

Be.

**A No-Bullsh*t Guide
to Increasing
Your Self-Worth and
Net Worth by Simply
Being *Yourself***

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INTRODUCTION

HOW I CAME TO BE.

“You can either stand inside your story and own it, or stand outside your story and hustle for your worthiness.”

Brené Brown

I grew up an awkward, gawky girl with frizzy hair, terrible acne, and about twenty pounds of baby fat that stuck around until I was twenty-one. I was ruthlessly teased by the mean girls and bullied by the even meaner boys. In high school, I found a home in the theater department, surrounded myself with the other suburban misfits, and, quite literally, pretended to be someone I wasn't.

As if my insecurities weren't palpable enough, I went off to college to study theater and became a professional actress. After graduation, I lived the quintessential artist life, dabbling in cocktail waitressing, nannying, and temping, and all the while getting rejected on the regular at auditions and trying to stay—well—*not broke*.

In 2008, at the ripe age of twenty-six, I met a girl at one of those temp jobs, and we became fast friends. Three months later, fueled by our love of trying out new restaurants in Chicago, we decided to become business partners. After endless hours of researching what it took to actually run a business, let alone build one, we wrote a hundred-plus-page business

plan defining what would become the largest online women's lifestyle magazine for seven years straight: CheekyChicago.com (Cheeky). We raised some money from friends and family, quit our temp jobs, and became cofounders. Each week, we published over thirty articles on the hippest restaurants, bars, and nightclubs, reported on the latest fashion and fitness trends, featured local celebrities and national lifestyle experts, and covered up-and-coming destinations in arts and culture. This was at the dawn of social media, and we were early adopters. As a result, Cheeky exploded. We quickly reached over one hundred thousand local readers and partnered with hundreds of brands as our clients. We also threw the sickest parties in town.

I became an "It Girl" in Chicago practically overnight, with my photo seen in every monthly glossy socialite magazine. I was regularly featured in TV segments on NBC, ABC, and FOX as a social media and lifestyle expert. My personal brand was starting to grow (albeit unconsciously), and it felt like the whole city knew who I was. You can only imagine how cool and self-important this made me feel, having never been considered a member of the popular crowd until that moment in my adulthood.

From the outside in, Cheeky looked like a super-hip start-up, led by two sparkly, social, stylish founders who preached women's empowerment.

What was happening on the inside was a very different story.

Our business partnership was toxic. We actually hated each other. I suffered from constant anxiety attacks and depression and eventually contracted an autoimmune disease from all the stress. I was going out six nights a week, and usually drinking too much, in the pursuit of "being seen." Back at the office, our advertising revenue model was too cyclical to sustain itself, and we could barely pay our employees, let alone ourselves.

I knew I needed a shift, but I could not figure out how to make one. The magazine, despite its dysfunctionality, was my life. It was my entire identity. It was *me*. How on earth could I stop doing it?

The day I found myself at my parents' house in the suburbs asking them to help me pay my phone bill was around the same time I started

experiencing regular panic attacks and emotional breakdowns. There was one particular meltdown where I found myself looking down at my wrist, eyes welled with tears, and staring at the tiny tattoo written across it, which said, “Simply be.” It had been there for years. It was in that moment that, for the first time in my life, I heard a *very* loud, *very* distinct, *completely undeniable* inner voice, my higher self. She said, “No matter what you do after Cheeky—and you *will* do something else—name your next company Simply Be. as a reminder to always be in alignment with your truth. Because right now, you’re not. And something has to change.”

I ended up leaving Cheeky soon after to do just that. (Once you hear the truth from your higher self, you can’t unhear it.) And when I did, something remarkable happened. I made the announcement I was leaving to start my one-woman consultancy called—you guessed it—the SimplyBe. Agency with a launch strategy that consisted of two tactics. The first was an email I sent to my network bcc’ing a couple hundred people announcing my departure and that SimplyBe. was open for business. The second was a Facebook post.

Within one business week, I had over \$20,000 worth of client retainer work and a line out the door. This was my aha moment on the power of a personal brand. At that juncture in my career, I didn’t even realize I had one myself. What’s more, I realized that no one who had hired me *actually* understood what I did. All they knew was the story I had been unconsciously telling about myself online for the previous seven years as the founder of a seemingly successful digital magazine. It was enough information for my prospective clients that I didn’t have to make a single sales phone call to launch an entirely new business. I thought to myself, “Shit, if I did this *accidentally*, what could I do if I got *intentional*?”

I learned quite quickly that when done effectively, intentionally, and authentically, a strong personal brand can be the most powerful business asset you can possess. In fact, it could become the only marketing tool you will *ever* need. That’s because people do business with *real people*, not logos, websites, mastheads, or Instagram channels.

However, before I could go forth and build a personal brand rooted in truth and authenticity, I had to get clear about my own truth first. And this didn't happen overnight. It took years of work, an expensive life coach, and most of all, a willingness to own my side of the mess I had created at Cheeky. To fully acknowledge that I was showing up without integrity and in total misalignment with my purpose. What's more, I realized how much I had been dimming my own light to make my business partner feel comfortable, and, in an effort to avoid conflict, how much I had lied to her as a result. I finally acknowledged that I had a horrible relationship with money and needed to become responsible enough to not spend money I did not have. I grew to understand that the world would only mirror back to me the money I felt I was worthy of making, and *that* was the real reason I was broke. I had to finally own that I was living a lie. That it was all bullshit.

As I moved forward to launch the SimplyBe Agency, I made the decision to do things very, very differently this time around. I knew this time, my entrepreneurial business was going to be a direct expression of my values, my strengths, and my truth. I was going to surround myself with only the highest vibrational people. I was going to shelve my ego and focus on helping other people, but I was also going to charge more money for my value and time. Finally, and perhaps the most powerful choice of all, I decided to share my story with anyone who would listen. The real story—unapologetically, unabashedly, and authentically. The good, the bad, the ugly, the shameful, the glamorous, the piss poor. Online. Offline. With old friends and new colleagues on panels, on my blog, on social media, and in my newsletter. I decided to use my authentic personal brand platform in the service of my business and my mission.

It was at this precise inflection point that everything shifted. I started to attract *incredible* clients and top talent to my company, I got paid to speak to share my story, I hit national PR outlets, and I began making more money than I ever had in my life.

I am not saying it was smooth sailing, because it never is. I am sharing this to demonstrate that as soon as you get into alignment with your

truth and lead with a personal brand that is full of humanity, service, intention, and *your story*—the game changes. As soon as you uplevel your self-worth, your net worth responds in kind.

This is the sauce.

As soon as I figured out how to simply be me, everything expanded. The instant I decided I was worthy of sharing myself, my stories, my realness (financially and personally) with my clients, my team, the media, and my social media followers, my business took off. I now live and breathe unapologetic authenticity with every decision I make. This is the Kool-Aid I serve daily to my clients and sip myself.

While this is a book about personal branding, this is not your typical personal branding book. To be frank, I find most books on personal branding to be full of shit. Sure, they might teach you how to curate a perfect Instagram feed, create the magic bullet to make your blog go viral, or get yourself on the stages of TED without ever asking the question, “WHO AM I?” in the first place, and perhaps more importantly, “WHY SHOULD PEOPLE CARE?”

Sorry, I didn’t mean to yell. I’m just fired up about the notion of people fully waking up to the power of their true, authentic *message*—their *real* personal brand. I get miffed watching so many personal branding “experts” talk pure tactics, pointing people to more followers and larger readership metrics in an effort to become “known.” And hey, it’s okay if you want to become known. Just ask yourself, “Known in service of what?”

I’m not diminishing the importance of what views, followers, subscribers, and fans can and will do for your platform. I am, however, stating that most people skip the most essential piece of what builds and sustains a personal brand platform over time:

Your unapologetic authenticity.

Your unapologetic authenticity is what will get people to come to your business, platform, or space, what will make them stay, and what will make them tell their friends and colleagues about you. The more authentic, real, and vulnerable you are, the more viral you actually become.

Authenticity is not rocket science. All it takes is a dose of courage, a dash of strategy, a shit ton of self-awareness, and a willingness to serve.

You see, it starts from within. It starts with really digging down inside the tiniest nooks and crannies, into the deepest depths of your desires, triumphs, failures, dreams, wounds, and one-of-a-kind life stories to reveal your *authentic personal brand*. Only then will you be able to architect a personal brand message that is real, meaningful, consistent, inspiring, original, and useful.

This book will teach you how to do exactly that.

In part 1, “Be. Real,” you’re going to learn once and for all the true meaning of “authenticity” and why you’re worthy of sharing yours with the world. Expect to unlearn everything you’ve ever been told about personal branding. You’ll find worksheets, assignments, and soul prompts that will remind you of your worthiness and inspire you to live your truth, and above all, *share* your truth with the world.

In the second part, “Be. Your Brand,” you’ll learn how to take this newfound understanding of branding yourself and use it to crystalize your authentic message and build an expert-level strategy to attract your ideal opportunities, clients, and customers to increase your net worth. I am opening up the freakin’ vault to SimplyBe’s best-in-class, trademarked methodologies, tools, templates, and frameworks. This is our process in building world-renowned personal brands, and I’m giving you access to it all.

We’ll end our time together with part 3, “Be. Free.” This is where your journey actually *begins*. You will learn how to take your authentic personal brand where it matters most: offline and into your relationships, human interactions, and work environments, so that you can become the *living* example of authenticity.

Finally, I’m going to encourage you to put the book down once and for all and go live your life. Because life is your teacher, and the further you reach into the depths of your soul and explore the edges of what’s possible, the more inspired, real, brave, authentic, and impactful your message becomes.

Above all, you'll learn how to make your personal brand stand the test of time, because hey, life is long and Instagram might not be relevant ten years from now.

But this book will Be. And you can Be. too.

So, welcome to *Be.*, a guide to building *your* unapologetically authentic personal brand, with the precise actions and strategies that will take you from unknown expert to recognized thought leader, using the best marketing strategies, social media tactics, and PR hacks available.

But it will be your authentic true story that will be the ultimate guiding light, with me at the helm to help steer you each step of the way. Warning: This won't be a journey of rainbows and butterflies. That's not life, and that's certainly not business. This book will require an ample amount of self-discovery, self-awareness, and humility, an investment of your time, and a bit of ass-kicking. To be clear: this isn't just a guide; it's a *no bullshit* guide.

So buckle up, and get ready to Be. Your self-worth—and your net worth—are about to explode.

What a time to
be aligned.



PART 1: BE. REAL

CHAPTER 1

EMBRACE YOUR SHIT

↙
“Wherever you go,
there you are.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn

I learned the power of embracing my own shit over a decade ago.

I was going through one of the most difficult periods of my life: the end of a five-year relationship with a man fourteen years older than me. I was in my mid-twenties and up until then, I had never experienced that level of heartbreak. Breaking up with him felt like cutting off my own arm. My entire life was defined by that relationship, so when it ended, I was a shell of my former self.

I was also running Cheeky at this time. On the home page of the company website, there was a tiny section on the bottom right titled *Jessica's Blog*. (This was in 2009 when blogging was still a novelty.) I began to blog about my newly single life, and all that I was learning about myself. Week after week, I would take fingers to keyboard and let the truth of my experience with this heartbreak just pour out. Sure it was cathartic, but I also hoped that since my audience was mainly women, at least a *few* of them would undoubtedly relate. It turned out I was wrong.

There were thousands!

My blogs went viral. Each month, when I checked our Google Analytics, my personal blogs received at least 100 percent more engagement than our posts on the hottest new restaurants, workout fad, or Chicago celebrity sighting. I would get stopped on the street by women who had read my blogs, and they would relay to me how they shared them with all their friends across the country. This was my epiphany on sharing yourself authentically online.

The secret sauce to going viral is *vulnerability*.

This theory of mine didn't start and end with my breakup blogs back in 2009. I have seen it time and time again, all across the internet, for years. People have touched the masses, reached the media, and launched careers with this approach.

Vulnerability shouldn't be a one-trick pony. It should be the bedrock of your message. Whether it's a breakup, a divorce, a death, or just the lessons of daily life, the more vulnerability you share, the more infectious you become. Shit's powerful, and here's why:

Everyone has shit.

The more willing you are to reveal your shit, the more opportunity you have to create true brand affinity. People will listen to you because they can see themselves in you. Despite how big a company you have, how many people follow you on social media, or how many books you've sold, when you're real, you become accessible. People will resonate with your content, because you are, in fact, just like them.

Start by believing your shit is worth sharing and watch how you scale.

WHAT IS SHIT?

It's time to face your own shit. It's been waiting for you. There's nothing to be afraid of. Your shit is your friend, your edge, your magic. It's time for you to finally embrace it, and by that I mean to look your shit squarely in the face, claim it, own it, squeeze it, and give it a big THANK YOU. It's your biggest gift. It's time to wear your shit on your sleeve. (Not that kind of shit. Gross.)