

VANESSA LODER

THE

A Guide for Brilliant,
Overwhelmed Women

SOUL

to Quiet the Noise,
Find Their Superpower,

SOLUTION

and Feel Satisfied

finally

Book Excerpt



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INTRODUCTION

She has achieved everything she set out to do, but
it has come at great sacrifice to her soul.

MAUREEN MURDOCK

The Heroine's Journey

I met Caroline when she was on the brink of collapse. Most days, her calendar was packed with nonstop meetings. During lunch, she would inhale a quick salad, rush through her parenting to-do list (e.g., sign up her kids for classes or respond to teachers), and power through emails before returning to meetings. Caroline loved many aspects of her demanding job, but it was taking a toll on her well-being. At home in the evenings, preparing dinner or playing with her daughters, Caroline's mood was tinged with bone-deep exhaustion. What she really wanted was to curl up in a ball and take a nap for three days straight. But she was too stressed to sleep. Her therapist and husband were worried: Caroline had recently developed severe migraine headaches that knocked her out for days at a time. She knew deep down that this frenetic lifestyle was not sustainable, but she couldn't seem to get off the hamster wheel. Having grown up in an unstable environment with a mother who was emotionally unavailable, Caroline craved financial security and was used to being supercompetent. But her driven, overachiever tendencies were taking a toll.

Then her father died.

At work, it was the end of a tough month in which Caroline had been toiling tirelessly to land an important new client for the firm, only to have that client go elsewhere. At her father's funeral, Caroline's mind was riddled with thoughts of her incomplete "to-dos" and all of the "shoulds" she had

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prioritized over what really mattered—her family and her dreams. Just as she was reflecting on these trade-offs, her eight-year-old daughter leaned across the pew. “Mommy,” she said, “are you sad about work again?” It was the push Caroline needed to change.

If that wasn’t enough, at the urging of a friend, Caroline joined my thirty-day meditation challenge for ambitious, overwhelmed women, which helped her begin a daily five-minute meditation and journaling practice. She was amazed at how time seemed to stretch when she was in that relaxed state, so different from her usual scarcity mindset in which she was constantly rushing around with never enough time.

“If you were to tune in to your heart and your intuition rather than your ego, mind, or wallet, what would your heart tell you it needs right now?” I asked her.

Caroline told me that for years she had dreamed of selling their small condo in San Francisco, moving to Oregon, and learning to garden. She had written this off as an unrealistic fantasy, but then she had a serendipitous encounter with a woman in a coffee shop who was selling her property in Oregon. It felt like Caroline’s soul was calling her there. Looking at pictures of this woman’s house, Caroline spontaneously burst into tears, goose bumps rising on her arms. A little voice in her head whispered, *That’s your house*. It felt irrational, but also right.

Prior to working with me, Caroline would have dismissed her instincts. But now she was trying a radically new approach: I had taught her to pay attention to her emotional cues, soul whispers (that inner voice she heard), and energetic bread crumbs (those moments she felt energized and alive). Caroline got clarity on what was important to her and confided in her husband that she really wanted to make this change. It wasn’t always easy; there were some tough conversations and trade-offs with her husband’s job and proximity to family. But in the end, they agreed to put an offer on the house. Less than two months later, she was shocked to be living in her dream home. Caroline had always been taught that she had to grind for rewards. But when it came to realizing her wildest dreams, she was surprised that when she prioritized her truth and changed her mindset, things came with greater ease than expected.

It raised a fundamental question: What if the point in life isn’t to “crush it” but to savor it?

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For many women, chasing success doesn't just include constant hustling for the corner office, working on weekends, endless video conferencing, forsaking others to get to the top, or adopting a masculine persona (acting "tough" to make it in male-dominated industries). There's pressure to succeed in all aspects of our lives: to be the ideal worker, the perfect mother, and the supportive spouse and friend all at once. The result? According to a 2016 study published in the journal *Brain & Behavior*, women are twice as likely to suffer from severe stress and anxiety as men and, according to the United Nations, women globally spend about three times as many hours on unpaid domestic and care work as men on an average day (4.2 hours compared to 1.7).¹ These arrangements are not paying off. While women outnumber men in college and account for 51.4 percent of middle managers in the US, only 18 percent of the highest-level leaders and 8.2 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are female.² Other factors, such as COVID-19, have only compounded this issue, as women disproportionately shouldered the extra caregiving and homeschooling responsibilities.³

We live in a fast-paced, always-on culture that prizes busyness. Advances in technology, enabling 24/7 connectivity, have shifted expectations and blurred the boundaries between work and home. We wake up feeling "behind" before our day has begun. When we aren't working, we listen to podcasts and obsessively try to maximize every minute, but to what end? We're too busy rushing around and optimizing our productivity to pause long enough to deal with this frenzied insanity. Most people live in a state of sympathetic nervous system overdrive, steeped in adrenaline-fueled fight or flight, focused only on knocking items off an endless to-do list. Amid these competing demands, women, conditioned to be people-pleasers and rule-followers, are overwhelmed, dissatisfied, and on the brink of collapse. Many can't even imagine a life that supports their ambition *and* their emotional well-being.

That's where I come in.

If you had told me fifteen years ago that I would be writing a book with *soul* in the title, I'd have thought you were crazy. But that was before I realized that there are two realities: one governed by our ego and one by our True Self. Our ego, fueled by external norms and expectations, is made up of various internal voices, personas, stories, beliefs, and "shoulds." The True Self is connected to the soul. While our ego is loud and insistent, our soul

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brings deeper wisdom. It's the part of us that knows we don't want to be a lawyer anymore, that this marriage feels lonely, or that we need more laughter in our life. Our soul holds our Truth with a capital *T*, and though we work to repress it, our Truth has a way of surfacing whether it's convenient or not.

In my twenties and early thirties, I thought the point of my career was to find “success” by working hard, earning money, striving for promotions, and continually learning (that last part still holds true). My ego guided my choices, behaviors, and beliefs, which, from an outside perspective, appeared to work well. Here is how my ego would describe my past to impress you: I graduated top of my class from Columbia University, and I took a high-paying investment banking job on Wall Street followed by a job with a prestigious private equity firm. I moved to California to get my MBA from Stanford and climbed the career ladder in Silicon Valley. I married a wonderful man and was on track to become a partner at my firm. On paper, I was crushing it. But I couldn't shake the nagging feeling that I was meant for more—more fulfillment, more purpose, more happiness. My traditional success wasn't bringing the satisfaction I'd been promised by our mainstream culture, which confused the heck out of me. For years, I had been following the rules, dotting all my *i*'s and crossing all my *t*'s.

What if the playbook itself was flawed?

I began to wonder if there was a better way to live. Could I be driven and productive without rushing, anxiety-fueled, through my days? Could I realize my dreams instead of satisfying everyone else's perceived expectations? Why was I constantly meeting other people's needs but ignoring my own, only to wind up feeling resentful and exhausted? How could I balance work, family, health, and hobbies? How could I honor my ambition *and* nourish my soul? I had been so busy following this prescribed path that I had no idea how to forge my own way forward. What the heck did I want to do with my “one wild and precious life”?⁴

What I had yet to realize was that by asking these questions, I had already started on the path to recognizing and listening to my soul.

Seeking answers like any good overachiever, I began researching, asking experts, and tapping into my friends' networks (from executive coaches to

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psychics). I read dozens of books, attended mindfulness and neuroscience training and silent meditation retreats. I basically got my PhD in soul-searching! Some things worked better than others. But gently, and sometimes not so gently, that accrued knowledge began to nudge me in a more authentic direction.

After many sleepless nights, I decided to stop playing by the rules laid out by society and I quit my job to follow my heart and intuition instead. What happened next shook me to the core: my inner overachiever felt lost without someone else setting the gold standard.

I felt my soul calling me to something bigger, more meaningful, but I had no idea how to connect with or trust this inner wisdom.

There was no road map that I was aware of. So, over the last decade, I have dedicated myself to learning how to live a life of joy and success—on my own terms.

And that's how *The Soul Solution* was born.

If striving, people-pleasing, and pursuing achievement for achievement's sake has left you exhausted and unfulfilled, this book is for you. If you're at a crossroads, your priorities have shifted, and you're not sure what's next, you're in the right place. If you want more out of life but are unsure how to get it, welcome. *The Soul Solution* is designed to help you unpack the stories you've been told and uncover who you really are, so you can build a life you love and (finally!) feel satisfied.

Maybe you picked up this book because you are being called to something greater in your life. Perhaps you've heard me speak about mindful leadership at your company or at a conference or you watched my TEDx talk, "How to Lean In Without Burning Out," and you want to go deeper into these tools and practices. Perhaps you've compromised or given so much of yourself to others that you need to reclaim your wholeness. Maybe you've been a rule-follower, only to find yourself unrewarded. You've tried your darndest to be good enough—the perfect employee, spouse, mother, sister, daughter, friend—but you've hit a wall and lost yourself.

Good news! *The Soul Solution* is full of answers to help you access your deeper desires and potential. Well, actually, *you* are full of answers. You've just been so busy fulfilling other people's expectations that you've forgotten how to access your own truth. As someone who has experienced this transition, I am honored to offer you the tools you may need to come out the

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other side. You hold in your hands a road map back to *you*, one you can return to again and again.

There's no telling where your journey might take you, but it will make you feel more alive, clear, confident, and attuned, poised to share your unique gifts with the world. *The Soul Solution* is about saying *yes* to feeling good more often, expanding in creativity, love, ease, and abundance every single day.

What Is *The Soul Solution*?

At its core, *The Soul Solution* is about helping you learn to hear, trust, and act on your innate wisdom, heart, intuition, and deeper truth rather than doing what you “should” do. Your instincts are strong, and while you may need to excavate your inner voice in order to hear it, it's there.

If you don't know how to do this or aren't sure if it's even possible, relax, you're already doing it. Your higher self guided you here with me right now. Trust her. She knows the way.

For most of our lives, we live with tunnel vision. We're so focused on getting through the day that we forget to ask ourselves if we're on the track we want to be on. Here's what I've learned actually matters: self-realization and connection to your inner power source rather than chasing approval or external power over others. The only gold standard that matters in the end is the one that comes from your soul.

At its heart, this journey is about you coming home to yourself. **What most women who come to me are really asking is, “Can I trust myself?”** In a culture that has invalidated and devalued innate feminine wisdom and feminine traits in favor of patriarchal values such as rational, linear, logical thinking above all else, this is a valid and understandable concern. In learning how to trust *your* inner guidance, you will discover a new way of being in the world that is empowering and life-enhancing. This is *The Soul Solution*.

Why Do We Need *The Soul Solution*?

Women today carry a crippling burden of expectations and unconscious messaging about our value, duties, and roles in a patriarchal society. Women have been so relieved to have a seat at the table that we haven't questioned how the table is set!

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When we reconnect with our souls and empower ourselves to create, build, lead, and speak our truth, we will craft the radical, holistic solutions that our world needs. It is by each connecting with our true essence (our soul) that women will reclaim an unshakable sense of worthiness and a belief that “I deserve more, I deserve better, and I have the power to create it.”

These changes—negotiating a four-day workweek without a salary cut for more family time, delegating chores to make time for passions and hobbies—may feel scary at first. The current system of power and privilege can only shift if we begin trusting and prioritizing ourselves—our souls.

How to Get the Most Out of This Book

Change is 20 percent insight and 80 percent action. You can read books about swimming or mindfulness all day long, but it’s when you jump in the pool or sit still on a meditation cushion that you reap the benefits. So, to help you embody these strategies and concepts, I’ve included **Flip the Switch** tools at the end of each chapter, as well as additional exercises called **Quick Soul Tips** throughout the book. These tools, journaling prompts, and activities are designed to help you implement *The Soul Solution* in micro moments throughout your day.

Give yourself permission to skip around and apply these tools in the best ways for you. Think of this like a carefully crafted research study you are conducting on yourself. You will try all these new strategies, notice your responses and reactions, observe how you *feel*, and then make your next set of choices.

No matter what, I hope you can sense how much I am with you every step of the way. I’ve got your back. (And so does the universe!)

Getting Started

I recommend using a special, dedicated Soul Solution Journal for the exercises in this book in order to track your progress. Choose a notebook that brings you joy and just *feels* right! Trust yourself and your inner impulses. If you can’t find a notebook, take notes on your phone, tablet, or computer, or just grab any old piece of paper.

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Intention Setting

One of the skills *The Soul Solution* will instill in you is to set a clear intention before beginning any new endeavor. An intention is a statement of desire. When you set one, you activate a part of your own receptivity and clarify direction.

For example, when I drive somewhere, I set the intention to arrive safely and on time. Sometimes I amplify the intention by visualizing my car pulling into our garage intact or traffic parting to let me through. As I pad down the wooden hallway at the end of a workday to play with our kids, I often set the intention to embody a loving presence while I'm with them.

My primary intention with this book is to connect with those who are seeking these teachings at this time—to cocreate with those who are asking to remember their connection to their soul, to discover and unleash their real power so they can have the impact they long to have in the world.

Your Intention

To begin, set an intention to get clear on what you would like to receive from this book. Take a moment to sit with these questions: What would you like? Why are you here?

Some sample intentions:

I want to gain clarity on my next steps with ease and grace.

I would like to feel more calm and joyful on a daily basis.

I want to improve my relationship with myself, be kinder to myself, get my needs met, and have the impact I long to have.

Write down your intention in your Soul Solution Journal. This simple act will make you more likely to create it.

I'm so happy you've made the decision to put yourself first. When you make the decision to connect with your soul, you'll discover and unleash your true power. It will impact not only your life but also the world around you.

This book condenses ten years of soul searching into an easy-to-follow format that you can apply to your life immediately. Are you ready to begin?!

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Soul Symbols

This book came to me in a dream several years ago. During a 2 a.m. meditation, I had an intuition that I would be given symbols to include in the book that would change the vibration or energetic signature of the book itself. It seemed weird, but this whole book is about following our weirdness, so I trusted the guidance. The week before I was to turn in the final manuscript to my editor, I received *The Mayan Oracle* in the mail. When I looked at the cover and saw the symbol below, my heart leapt and a quiet little voice inside whispered, *These are your symbols*.

Each chapter includes a symbol inspired by *The Mayan Oracle* for you to use as a focal point, or *drishti*.⁵ *Drishti* is a Sanskrit word that means “view,” “gaze,” or “point of focus.” It is a specific point on which to lock your eyes or inner vision during meditation or yoga. As you gaze at these symbols and repeat the accompanying affirmations, it will help you further integrate the deeper knowings and callings of your soul. If you feel inspired, you can draw one of the symbols on a sticky note and place it somewhere you will see it often. Notice how you feel in your body as you gaze at it. You can even draw one of the symbols on a key point on your body, like the inside of your wrist. Heck, go crazy, get a tattoo if you want. Tell everyone your soul made you do it. Your weirdness is welcome here, always.

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(pronounced keeb)

This symbol represents trusting your inner voice of knowing and intuition. Breathe in and out deeply while gazing at this symbol and ask yourself, *What is the truth my heart wants me to know right now?*

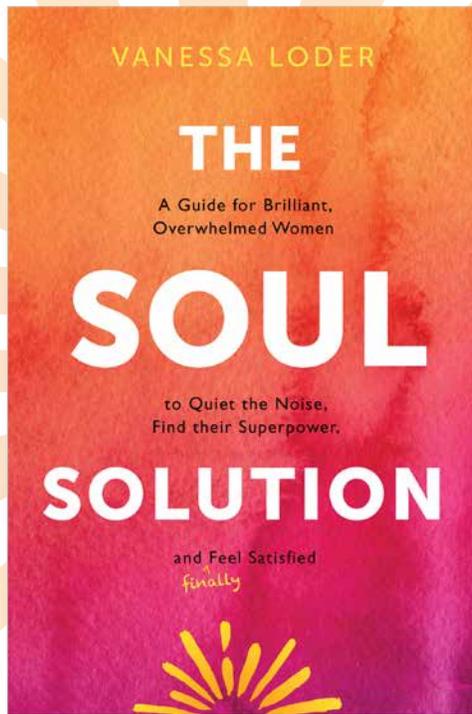
I open to my inner truth with ease.

I say yes to receiving the inner guidance I seek.

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