

CHAPTER 2

The Lie:

I'LL START TOMORROW

I can't count the number of diets I've tried. I can't tell you the number of times I've made plans to go to the gym and then blew them off. Number of half marathons I signed up for, paid the entry fee for, and then quietly pretended not to remember when it was time to actually train? Two.

Number of times I've declared, "From here on out, I'm going to walk a mile every morning before work!" and then never made it past the third day? Infinity. I had this habit for years, as many women do. We talk about the things we'd like to do, be, try, and accomplish, but once we get to the moment of actually doing it, we fold faster than a card table after bunco night. Maybe we've created this habit because we were brought up observing this pattern.

Magazines and TV shows spend a lot of time focusing on what to do when we fall off the wagon rather than teaching us how to stay on it in the first place. Life happens, and the plans we make fall through—but when it becomes such a regular occurrence that the promises we make hold very little actual power in our lives, we need to check ourselves. A few months ago I was out to dinner with my closest girlfriends. It was an impromptu happy hour that turned into an impromptu dinner and ended up going later than any of us anticipated. I got home after the kids were in bed, and Dave was already deep into a game of Major League Ball or Hard Hitting League or whatever the name is of the baseball game he's played nightly for the last two years of our marriage (without making any real progress that I'm aware of).

So I gave him a smooch and chatted with him about his day, then I went downstairs to the basement where our old treadmill is hidden and ran a few miles. I put the evidence of that workout on Snapchat, and later my girlfriend saw it and sent me a text. You worked out after dinner? What in the world? I wrote back, Yes, because I planned on doing it and didn't want to cancel. Couldn't you just postpone until tomorrow? She was genuinely perplexed. No, because I made a promise to myself and I don't break those, not ever. Ugh, she typed back. I'm the FIRST person I break a promise to. She's not the only one. I used to do that all the time until I realized how hard I was fighting to keep my word to other people while quickly canceling on myself. I'll work out tomorrow

became I'm not working out anytime soon —because honestly, if you really cared about that commitment, you'd do it when you said you would. What if you had a friend who constantly flaked on you? What if every other time you made plans she decided not to show up? What if she gave lame excuses like, "I really want to see you, but this TV show I'm watching is just so good"? Or what if a friend from work was constantly starting something new? Every three Mondays she announced a new diet or goal and then two weeks later it just ended? What if you called her on it, like, "Hey, Pam, I thought you were doing Whole30"? Meanwhile Pam is sitting in the break room eating a meat lover's pizza and telling you that she was doing Whole30, and even though it made her feel great, two weeks into the program her son had a birthday party and she couldn't resist the cake and then figured there was no point.

Now she's gained back the pounds she lost plus a few extra. Y'all, would you respect her? This woman who starts and stops over and over again? Would you count on Pam or the friend who keeps blowing you off for stupid reasons? Would you trust them when they committed to something? Would you believe them when they committed to you? No. No way. And that level of distrust and apprehension applies to you too. Your subconscious knows that you, yourself, cannot be trusted after breaking so many plans and giving up on so many goals. On the flip side, have you ever known someone who always kept their word? If they tell you they're coming, you can expect them ten minutes early. If they commit to a project, you can bet your butt they'll finish it.

They tell you they've signed up for their first marathon, and you're already in awe because you know for a fact they'll finish. When this type of person commits to something, how seriously do you take their commitment? I hope you see my point here. If you constantly make and break promises to yourself, you're not making promises at all. You're talking. You're waxing poetic like Pam and her diet or your flaky friend who bails on you to watch Game of Thrones. How many times have you bailed on yourself to watch TV? How many times have you given up before you've even started? How many times have you made real progress, only to face a setback and then give up completely? How many times have your family or friends or coworkers watched you quit? How many times have your children watched you give up on yourself over and over and over? This is not okay. Our society makes plenty of room for complacency or laziness; we're rarely surrounded by accountability. We're also rarely surrounded by sugar-free vanilla lattes, but when I really want one, I somehow find a way to get one. I'm only sort of kidding. When you really want something, you will find a way. When you don't

really want something, you'll find an excuse. How does your subconscious know the difference between what you want and what you only pretend to want? It looks at a history of how you've tackled similar things in the past. Have you kept your word? When you set out to do something, did you see it through? When we're at a loss, we reach for the lowest bar—and the lowest bar is typically our highest level of training. That sounds a little backward, so let me explain. If you set out to run thirty miles today, where do you think you'll easily get to without stopping? You'll get to your highest level of training. So if the most you've ever run comfortably is four miles, you'll peter out somewhere around there.

Sure, adrenaline can take you a bit farther, and mind over matter is a big deal too; but typically your body will revert to what it knows and what it feels most comfortable with. The same can be said for keeping promises to yourself. If you decide on a goal—for example, "I'm going to write a novel" or "I'm going to run a 10K"—your subconscious will formulate the likelihood of that happening based on past experiences. So when it's day four and you're feeling tired and you don't want to head out for a run, you will revert to the highest level of mental training.

What happened the last time you found yourself here? Did you push through and form a habit and get it done? Or did you make an excuse? Did you put it off until later? Whatever standard you've set for yourself is where you'll end up . . . unless you fight through your instinct and change your pattern. That's how I changed my own patterns and behaviors—how I established the rule in my life that I would no longer break a promise to myself no matter how small it was. It all began with Diet Coke. I used to love—like, obsessively love—Diet Coke. For the longest time I'd have several Diet Cokes a day. Then I realized how terrible they were for me. I cut my consumption down to one can a day, and I looked forward to that soda like an addict waiting for a high. Do I want to drink it at lunchtime to give the afternoon a little pep? Or should I wait until dinner? We're eating Mexican food tonight, and Diet Coke is so good with chips and salsa, so maybe holding out is the right choice . . .

I spent way too much time looking forward to the beverage. Then one summer I found myself with terrible vertigo, and I tried cutting anything out of my diet that might be harmful. Even my daily Diet Coke came into question. Honestly, I thought to myself, what kind of sicko gives up Diet Coke?! Are we supposed to just give up joy and goodness in our lives? Why don't I give up electricity and live like the Amish? My inner monologues are incredibly dramatic. I decided to give it up for a month. I figured one month wasn't a long time . . . I could hold out for

thirty days on anything. The only problem was, I'd never in my life successfully stuck to any kind of diet, exercise, writing, you-name-it without quitting or "cheating" at least a few times. What if just this once, though, I really saw it through? And so I did. For thirty days I didn't have any soda of any kind, which seems like no big deal when you're healthy and happy and not addicted. For me, that first week was a special kind of hell. But what if, I kept asking myself, what if I just don't break this promise? One day passed and then another, and by week three, it wasn't bad at all. At the end of the month I hadn't broken my word, and by then I didn't even crave DC anymore. It's been four years now, and it doesn't even occur to me to drink Diet Coke like I used to.

When faced with it as an option, my instinct is to reach for my training—which tells me that I don't drink that stuff anymore. Establishing success in this one small area made me realize that the only thing standing between me and achieving my goals is the ability to build on past success. Running my first half marathon? I got there by committing to running one mile a few times a week.

When I kept that promise to myself, committing to running two miles a few times a week didn't seem like such a tough thing. My training told me that whatever goal I set I would keep, even if I was tired —so I kept showing up. Writing my first book? It was the same kind of thing. Before that first completed manuscript, I'd started and stopped at least a dozen different novels. But once I got a first draft, I knew it was something I could do. When my instinct is to give up or walk away or throw my computer against the wall when I'm on a deadline, I remember how many times I've been here before. I used to wear the word count of my first novel on a cheap gold bracelet around my wrist: 82,311 was etched into it, and every time I looked at it, I would remember what I'd achieved. I was the one who'd strung 82,311 words together in semi-coherent sentences. When faced with the challenge of writing other books, I revert there . . . Well, I think, at least I know I can write that many words. I've done it before! I know that blowing off a workout, a date, an afternoon to organize your closet, or some previous commitment to yourself doesn't seem like a big deal —but it is. It's a really big deal.

Our words have power, but our actions shape our lives. If you choose today not to break another promise to yourself, you will force yourself to slow down. You cannot keep every commitment, promise, goal, and idea without intentionality. If you recognize that your words have power and that your commitments carry covenant weight, you won't agree to anything so easily. You'll have to ask

yourself if you really, truly have time to meet that friend for coffee this week. You'll have to decide if working out four times before Sunday is a real possibility, or if it's more realistic and achievable to commit to two beast-mode sessions and then one power walk with your neighbor. You'll slow down and think things through. You won't just talk about a goal; you'll plan for how you can meet it. You'll set a goal and surprise yourself when you achieve it. You'll teach yourself a new way to behave and set a standard for the type of person you truly are—not the one you've dreamed about becoming, but who you practice being every single day. Also, maybe you'll consider giving up diet soda because the chemicals in that mess are terrible for you. THINGS THAT HELPED ME . . .

1. Starting with one small goal. Diet Coke felt like my great white whale at the time, but in retrospect, giving up a soda was a million times easier than running marathons, hitting our annual budget goals, or writing a book. When someone tells me they want to start a diet, I'll suggest they start by aiming to drink half their body weight in ounces of water every day. It's much easier to add a habit than to take one away, but the water goal is a challenge. When they conquer that for the month, they've set a new standard for achievement and can add on something tougher.

2. Being careful with my commitments. We easily jump on board with anything that sounds good for us. A diet? Of course. Volunteering with church this Saturday? Absolutely. We know these things are important and good, so we say yes, assuming the value of the commitment will motivate us into following through. Unfortunately, that isn't always the case. Slow down your yes. Only commit to things you know you can accomplish because they're incredibly important to you. Otherwise you set yourself up for continued failure.

3. Being honest with myself. Be honest with yourself about what you're blowing off. A little cancellation here or a bow-out there can add up . . . but only if you refuse to acknowledge your actions. If you take a good hard look at what you've canceled on in the last thirty days, you might be shocked to discover how you're training yourself to behave.