A Standard Is an Invitation

Self-Worth, Self-Trust, and Unconditional Self-Love for People Who Lead Everyone but Themselves

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INTRODUCTION

Witnessed, Not Rescued

For most of my life, people responded to my pain in one of two ways. Some looked away. The rest felt sorry for me.

I had seen death. I had seen a murder. I'd had an eating disorder. I'd been homeless. I'd been through more by my early twenties than many people go through in a lifetime. And when people heard any of it, they'd tilt their heads and say, "Oh, you poor thing." They validated my pain, which sounds kind, and in a way it was. But it also kept my pain right where it was, at the center of who I was.

Then I met my first mentor. He was the first person in my life to witness me and not validate me. He watched me with love and compassion, but he did not feed my pain. He gave me unconditional love without enabling my wounding. And it changed my life.

I didn't have words for it then. Now I'd say he held a standard for me. Not a rule, not a wall, but an invitation. Without ever saying it out loud, he told me: I see what you've been through, and I know you're capable of more than living inside it. This is where I'll meet you.

That's what this book is about. It's for the leaders, parents, founders, caretakers, and high performers who are brilliant at holding everyone else, and quietly running on empty themselves. Through my programs and the speaking events and workshops I've been brought in for, I've worked with around 2,000 people, mostly men and also women, and the pattern I see in the most capable ones is almost always the same. They know how to give. They don't know how to receive their own worth.

In these pages, we'll look at three things no promotion, client, or partner can hand you: self-worth, self-trust, and unconditional self-love. We'll look at where they went, how to build them from the inside, and how everything changes, including your leadership and your relationships, when you have them.

CHAPTER 1

Being, Not Doing

One of the first questions I explore with a new client is this: were you given love for your being, or for your doing?

Most high achievers, if they're honest, were loved for their doing. Good grades. Honor roll. Number one on the team. Not because their parents were bad people, but because that's how most of us were raised. Society rewards performance, not existence. So a child learns, very early and very deeply, that worth is earned.

And we are social creatures. We seek connection by default. So when a child is conditioned to find love, worth, and acceptance through performance, that child doesn't just learn a habit. They learn what they believe they need to survive. Of course they'll keep chasing it as adults. It isn't weakness. It's loyalty to the only strategy they were given.

I was extremely good at earning it. I could get the A's. I could be at the top of whatever I pursued. I was number one in my company multiple times as an adult. And none of it ever filled the hole, because the hole wasn't about achievement. It was about being.

When we build our worth on what we do and how we show up for others, it will always feel lackluster. It will always be a thing we're chasing. Because the moment you stop doing, the worth disappears, and you have to go earn it again.

I remember my father telling me, when I was a heavy kid, "Hey, you're looking a little chunky." He probably didn't think much of it. But from that moment on, I started exercising, and it became obsessive. I learned that my body was something to fix and my worth was something to earn. That one sentence shaped years of my life.

I tell you that not to blame him. I'll tell you more about my father later, and how our story turned. I tell you because almost everyone I work with has a sentence like that. Something said once, maybe casually, that became the rule they've been living by ever since.

Here's the question I want you to sit with: what's my sentence? What did I learn, early, about what I had to do to be loved?

And then the harder one: what if I'm allowed to be worthy before I do anything at all?

People get scared when I say that. They think if they stop earning their worth, they'll stop achieving. In my experience, the opposite happens. When you no longer need achievement

to prove you're enough, you get to achieve from overflow instead of scarcity. You start creating because you want to see what's possible, not because you're terrified of what happens if you stop.

CHAPTER 2

The Three Pillars

After years of working with people, I've come to believe that three things sit at the root of almost everything. I ask every client about them:

Do you have self-worth?

Do you trust yourself?

Do you have unconditional love for yourself?

If you have all three, life changes. If you're missing any of them, we work on them one by one until they're solid, something you fully embody. Not something you can recite, something you live.

Self-worth. When someone is struggling here, I always start with two questions: What is making me feel unworthy right now? And how can I create worthiness within myself right now, instead of looking for it outside of me? Notice that the answer is never a thing you do. You are not your job, your role as a parent, your title. Those are things you do. Worth is something you are.

Self-trust. Trust usually breaks when someone does something that hurts us. And then, quietly, we stop trusting ourselves, because we allowed it, or we didn't see it coming. Here's what I've learned. Self-trust starts with accepting that we were attached to an outcome, to a projection of what we believed someone would do, instead of being present and allowing them to be human, just like us. People with trust wounds often try to control everything. They believe that if they stop controlling things, everything will fall to the floor. And here's the truth: some things will fall. Self-trust is learning that you can handle it when they do.

I'll be honest: when you start stepping into self-trust, fear often gets louder before it gets quieter. You don't know what it's going to look like. Humans love to project into the future because it gives us an illusion of safety. Self-trust asks you to let go of that illusion and believe that you will meet whatever comes. You always have, and you always will. The resources to handle your life are already inside you.

Unconditional self-love. My definition of unconditional love is unconditional acceptance for everything: past, present, and potential. Everything we've done, everything we've allowed, everything we've let others do to us, everything we've done to others. That means a

lot of "oh no" moments. A lot of "I allowed that." A lot of humility. But on the other side of it is a freedom I can't fully describe. We're conditioned to believe that if we accept something, we'll stop working on it. It's the opposite. Acceptance is what lets you move.

These three build on each other. When you have worth, trust becomes possible, because you stop needing others to behave a certain way for you to be okay. When you have trust, love becomes possible, because you can finally accept all of yourself without fearing that acceptance will make you lazy or careless. And when you have love, worth stops being something you have to defend.

I'd love for you to try what I call the pillar check. Rate yourself from one to ten on each: worth, trust, love. Don't overthink it. Then start with the lowest one. Not all three at once. Just the lowest one, this month.

CHAPTER 3

The Worth His Father Promised

When someone asks me where to begin, I usually say the same thing: learn how to parent yourself.

Let me tell you about a client. He owned a very successful law firm. On paper, he had everything. But he was charging far too little for his work and had been for a very long time. He was exhausted, burned out, carrying a lot of extra weight, and he had a baby on the way. He didn't know what to do.

As we talked, he realized something that stopped him cold. He was chasing self-worth. Everything in his life, the firm, the hours, the underpricing, the way he kept giving more and asking for less, was an attempt to earn a worth his father had once told him he could only have when he achieved certain things.

Using my disentanglement process, I showed him, through his own memories, that it was simply something he had never given himself. It wasn't out there. It had never been out there.

As soon as he saw that, he ran with it. He tripled his prices and paid for his entire mentorship within a month. And more than that, he started to see the rest of his life differently.

I love this story because it shows how practical this work is. This isn't soft. When a person stops chasing a conditional "yes" from long ago, they stop underpricing, over-giving, and over-working. They make different decisions in their business and their family.

That's what self-parenting means. It means becoming, for yourself, the voice that says, "You're already worth it." It means noticing when you're about to do something to earn love, and asking whether you'd want your own child to live that way.

Men and women alike can usually get to that moment of awareness: "I'm chasing this thing outside myself." Sometimes it comes out as, "Oh wow, I'm codependent on this." Most people can admit that isn't good. And that admission isn't shameful. It's a doorway. That moment of awareness is usually my foot in the door. From there, we slowly build ownership. And when people start to take ownership, they build a sense of autonomy, and that autonomy creates a positive feedback loop of real change.

So here's a practice. The next time you feel the urge to over-deliver, over-explain, or undercharge, pause and ask: whose approval am I trying to earn right now? Then answer the way a loving parent would answer a child they adore.

CHAPTER 4

The Bedside

My mother died of cancer when I was twenty-two. She had been a huge support to me, including in my bodybuilding years. And she didn't trust my father to make the right decision about taking her off life support, so she named me as the person to make it.

I was twenty-two. I was going to school full time. And I ran.

I made excuses not to be at the hospital. When it came to her deathbed, I made up some excuse and left. I couldn't handle it. I didn't want to be there.

I hated myself for that for a long time. That guilt and shame wove into everything else I was carrying, the eating disorder, the anxiety, the overachieving, the inability to sit still. A year after she passed, I did one more bodybuilding show, not because I wanted to, but to fulfill a promise to her, to remember her. And then I was done.

Forgiving myself took a long time, and it took me looking at something I didn't want to see. When I finally sat with it, I realized there was a part of me that didn't want to forgive myself. That pain was a connection to her. If I didn't forgive this, maybe I got to hold on to her. And there were other quiet payoffs too: people felt sorry for me, and the pain gave me a buffer, a reason, a comfort. Letting it go meant letting go of all of that, and of her.

Once I saw that, I chose to heal it. I'm the kind of person who'd rather rip the band-aid off. And when I did, a heaviness lifted that I hadn't even known I was carrying. I could operate freely. My perception opened up.

I want to be gentle with you here, because many of you have your own bedside. Something you didn't do, or did, that you've never forgiven yourself for. And I want to tell you what I've learned: taking full ownership is not the same as blame. Ownership says, "I was part of that. I allowed that. I'm responsible for what I do with it now." Blame says, "I'm bad because of that." One frees you. The other keeps you exactly where you are.

Taking 100 percent responsibility is a very large pill to swallow. But it makes the next pill easier. And the one after that easier still.

My mother's death also shaped one of the most important decisions of my life. Years later, in 2020, when I was at my lowest, the thought of leaving my sister alone after our mom had passed is what made me choose to face everything instead of ending it. I healed it, and I

haven't had any issues since. My entire behavioral profile changed, and that work is now the heart of my business. I tell that story fully in *Checkmark Syndrome*. *If you're in that place, please call or text 988 in the US, or your local crisis line, today.*

Love can hold us back, and love can bring us back. Sometimes it's the same love.

CHAPTER 5

It's Not Selfish, It's Selfless

You've heard the airplane instruction a thousand times: put your own oxygen mask on before you help anyone else. And yet so many of the most capable people I know still don't do it.

For years, I was the yes girl. I sacrificed myself for close to a decade. I said yes to everyone but me. I ended up in the hospital twice. One of those times I collapsed and was carried out, unable to move my body for hours. That's what happens when you keep pouring from an empty cup. Eventually your body pours you out.

Here's what I believe now. Putting yourself first isn't selfish. It's selfless.

When you give from an empty cup, you're not actually showing up fully. You're not in full integrity with yourself, and you're compromising the quality of your energy in every interaction. It might feel satisfying for a while, because helping others gives you a sense of worth. But if that's the only place your worth comes from, you're caught in a cycle: the only way to feel worthy is to keep serving, so you can never stop. When you take care of yourself, you show up for others with the full quality of your energy, instead of a depleted version that's secretly resentful and exhausted. And when you've walked the path yourself, you can actually lead people through it. You can't lead someone to a place you've never been. That's the blind leading the blind.

I see this especially with parents, and particularly with moms, though plenty of dads and caretakers live it too. Their worthiness gets tied to how they're received in that role: running the house, taking care of everyone. So until a person reinstalls themselves as a priority in their own life, they'll keep running around trying to plug holes in their cup.

When I say "make yourself a priority," people often hear "abandon everyone else." That's not what I mean. You can have both. I'm a firm believer in the middle path. You start small, with something realistic, and you grow it as you get better at it.

For me, it's my morning. I have about two and a half hours first thing in the morning that are mine. I am fully taken care of. Then everybody else gets served fully and completely. Instead of me running around trying to survive, which was me for years, I show up with something to give.

Your version might be twenty minutes. It might be a walk with no phone, or a quiet coffee before anyone else is up. The length matters less than the message it sends to your own nervous system: I matter too.

People who constantly insist on helping everyone else first often get their worth from other people's validation. So the question underneath is always the same: why don't you believe you're worth taking care of? Where did that come from?

This week, choose one small, protected block of time that's just yours. Guard it like you'd guard a meeting with your most important client. Because you are your most important client.

CHAPTER 6

A Standard Is an Invitation

I want to tell you about my father.

He used to abuse me. When I was younger, he would chase after me and hit me. That's part of my story, and I won't pretend otherwise.

There came a moment that changed our relationship. Instead of running, the way I always had, I stayed. I held my ground, with love. I held a standard.

He stopped. You could almost see his brain trying to figure out what to do. "Hold on a second." The pattern we'd been in for so long didn't have a next move. And when that happened, it pulled him out of autopilot. Because he loved me, despite all the wounding, it opened the door to the deepest conversation we'd ever had. It created the strongest bond we've ever had.

That's when I really understood the difference between a boundary and a standard.

Here's where I've landed, and you can take it or leave it. Boundaries are often built on the belief that we can be hurt or wounded, so we put up a wall to protect ourselves. A standard is different. A standard is an invitation. It says: "I know you're capable of this. And because I love you and I know you're capable, this is where I will meet you."

A boundary says, "Stay out." A standard says, "Come up here."

Part of what makes this possible, for me, is a belief I hold deeply: the deepest part of you can't actually be wounded. The mind can be hurt. The stories can be hurt. But who you really are is still whole. When you know that, you don't need a wall to survive someone. You can afford to invite them.

Not everyone accepts the invitation. That's real too. Sometimes you hold a standard and the other person doesn't meet you, and you love them from a distance. Holding a standard doesn't guarantee the outcome. It guarantees that you stop shrinking to fit an old pattern.

This works in leadership too. A leader who only sets boundaries manages behavior. A leader who holds standards calls people up. "I know what you're capable of. This is where I'll meet you." That's how my first mentor treated me. That's how I try to treat my clients.

As you change, the people around you may react. Some will keep pulling the old version of you forward, because the mind wants to keep identifying you as who you were. That's not a reason to stop growing. It's a reason to hold your standard with even more love.

Think of one relationship where you've been holding a wall. Ask yourself: what would it sound like to turn this boundary into a standard? Instead of "you can't treat me like that," try "here's where I'll meet you, because I know you're capable of it." Then say it with love, and let them choose.

CHAPTER 7

Sharpen the Blade

When did you stop being a kid?

A podcast host asked me that once, and I knew the answer right away. Around fourteen. I was homeschooled and had a lot of responsibility from a very young age. I got my first job at fourteen. And as I went through traumatic experiences, I suppressed them, and I lost a lot of my childlike play. Play wasn't essential. It wasn't part of the construct of success. So I let it go.

I was excellent at everything I pursued, and I had no joy in any of it.

Here's what I learned about why that matters. When you keep driving down the same pathway again and again, it's like using a blade. You keep cutting, and the blade gets duller and duller, and then you wonder why you can't cut through anything anymore. It's because you never stopped to sharpen the blade. That's what the hustle, grind, drive mentality does to us. We don't allow ourselves the play and rest we need to pursue our goals with the energy and intention we want.

Play isn't a reward for finishing your work. It's how you maintain the person doing the work.

I still have a child in me, and these days I don't hide her. If I'm ever too much at a party, I go sit with the kids. They have a beautiful way about them. They call things out. They're curious. They want to experience life fully, messily, without judgment. I believe that's who we all are underneath the programming: someone who just wants to experience the world, to love and be loved.

This connects to something people often get wrong about me. They say, "You're so disciplined." I'm not, really. I'm passionate. There's a difference. Discipline that comes from passion builds you up. Discipline that comes from self-hate tears you down. I used to run to beat myself into submission. When I dealt with my shame, I realized I don't even like running. I stopped. Movement became something I chose to enjoy again, not a punishment.

So I'll ask you what I ask my clients: what would you do if money were no object? What did you love before it had to be productive? You don't have to quit your job for it. Just ask how you could bring a little of it back in.

This week, schedule something that has no purpose except joy. Protect it. Notice how it sharpens everything else.

CHAPTER 8

Lead From Where You've Been

The goal of my work isn't for people to need me. It's for them to not need me.

Most of my clients are done within months, and they don't need me again in that area. They become their own operating system. They know how to handle their own stuff years later, and many of them start helping other people.

One woman I worked with went on to speak before her city assembly. She hasn't worked with me in three years, and she still reaches out to say thank you for what we did together. I've even had women I coached years ago, long before I started this business, message me out of the blue to say they still use what we worked on. That's what success looks like to me. Not dependence. Freedom.

And that's what I believe leadership looks like too. The best leaders don't keep people small so they'll stay needed. They witness without rescuing. They hold standards instead of walls. They love people for their being and still call them toward their potential.

You can only do that from a place you've been. You can't lead people somewhere you've never gone. That's why the work in this book isn't a side project for leaders. It is leadership. Your worth, your self-trust, and your self-love are the ground your team, your family, and your clients stand on.

I also hold standards in my own practice. I don't accept everyone into my programs. If someone isn't open to change at all, there's no amount of money that makes it right for me to take them, because it wouldn't be in integrity, for them or for me. That's not rejection. It's respect for where they are.

I'm very in-your-face. I'm also very compassionate, because I've been in a lot of the places the people I work with have been. Everyone's journey is their own, and I honor that. I don't drag anyone across the line. You can show someone the door, but you can't walk them through it. What you can do is stand on the other side of it, fully yourself, and make it look like a place worth going.

This entire process of life, in my view, is remembering who we are and letting go of all that we are not.

CLOSING

Put Your Own Mask On

If there's one idea I hope stays with you, it's this: you were never meant to earn your worth. You were meant to bring it with you.

When you do, you lead differently. You love differently. You stop shrinking to fit old patterns, and you stop asking others to shrink to fit yours. You hold standards that invite people up, starting with yourself.

Bring this talk to your team. This book is the foundation for my keynote *Put Your Own Mask On: Leading From Worth Instead of For It.* It's built for leadership teams, women's and men's leadership events, family businesses, parent and caregiver communities, and anyone who leads others and forgets to lead themselves. To bring it to your organization, reach out through arielzeigler.com or call 661-400-8672.

If you're ready for your own work. At Heart N Sole Wellness, home of Rewired mentorship, I walk with people as they build worth, trust, and love from the inside. **Wellness From Within** is a grounded place to start, taking care of yourself first so you can show up fully. **Rewired** is my mentorship for high performers ready to untangle the old rules they've been living by and lead their lives on their own terms. No pressure. If something here spoke to you, I'd love to hear from you.

With love,

Ariel

FOR EVENT PLANNERS

Keynote Summary

Talk title: Put Your Own Mask On: Leading From Worth Instead of For It

The big idea: Capable people are often brilliant at holding everyone else and empty themselves, because their worth was tied to their doing, not their being. When you build self-worth, self-trust, and unconditional self-love from the inside, you lead, parent, and love from overflow. And you learn to hold standards that invite people up instead of walls that keep them out.

Three takeaways

1. **The pillar check.** Rate yourself one to ten on worth, trust, and self-love, and work on the lowest one first.
2. **Being, not doing, out loud.** Tell one person this week what you value in who they are, not what they did. Then say it to yourself.
3. **Turn one boundary into a standard.** Rewrite one "you can't treat me that way" as "here's where I'll meet you, because I know you're capable," and say it with love.

Ideal audiences: Leadership teams and offsites; women's and men's leadership events; family businesses; HR, people, and culture teams; parent, caregiver, and healthcare-worker communities; founder groups.

Format: 45 to 60 minute keynote, or a 90 minute workshop with the pillar check and a standards exercise.

Booking: arielzeigler.com | 661-400-8672