

# The Art of Good Enough



*All Things Women*

CREATE THE LIFE YOU LOVE

THE WORKING MOM'S  
GUILT-FREE GUIDE TO THRIVING  
WHILE BEING *perfectly imperfect*

The  
ART  
of  
Good  
enough.

DR. IVY GE

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*To women who are still figuring it out*

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# Introduction

Have you ever lain awake wondering if you're a bad mother? If you've done everything you could to keep your children happy, healthy, and to maximize their chances of success? From your in-laws to the women in the park, everyone has a firm grip on what a good mother does, except you. As you listen to your partner snoring away blissfully in the dark, you wonder why you feel like a failure even though you've done a million things from dawn to dusk with never a moment of peace. How can your partner sleep like a baby every night, not bothered by the mile-long to-do list for tomorrow? How can he tell you to relax and everything will be okay, when you're overwhelmed, underappreciated, and terribly lonely?

You're not alone.

Working mother is the most demanding role in modern society. It demands endless patience, infinite adaptability, and the incredible balancing act of a high-wire walker between the towers of career and motherhood.

Every single day.

Before becoming mothers, we were girls with dreams. We had silly jokes. We watched the sunset and listened to the wind. We were wholesome then. With motherhood, our

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lives are divided into slices, filled with appointments, activities, homework, housework, and family obligations. There's little time left for our dreams and silly jokes. We stop our gym memberships, skip the girls' nights out, put aside our hobbies; we settle on the easiest hairstyles; we eat whatever is available in the fridge; we are determined to be the best moms we can. We carry the burden of responsibilities, heads down, putting one foot in front of the other on the long journey toward the temple of perfection. Despite all the good intentions, time, and effort we devote to this noble position, we aren't sure if we have done enough or whether our kids will turn out all right.

Technology has made life much easier than decades ago, yet more moms feel anxious and inadequate than ever. The more connections we have online, the fewer people we can talk to about our overwhelming sense of failure. Behind the happy family posts we share with the world, there are moments we wonder how much longer we can do this, day after day, year after year.

We become invisible in the frantic race to meet everyone's needs. We don't like what we see in the mirror—the relentless wrinkles and sagging skin. We don't like what we feel about our bodies—easily tired, out of shape, and worst of all, we find little joy in caring for our partners and children. Yes, we love them, but is love enough to keep us marching on this motherhood pilgrimage?

One chilly afternoon in early 2005, I sat in a small exam room at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) Student Health Clinic and told the nurse practitioner I couldn't handle it anymore. I was a second-year student in the best pharmacy school in the country. My son, Ethan, was almost six months old. He had asthma that required a nightly nebulizer treatment. For the machine to work properly, I had to hold him in my arms at night to keep him at a reclining angle rather than lying flat in his crib. I did my homework at

3:00 a.m. and then went to school at 7:00 a.m. on weekdays. I worked on the weekends for money to buy cute outfits for Ethan.

My husband, Chu, and I had bought a house the year before. He worked full time, paying for the mortgage, my tuition, and our living expenses. I had packed on twenty pounds from the pregnancy and couldn't fit into any of my old clothes, so I continued wearing the baggy pregnancy garb, not wanting to spend any more money on myself. I felt awful most of the time: I was sleep deprived, unable to concentrate, and worried about Ethan, my grades, and the endless housework at home. Chu helped me with the baby as much as he could. We bickered frequently, arguing about whose turn it was to do the chores.

The nurse practitioner listened to my problems patiently. He was a man in his fifties with gray hair and wise eyes. He advised me with all seriousness that I should replace my broken dishwasher with a new one. "Come back to see me again if you still have problems after getting a new dishwasher," he said.

I was falling apart, and a dishwasher wasn't going to fix me.

After the visit, I spent days considering my options: I could quit pharmacy school or consider postponing it until Ethan was older. Becoming a pharmacist was the career change I had been waiting for, after working for an airline with degrees in business and engineering. I could stop working and use precious weekend hours to catch up on studying. I could also give up on being a good mother. I was ill-prepared for motherhood; I didn't know what to do most of the time, so I constantly worried if I would ruin Ethan's life. All of my options involved giving up something to regain control of my life. Which one of them would be my best bet? I didn't want to be just a mother; I wanted an identity beyond motherhood. For all the ingenious women before me, there must be

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something out there that could guide me through the mess. I wanted to look good and feel good while having a happy family and a successful career.

Fast forward to 2015: I became one of the first 500 clinical pharmacists in the country with dual board certifications in pharmacotherapy and critical care. In 2018, Ethan was accepted into the best public high school in San Francisco. Chu and I are still married and living in the same house. We never replaced the broken dishwasher.

I discovered the key to being a happy, healthy, and confident working mother is to make choices based on my values and only strive for what is good enough for me.

Since 2005, I have continued my search for mind and body transformation methods that work for working moms who have little time and resources. I read hundreds of books, studied cutting edge research findings in neurobehavioral, psychological, and social science. I experimented with different techniques of self-improvement and developed easy and effective practices that keep me focused and efficient. I tried out various workout routines, and I worked with personal trainers and sports professionals to find the one best suited for my body type and lifestyle. My beauty and fitness routines help me maintain a youthful look and an hourglass figure. Just last week, a guy in his twenties asked me out during my lunch-hour walk. When I told him I'm happily married and my son is in high school, he didn't believe me.

I condensed everything I've learned into these pages. There are three sections in the book. The Mind focuses on discovering your strengths and transforming the way you think and act. The Body illustrates understanding and working with your body to improve your health and confidence. The Path centers on pursuing a meaningful life beyond motherhood. Throughout the book, I mention the importance of self-monitoring, from relieving emotional strains to understanding how your body changes to appreciating your growth

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in reaching the goals. This book's companion journal is a multifunctional tool designed for you to complete these steps to the life you love. If you want to learn more about the strategies discussed in this book, visit my website <https://ivyge.com> for the related online course offering.

Every technique I show you is proven feasible and effective with little time and resources required. That doesn't mean you'll flip through these pages and become a new person at the end of the book. Knowing something but not doing anything with it is a waste of that knowledge. Practicing the techniques I show you for a few minutes a day is all it takes. The more time you devote to the practice, the faster you'll see the results.

There are many ways to achieve a worthy goal in life. The most satisfying and long-lasting approach is to give a little effort every day. As with any great success in life, time is the most enduring witness of our journey to fulfillment.

Everything you need for your mind and body transformation is already in you. My job is to show you how to find it, enhance it, and use it to create your best life.

## THE MIND

Your mind is your compass;  
What you see dictates how you feel;  
What you focus on determines what you'll achieve;  
Look within you for strengths; look around you for beauty.

# What's Good Enough?

PERFECTION IS LIKE infinity; it's a great concept but impossible to reach. We can't strive for perfection without feeling defeated, questioning our intelligence and ability. If you want a happy, healthy, and confident self, stop chasing the unobtainable. Take an inventory of your life, and examine the pattern perpetuating your disappointment. Ask yourself, *Can I break the negative cycle for a better outcome?* If you see no way out of your current situation, you haven't looked closely enough. You hold the key to your own problems. I'll show you how to uncover your strengths and hidden wealth to map out the path to the life you deserve.

## The Distance Between Pleasure and Pain

There are only two types of goals in life: moving toward pleasure or moving away from pain. Those who move toward pleasure know what they want and make efforts to reach their

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rewards. When they encounter pain on their journey, they see it as necessary before their favorable outcomes. Those who move away from pain live their lives passively, letting fear guide their courses of action. Although they minimize the risk of failure, they're far from success.

Which one of these are you?

Your goal determines your path. You don't change your goal; the past only reinforces the future. If you want a new life, set a new goal. Stop playing all the worst-case scenarios in your head. You don't need the entire map drawn out before taking the first step. When you drive at night, you can only see as far as your headlights allow. As the road extends before you, you find your way to the destination.

The key to your desired outcome is to have the right goal. This goal must be long-term, obtainable, and aligned with your values. Short-term goals are specific to the stage of your life. They don't provide further guidance once you achieve them. Obtainability means you don't aim for perfection; you aspire to reach your full potential. Alignment with your values means you live in tune with who you are. Living by other people's values won't make you happy, even when those values belong to your loved ones.

Most people know what they don't want. Few can tell you what they do want. Before you set a worthy goal, ask yourself what is important in your life. Recall the events in your life; what made you proud despite failures? What left you wanting more even when you succeeded? Your goal should not be defined by the life you lived but by the unlived life within you. Think about the dreams you ignored because of the circumstances, the marriage, the kids, and the job. Pay attention to what you yearn for ... who you want to be.

The art of good enough has two layers of meaning. One, define the standard you consider good based on your values. It should be consistent in all aspects of your life. Inconsistency in action will confuse you and lead you astray from the path

## What's Good Enough?

to your desired outcome. Two, our time and energy are limited. We have to be misers to the things that don't matter to us and give abundance to what does matter. Every time you struggle to decide, ask yourself if it will matter to you in five years, in ten years. If the answer is no, don't give it another thought. Life is too short to dwell on background noises. We only fight the battles worthy of our time and effort.

## Maximize Your Happiness

Take a look at the area where the three circles overlap; that is where happiness resides. Health represents the emotional and physical well-being; connection means maintaining harmonious personal and social relationships; satisfaction indicates internal gratification.

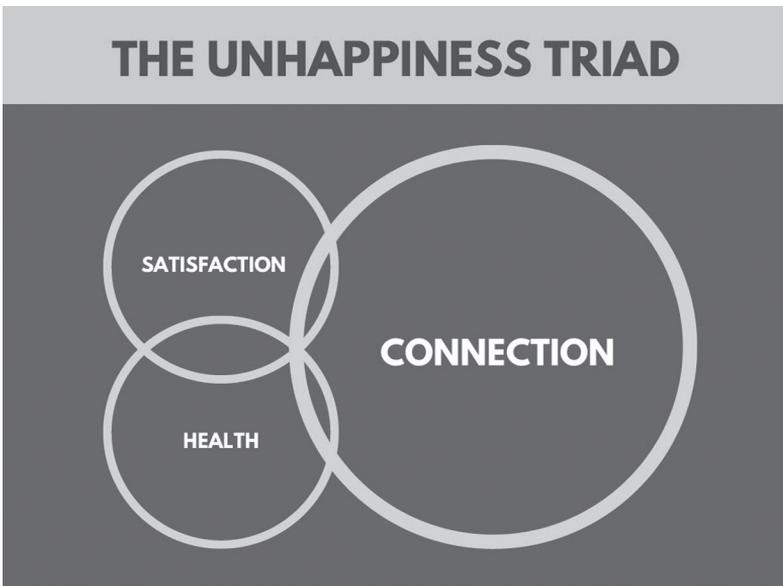


We feel happy when we achieve emotional and physical well-being, meaningful connections, and satisfaction. All

## What's Good Enough?

three components have to be in balance with each other to maximize happiness.

When we devote all our waking hours to caring for our children and partners, the circle of connection expands while the areas of satisfaction and health shrink. As a result, the area of happiness becomes much smaller. We feel stressed out, angry, and lonely. In return, the quality of our care declines. Our maximal efforts yield suboptimal performance.



Contrary to common beliefs, putting your children and partner first at all times isn't the best way to love them. Scheduling routine "me time" to regain a sense of control is not being selfish. It's essential for our well-being.

It's impossible to take good care of others when you don't care about yourself. You might pull it off for a short while, but in the long run, the burden on your mind turns into pains and ailments in your body. You take medications to ease the physical symptoms, which gives you new sets of

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problems from the adverse effects of the pills. Being a hospital pharmacist for over a decade, I've seen many cases like this. Take care of yourself before it's too late, for the sake of your family and friends. Remember, you and your partner are the role models for your children. If you don't maintain a healthy lifestyle, how do you expect your kids to pick up the good habits?

## The Key to Our Problems

When describing our problems to others, we emphasize how difficult our children are, how unappreciative our partners get, and how demanding our jobs become. Rather than waiting for others to change, think about how you can influence them in a positive direction.

Children didn't decide to be difficult one day. Our parenting approach may have played a role in their behaviors. Kids learn fast, especially from the people they spend the most time with. Since this is a whole topic on its own, I'll address child-rearing issues in Chapter 10.

You wanted to have children with your partner for a good reason. What has changed in the relationship since the births of your little pumpkins? How often do you talk to each other about your feelings? When was the last time you had sex that made you feel like a woman in love? Chapter 9 will tell you how to nurture the most important relationship in your life.

Once you figure out how to care for your kids and partner wisely, you'll feel more energetic at work, more poised to handle challenging tasks. Your positive attitude will attract more opportunities.

## The Path to Happiness, Health, and Confidence

There are four steps to draw up your own success blueprint:

Step One: Define Where You Are and Where You Want to Be

1. Discover your values and strengths (Chapters 2 and 3)
2. Revisit your old dreams (Chapter 18)
3. Prepare for your transformation (Chapters 4 and 8)
4. Look good and feel better (Chapters 11, 12, 13, 14)

Step Two: Declutter Your Life

1. Live simply (Chapter 4)
2. Declutter your mind (Chapters 6 and 7)
3. Recharge your body (Chapters 16 and 17)

Step Three: Build a Support Network

1. Bring passion to your relationship (Chapters 9 and 15)
2. Raise independent children (Chapter 10)
3. Rally for support (Chapter 21)

Step Four: Create the Life You Love

1. Reverse engineer your path (Chapter 19)
2. Maximize your productivity (Chapter 20)
3. Be prepared for the journey to success (Chapter 22)

To present the above information in an easy to follow manner, I grouped them in three sections titled “The Mind,” “The Body,” and “The Path,” respectively. In the next few

## What's Good Enough?

chapters I will illustrate Steps One through Three in detail, together with various methods to help you overcome the negative emotions keeping you from living your best life. After you have a firm grip on what you need to create the life you love and how to focus your energy on important things, I'll show you how to get healthy and look and feel your best in "The Body." Once your confidence improves, we'll revisit all the steps in "The Path" to reverse engineer your path to the life you deserve.

## 2

# How Well Do You Know Yourself?

LIFE IS A sequence of choices we make. What we hold on to and what we let go of make all the difference.

Before we know what we want, we must know who we are. Yet knowing ourselves is among the hardest things to do these days. Our lives are packed with responsibilities and distractions, leaving little room to reflect on what is meaningful to us. We're busy reacting rather than living, looking at but not seeing the truth in life. Until one day when our health breaks down and we finally stop to ponder what is important to us and how we should live the rest of our lives.

Some of you may say you know yourself well. You've done the Myers-Briggs personality test or the 16Personalities questionnaire.<sup>1</sup> Yes, these analyses provide insights into our temperament and behavioral characteristics. But we change in reaction to the changes in our environment. If you did your

test back in those college years, I'm not sure how accurate it'll be now. Think of these tests as photos taken at a particular moment of your life—a glimpse of your past.

Most people know their weaknesses well; few know their strengths. Ever since we were old enough to tell right from wrong, we learned about our shortcomings, often from our parents. They wanted to protect us by informing us about what we lacked and the importance of amelioration. We were told to work on our weaknesses so we could increase our chances of success.

The thing is, if we only focus on our weaknesses, that is all we see, so we feel insecure, and believe we're not good enough. All you working mothers out there, if you remember one thing from this book, let it be this message: it's much more satisfying and effective to enhance our strengths than to improve our weaknesses.

Nicole Kidman, a renowned actor and producer, describes herself as being exceptionally shy, a circumstance that was only worsened by her childhood stutter. "I just remember everyone always saying to me, 'Calm down, think about what you're gonna say.'" Even with her massive success in the entertainment business, "I don't like walking into a crowded restaurant by myself."<sup>2</sup> Our genetic makeup has created a blueprint for us, where our weaknesses and strengths are laid out already. Our job is to figure out how to maximize the effect of our strengths while not letting our weaknesses stop us. No one is perfect, so we can shove off the burden of trying to be so.

## What Are My Strengths?

Few of us know precisely in what areas we excel because we've been focusing on improving our weaknesses. Strengths lead us to new horizons; our flaws keep us on the treadmill of life, busy running but not getting anywhere. To have an accurate

## How Well Do You Know Yourself?

grasp of your strengths requires work, but the result will be empowering. When you know the *magic* words that sum up the purpose of your life, you'll know why you've failed in previous attempts trying to fit. Instead of muscling with your feebleness, you can now free yourself of that burden and discover where your strengths can lead you.

The four steps of self-discovery include:

1. Think deeply about yourself.
2. Reflect on your past interests that weren't fueled by monetary benefits.
3. Think about what others say about you.
4. Use a well-tested character strengths assessment tool to verify your findings.

### Think Deeply about Yourself

What activities energize you? What gives you joy just thinking about it? When are you at your best? Periodically take an inventory of your emotions, filter out the impurities, and look for the gold specs that highlight your life.

My husband had trouble deciding what career he should pursue when he finished high school. All his friends wanted the computer science major as it was all the rage in the '90s. He took a week-long road trip to Yellowstone National Park. The open road and scenery helped him think deeply about what he cared about the most and what he was good at. When he returned, he chose to study civil engineering. While many of his friends switched career during the dot-com crash in the early 2000s, he's still satisfied with his career path.

## Reflect on Your Past Interests that Weren't Fueled by Monetary Benefits

Think about what you wanted to be when you were in tenth grade. What activities consumed most of your time when you were a child? I've loved reading from a very young age. By the time I was twelve, I had read all the classic literature on my father's bookshelves, such as *War and Peace*, *Crime and Punishment*, and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. I was enthralled by the power of words. I had a big pile of notebooks collecting all the beautiful phrases I encountered. I wrote my first novel when I was ten. My parents told me I needed to have a successful career to be financially stable. So I tried a business major, then engineering, and eventually pharmacy. Although I've published technical articles and research papers, creative writing was always a nostalgic thought for me.

A few years ago, a surgery kept me off work for weeks. During those long, idle days, I started writing a political thriller. I watched my characters react and then fight back as their lives turned upside down. I cried for their struggles and their courage to do the right thing. I haven't stopped writing since.

## Think about What Others Say about You

We're not always the best judges of our characters. Others may have a more accurate view of our personality traits. Your close friends and family members will be among the first people you'll want to consult. I asked my seven-year-old son what he thought of me. Amazingly, he identified three of my top five strengths. If you have trusted colleagues at work, ask them what you have done well. These external inputs will converge on a few core characteristics that likely represent your inner wealth.

You may receive a range of opinions about you from different sources, so the caveat is to find commonality in them. Reflect on your past experience to verify the existence of such traits. Ignore those irrelevant statements about you. You don't live according to people's opinions. You live true to your values.

## Use a Well-Tested Character Strengths Assessment Tool to Verify Your Findings

Drs. Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, two well-known researchers in positive psychology, created the Values in Action Signature Strengths test to help people identify their own positive strengths and learn how to capitalize on them. The questionnaire contains 240 questions that take about twenty-five minutes to complete. You can register and take the full test at [www.authentic happiness.org](http://www.authentic happiness.org) for free and receive feedback on your top five strengths.

The survey examines an individual's profile of character strengths in the following categories:

Wisdom and Knowledge: creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, perspective

Courage: bravery, perseverance, honesty, zest

Humanity: love, kindness, emotional intelligence

Justice: teamwork, fairness, leadership

Temperance: forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-regulation

Transcendence: appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality

My top three strengths are *love of learning, fairness, and curiosity*.

Once you have identified your strengths, view them as the clues to your struggles and untapped potentials. In the next chapter, I'll show you how to improve the fit between your strengths and your life.

## 22

# A Most Splendid Ride

THANK-YOU FOR TAKING the journey with me through these chapters. At the start of this book, you were disappointed at how life turned out. You wanted more, but you weren't sure what you wanted and how to go about getting it. In "The Mind," you realized you don't have to be perfect to be happy. You can aim for being good enough. You found ways to uncover your strengths and to improve the fit between your strengths and your life. You learned the tools to unload your emotional burden and live true to your values. You saw how a simple way of living could make you happier. You explored the methods of raising flourishing children and the importance of nurturing the love for your partner.

In "The Body," you began your physical transformation. You learned to appreciate your body and make the best of what you have. You followed the four commandments of beauty to enhance your features. No longer shying away from colors, you adopted flattering ways to dress for your body type. You

discovered techniques to improve your sleep and workouts to improve your health. You looked beyond the dietary hypes and trends and learned to treat food as medicine. You recognized the benefits of a satisfying sex life and explored the power of physical love.

In “The Path,” you examined your old dream and why it was important to you. You drew your growth roadmap by reverse engineering the experts’ success. You learned how to maximize your productivity and build a support network to motivate you.

Now, you’re ready to embark on the journey to a new life.

Good luck, my friends, I wish you all the very best. No one can predict the future, but I can guarantee you’ll meet challenges and setbacks along the way. I want to see you off with these words:

Be prepared to be disappointed, brokenhearted even, when everything seems to go against you. Build a defense system for times like that. Have a mentor guide you through troubles; have your partner or a close friend comfort you; have your accomplishment journal handy to appreciate how much you have already achieved.

Be prepared when things are going too well, when your business is taking off and your talent is in high demand. Don’t neglect the other two vital components of happiness—your health and your relationships. Keep everything in balance and share the fruit of your labor with all who have helped you.

Be prepared by having a Plan B. When the situation challenges you to gamble, take a moment to draw up a backup plan. If there’s no alternative, don’t do it. You don’t want to end up with your back against the wall.

Be open to new opportunities. Don’t worry if you’re good enough. You only become good by doing. Failure is the prequel to growth. Change your struggles into knowledge and turn your mistakes into wisdom.

## *A Most Splendid Ride*

Be flexible in your approach. When something doesn't work after multiple tries, test a different angle. Read a book, watch video tutorials, talk to people, and learn to draw inspiration from random events. The clues are everywhere; you just have to look for them.

Be optimistic. Your attitude plays a role in your likelihood of success. Happiness is a mindset built on open-mindedness and gratitude. Choosing to see the bright side may just bring you the lucky break you deserve.

Be humble. There is always something you can learn from the person next to you. Pay attention to those with specialized skills. Don't copy their ideas; study their methods instead. Change their approaches to fit your practice and come up with your own creation.

Be you. Stop comparing yourself to other people. Remember, your height doesn't change when you stand next to a giant or a dwarf. You don't have to be perfect—just be the best of you. Think of life as a train ride. We're all heading for the same destination, but everyone sees a different view. Stop looking at life through others' lenses. Find your own horizon. Make your ride the most splendid and memorable.

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in books, and in real life.*

*Your courage, passion, and perseverance are  
my inspiration to write.*

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# About the Author

From an aspiring actress to working for airline executives to becoming a pharmacy professor and a multigenre author, Dr. Ivy Ge has transformed her life while balancing her role as a working mother and a wife.

She writes to inspire women to design their own fate. Her thrillers tell the extraordinary tales of ordinary heroines caught between personal conflicts and national crises. Her self-help books empower women to pursue self-growth outside the role of caregivers. Visit her website <https://ivyge.com> for more information on how to create the life you love.

Besides traveling, she enjoys practicing hot yoga, horseback riding, and skiing in the mountains in Lake Tahoe, California, with her family.