

How to Set Boundaries and Prioritize What Matters Most

FROM "THE MYTH OF THE NICE GIRL" BY FRAN HAUSER

When I was working at Coke, any time a last-minute task or request came up, I was the first person to raise my hand and volunteer to stay late and do it. Yes, it showed I was ambitious, but I had also unwillingly set a precedent to always be available to take on more. My mentor told me, **"FRAN, YOU NEED TO CREATE BOUNDARIES, OR PEOPLE WILL KEEP TAKING ADVANTAGE OF YOU."**

Easier said than done. I know it's vital to create filters at work to help you cut out extraneous tasks (and say no) so you can focus on the things that matter. I also know I work better when I have a specific plan to follow so I created this Four Square method to force myself to create and maintain boundaries.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

1. Draw two lines, one horizontal and one vertical (or use our template below).
2. Label each quadrant. Ask yourself, what are the four most important areas of your life right now? Career or school will most likely be one of the four. But others may be a hobby, political advocacy, or a particular relationship. Write this at the top of each box.
3. In each square, list no more than three top priorities or goals related to that part of your life. Every item in your four square should ideally add up to 80 percent of your time. It's hard to limit to three, but this exercise forces you to say no to things to maintain your boundaries.

A PEEK AT MINE:

ME

1. Cardio
2. Meditation
3. Less sugar

FAMILY

1. Caregiver transition
2. Travel/Adventure

CAREER

1. Promoting my book
2. Sale of startup in my portfolio
3. Writing more for Refinery29

WORLD

1. New GlobalGiving CEO
2. Auction for local school foundation



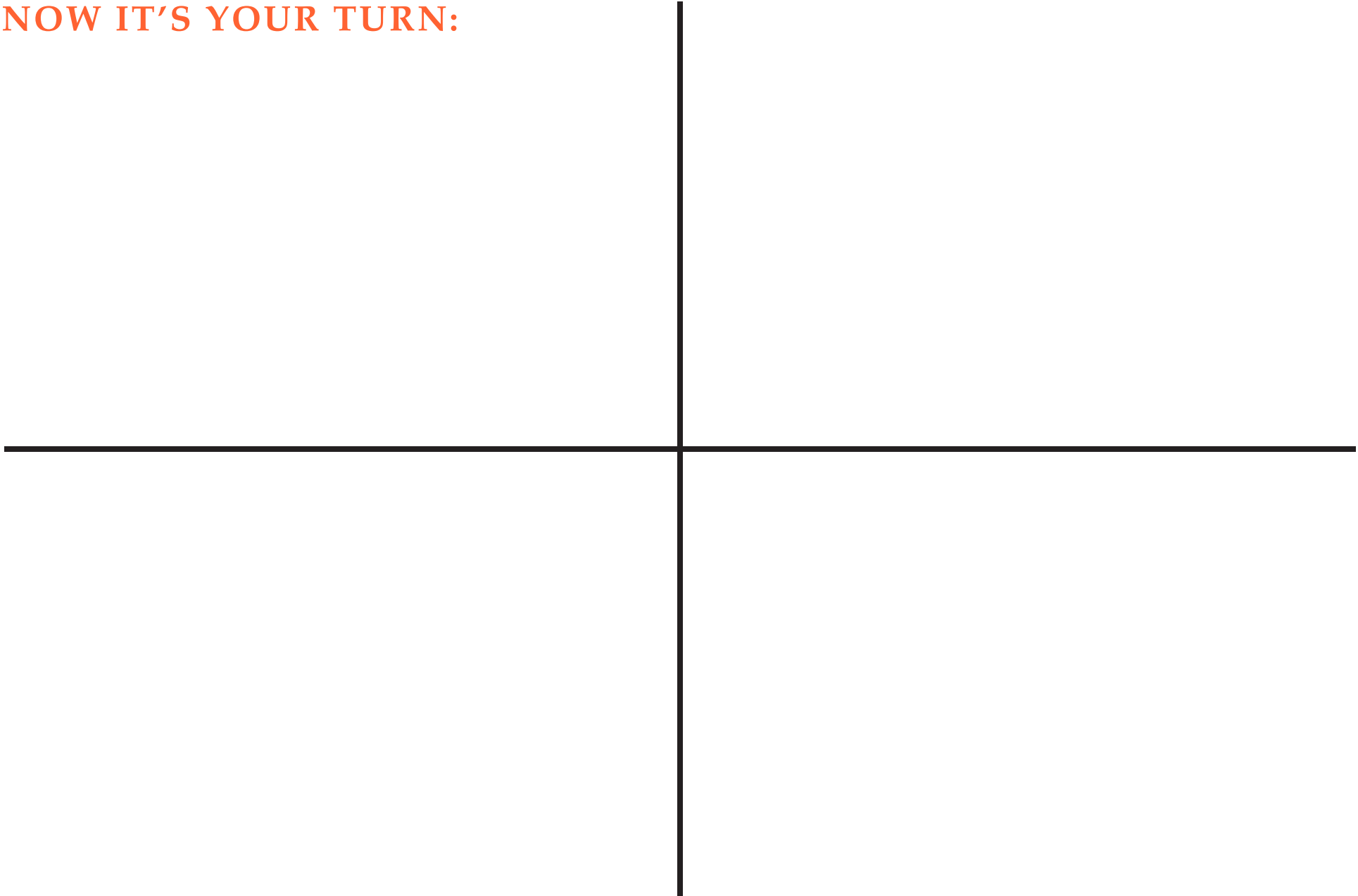
TIPS TO MAKE IT WORK:

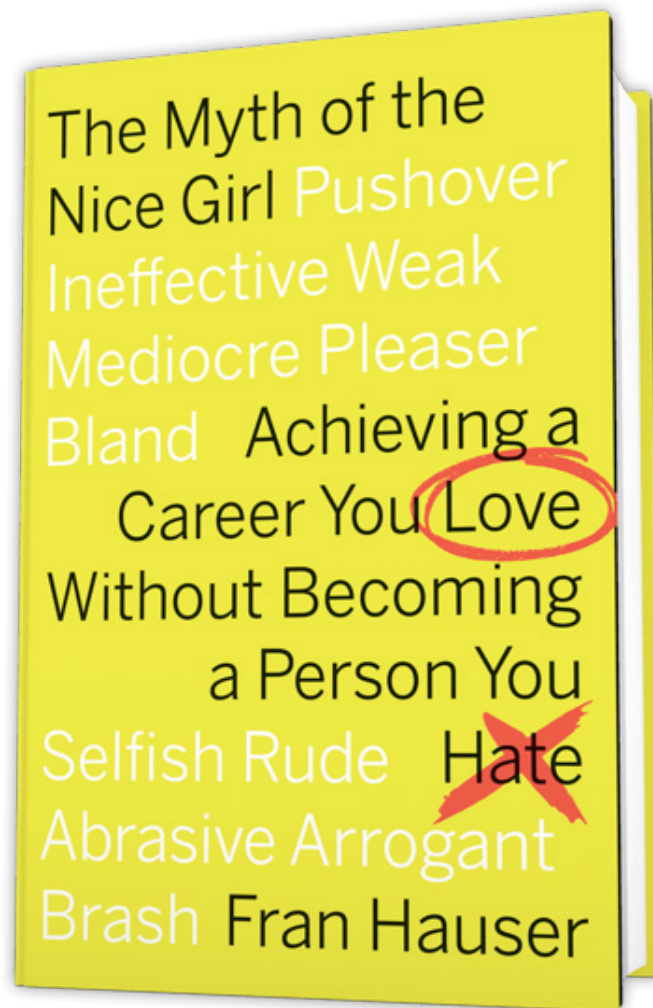
1. **Just start!** If you're stuck, remember that you don't have to live with these forever. Even thinking about focusing your priorities is a great first step.
2. **Look closely at your calendar.** Are your appointments and to-dos aligned with your priorities? If not, adjust your schedule and begin to say no or delegate some requests.
3. **Be prepared to make tough decisions.** One of my mentees realized she was only spending about a quarter of her time on the things that mattered most to her, which meant she had to take a hard look at what she was going to drop. Though she felt good about a community service project she was working on, it wasn't aligned with her current priorities.
4. **Set clear goals for the Career square.** This is one area where it can become too easy to want to write a million things down. And, even if you have a boss who tends to change your priorities daily, you need to look at the bigger picture. Ask your boss, "This is what I think I should be focusing on based on company goals. Does this look right to you?" Ask yourself, "What do I most want to learn or improve to take my career to the next level?"



5. **Be okay with shifting priorities.** Some months are more weighted toward my career; others are filled with family obligations. That's OK, but check in every two weeks to make sure your calendar is still mapping with your priorities.
6. **Change it up.** On a quarterly basis, I redo my Four Square. For me, Career might become more specific and change to My Book the month before it comes out because I know that's where I will be devoting all my time and energy.

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