman makes in her life, beyond what many of us might be aware of. As a tech CEO and an investor, as well as a father and husband, I have long recognized the role I need to play in empowering women in their careers. The insight I have gained from this book has helped me feel more empathy around many of the obstacles that I wasn’t even aware of and has inspired me to be a more effective ally.”

—Spencer Rascoff, cofounder of dot.LA, Zillow, and Hotwire

“If you think this is some stranger’s story, think again. At every crossroads, I found myself on the path of a woman I know and love—confronting her choices, facing her struggles, and embracing her hope. We grow up thinking that the wrong twists and turns could ruin everything. But we are way too strong for that.”

—Mónica Guzmán, cofounder of The Evergrey

“Every once in a while, an author so delightful and smart breaks through with a winning idea for the world. With interactive, useful, and fun-to-read chapters like ‘Love or Marriage,’ ‘Ladder or Jungle Gym,’ or ‘Snot and Tears,’ *Blaze Your Own Trail* walks us through career and life choices with poignancy and power. In what is one of the most emotionally fraught topics of today’s age—gender equity in the office and home—Rebekah manages to provide a winning framework

for anyone giving big life decisions full consideration. A must-read for everyone, male or female, parent or child. I loved it!"

—**Jonathan Sposato, Chairman, GeekWire, and author of *Better Together***

"Rebekah distills the defining moments of life—excitement, choices, hardships—into interactive, fun-to-read chapters that offer a glimpse into every woman's reality. She intersperses the story with grounding statistics on themes like choosing a career, motherhood, workplace harassment, relationships . . . and the result is a book that feels reassuring, kind, and comforting for any woman who has ever had a decision to make. A wonderful and refreshing reminder that, even when everything feels out of our control, we are the creators of our story."

—**Amy Nelson, founder and CEO, The Riveter**

**BLAZE YOUR
OWN TRAIL**

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*An Interactive Guide to Navigating Life with
Confidence, Solidarity, and Compassion*

REBEKAH BASTIAN



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Blaze Your Own Trail

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Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

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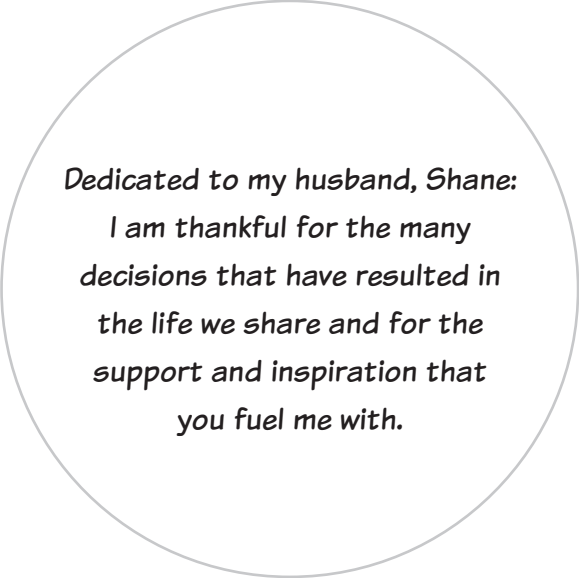
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Dedicated to my husband, Shane:

*I am thankful for the many
decisions that have resulted in
the life we share and for the
support and inspiration that
you fuel me with.*

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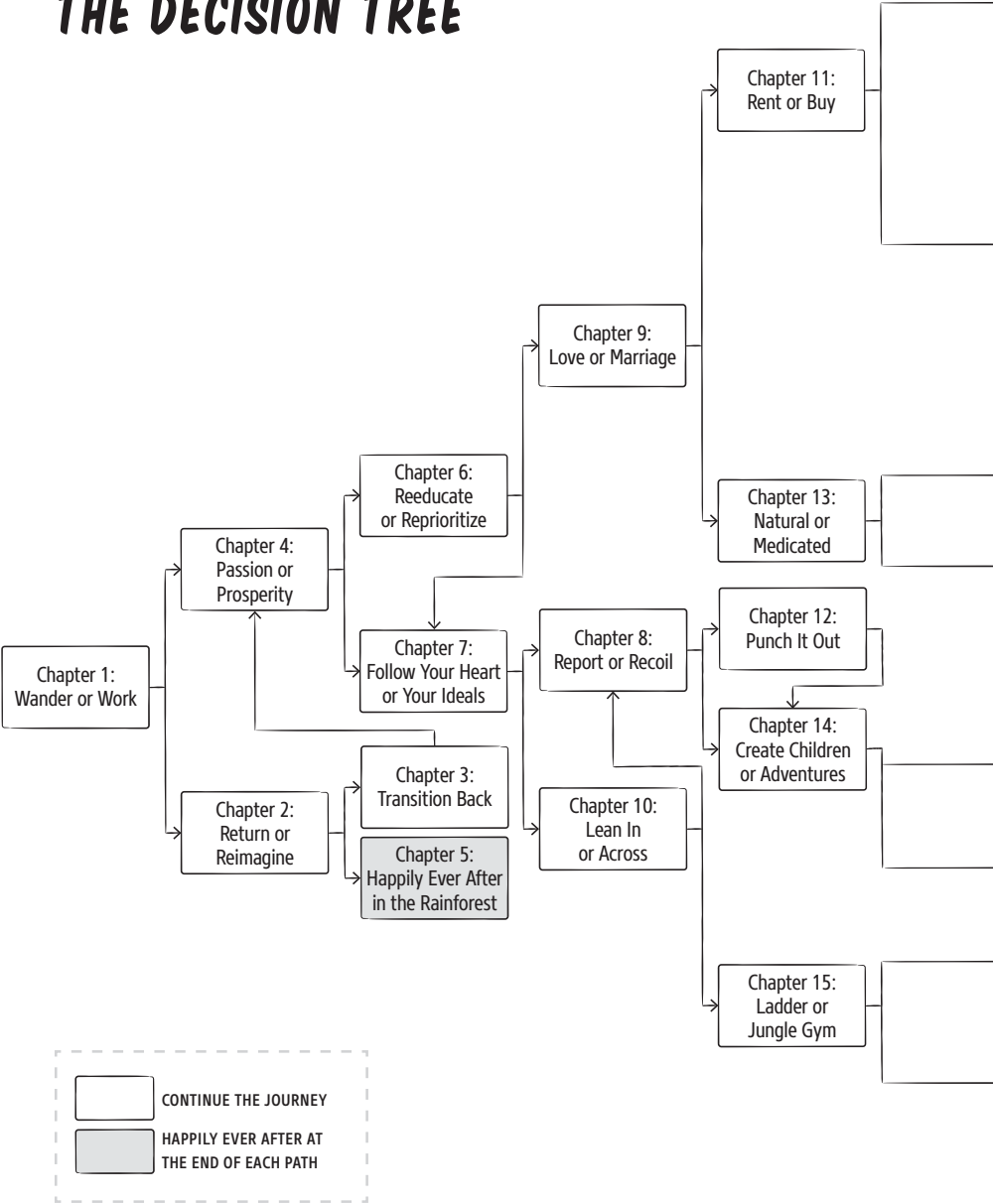
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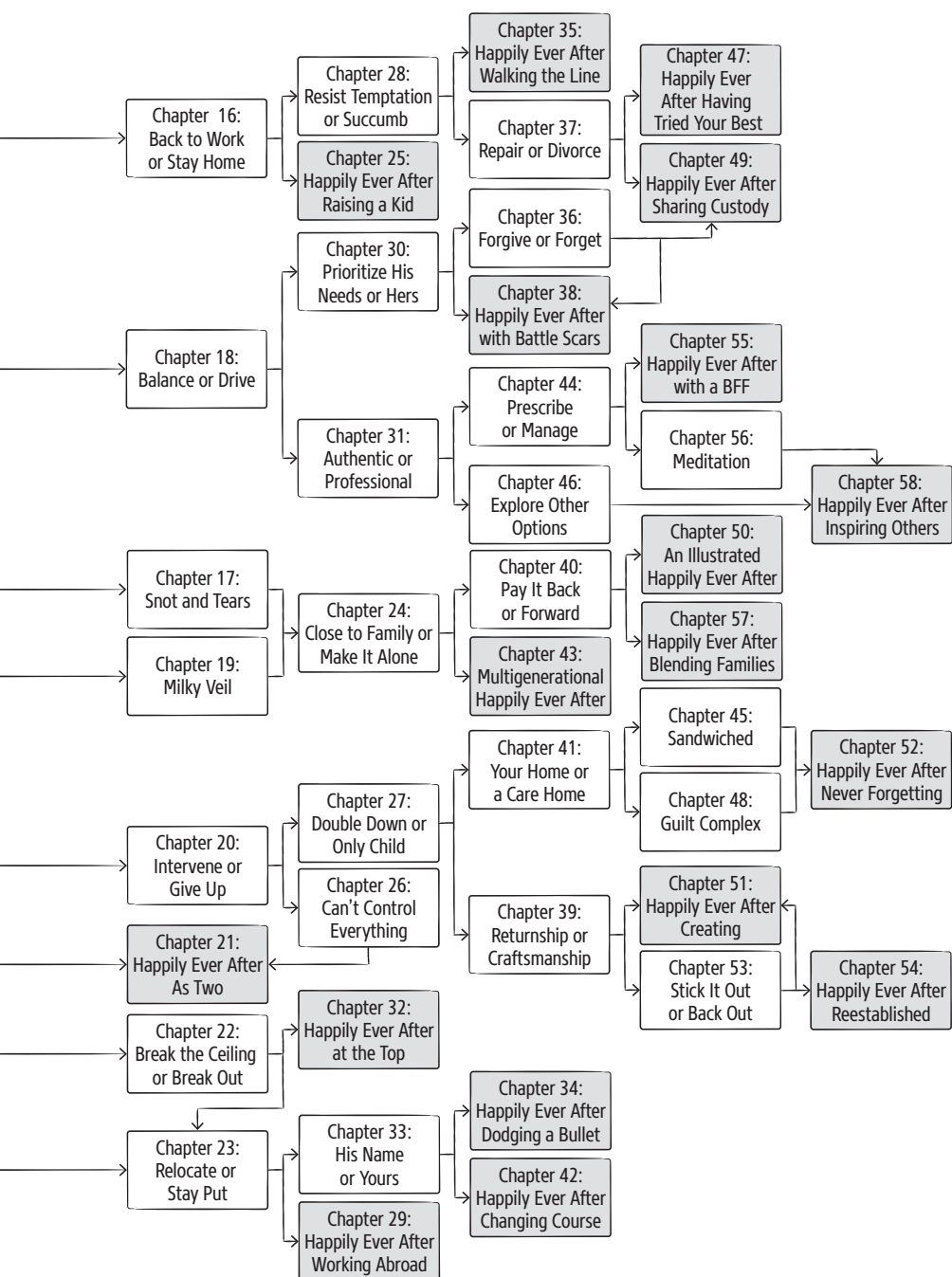
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THE DECISION TREE





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FOREWORD

“If you could go back in time and say anything to your younger self, what would it be?”

The first time I was asked this question I was on stage during a conference. I was thirty-five years old, married, seven months pregnant with my first child, had just spent forty weeks traveling through the emerging world for my second book, and had been promised a massive promotion at work.

I had already faced a lot of the dilemmas that the protagonist of this book faces in the pages to come. I'd put off having kids. I'd called off one wedding that didn't feel quite right at the last minute. I'd decided not to change my name when I did finally get married. I'd refused higher paying jobs to do what I was passionate about. That book on emerging markets, for instance, had cost me hundreds of thousands of dollars in travel expenses and opportunity cost to write. But after it published, I'd gone to five continents promoting it and done speaking gigs all over the world—all while pregnant—and in the process, I more than made that money back.

I was happy. The risks had paid off, the tradeoffs all felt worth it. I felt a rare sense of peace wash over me, and I answered, “I would tell the younger me to calm down. *It's all going to work out fine.*”

That would have been a big ask of the younger me. I still vividly remember the anxiety I had in my teens and early twenties over my future: Would I ever fall in love? Would I ever find someone who could appreciate me? What on earth was I qualified to do for a living? Did I want to be a mom? Would becoming a mom require me to throw away everything I'd ever worked for?

What a waste of all that stress, I thought that day when I was asked the question. *It was all fine.*

Since that moment, I've had two kids, I've started two companies, I've gotten divorced, that promotion I was promised got handed to a dude while I was in labor, I've been hospitalized from over-work, I've had threats made against my family, I got kidnapped in Nigeria and had to bribe my way out, and I once had a repo guy show up for my minivan.

But guess what? Although many of those moments felt like the end of the world at the time, it has still somehow *all worked out fine*. I'm in a loving relationship, I've started a company called Chairman Mom that makes working women's lives better on a daily basis, my kids are phenomenal, I'm healthy, and I have more girlfriends than I did in college.

Young women face an uncertain, unfair, and legitimately scary world. But young women are also amazingly resourceful, adaptable, and resilient.

Spoiler: In the amazing adventures you are about to go on in this book, it will also *all work out fine*, no matter what path you take. There are nineteen different happy endings with a pretty big range of outcomes. The delicious part of this book is that it gives you what real life can't: it allows you to compare your happy endings and reexamine the paths that got you there. It gives you dozens of do-overs.

You don't have to sit and watch while the protagonist stays in a relationship that creeps you out, or a job that isn't

FOREWORD

fulfilling, or when she makes a choice you wish she hadn't. You make the decisions for her. You can see what it's like to make the choices you never would in real life, consequence-free.

The protagonist ends each version of her story feeling fulfilled, happy, and like *it all worked out fine*, even though the endings aren't all equally happy. Part of what's stunning about this book, is that it explores the subjectivity of what a happy ending is.

Some women may find Chapter 50 to be one of the worst ways to end their story. I found it one of the best. It's not only subjective to who you are, it's subjective based on what stage you are at in your life. This is a book you can revisit ten years after you first dive in, curious to see if your choices change now that your own bets have played out.

In my own life, I can look back and see the different forks I took and imagine how my happy endings might be different had I taken a different path.

I work in the startup industry, where the odds of success are daunting: even though 68 percent of business owners in America are women, we only get 2 percent of the venture capital invested each year. I've largely been able to beat those odds because of who I knew, which was based on a series of forks I took in the road. Different forks, and I might not be running my own multimillion-dollar company right now.

Women experience a lot of pressures in their lives to choose the "right" path, and often times it feels like the right path was the one we didn't take. We bear the motherhood penalty if we decide to have kids, or we push against societal norms if we don't. We feel judged whether we work or we stay home, with nearly 90 percent of women witnessing "mom shaming." And this is to say nothing of the heartbreaking ubiquity of sexual harassment and sexual assault exposed by the #MeToo movement, with a double-edged sword of choices for how to respond.

BLAZE YOUR OWN TRAIL

All of this ratchets up the fear of making the wrong move. It's true that the moves you make matter, and small things could impact what you do, where you live, and who you are with. But somehow, because women are so strong, so resourceful, and so resilient, it will *all still work out fine*.

Sometimes I shudder when I think about the near misses in my own life. What if I had married the first man I was engaged to? What if I hadn't gotten out of my home town? What if I had decided not to have kids? What if I put money before passion any of the dozens of times I wrestled with that very choice? There's a duality in these questions that is as comforting as it is unsatisfying.

As you map this book against your own experience, you can begin to compare the outcomes to your own happy endings. The more we share our real-life struggles and decision points and are grateful for our own happy endings, the more we can appreciate the fullness of the choices we made, understand the choices of others, and recognize the things that were outside our control.

As you see the protagonist's journey unfold, and as you see your own choices mirrored in various paths, you can begin to feel the confidence that *it is, in fact, all going to work out fine*.

—SARAH LACY

Author of *A Uterus Is a Feature, Not a Bug* and CEO of Chairman Mom

PREFACE

My conscious mind didn't come up with the idea for this book. Rather, I shot awake at 3:30 A.M. with the idea in my head. That phenomenon is not entirely new to me—I've been woken by crazy ideas many nights—but the difference with this one was that I wasn't able to talk myself out of it. Somehow all of the expectations, trials, challenges, heartbreaks, and triumphs that I ever knew women to go through—my own, those of my close friends, and those of the countless women that I've had the privilege of getting to know professionally—cried out to me to write this book.

I have the benefit of being a living example of crooked paths, magnificent screw-ups, and shocking successes. Perhaps that in itself qualifies me to write about the unpredictability of our choices and the survivability of our crashes. On top of that, I've been lucky to have the close bonds of friendship that have allowed me to live multiple lives at once. My friends and I have experienced each other's emotions as though they were our own—we have laughed, cried, raged, and celebrated together.

When I first started out on my professional journey—a bit later than many due to that crooked path I mentioned—I had the level of arrogance that is often expected and somewhat endearing in a young woman. Yes, I had heard the stories about being a woman in the workplace—and specifically