Why did you write “Fair Play: A Game-Changing Solution for When You Have Too Much To Do (and More Life to Live)”?

This was the book I was born to write. I grew up in a single-mom household where early on I helped my mother manage late utility bills and eviction notices. I vowed that when I grew up, I would have an equal partner in life, and I did! I married that partner, and we were crushing it together in business and in life. Cut to two kids later, and I find myself sobbing on the side of the road after my husband sent me a text that read, “I’m surprised you didn’t get blueberries.” I thought, I’m so overwhelmed juggling our home life and my return to work that I can’t even manage a grocery list (when I used to manage a team of employees). And – hold on – more importantly, when and why had I become the default, or what I call the “she-fault,” for every single household and childcare task? This is not the career and marriage combo deal I ordered. In that moment, I knew something had to change. So, I embarked on a quest to find a solution for domestic rebalance, not only for my own marriage, but for couples also seeking a greater sense of household fairness. Through this, I found that many of us weren’t treating our homes like our most important organization – with the respect and rigor they deserve. My research revealed that the majority of couples were figuring things out on the fly. Making decisions in the moment not only leads to strife and resentment, but promotes an unfair division of labor where women in heterosexual relationships hold two-thirds or more of what it takes to run a home and family, regardless of whether they work outside of the home.

You promote the idea of equity and fairness, rather than equality, when it comes to division of labor in a household. What is the difference?

50-50 in the home is the wrong equation because it encourages competition over collaboration. Add to that, when partners have differing perceptions and misaligned expectations of what is 50-50, there is no true way to measure equality. My research showed that perceived fairness was more important to a couple’s contentment than a 50-50 split. The way to get to perceived fairness is for each partner to completely “own” the tasks they do take on. Within the “Fair Play” lexicon, “owning” includes the cognitive labor – the conceiving, planning and remembering when and how to execute a task without reminders, half-based efforts and excuses or soliciting a “good job” for completion. When partners – and specifically, women – feel relieved of a share of the cognitive labor, they report that division of tasks was more equitable and fair – even when the division is not straight down the middle.

“Unicorn Space” is a term you use a lot – discovering it, prioritizing it and using it for personal growth. Can you explain what it is and why it’s important?

As I define it, “Unicorn Space” is time you create and allot space for in your schedule to reclaim, or discover and nurture, the natural gifts and interests that make you uniquely you and that you share with the world. For many of us – and again, for women specifically – when a teeth cleaning feels like an indulgence, the idea of carving out Unicorn Space seems like a fantasy – and it will remain the stuff of fairytales until you and your partner are able to rebalance the workload between you. Once you put a new system in place that optimizes efficiency and frees up some of your time, you and your partner must both assert your right to Unicorn Space without asking for permission or feeling guilty, because it is essential to your ongoing sense of self, the health of your partnership and your ability to convey what a full life looks like to your family friends and community. Unicorn Space is the end game. It will give your life purpose beyond partnering and parenting.

Who is a role model in your life, and what have they taught you?

From very early on, my mother taught me the value of speaking up for change. One of the ways she instilled this was by celebrating birthdays in an untraditional way. Instead of giving me toys or clothes, she’d buy us two roundtrip bus tickets from New York City to Washington, D.C., where we would engage in a civic activity for the day. As the birthday girl, I could choose the event. One year, we marched together for the Equal Rights Amendment, and another year, we walked the streets holding our homemade signs for civil rights. Mom loved the Gandhi quote, “Be the change you want to see in the world,” and repeated it often. I didn’t realize until I was an adult with kids of my own what an important gift she’d given me.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

People tell women all the time, “There is no good time for anything, so just do it.” I completely disagree with that. A plan is the most important thing a woman can have for her life. Never mind the life-changing magic of organizing your sock drawer; there is life-changing magic in long-term thinking.

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EVE RODSKY

New York Times Best-Selling Author of “Fair Play”

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