

This is the **DO IT SCARED PODCAST** with Ruth Soukup, **EPISODE NUMBER 38**. On today's episode, we are going to talk with *New York Times*' best-selling author Gretchen Rubin about discovering who you are so that you can become who you want to be.

Welcome to the *Do It Scared* podcast. I'm your host, **RUTH SOUKUP**, and each week on the show we will talk about how to face your fears, overcome obstacles, and, most importantly, how to take action and create a life you love.

This episode is brought to you and made possible by the world's very best tool for managing your time and getting your life in order: the Living Well Planner. Created by yours truly, the Living Well Planner is designed to help you organize your time, manage your budget, plan your meals and your to-do list, and crush your goals, all in one place. It literally is the tool that keeps me sane every day, and it can absolutely do the same for you. You can find it online at livingwellplanner.com, and be sure to use our promo code *do it scared* to save \$10 on your order in our special offer just for podcast listeners.

Hey, there, and welcome back to the show. As always, my name is Ruth Soukup, and I am the founder of Living Well Spending Less and the Living Well Planner, as well as the founder of Elite Blog Academy, and the *New York Times*' bestselling author of five, soon-to-be six, books.

In today's episode, we are going to be talking to happiness and habit expert Gretchen Rubin about how to set yourself up for success in the new year by first getting real with yourself about who you are and how you operate. Gretchen is the *New York Times*' best-selling author of eight, soon-to-be nine, books, including *The Happiness Project*, *Happier at Home*, *Better Than Before*, and, most recently, *The Four Tendencies*, as well as the host of the *Happier* podcast. An avid student of human nature, she has become an expert on not just happiness but how to create better habits and how our natural tendencies affect our ability to follow through. She has so much insight to share on working with your own natural instincts and inclinations rather than trying to fight against them so that you can affect the kind of change that you would like to see in your life. And ultimately, that is exactly what this podcast is all about. It's about taking the steps that will help us make necessary changes so that we can create a life we love, because in the end, courage doesn't mean we're never afraid; instead, courage is being scared but taking action anyway, despite our fear. It's putting one foot in front of the other even when we're not quite sure where that path is going to lead.

Okay, so just a couple more quick things before we dive into today's episode. First, if you have not done this already, this is the perfect time of year to do it, you can

download our “Do It Scared” manifesto to remind yourself to start living your own life of courage this year. You can get it by texting **DOITSCARED** to **44222**, or you can get all the show notes for this episode—we talk about a lot of things. There’s a lot of links, so you’ll probably want those—you can get all the show notes at **doitscared.com/episode38**. Once again, for just the manifesto, you can text **DOITSCARED**—all one word—to **44222**, or get all the show notes and the manifesto at **doitscared.com/episode38**.

And now, without further ado, I am so honored to introduce you to best-selling author and happiness expert Gretchen Rubin.

RUTH: Hey, Gretchen. Thank you so much for coming on the *Do It Scared* podcast. I am so excited to talk to you today. Thank you for being on the show.

GRETCHEN: I’m so happy to be talking to you!

RUTH: Yay! Okay, so, I am such a super fan, and I have read all of your books—

GRETCHEN: Aw.

RUTH: —and I’m so excited. I have so many questions to talk to you about. I can hardly decide where I want to start with this interview, but first, let’s just start at the beginning. So, for my audience who hasn’t heard of you—which I can’t imagine would be very many people, but I’m sure there are some out there—can you just tell us a little bit about who you are, what you do, and kind of the quick-and-dirty overview of how you got to where you are today?

GRETCHEN: Okay, yeah. I’m a writer and a podcaster, and I’m best known for my study of happiness, human nature, and good habits. And my most well-known book is a book called *The Happiness Project*, which just hit its 10th-year anniversary. Very exciting milestones.

RUTH: Wow! Ten years already?

GRETCHEN: I know. Time flies.

RUTH: That’s amazing.

GRETCHEN: And I also have a podcast called *Happier with Gretchen Rubin*, which I do every week with my sister—we’re sisters so we don’t let each other get away with much—where we talk about how to be happier. And so, I’ve written nine books, and *The Happiness Project*, *Happier at Home*, *Better Than Before*, and *The Four Tendencies*, and my forthcoming book which is called *Outer Order*,

Inner Calm are really all about sort of happiness and kind of self-management, personal development, that kind of thing.

But what a lot of people don't know is I started my career in law, and then I was actually clerking for Justice Sandra Day O'Connor as a lawyer, working for her on the Supreme Court, when I realized, "No! I want to be a writer." And I had written, I think, four books before I wrote *The Happiness Project*. So a lot of people think that was my first book—

RUTH: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: —but I'm a good example of someone working very hard for 10 years to be an overnight sensation.

RUTH: I love that.

GRETCHEN: Yeah, yeah. So, a lot of people don't realize about my earlier work, but, yeah, I've written sort of four and a half books about happiness.

RUTH: And what were your first four books about before *The Happiness Project*? That's news to me, too.

GRETCHEN: Well, my first book was called *Power, Money, Fame, Sex: A User's Guide*, and that's kind of the opposite of *The Happiness Project*. It was a super-fun book to write. Then I wrote two biographies, one called *Forty Ways to Look at Winston Churchill* and one called *Forty Ways to Look at JFK*. And those are short, unconventional biographies of Churchill and Kennedy. And I also wrote—when I was in law school I became obsessed with the question of why owners would destroy their own possessions. This is, like, this thing that seemed really strange to me. And I often in my life get very preoccupied with certain questions or certain subjects, which that's how I got into happiness. I just became kind of overnight obsessed with happiness. And so I was very, for years, I was very enthralled with this question of why would somebody destroy their own things. And so I wrote a little book about that, in collaboration with an artist. So that's more of an art book.

RUTH: Wow.

GRETCHEN: Yeah. But you know, I think—

RUTH: That's amazing.

GRETCHEN: —a lot of people think my books seem very different, but to me they're really all about human nature. So they all feel very connected to me even if they don't look that connected from the

outside.

RUTH: I can see that. And that's amazing that it took you 10 years to become an overnight success.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: We see that so often.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: From the outside, it always looks like, "Oh, that person just popped out of nowhere—"

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: "—and it's amazing, and it's been so easy." And that is almost never the case.

GRETCHEN: Yes. That is so true. If you knew the backstory, a lot of times, you would realize how much hard work went into something that looked very simple in its final iteration.

RUTH: So true.

GRETCHEN: You're only seeing the tip of the iceberg.

RUTH: The final result.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: Exactly. Okay, so let's first start by talking about *The Four Tendencies*.

GRETCHEN: Mm.

RUTH: That one is your latest book except for the one that you're writing now. Is that right?

GRETCHEN: Yes, yeah.

RUTH: Okay. And so you talk about this theory about people and the way that they respond to expectations—

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: —which is more or less in one of four different ways. And I'm such a personality-test junkie, like StrengthsFinder—

GRETCHEN: Oh, yeah.

RUTH: —the Kolbe—I don't know if you do that one. Like, I talk about those all the time. So I was—

GRETCHEN: DISC, and enneagram—

RUTH: —yeah. Oh, enneagram. I love, like, give me a personality test, I'm all over it. So, can you just explain a little bit about each of these Four Tendencies and how you actually came about even figuring all of this out?

GRETCHEN: Yeah. Well, you know, I do often become sort of preoccupied with questions, and I had this kind of epiphany, or kind of like I was hit by a question, when I was having lunch with a friend. And she said to me very casually—I'm kind of a happiness bully, and I was grilling her about her habits—and she said something to me that just hit me like a lightning bolt. She said, "You know, here's the weird thing about me. I know I would be happier if I exercised. And when I was in high school I was on the track team, and I never missed track practice, so why can't I go running now?" And I was like, "Well, why? It's the same person. It's the same behavior. At one time it was effortless, now she can't do it. How do you explain that?" And then I started seeing other patterns in how people could or couldn't change habits or could or couldn't meet expectations. And after a huge amount of pondering, I realized that it was about expectations, as you said. We all face two kinds of expectations: outer expectations, like a work deadline or a request from a friend, things that come to us from the inside; and then we have inner expectations—our desires for ourselves, like I want to keep a New Year's resolution, I want to get back into meditation. And depending on how you meet outer and inner, that makes you either an Upholder, a Questioner, an Obliger, or a Rebel. And I can briefly describe these. There is a quiz on my site—

RUTH: Yeah, I took it.

GRETCHEN: —if you go to quiz.gretchenrubin.com, it'll tell you. It's free. Like, 1.6 million people have taken the quiz. But a lot of times, people don't need to take the quiz; they can just tell from the description that I'll give right now. So, a lot of times people just know when they hear the description.

RUTH: Mm-hmm.

GRETCHEN: So an Upholder—and I'm dying to hear what you are—so Upholders—

RUTH: —to guess.

GRETCHEN: —readily meet outer and inner expectations. They meet the work deadline, they keep the New Year’s resolution, without much fuss. So they want to know what other people expect from them, but their expectations for themselves are just as important. Then there are Questioners. Questioners question all expectations. They’ll do something if they think it makes sense. They resist anything arbitrary, inefficient, unjustified. So they’re making everything an inner expectation. If it meets their inner standard, they’ll do it, no problem. If it fails their inner standard, they will resist. Then there are Obligers. Obligers readily meet outer expectations, but they struggle to meet inner expectations. And this explains my friend on the track team. When she had a team and a coach expecting her to show up, no problem. When she was trying to go on her own, when it was an inner expectation, she struggled. And then, finally, Rebels. Rebels resist all expectations, outer and inner alike. They want to do what they want to do, in their own way, in their own time. They can do anything they want to do, anything they choose to do, but if you ask or tell them to do something, they’re very likely to resist. And typically they don’t even like to tell themselves what to do. Like, they won’t sign up for a 10 a.m. Saturday spin class because they’re like, “I don’t know what I’m going to want to do on Saturday morning. And just the fact that somebody thinks I’m going to show up annoys me.” So those are the Four Tendencies.

RUTH: Okay. So, do you want to know what I am?

GRETCHEN: Yes. Tell me what you are.

RUTH: Well, we don’t know each other that well, but you can guess.

GRETCHEN: I can’t guess. I could ask you—

RUTH: No.

GRETCHEN: —a few questions and see if I could guess.

RUTH: Okay, ask me a few questions.

GRETCHEN: Okay. How do you feel about New Year’s resolutions?

RUTH: Love them.

GRETCHEN: Oh! Why?

RUTH: I’m super New Year’s junkie. I have goal setting. It’s my favorite—this episode will be going live on December 31, and this is my favorite, favorite, favorite time of the year. The week between

Christmas and New Year's, I call it the best week ever. We do a whole big thing on my blog, Living Well Spending Less. It gets me more fired up than anything else. I love goals. Love goals.

GRETCHEN: Okay, now, what if there was something that you wanted to do for yourself but it was kind of inconvenient for the people around you? Like, you wanted to go to a class, where other people wanted to go out to brunch—

RUTH: Oh, yeah. Not a problem.

GRETCHEN: —or you wanted to go sleep early when everybody else wanted to stay out late. How would you feel about that?

RUTH: Does not bother me at all. I do what I want to do.

GRETCHEN: So you're an Upholder, I bet. Are you an Upholder?

RUTH: No.

GRETCHEN: Are you a Questioner?

RUTH: Huh-uh.

GRETCHEN: You're a Rebel.

RUTH: I'm a Rebel. Yeah.

GRETCHEN: So what you are, you're an example of a highly, highly motivated, highly achieving Rebel.

RUTH: Okay, tell me about that.

GRETCHEN: And this is the point about Rebels—

RUTH: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: —because some of these Rebels think Rebels aren't grownups, they're perpetual teenagers, they're perpetual narcissists, they won't do anything that anybody wants them to do, how can they succeed? And what I always say is they can do anything they want to do.

RUTH: They want to do.

GRETCHEN: So it's a matter of what does that Rebel want? Does that Rebel want to succeed? Does that Rebel want to be rich? Does that Rebel want to have influence? Does that Rebel want to be healthy? Do they see themselves as an athlete? Do they see themselves as a creative person who wants to put their stuff out in the world? They can do anything they want, but they're not going to do it if that's

just what you ask or tell them to do. So you sound like a highly motivated—

RUTH: Very true.

GRETCHEN: —high-value, high-achieving Rebel.

RUTH: High-achieving Rebel.

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: I'll take it.

GRETCHEN: Okay.

RUTH: Yeah, no, that's totally me. And I love goals so much, and I want to do that, but if you try to make me do something that I don't want to do, it's just—

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: —not going to happen.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: It's true.

GRETCHEN: And do you ever—well, see, it's interesting because Rebel is the smallest tendency. Of all the tendencies, it's the one that the fewest people belong to, and then, Upholder, which is my tendency, is just slightly larger, and then, Obliger is the biggest tendency, and after that, Questioner. So you and I actually represent the sort of the two extremes—

RUTH: Mm-hmm.

GRETCHEN: —but this is a good example of, in many ways, from the outside, we probably look very similar to each other, but we really are coming from very different places—

RUTH: Very different places.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: Interesting.

GRETCHEN: Which is fine. But it might help, like, if we were going to work together, like, I work with many Rebels, kind of collaborated with Rebels—

RUTH: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: —and I have to be sure to talk to them in a Rebel way. Like, to say things like, if you have the time and the inclination and you felt like this is something that would work for you, how about x, y, z? Which as an Upholder, I would just be like, can you get back to me by Friday? You know I mean? But I'm like, I'm not going to say to a Rebel because they're going to be like, I don't understand; why are you telling me what to do? You know? I don't—

RUTH: Well, it would be for me, like if that project that we were working on was a priority, I would be all over it, and it wouldn't matter, you could say, "Okay, need it by this time." I'd be like, "Awesome," because that was on my radar. But as soon as it's not a priority—

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: —for me, it's like it doesn't even exist.

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: And that actually drives my team crazy—

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: —that quality, because my priorities are not always what their priorities are.

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: And so they're waiting on me for something, and I'm like, "Yeah, I'm not going to do that right now."

GRETCHEN: Yeah, and it can be—

RUTH: And it never bothers me one bit, but they've gotten used to that.

GRETCHEN: And that's exactly what people say about working for a Rebel is in many ways it's great, but then in many ways it can be frustrating. They often also will change strategy very dramatically, and if you have a Questioner, they're like, "I want to know why you changed strategy." And the Rebel's like, they're not interested—they're like, "Because this just seems right to me now. Why are we wasting time in this long conversation?"

RUTH: I don't think I have any Questioners on my team.

GRETCHEN: Probably don't.

RUTH: But I do have a Questioner husband, and that is rough.

GRETCHEN: That's interesting because usually when you have a Rebel and they're paired up either in romance or on a team, like a founding team, it's usually with Obliger. So to be married to a Questioner's unusual for a Rebel such as yourself. But he might be a Questioner who tips to Rebel, in which case there'd be that Rebel affinity—

RUTH: Yes.

GRETCHEN: —but then, also, I imagine probably a lot the people who work for you are Obligers, because Obligers—

RUTH: I think so.

GRETCHEN: —Obligers tend to have a higher tolerance for Rebel behavior than Upholders or Questioners. It's like it kind of rubs them the wrong way more often. But you're married to a Questioner, so it must not rub him too much the wrong way.

RUTH: Well, we have a lot of sparks, I will say that, but we have made it 14 years, so—

GRETCHEN: Good! There you go.

RUTH: —doing something right.

GRETCHEN: But this is a good example of how, like, when you were describing yourself, I wasn't able to guess from what you—you were describing what you did, and to know a tendency, we have to know how someone thinks, because—so, like, let's say I was a teacher and I had two students in front of me who were refusing to do their homework. Well, one could be saying, "You're an idiot, and this homework is a waste of my time, so I'm not going to do it," that's a Questioner. Or somebody could be like, "You may be my teacher, but you're not the boss of me. You can't tell me what to do," and that's a Rebel. And to try to get that child to do the homework, I would want to speak very differently if I knew what their tendency was, because, like, here you and I, from the outside, we might look alike, but if you wanted to communicate with us effectively, in different situations you might really want to communicate using different language given that we do have different tendencies.

RUTH: So, you think that's the most useful application of the Four Tendencies is knowing how to relate to other people, or is it knowing how to relate to yourself? How do you use this information?

GRETCHEN: Well, I think it's either one, and I think it's both. It's managing

yourself, certainly, and then also working more effectively with other people. And depending on who you are and your tendency and how effectively you manage your tendency, one or the other might be more difficult. Like, for me being an Upholder, being an Upholder wasn't that hard for me to manage, but it really helped how I managed to work with other people. But, say, for an Obliger, Obligers often are very frustrated with themselves because they're like, "I'm meeting everybody else's expectations. Why can't I meet my expectations for myself?"

RUTH: Mm-hmm.

GRETCHEN: "I never miss a deadline at work. Why can't I stick to an exercise schedule? I don't understand it." So for them it might be this—but I don't have really any conflict with my family or my work. So for them, self-management might be the more important kind of revelation about the Four Tendencies. Some Rebels are very frustrated with other people, like, what's everybody else's deal? And then some Rebels do get very frustrated with themselves. You're very good at meeting your aims for yourself, but some Rebels are like, I decide that I want to give up bread, and then the next day I go out and buy a giant loaf of cinnamon bread because I'm not going to tell myself what to do, or I rebel against all the demands of my diabetes, so I refuse to check my blood sugar. So then they need to figure out a way to harness the power of the Rebel tendency in order to overcome—or really not overcome, but work around or reframe these issues in a way that doesn't—

RUTH: That makes it something that they want.

GRETCHEN: Exactly. That makes—

RUTH: Yeah. I can see that.

GRETCHEN: —it something that they want.

RUTH: Yes.

GRETCHEN: That is—you can see you're a Rebel.

RUTH: That's the key.

GRETCHEN: That is the key. It's something that you want.

RUTH: I get it, because that's for me. I can only make those—once I want something—

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: —like, for me, my drive to make my business succeed is huge, so that makes me do so many things that would be outside of my comfort zone or that I wouldn't normally want to do. Same thing, because I want my business to succeed, I also know that I have to look a certain way. I did a podcast episode about this a couple months ago of I couldn't lose weight and get in shape until I connected needing to have a certain appearance with creating the successful business that I want. And so once I could connect that to the larger why, then I'm like, I'll go to the gym. I'll go work out with a trainer three times a week. I'll eat healthy and do all the things that I'm supposed to do, because it fits with a bigger goal. But that was the only way that I could ever get myself to do it. Otherwise, I'm like, no, I just want to eat Doritos and drink beer all day.

GRETCHEN: Yeah. But see, and this is why a lot of times when it's really important to understand other people and how they might be different from you because often what Upholders, Questioners, and Rebels often say to Obligers is, "You've just got to want it."

RUTH: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: "You just have to get clear on what you want and actions will follow." That is not true for Obliger. That's a big waste of time for Obligers. They often spend a lot of time trying to whip themselves up into a frenzy of motivation—

RUTH: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: Or, like, "I need to put myself first. I need to make myself a priority." I'm like, "That doesn't work. It does not work." I'm not saying it's not a good idea—

RUTH: So, what does work?

GRETCHEN: Outer accountability. If you're an Obliger, you need outer accountability. So, it might be like, "Look, I'm leading a team. I've got all these people depending on me to grow the business. I have to look a certain way because they're all counting on me." Or like, "I have a message that's really important for a lot of people to hear. I'm not going to be as successful at connecting with them unless..." Or you could say like, "Given the pace of what I want to do, I need to take good care of myself or else I'm going to burn out, and that's not good for anyone."

RUTH: Mm-hmm.

GRETCHEN: Or you could think about, "Okay, it's 2019. By the end of 2019—Gretchen right now doesn't feel like eating right, but if I get to

the end of 2019, Future Gretchen is going to be so disappointed if Now Gretchen doesn't stick to her healthier ways." Or I'm going to partner up with a friend. You know, there's a million different ways to create outer accountability when that's what you need. But, see, to a Rebel, outer accountability is often counterproductive because it's like, "Gosh, who wants somebody looking over your shoulder and telling you what to do and nudging you and reminding you? Ah! That just makes me want to do the opposite." So it's absolutely counterproductive.

RUTH: See, that's interesting. I have a couple questions on this. Obligers are the most common, right?

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: So about what percentage of people are Obligers?

GRETCHEN: 41 percent, and that's the—

RUTH: 41 percent.

GRETCHEN: That's the biggest tendency for both men and women. So you either are an Obliger or you have many Obligers in your life. They're the rock of the world, and they're everywhere.

RUTH: Okay. It's probably a good thing that there're so many Obligers.

GRETCHEN: Yeah, no, they are the rock of the world. They really are. Yes, they are.

RUTH: Yeah, I would think so. Okay, so 41 percent are Obligers. So, biggest group. So most people listening right now are probably falling in that camp. And then the second most common—

GRETCHEN: Questioner.

RUTH: —is Questioners, and what percentage is that?

GRETCHEN: I believe it's 24, if I remember correctly.

RUTH: 24. Oh, so, that's a pretty big difference. It's much smaller.

GRETCHEN: It's a pretty big— it is.

RUTH: And then what are the percentages for Upholder and Rebel?

GRETCHEN: So Rebel is 17, and Upholder is 19. And so for the Questioners out there who are thinking, "Hey, Gretchen. Yes, 1.6 million people have taken your survey, but you forgot about selection bias." No,

Questioners, I did not forget about selection bias. I actually paid for a representative sample for people to take the test. So these percentages do not reflect the people taking my quiz online. It represents an official, paid-for, representative sample of U.S. citizens.

RUTH: Of the general population.

GRETCHEN: Yeah. So—

RUTH: Okay.

GRETCHEN: —if you're not Questioners, I've heard your—you know. And if you're thinking to yourself, "I really question the validity of this framework," you're probably a Questioner. If you think—

RUTH: That's funny.

GRETCHEN: —I'm a little bit of everything, you're probably a Questioner. Upholders, Obligers, and Rebels, really much more clearly see themselves.

RUTH: Mm. I can see that.

GRETCHEN: And framework, Questioners, they're like, "I do whatever makes sense in a particular situation." I'm like, "That's what Questioners do. That makes you a Questioner."

RUTH: Okay, so, now I forget what my other question was. We were talking about Obligers. So, if you're—

GRETCHEN: There's Obligers all around you.

RUTH: Oh. So there's Obligers that are all around you, and then, if you are, if you have this and you need to set up the outer accountability, what are the best ways to do that?

GRETCHEN: Well, there's a million ways to set up outer accountability, which is great. One thing that Obligers should take into account is that different Obligers are kind of sensitive to different forms of accountability. So some Obligers can think about their future self. Some ca—some, that doesn't work. Some Obligers can have an auto responder on an app would make them feel obligated. Others, that wouldn't work; they need actual expectations from a real person. For some, paying. It's like, if I pay for a class, I'm going to go. I'm going to feel like I'm not going to waste the money. For some, no. I remember talking to a woman who was like, "Well, I paid to work out with a trainer because I knew I needed the outer accountability, but then I realized if I don't show up, he still gets

paid and it gets the time back.” So I was like, “Okay, that’s not working for you. You need a different kind of outer accountability.” Sometimes people do funny trades, like you and I will go to the gym together, and we’ll work out separately, but then before we leave, we’ll swap a shoe. So you have to come tomorrow because if you don’t come I only have one shoe. Or you can do something like, I’m going to study for the bar. Like, I’m a grown person; I have children; I’m like, I’m going to study for the bar. If I pass the bar, we all get to go away for a week in the summer. If I fail the bar, we’re all going to stay home so I can study to take the bar again. Do you feel like reminding me to study for the bar? It’s like the whole family’s going to be like, I think you need to study for the bar.

RUTH: Right.

GRETCHEN: Or you could have it, like, let’s say you’re trying to work on a novel in your free time. You could say to your children, “You have your work; I have my work. If I’m not doing my work, hey, you kids, you don’t have to do your homework.” And your kids will be policing you. You could think about your duty to your dog, your duty to be a role model for other people. You could join a group. I have an app called the Better app where people talk about the Four Tendencies and how to be happy generally. And there’s a way there for people to form accountability groups, because sometimes it’s like, I want to garden. I want to finish my PhD thesis. I want to quit sugar. I want to exercise regularly. I need a group of people where we just check in. Accountability partners can work really well, but sometimes if one partner kind of wanders away or loses interest or goes out of town or something, then it falls apart. So I like accountability groups better. I think they’re more stable. And here’s an important tip: often sweethearts do not make good accountability partners.

RUTH: Ooh.

GRETCHEN: So don’t use your sweetheart to be your accountability partner—

RUTH: I can see that.

GRETCHEN: —for a very romantic reason. It’s like you’re so close to me, it’s like you’re part of me. So I ignore you just the way I would ignore me. It needs to come from the outside.

RUTH: From somebody else.

GRETCHEN: And often, people around Obligers are very annoyed because they’re like, I’ve been telling my husband for years that he needs

to exercise, and he never listened to me, and then his boss is like, hey, man, you've got to exercise, and he starts. And it's like, well—

RUTH: Interesting.

GRETCHEN: —yeah, because you're inner. You're inner—

RUTH: Interesting.

GRETCHEN: —because you're so close. So—

RUTH: So it has to be outer.

GRETCHEN: It has to be outer. Now, it can sometimes be an imaginary form of outer, like I feel a duty to my calendar. Some Obligers can do that. I feel a duty to my future self. Those are kind of imaginative sense about our expectations. But someone like me, an Upholder, or a Questioner wouldn't need that kind of, that framework, that kind of imaginative twist—

RUTH: Interesting.

GRETCHEN: —in order to follow through. Yeah.

RUTH: So, do you—now, once this is your tendency, is your tendency permanent? Is it fixed? This is just a part of who you are and you have to figure out a way to deal with it?

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: Or is it something you can change about yourself?

GRETCHEN: I really do believe that this is genetically—it's part of your genetic makeup. It's hardwired. You bring it into the world with you. You're the same one at 20 as at 40. You're the same one at home and as at work. Of course, with time and experience, people learned how to manage their tendency better. So typically Obligers learn even subconsciously that they need outer accountability, so they'll do things like sign up for the exercise class, because they get it that they—you know.

RUTH: They already know that about themselves.

GRETCHEN: So they might think that like, "Oh, I was an Obliger, but now I'm an Upholder," but when I talk to them, I'm like, "No. Really what you've done is you very cleverly—you wanted to read more, so you joined a book group. You wanted to exercise more, so you bought a dog who needed to be walked three times a day." I'm like, "It's not really your fundamental tendency; you're managing your tendency better."

RUTH: Mm-hmm. Makes sense.

GRETCHEN: Now, every once in a while—we all know a handful of people where they’ve truly changed, where they’ve had a long bout with addiction or they’ve had a near brush with death or they’ve had some kind of traumatic event or they’re on a medication that really changes the way their personality comes out. When they really are fundamentally—you’re like, well, this is not the person that I once knew. There’s really been a big change. Then those people—and it’s funny. In my observation, I don’t know many people like this. I don’t have a huge pool to study, but those people almost don’t move to a different tendency. It’s almost like they escape the tendencies altogether, and they’re just in a different zone of—

RUTH: Huh.

GRETCHEN: —meeting expectations. So then they just kind of aren’t part of the framework, but the framework really does fit, I would say, 90 to 95 percent of people—

RUTH: Interesting.

GRETCHEN: —that I talk to. I’m like—

RUTH: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: —you’re pretty solidly within a tendency to my mind.

RUTH: Yeah, yeah. It’s so interesting. And then even as you were talking about the accountability thing—because I was thinking, I’m a Rebel, but I love—I talk about accountability all the time and how important it is, and I love having what I call accountability partners in my life. But they’re not accountability so much as of saying, “Did you do this, or did you do this,” because you’re right. That would totally annoy me if somebody was telling me that—

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: —all the time, because I don’t really feel like I need that in my life—

GRETCHEN: So what are they?

RUTH: —but what I do like accountability for is to push back and if I have an idea, to have somebody come back and say, “That’s a stupid idea,” and fight with me on it and force me—

GRETCHEN: So you like a sounding board.

RUTH: Yes. I like some sort of accountability because—are you familiar with the Kolbe at all?

GRETCHEN: Huh-uh.

RUTH: It's—

GRETCHEN: But that doesn't sound like—accountability is, "Did you do this?"

RUTH: "Did you do this?" Yeah. And I—

GRETCHEN: "Did you do this?" And it's like, okay—

RUTH: I think it's more of, "Maybe you shouldn't do that," because I'm a very quick start of—

GRETCHEN: Ah.

RUTH: —I have another idea. I'm an entrepreneur—

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: —I want to do this, and I want to do this. And I have people who say, "You know what? Time to slow down. Let's get a different opinion."

GRETCHEN: Oh, that's another distinction among people, and I write about this in my book *Better Than Before*—

RUTH: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: —which is all about habit change, so maybe this is a different aspect of—

RUTH: Want to talk about that, too.

GRETCHEN: —yeah. A different aspect of—

RUTH: Yeah, let's talk about that.

GRETCHEN: —your personality, which is some people are Finishers and some people are Openers. So, Openers have a million ideas, they love to get things started.

RUTH: Yes.

GRETCHEN: It's like a friend of mine who was a professor. He was like, "I've got a curriculum design for seven different courses. They're all half finished in a desk drawer." They love to open, and they're really creative, and they're always thinking and moving forward,

but sometimes they kind of lose interest before things actually cross the finish line. That sounds like maybe what you are. I'm a Finisher. You're an Opener. I'm a Finisher. Finishers take huge delight in crossing things off and getting things done, so they're very focused on execution all the way to the end. Now, that is good, but it also has pitfalls in that sometimes they'll rush at the end because they want that hit of crossing it off the list, or sometimes they're too conservative about starting something because they think, "Well, if I start this, I'm going to have to finish it. I don't know if I can finish it."

RUTH: So true.

GRETCHEN: "And so if I don't know that I can finish it, I don't want to start." So they can be too conservative. So, this is a place where in a team you really want to say, I don't want all Finishers or all Openers because they're going to be too mismatched.

RUTH: Too much on one side, yeah.

GRETCHEN: But it sounds like you very intentionally are like, "I'm an Opener. I need to make sure that there are people around me being like, 'okay—

RUTH: Finishers.

GRETCHEN: —let's think about the execution risk here—

RUTH: Yes.

GRETCHEN: —and are we going to get the ultimate bu—" Because with many things, if you don't do the last 10 percent, you really don't get the benefit of all your time and energy.

RUTH: It's true.

GRETCHEN: So you want to make sure that you're like, okay, do I see that that's going to play out? And so this is—

RUTH: So interesting.

GRETCHEN: —so, you again, you understand yourself and if I'm really good at some things, maybe I need to think about having people in my life who are going to complement me to help me get where I want to go. And I think that's exactly why these kind of terms and vocabularies are helpful.

RUTH: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: Because you're like, "Okay, guys. I'm an Opener. I need some Finisher, here."

RUTH: That is so true. And I never thought about it that way. We use the Kolbe in our team.

GRETCHEN: Oh, yeah.

RUTH: Everybody does the assessment.

GRETCHEN: Now, Kolbe? What is this? I'm not—

RUTH: So Kolbe is—it measures your natural instincts, like the way that you naturally would—like, left to your own devices.

GRETCHEN: Oh, yeah.

RUTH: It's really—it's a great—it's K-O-L-B-E. And for those of you who are listening, we'll link to the test in the show notes for this. But it measures four different things—what is it? Fact Finder: your level of how you research. Are you more of a bullet-point person, or do you like to find out—I would assume you were a super-high Fact Finder based on everything.

GRETCHEN: Oh, maybe, yeah. I think so.

RUTH: And then there's Follow Thru, which would be your Finisher versus Openers. A high Follow Thru person, which I am not, is somebody who wants to check everything off the list, who wants to complete everything, will be the one who always makes sure things get done. Then there's Quick Start—and I'm off-the-chart Quick Start. I'm a 9 Quick Start—and that's the person who, you hear an idea and you're instantly ready to jump in and do it. Jump first, look later. A lot of entrepreneurs are high Quick Start, but most people are fairly low Quick Start. And then the final one is Implementer, and I don't think anybody really knows what Implementer means, but it's how you handle physical space and tangibles.

GRETCHEN: Oh.

RUTH: So most people that I've seen are a lower Implementer score, which means you're better at visualizing things, like you can walk into a room and visualize how you want it to look with decorations. But a few people, like people who are really good in the kitchen or really good with physical things might be high.

GRETCHEN: Or engineers, or, yeah—

RUTH: Yeah. Engines, that kind of thing, are high Implementer. So I have

found in my life that being a high Quick Start, I work really well with people, and I'm also low Fact Finder. Like, just give me the bullet points. My husband says I'm like an oil slick. My knowledge goes very wide and very shallow.

GRETCHEN: Interesting.

RUTH: But I—

GRETCHEN: I'll have to check this out.

RUTH: Yeah, check it out.

GRETCHEN: Thank you for letting me know about it.

RUTH: It's very interesting, and I would be interesting to see how that coincides with what you're doing with the Four Tendencies and with the Finisher-Opener thing. But what I find is that on my team I have a lot of high Follow Thru people and high Fact Finder people, and I work great with them. I scare them a lot of times because I'm so like, "Let's do this. Let's do this." But they're the ones who hold me up and support me and actually get things done. So—

GRETCHEN: Mm, right.

RUTH: —it's good to know who balances you, and I think that—

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: —for me that's accountability, too, is having people to balance you out, and where you're weak, then they're strong.

GRETCHEN: Yes. Absolutely, yes. Yes.

RUTH: So, let's talk a little bit about *Better Than Before*—

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: —which was your book before *The Four Tendencies*, and that's where you actually introduced the Four Tendencies, right?

GRETCHEN: Yes, good memory! No, I came up with the Four Tendencies because *Better Than Before* is about the 21 strategies that we can use to make or break our habits, and so I was studying every possible way that people successfully changed habits. And I stumbled across the Four Tendencies as kind of an element of it. But the word I used is actually much bigger than just habits, and the funny thing was, okay, so, *Better Than Before*, I think is chock full of insights and fascinating anecdotes and interesting

things to—you know, observations and things for people to try and act on. And then so many of the questions after the book came out were like, okay, you need to tell me more about the Four Tendencies.

RUTH: And that was just a little part of the book.

GRETCHEN: It was one chapter—

RUTH: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: —out of 21 chapters, but it was the most original, I would say.

RUTH: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: Like, this is something no one had ever introduced, and I got these long, super-sophisticated questions, really pushing my own framework to points where I'm like, well, you're a pediatric endocrinologist talking about how you see this playing out with your patients, or you're—

RUTH: Oh, no.

GRETCHEN: —you're teaching computer science to graduate students, and you're talking about what you're seeing. And so they were really pushing me to understand it better. And so, first, I was going to write a little PDF that I would offer, and then, I thought, okay, well, then I'll write a little pamphlet. And then, I'm like, this is turning into a whole big book.

RUTH: Amazing.

GRETCHEN: Yeah. But it did, but you're exactly right, I came across it as part of the research and part of the framework of habit change that I introduced in *Better Than Before*.

RUTH: So, I think that was the book that I read last year around New Year's—

GRETCHEN: Hm.

RUTH: —so it's the perfect topic for New Year's resolutions.

GRETCHEN: Yeah. It's a "new year, new you" book, for sure.

RUTH: Yeah, it definitely is.

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH:

So, talking about New Year's resolutions and goals and changing your habits, what advice can you give for setting those better habits and for people who want to set themselves up for success this year?

GRETCHEN:

Well, the thing I would say is that the most important stuff is the stuff that many people skip, and this is what leads to people feeling frustrated or kind of discouraged or feeling like they have no willpower or self-control. And that it's—you really have to begin by thinking about yourself—what kind of person are you? What is true for you? When have you succeeded in the past? What does not work for you? What is not appealing to you?—and really try to set things up in a way that's going to work for you—you as an individual—because there's all kinds of things that are, like, the, you know, the seven habits of highly effective executives, or what's the one thing that you have to do before breakfast? And the fact is, we're all different. There is no magic one-size-fits-all solution. And just to give a very obvious example is one of the most common pieces of advice is if something's important to you, you should get up and do it first thing in the morning. If you want to exercise, exercise first thing in the morning. If you want to work on your PhD thesis, do it first thing in the morning. And there's a million reasons on paper why this is a good idea, and it's a good idea for me because I am a morning person, but what the research shows and what we all know from common human experience is that some people are night people, and it's largely genetic and a function of age, and some people are just at their most creative and energetic and productive later in the day. And if you are a hardcore night person and you can barely get yourself to work on time in the morning, the idea that you're going to get up and run two miles every morning before work, you're setting yourself up for failure, not because there's anything wrong with you, not because you have no willpower, but because you're a night person. And so you'd be much better off exercising later in the day. So your aim should be not how do I turn myself into a morning person; your aim should be how can I exercise in a convenient, sustainable way later in the day? There's a million ways to do that once you understand that's what the problem that you need to solve. You don't need to change yourself. You're fine the way you are. Whatever way you are, there are many people who are like you, and there's many solutions for it, but you have to think, well, what's the solution that's going to work for me, not how do I change myself to an utterly different kind of person who's going to be able to do something that's completely foreign to me? That you cannot do successfully, and I think that's where a lot of people get discouraged.

RUTH: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: And another example is Abstainer and Moderators. So this has to do with how a person most easily faces a strong temptation. When you look at “new year, new you” resolutions, a lot of times people want to eat more healthfully or quit sugar or drink less or turn off the TV or step away from their devices. They’re resisting a strong temptation. So some people are Abstainers, like me, and Abstainers find it—they’re kind of all-or-nothing people. They find it easy to give things up altogether, but once they start, they keep going. So I have a tremendous sweet tooth, and I can have no cookies; I can have 11 cookies. I can’t have one cookie. I can’t have half a dish of ice cream. Once I start, I want to go all the way. Or if I resist, it takes enormous mental energy to stop.

RUTH: That’s me and Doritos.

GRETCHEN: Okay, there you go. That’s your kryptonite. There it is.

RUTH: Totally.

GRETCHEN: Then there are Moderators, and Moderators get kind of panicky and rebellious if they’re told that they can never indulge in their temptation. They want to have it a little bit. They want to have it sometimes. So these are the people who have a bar of fine chocolates squirreled away in their desk drawer, and they’re like, “Every day or two, I have one square of fine chocolate, and that’s all I need.” And the fact is that’s fine for Moderators, and they go kind of nuts if they’re told that they can’t have it. For them, moderation really is better. And the problem is is that Abstainers tell Moderators they’re doing it wrong, and Moderators tell Abstainers they’re doing it wrong, and the fact is nobody’s right, nobody’s wrong; it’s just that different approaches work better for someone. Now, a lot of people believe that moderation is the better way. And they’re like, “You should follow the 80/20 rule. It’s not healthy to be too rigid. You shouldn’t demonize certain foods. You shouldn’t be so hard on yourself.” The fact is this works for me. I’m an Abstainer. I abstain from stuff. I basically gave up carbs, except for nuts and leafy green vegetables. I eat no sugar. I eat no bread. I eat no rice. I eat no starchy vegetables. I abstain like crazy. It wouldn’t work for most people; it works for me great. And the fact that a Moderator is telling me it’s not healthy, I’m like, in what sense is it not healthy? It works for me.

RUTH: That’s interesting.

GRETCHEN: But I’m not saying it would work for you.

RUTH: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: And so if you are struggling or something isn't working for you, try a different way, because there's a lot of ways to achieve our aims. So you want to think about—just like my friend who was like, "Well, one time I exercised successfully, now I can't." What lesson can she learn from that? Because a lot of times we don't really identify the problem. What actual problem are you facing? What's stopping you? Maybe you're not exercising, but if I really ask you, "Why aren't you going? Why aren't you going?," what you're going to tell me is, "You know, my gym, it's really loud. There's really loud music. There's a lot of people. I feel self-conscious. There's a lot of TVs. I just feel overwhelmed." And I'm like, "Then the answer is not you need to deal with your gym. It's this isn't an environment that you enjoy. What if you were just going to go for a walk in the park and listen to bird noises? How would that work for you?" And you're like, "Well, that would—I could do that." It's like, "Okay, why don't we try something that looks more like— Maybe you want to go for a long bike ride." Because for some people, they think that they don't like exercising, but in fact it's some aspect of it. Or the gym is too inconvenient, and it's like, "Well, I should go to the gym, but it's going to add 45 minutes to my work day." It's like, "Okay, we need to find a better solution for you, because you don't have that kind of time. There's many other ways to exercise. Let's figure out what works for you."

RUTH: So, it's getting real, first of all, with—

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: —exactly what the problem is before you start working on a solution.

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: And then that's where the Four Tendencies fits in, too, because—

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: —if you know what your tendency is, then, you also—

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: —know what are some of the struggles that you are going to face specifically—

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: —to that tendency.

GRETCHEN: Like, do you need outer accountability? Do you need choice and freedom? If you were a Rebel and you wanted to exercise, you might join a giant gym that had tons of different classes. So you're like, "I feel a little stiff, so I'm going to do yoga today," or "I'm feeling kind of restless. I think I'm going to do cardio," or "Ooh, there's some kind of crazy weird class that nobody's taking. I'm going to take it." Or it's like I go to a strength-training gym where it's super quiet. I do six machines with a trainer, and that's it. There's no choices, there's no decision making. It's very passive. I just do what this guy tells me. And I love it because that's what works for me. Whereas for a Rebel it's like, "Oh my gosh. I hate the idea that I'm supposed to be there at 10:00 every Friday morning. Like, ah, who wants to do that?"

RUTH: Unless you have a bigger reason why you need to go there. See, I go, and I hate every second of it, but I do it.

GRETCHEN: Well, if you—then, yeah. There's probably—people said I couldn't do it, but I can; watch me. Yeah, there's a lot—you can get there in your own way. Everybody can get there in their own way. But I think a lot of people try to do it another way or they think if it's not working there's something wrong with them, instead of saying, "Let me move on to something else. Let me try it a different way." On my website, if you go to gretchenrubin.com/resources, I have tons of resources there, but one thing I have is it's called the Checklist for Habit Change. And so if you're trying to form an important habit like exercise or eating more healthfully or like a challenging big habit, it has all 21 strategies listed, and then you can go through and think of, what's every strategy that I could use to strengthen this habit? Because it sounds harder than it is, actually, to use, like, six or seven different strategies, but a lot of it is just like, okay, I want to make it more convenient to do this thing. I want to make it less convenient not to do it. I want to pair it with something that I really enjoy. I want to involve other people so that I have a sense of kind of like, you know—I'm going to read a magazine about running because that's going to get me into that runner mentality and make me feel like I'm part of a community. I mean, I think if accountability works for me, if putting things on the calendar works for me, I'm going to make sure I get enough sleep the night before so I have the energy to go, there's a million—a lot of times people just sort of try to do it kind of—I'm not saying they're throwing spaghetti against the wall, but they haven't thought a lot about, like, how do I really cement this into place? And so I try to help people think of, how can I really try to give myself the best chance of success?

RUTH: Right. Right. Well, you know, when you actually were saying

that, it reminded me, I wrote a book a couple years ago called *Unstuffed: Decluttering*. It's about decluttering your home, mind, and soul. And I actually—

GRETCHEN: Oh! How did I not know that? I've got to write—

RUTH: I don't know.

GRETCHEN: —down your book because—

RUTH: You've got to get it.

GRETCHEN: —I have a book coming out in March called *Outer Order, Inner Calm*.

RUTH: Oh.

GRETCHEN: And it's all about how to create outer order.

RUTH: Similar things.

GRETCHEN: So, okay. We'll get—that's a whole—other stuff.

RUTH: Yeah. Whole other thing. We'll talk about that later.

GRETCHEN: Okay, okay, yes.

RUTH: No, but, in that book—

GRETCHEN: I'm writing down the name, yeah.

RUTH: I specifically—and maybe you talk about this in your decluttering book, too—but I talk about when you're thinking about your home, the first step is to just think about how you use your home, because I think so many times—

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: —and I was totally guilty of this—so many times we have this idea of how we want our home to look, but we don't think about how we actually use it.

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: And so for me, it was, I had two toddlers at home. I was redecorating my house, and I had two toddlers: a one-year-old—a very destructive one-year-old—and a three-year-old, and a very destructive dog. And I insisted on buying all this beautiful furniture, which my one-year-old proceeded to ruin every single piece of furniture in our house. And I just was not smart about

how we were going to use the home. And I had throw pillows everywhere, and they were always on the floor, so they always looked cluttered because I had two little kids. And it's sort of the same thing. If you're thinking about goals, you've got to think, who am I, first, and how am I going to be able to implement this in my life, and stop worrying about what you think it's supposed to look like. I think that's the biggest problem.

Gretchen: Well, yeah, and I have an example exactly along the same lines. So, I'm really super close to my mother, and I'm very influenced by my mother, and my mother loves beautiful things and design, and I am just clueless. And so I'm very influenced by my mother's taste because I really like her and admire her and she's just much more engaged in it than I am. And so when we were redoing our apartment, I was listening to a lot of what she would say and acting on it, and then later on I realized the thing about my mother is she's not a desk person. She's not a computer person. She's not a person who sits down at a desk much. All I do is sit down at a desk. If I go anywhere, I'm like, I need to sit down at a desk right now, or a table at a coffee shop. I'm like, that's how I am happiest. And I realized if I go to my parents' apartment, they don't really have what I would consider to be a desk, and they're like, "Who needs a desk? If you want to use the laptop, just use the kitchen table." And I'm like, "No, I really need a desk." But I had to specifically have this light bulb go off to be like, I have different needs from my parents. And just because that environment works really well for them and my mother doesn't think that this needs to be incorporated, actually knowing myself, I do need to incorporate it.

RUTH: So true.

GRETCHEN: I have a related thing which is the fantasy self. "Oh, I'm going to have these lovely, fancy dinner parties," like, as if. Why do I have all this stuff? You know?

RUTH: Yes.

GRETCHEN: Yeah. I don't need that.

RUTH: It's so true. And I think that happens with all different areas of our life.

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: Who we would like to be in our mind versus who we actually are, or what our—

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: —home is in our mind versus what our home actually looks like are two different things.

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: And then that's where we get frustrated with ourselves because of the disconnect. And I love that you're talking about this, and I think this is so perfect for the new year. Before you sit down to set those goals for the new year, first spend some time getting real with yourself. Who am I?

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: What do I struggle with? What are my tendencies? What are my strengths? What are my weaknesses? And how can I use what I know now about that to overcome it and actually set those goals?

GRETCHEN: And also I think, sometimes when people are making resolutions, they're thinking about kind of other people's judgment of them. So here's an example related to *Outer Order, Inner Calm*, which we were just talking about, which is Simplicity Lovers and Abundance Lovers. Some people are Simplicity Lovers, where they like a bare desk, they like a clear table, they like empty shelves, they really like a lot of space and kind of not so much stuff around. But then there are Abundance Lovers, and Abundance Lovers like collections and profusion and buzz and like lots of stuff, and they are attracted to that. Then there's clutter, and clutter is not abundance. Clutter is things that you don't need, don't use, and don't love, and they're not adding anything; they're just in your way. But sometimes to a Simplicity Lover—and I say this from the perspective of a Simplicity Lover—sometimes an Abundance Lover looks like it's somebody who's cluttered, and sometimes people who love abundance are kind of shamed about that and told, "You need to do a better job. Everybody in this office needs to leave with an empty desk. Why do you have all these tchotchkes lying around on your coffee table? We need to clear it off." And the fact is, clutter doesn't benefit anybody. Some people are clutter blind and they literally don't see it, but they don't like it; they just don't see it. But even for Abundance Lovers, they want things that they love and that attract them. But I think that sometimes they are told that they should be different from the way that they are. And I'm like, it's not that one way's right or one way's wrong. I'm more comfortable in a simplicity environment, but it's not because I'm better or right; it's just that's my preference. And so sometimes I think, too, when we're trying to understand what's true about ourselves, you can get into this thing, I'm right, you're wrong,

where it's like—or somebody said to me, you know, my daughter's backpack is a big mess; she needs to learn to keep it clean. And I'm like, "Well, is it a problem?" In what way is this—in what way is she frustrated or missing homework or forgetting to bring things? And she's like, it's just messy. And I'm like, that's your preference.

RUTH: Yeah. Well, and I think it's interesting—

GRETCHEN: You know, if you don't—there's no negative consequence.

RUTH: Right. And I think we forget that, too. And I think what's interesting is that people that are, I guess, the so-called experts in this field, I mean, think about you and I if we're here, we have podcasts, we talk about this stuff—

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: —we're writing books on this kind of stuff, and we're Simplicity Lovers. I am also a Simplicity Lover. I like a clear desk, I like things to be clean and uncluttered, but if you're getting all your information from people—

GRETCHEN: Yes!

RUTH: like us—

GRETCHEN: Yes!

RUTH: —then you're automatically—

GRETCHEN: Yes!

RUTH: —going to think something is wrong with you.

GRETCHEN: Yes!

RUTH: And that's not true, because—

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: —there are lots of different ways of being. It might just be that people who are more Abundance Lovers are not writing the books on decluttering because that's not where their passion is.

GRETCHEN: Well, and here's an example of that. My husband and I, we're still so old fashioned that we actually get lots and lots of physical magazines. And so this isn't an issue as much as it used to be when people got a lot of physical magazines, but we have a drawer

in our chest of drawers in our front hall where we keep all the magazines that we haven't read yet, because I can't stand to see magazines out. But then there are people where you go over, not so much anymore but imagine 10 years ago, and they would have like a fan of magazines out on their coffee table. There'd be a whole thing there. To me I'm like, get rid of that right away! Like, why would you have an abomination like a bunch of mag—even if they're nicely arranged, clearly purposely—

RUTH: Yes.

GRETCHEN: —put there and to be enticing. To me, I'm like, oh my gosh, get that off your coffee table. Why do I think I'm right? Like, there's nothing wrong about that.

RUTH: No, but—

GRETCHEN: It's just some people like to have a coffee table with magazines. I don't understand coffee-table books. Why is that there?

RUTH: My friend Edie who was on this podcast, she was episode 10, I think, she has the most beautiful home, and it was featured in *Better Homes and Gardens*, really beautiful, but she is an Abundance Lover. When you were describing that I was thinking. I mean, she layers rugs on top of her rugs.

GRETCHEN: Okay, see, there you go!

RUTH: I do not—

GRETCHEN: Right?

RUTH: —understand.

GRETCHEN: You're like, how is it possible?

RUTH: I can't even stand one rug. I don't want three on—

GRETCHEN: No.

RUTH: —top of each other.

GRETCHEN: Yeah. You're just like, get that off there.

RUTH: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: So, everybody has their own thing. But—

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: —that goes right back to what you were saying. So whether it's you're setting goals or you're figuring out your home or whatever it is, you really have to be so true to yourself first, and then—

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: —figure out the solutions that work for who you are and—And it's great to get ideas from different people. It's great to get ideas from—

GRETCHEN: Yes.

RUTH: —people who are habit experts or Simplicity Lovers. But pick and choose. Nothing is all or nothing.

GRETCHEN: No, and that's what—because ever since *The Happiness Project*, I've been talking to people about their New Year's resolutions and their goals and their aims for themselves, and it really seems very poignant to me when people are really discouraged. They've tried and failed before. They feel like there's something wrong with them. They say things like, "I have no willpower. I'm not a real grownup. Everybody says to use a to-do list, and I can't. What's wrong with me?" And my whole thing is, whatever you are experiencing—many other people experience it—many people cannot use to-do-lists. That is fine. I wrote a whole blog post about alternatives to the to-do list, because you could have a ta-da list, you could have a today list, you could have a might-could list. There's a lot of different ways to use the to-do list in a different way that work better for different people. But people get discouraged because they're like, "Well, it worked really well for my sister-in-law," or "This is what Steve Jobs did, so why shouldn't I do it?" I'm like, well, like you say, you're exactly right. You can learn from other people, you can get ideas from other people, and maybe you're going to even try something that someone suggested to you, but if it's not working, don't say, "There's something wrong with me. I need to beat myself up," say, "You know what? I need to find a different way." There's a million ways to achieve our aims and you just—and sometimes it takes a few tries—

RUTH: I think that's—

GRETCHEN: —to get it right.

RUTH: —why your book *Better Than Before* is so great, because it actually goes through all of these different things, and you don't need to

try every single strategy.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: You can pick and choose and try the ones that work for you.

GRETCHEN: Well, it's funny that you say that because, like, around the book, many people were saying to me, "Twenty-one is too many. Give me seven. Give me five. Twenty-one, I can't handle it." And I'd be like, "Well, but the thing is, 21's good because they don't all work for everybody." Some of them work for some people, but not others. Some of them, we can use it sometimes in our lives but not in other times in our lives. So you want to have a big, you want to have a big menu so you can pick the ones that are really right for you. If I picked what I would consider the top five, well, then, that would leave out a whole bunch of options that—

RUTH: And they would be the top five for you.

GRETCHEN: They'd be the top five for me.

RUTH: Right.

GRETCHEN: And that just means a whole bunch of people are left out.

RUTH: Mm-hmm.

GRETCHEN: And not because there's anything wrong with them, but just because the things that work for me don't work for other people.

RUTH: No, I think that's brilliant because that way, there's no way that anybody can do all 21 at the same time. You're forced to pick and choose the ones that actually work best for you.

GRETCHEN: Yes. Absolutely.

RUTH: So good. So, switching gears just a little bit. I'm personally curious about the role that fear has played in your life. This is the *Do It Scared* podcast, so we talk a lot about overcoming fear and overcoming adversity. But you seem pretty fearless to me. So what is something that has really scared you in your life, and how did you move past that fear?

GRETCHEN: Well, actually, something that really scared me was hugely important for me, so it's a good example of how facing your fear can be really, really positive. So, as we were talking about earlier, I wrote a book called *Forty Ways to Look at JFK*. And I loved that book. I loved writing that book. But that book, as your editor tells you when your book is a big flop, the book did not find its

audience. So people did not buy that book, and that was scary to me because one of the things about being a writer is you can only keep being a writer if people are responding to your work, and at a certain point, you can't get a book contract. Then, you could self-publish, and that's a whole separate thing, but I really wanted to stay as a book writer. Now I have many. I'm a podcaster, I have a lot—I speak, I have online courses, but at that time, my main focus was being a writer of books, and that still is my primary identity. It's the most important thing to me is to be a writer of books, and to get those books out into the public, I really want to have a relationship with the publisher. So the fact that that book had done very poorly was scary to me because it showed me maybe I'm not able to write the kinds of books that people will buy, and if people won't buy my books, then people will not publish my books, and that would be a big, big, big problem for me. So, what that taught me, though, was I don't want to be dependent on intermediaries. I don't want to be dependent on the idea that a lot of big newspapers are going to review my book. I don't want to be dependent on the idea that national television programs are going to have me on for five-minute segments. I don't want to count on the fact that NPR is going to decide to interview me. I want to have a direct connection to readers. I want to directly connect to people who are interested in the same subjects that I am, and I want to make sure that I can tell them that I have a book that I think that they would find interesting. I want to have a direct connection. And that was right at the t—fortunately for me, that was right at the time when something like blogging became technically easy enough that someone totally untechie like me could figure out how to do it. And the reason that I decided to do it is like, "I've got to have a direct connection to readers. This seems like a really great way to connect with people about a subject." And this was when I was starting my work on *The Happiness Project*. So that really lent itself. I mean, frankly, writing a biography of Winston Churchill, it doesn't lend itself to kind of like blogging and engaging the way happiness—so a lot of that was just fortunate that I had the kind of subject that lent itself to it

RUTH: So, is that what you were writing about right away on your blog was *The Happiness Project*, and that—

GRETCHEN: Yes, yeah.

RUTH: Okay.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: Gotcha. And what year was that—

GRETCHEN: So, a lot of people—

RUTH: —that you started that?

GRETCHEN: That was 2008, or—

RUTH: Okay. So, yeah, right in the—

GRETCHEN: —2006, maybe. Maybe 2006.

RUTH: —beginning of blogging.

GRETCHEN: Right. Well, and a lot of people think that I had a blog that I turned into a book. That's not the case. I had started the book, and then I thought—well, first of all, I wanted to do something novel and challenging because novelty and challenge bring happiness, so I wanted to do something novel and challenging, and I was terrified to start a blog, so I thought, "Okay, I'll do that, and see if it's true," which it was. But then also, I'm looking for this way to have a direct connection; this is the way to do that. If I feel like that's really important to me, I need to figure out how to make this technology work. And I've held to that. And so with all, you know—I remember getting on Twitter for the first time. I remember getting on LinkedIn for the first time. I started a podcast three years ago. I'm constantly thinking, how can I deepen my engagement with my audience and people who are interested in the same subjects that I am? But, you know, if that book had done better, I probably might never have thought that I needed to do it, and then I might not have been as receptive to trying all these tools and seeing how much I enjoyed them and how much I gained from them. So, it was really a fortunate scare—

RUTH: Yeah.

GRETCHEN: —because it kind of scared me onto a whole different path—

RUTH: Right.

GRETCHEN: —that in the end was really important for me.

RUTH: Huh. That's so interesting. You know, it's one of those things where we are so scared of failure and we're so scared of having something like that happen, and then you look back and you go, oh my gosh, that was the best thing could have hap—it was the best failure I've ever had—

GRETCHEN: Yeah, well, my mother always—

RUTH: —because it led me to where I am now.

GRETCHEN: My mother always quotes that Zen story about how do you know if this is good for you? How do you know if this is bad for you? And I think a lot of times we don't really know if something is good luck or bad luck until many years later, because I would have said that was horrible luck. At the time I was so sad about it and so discouraged. But then, as you say, in the end it was so fortunate for me that that happened.

RUTH: Best thing that ever happened. Yes. So much. And I love that you realized the importance of starting a blog. And I teach bloggers at Elite Blog Academy how to start a successful, profitable blog, and I have so many people who come to me saying, "Well, I don't want to have a blog; I want to have a book." I'm like, "Well, your place to start is with a blog. Create the relationship with your audience. If you want to launch a product, whatever you want to do, that's your place where you get to vet your ideas, you get to know your audience—

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: —and then everything else you do from there is easy because you already have that relationship with people.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: So, I love that that was part of your story, too.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: Okay. So, I know we're getting over time, so let me just ask a few final questions. First of all, I know you're working on this new book. Do you have anything else going on that has you really fired up right now?

GRETCHEN: Well, I'm really excited. I'm going to have a Happiness Project course for 2019.

RUTH: Ooh.

GRETCHEN: Ever since *The Happiness Project* came out, people have been saying, I want to do my own happiness project. Do you have a handout? Do you have resources? And I have created a lot of resources. But now it's really a full-on, year-long course where if people want to take their own happiness project and kind of get a little guidance, maybe they need accountability, maybe they want

ideas about what they might choose. Sometimes people feel like, oh, I need to make it up from scratch. I'm like, no, I completely gathered ideas from—

RUTH: Have the whole thing for you.

GRETCHEN: —other people. Yeah, yeah. I mean, come on. I'm going to throw out a lot of ideas and something's going to stick. So, if anybody's interested in that can go to my site, gretchenrubin.com, and that's something that they can do. And you can start—

RUTH: Awesome.

GRETCHEN: —it any time you want.

RUTH: And when does that start?

GRETCHEN: It starts in January, but you can—

RUTH: In January.

GRETCHEN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

RUTH: Perfect.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: Okay. And we'll include the link in our show notes for this as well.

GRETCHEN: Great, great.

RUTH: All right. Final question. What is the best piece of advice you have ever received, and why?

GRETCHEN: Oh, wow. That I've given myself or that someone else has given me?

RUTH: Either one.

GRETCHEN: Well, the best advice I give myself is to be Gretchen. Because like we were talking about, I feel like the more I know my own interests, my own values, my own temperament, and I do things that really—I want to accept myself and expect more from myself, but I have to really know who I am, not the fantasy self with the fancy furniture or the no desk. So I want to be Gretchen. And then my father always tells my sister and me, enjoy the process. And I think this is great advice because if you get very caught up in results and outcomes, you can be miserable along the way, and then a lot of times things don't turn out the way you want, and

then what have you got? You've been miserable for so long, and now you're disappointed? But if you enjoy the process, then you're just having fun along the way.

RUTH: I love that.

GRETCHEN: And then how things turn out is—I mean, it still could be disappointing if things don't turn out the way you want, but it's less disappointing, and if you enjoy the process, you certainly have a much happier life along the way. So I think that's really good advice.

RUTH: I love that.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: I love that. Oh, that's great wisdom. So, anything else that you want us to know? And then you've told us where we can find all your stuff at gretchenrubin.com.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: And then, where else can we find you online?

GRETCHEN: I'm everywhere on social media as my name, Gretchen Rubin. I love to connect with listeners and viewers and readers, so hit me up with your questions and insights and observations. And then I have a podcast called *Happier with Gretchen Rubin*. That's a weekly podcast. And then every Monday I have a two-minute little mini podcast episode that's a teaching—like a little story that I like to tell.

RUTH: Oh, I love that.

GRETCHEN: Yeah. So, yeah. Come find me.

RUTH: Awesome.

GRETCHEN: Yeah.

RUTH: Well, thank you so much. This was so great, so helpful—

GRETCHEN: I feel like we could talk all day.

RUTH: —so practical.

GRETCHEN: We're interested in all—

RUTH: I know. I feel like we can, too.

GRETCHEN: —the same subjects. Yeah, excellent.

RUTH: So many things to talk about, but, oh my gosh. So, I love all the practical tips, and I love that it's happening right at the new year. So, now just need to go out and make it happen. Thank you. Thank you for joining me today.

GRETCHEN: Thank you!

Okay, so, don't forget that if you would like to grab our "Do It Scared" manifesto or get all the show notes for this episode, along with all the links to everything we just talked about, you can find it all at doitscared.com/episode38. Once again, you can get all the show notes and all the links, everything I just talked about, on our website at doitscared.com/episode38.

And then, before we go, I want to say, as always, that I love, love, love hearing from you. So if you have any stories that you would like to share, I would love to hear your "Do It Scared" stories. If you have any questions about what we talked about today, any topics you would like to see me talk about on the *Do It Scared* podcast, or any guests that you would like to see me interview, please feel free to reach out via email by filling out our form at doitscared.com.

And that about does it for this episode of the *Do It Scared* podcast. Thank you so much for joining me today. And if you liked what you heard, please be sure to leave a review on iTunes, and then, if you're feeling very motivated, share a screenshot of your review at doitscared.com for a chance to win "Do It Scared" T-shirts and mugs. Also, be sure to subscribe via iTunes to be notified of all our upcoming episodes.

And speaking of upcoming episodes, be sure to join me next week to talk about something just a little different, but I think still very appropriate for this time of year, and that is losing weight. I've actually been following the keto diet for about three months now, believe it or not, and given that I don't eat meat, it has been a pretty interesting experiment, to say the least. Spoiler alert: I did start eating bacon, but I will be sharing a few more things and the most important things that I've learned so far as well as some tips you might want to consider if you're thinking about jumping on the keto bandwagon this year. It should be fun, little different, and I will catch you then.