

the garage

Tune Up before You Ride: Tools, Quick Fixes, and Necessities for Your Trip



my trip

The Dreamfield

I was driving across Iowa, marveling that the place seemed to have even more corn than Nebraska. It was the Fourth of July, around dinnertime, and the roads were empty. As the rows of corn ticked by, I suddenly realized I hadn't smiled, said anything, or had a moment of fun in about 120 miles. That's because I was alone, with no one riding shotgun, no one for me to talk to or joke with. I felt terribly needy. Being alone made the past too loud, my fears too amplified. I wanted some company, even the unfunny-joke-telling, annoying backseat-driving kind. When I was alone, I usually would call on a friend or a lover to come and entertain me, amuse me, and free me from my terrible solo-ness. But I had no one in Iowa: I lived thousands of miles away and my

cell phone service was spotty in the area. This was going to be a long, boring, lonely, slightly panicked day. Or so I thought.

As a last resort, I put an audiobook CD in the stereo, figuring that the least I could do was to pursue something intellectual while in my lackluster state. I'd never heard of the book: *The Santa Land Diaries* by the comedian/writer David Sedaris. I'd grabbed it out of desperation at the last Cracker Barrel store, wanting a voice to keep me company—anybody's would do. Sedaris began by describing his trials and tribulations while working as a Christmas elf for Macy's Santa Land over the holidays (he's Jewish). I laughed so hard I had to pull over. I was stunned. I hadn't expected to laugh, much less snort. And it had been as simple as paying \$4.99 and pushing Play.

I decided to continue creating my own good time to see if I could break my addiction to needing company.

The moment I made up my mind to discover what adventures I could have all by myself, my cell phone rang. It was my best friend, Alexandra. At first I thought she would be the perfect cure for my loneliness. Alex is a choreographer and one of the most interesting people I know. She always has the best perspectives on my life, she makes me laugh, and we talk about crucial life issues, such as in which episode of *Sex and the City* was Mr. Big the most handsome.

I was just about to press the talk button, when I paused. I remembered the brief feeling of empowerment I'd had earlier. I hadn't yet begun to see what else I could do on my own.

I'd had at least three long-term relationships built solely on the desire to have someone else divert my time and energy away from myself, and, boy, did it ever work. Drama and dysfunction are great ways to turn one's attention away from one's own life's path. But so are fun, friends, and relying on others to fill the space inside my heart where I could have, and often should have, become more self-reliant. Friends and good times, support, and love from others are all important. But as my thumb began to pull away from the cell phone and I saw the call was going to voicemail, I understood that it was just as important that I get to know myself, fill

myself up, and be able to stand alone—independently of anyone else. I'd neglected the other half of the equation for too long. And my sense of self was suffering for it.

After a few more miles of introspection, I pulled into Dyersville, Iowa, to search for the equivalent of a home-cooked meal. As I was walking down the road in search of a diner, a procession of festive Fourth of July locals walked past me, proudly adorned with red, white, and blue plumage. They waved and yelled at me to follow along. On a whim, I hurried to catch up and joined their informal parade.

We turned past a farmhouse into a clearing ringed by a cornfield. Families were seated on bleachers, on blankets lifted from couches and recliners at home. My parade friends separated in clumps of twos and threes, filling into the spaces in between. The place looked familiar to me. It was rather surreal when the fireworks started, and there, surrounded by pink- and green-lit flashes eliciting "Ooohs" and "Ahhhs," I realized I was sitting in the Field of Dreams—the one from the movie! You know, "If you build it, they will come"? The big, black Iowa sky was a perfect backdrop for the show. I leaned back and basked in the pretty lights, smiling, my boredom totally forgotten.

My goal had been to rely on myself that day—listening to and learning about me and what I needed. I didn't just follow my dream—I *made it happen*, like all my dreams since. I built it and, there in the clearing, I came to know my own potential to create soulfulness, all by myself, with no one's help but mine. I breathed in the pleasantly acrid air and sensed a distinct strength seeping into my heart, a feeling I would find ways to re-create on many more future days, anytime I needed to get back to *me*.

When I called Alex back later that night, she wanted to know if I was okay, since I'd left her a message the day before complaining about my loneliness. "I'm doing more than okay!" I exclaimed. "I'm with me."

This stop will give you some necessary tools to use along your way to keep yourself in a positive state of maintenance—and

mind—when you're rolling along. You'll also find a few quick fixes for the times when you're stopped dead in your tracks, unsure of where to go next. Let's open the garage door, and look inside.

the map

Soul Fuel and Other High-Octane Fillers

Physicists and philosophers, yogis and masters alike have followed the road trip teachings—of the cosmos, the earth, and the hearts of man—straight back to the soul. The path you choose for yourself will have an impact—on you, on those you love, even on people you will never meet. When you realize it is you who makes your life change and not life that makes you change, you can finally begin moving forward.

This seems like a pretty daunting responsibility, until you see that it can be really fun to create your life in the shape of everything you love. If you had the choice of eating a plate of rotten food for breakfast, one you know would make you sick all day, or going to your favorite restaurant with friends and having a wonderful meal, which would you choose?

The road to your soul is both a path you're on toward your future and a path that's already right here. Stay in the moment, and choose your present intentions, words, and actions wisely, which is the only thing you can do, because the past and the future are not happening right now, and only what you do right now makes any difference. Even though you're gearing up to live your future dreams, you still need to bring them back *here* with the choices you make. So stay in the moment at hand and decide how you want to be later in your most incredible life, then *be it now at all times*. The garage will show you how to do this on your own.

Your Road-Tripper Status

As a Road Tripper, you are a person who is on the road to learn to live, love, and create from your deepest connection point with the great source energy that surrounds you and also *is* you. I call this the soul.

You're now making the necessary preparations for your trip so you can remain firmly at this center place even as you begin moving toward your vision. Here in the garage you will find tools you can use to transform any situation or relationship and retain your inner strength no matter what happens. Whatever you're broadcasting now, you're about to move to a new bandwidth. Here you'll find everything you need to get started, begin the journey, and last till the end.

Alongside positive change, challenge appears. You will confront old fears, old ways of being, as you drive to meet your soul. Along the road to your best life possible, be prepared for delays. There will be potholes, irritating construction, and long stretches of open space where nothing seems to be happening. That's life, imperfectly perfect. These lag times and frustrations are necessary to hone your discipline and commitment to your path. Just as it takes time to get your physical body in shape, it takes time to build new spiritual muscle, and it takes time to make your heart resilient enough to bear the fire of a fierce life.

Let's enter the garage and give you the tune-up you'll need to begin the journey that lies ahead.

Riding Shotgun

Calling shotgun is the ongoing battle to claim and then keep one's position in the passenger seat during a road trip of any duration. It is a power struggle, a battle of wills whose outcome is always uncertain, as other riders, even previously supportive family members or significant others, may use any available method to try to remove you from your rightful position.

A successful "I call shotgun" moment results in your sitting smugly, with radio, window, and glove-compartment rights for the time being. The feeling of power is immense. The position, however, is unstable. You are at the mercy of the driver, who has ultimate decision-making rights over your spot. The driver's seat is the only one that is constant and assured. The driver is the ultimate road-trip creator, navigator, and final decision maker.

Why? Because the driver is at the wheel, and it's hers to steer wherever he or she wants.

In this way, when you rely on an external thing to make or break your feeling of worthiness—whether it's a relationship, a job, community status, or more money; or you allow outside circumstances or people to dictate how you feel about yourself—you can be just as easily kicked out of the seat of happiness.

Let the first lesson of the garage be that you do not need anything outside of yourself to give you permission to be who you want to be. If you let others'



Road Rule

You give your power away
the moment you look to
someone outside of you to
validate any part of your
existence—your worth, your
direction, or your dreams—
to the point where you
override your own capacity
to do it.



visions entirely become your own, or allow their decisions to hold authority over your joy, then any feeling of solidity, acceptance, or power can dissolve as quickly as it was bestowed upon you. This happens because the happiness or stability was dependent on someone or something out there—and not on you. These feelings were nothing but an illusion, since the real, sustainable joy can come only from within. When you choose to hand over your wheel and ride shotgun, it can easily become giving your power

away. Even the most loving person will not be able to sustain you forever, for that would drain them too.

Handing Over the Wheel

Luckily, giving your wheel away isn't permanent. It's like offering a handshake—when you turn around and leave, your hand is still attached to you. Your power is like that—it's an inherent part of you. You can, however, choose to feel as though you've lost your connection to it, which creates a state of weakness, reactivity, emotional chaos. It's known as disempowerment, and it doesn't feel good.

During your trip, you will be much happier if you can keep yourself in the driver's seat as much as possible and steer away from calling shotgun in other people's rides. It may feel like a relief to let someone else drive, and at times you will do this. But if you ride passively for too long, people will always take you where *they* need to go, in the end. It's nothing personal; it's simply the nature of the soul to compel each of us toward our own final destinations, no matter how much we'd like to sit back and go along for someone else's adventure. We do intersect with other people's trips, often. We should share and delight in others and allow them to help and support us. But you cannot go everywhere with them or hope to find your own road if you're not willing to take the wheel meant especially for you.

Visiting the garage allows you to tap into your inner source of strength at will. To do this, you must do three things:

1. Create space in your life for the trip.
2. Hold that space each day through your focused intentions.
3. Practice new habits through action that add up to your new life.

If you're going to be taking the time and effort to travel through all the stops, you must do so with a clear idea of where you're going. Who wants to be driving on someone else's highway, when your own is so much more *you*? Remember your list from the map, of your life's vision? This is your first step toward making it happen in your lifetime.

Your Tool Box

You can use the following tools to help you along your chosen road, whatever it may be. They are guides for where to place your mind and heart while journeying inside. I will explain their concepts first, then later, in the "Take the Wheel" section, you'll learn action steps to employ your tools to help quick-fix any emergency road trip situation.

Tool #1: You

There are certain things and people you don't need, now or ever, to be successful and happy on your life's road trip. What and who they are may surprise you:

- Your loving husband, wife, or partner
- Support groups of any kind (not even your book club)
- Your concerned mother
- Your children
- Your best friend
- Siblings, cousins, first cousins, mothers-in-law. Even first cousins in-laws' mothers-in-law
- Basically, anyone besides you

It's not that you shouldn't have these people around; enjoying lots of healthy relationships is necessary for balance in your life. It's just that you ultimately don't need others—their support, their acceptance, their good moods, or their understanding—to do the work you came here to do.

When I say you have to go on this trip solo, I mean it. Even I can go only so far with you. You can receive help, advice, and opinions all you want, and you can welcome them into your life. But eventually, if you really want to make changes within yourself, you have to do it yourself. Reflecting on others' perspectives and suggestions is fine, but in the end, you will only gain the driver's seat if you jump into it, regardless of what anyone else outside of you decides to do. Take everyone else's opinions on your process both into serious consideration and with a grain of salt. In the end, only you know what is right for you, because only you can see into your heart and make decisions that will benefit it. And as all great masters have agreed, what makes you truly happy is ultimately best for all those involved with you. Honor your relationships, but don't forget about first enriching the foundational one you're building with yourself.

Tool #2: Tell, Don't Ask

Change can make people weird. They might start to act strangely when you change, even those who are supportive of your decision. Even you will sometimes react in ways that seem to contradict the changes you want to make. Why? Because everyone has two major aspects of the mind that fight against each other. Your conscious mind knows what's best for you and rationally wants you to make changes for the better, but your unconscious mind freaks out at the mere suggestion of doing something differently. This mind is preoccupied with keeping you alive, and since you're alive now, then you should change nothing for fear of death. It's irrational, yet is an old-school defense mechanism that exists nonetheless. If you want to make changes, even good ones, your unconscious mind is going to try to stop you through doubt, fear, resistance, and counterproductive behavior.

Knowing this in advance can help you recognize the feelings and actions your unconscious mind may produce around shifting into new ways of being. Use your rational, conscious mind to keep yourself on track, and soon your unconscious mind will relax when your new habits become your daily habits.

Others around you also fear change. It's often unconscious also, so try to realize that even if they don't. Be compassionate and reassuring, but hold your ground. If you truly want to transform an aspect of your life, you cannot wait until everyone around you feels perfectly fine about it; that could take a very long time.

The thought of positive change can be scary. The *experience* of it, however, is exciting and rewarding, and it feels right. Lead the way through your actions for yourself and your loved ones, and when you succeed, they will be amazed at what you have managed to accomplish and may want to get happier and healthier the way you did. So as you go on the road



Road Rule

The word *shift* is gentler than *change* and won't trigger the unconscious as much.



trip, you won't ask if you can change, you'll *tell* everyone that you're shifting into more of yourself.

I'm not suggesting you ignore other people's needs during this time, only that you make your focus strong enough, so it cannot and will not be wavered by outside dramas.

The road trip to your soul is ultimately about you. At the same time, reassuring the people around you will not only make them happier, it will help them to provide you with the space you need to do your inner work.

The main thing to understand about your loved ones is that all they really want to hear is that they matter to you and that you're not going anywhere. They will be more supportive of you when they know that the reason you're trying to change isn't because you're unhappy with them or losing interest, but that you cherish the relationship and want to be a stronger partner in it *with them*. However, too much concern about reassuring others can take you away from your own work. It's up to you to balance a firm commitment to what is right for you with staying in tune with the feelings of others and doing what you can toward achieving harmony.

By maintaining your direction, you'll show your loved ones, over time, that it's going to be okay, by doing what you know you must do to be truly in love with your life. Wouldn't you want them to do the same thing? The benefit of positive change is a two-way street: they get the best of you and so do you. On the road trip, what you offer to yourself, you also offer to your community and, therefore, the world. When you hop into your own driver's seat, everyone wins.

Tool #3: The Mini-Stop

The mini-stop is a simple way to open a window to your soul. You don't have to spend hours in concentrated practice to get there. Instead, take just a few seconds or minutes to pause, notice what's beautiful about your surroundings, and really take them in. This teaches you to remain alert to the magic surrounding you, and soon your life will seem to fill with potential and fun, because you know how to stop and look for it. Choose the "longcut," a

mindful walk through the park instead of your usual rush, or catch up on one more chapter of a wonderful book. Sit in the café and write for a few moments instead of getting your coffee to go. Look up at the sky.

After finishing these sentences, I paused and let my gaze wander around my office. I noticed a quick movement outside my window. Now, I live in Brooklyn, New York, and my view is very urban—a fire escape and the brick building across the street. Nature shows up around here in the form of sidewalk-potted trees or the occasional dog on a leash. Imagine my delight when I glanced up from my computer screen to see a blue jay peering in at me. I hadn't seen one since my childhood, and my heart fluttered in delight.

I'm glad I didn't ignore what could have been just a shadow in my side vision, but had stopped to receive. It took only ten seconds, yet now I have a memory to cherish—and to share with you.

Life is sending you messages and simple pleasures all the time. It is constantly showing you the way to wake up and enter the stream of pure awareness. In this place of open eyes and hearts, everything becomes clearer. So make a mini-stop whenever you can and invite in the inspiration of now.

Tool #4: Soul Appointments

Each week, expand on the mini-stop and go soul-o, making time each week for a longer personal adventure.

Have you noticed that a yoga class is easier to skip out on than, say, a doctor or dentist appointment? Most of us think that time for ourselves can wait, which means we're undervaluing our alone time and, therefore, ourselves at a deep level.

You're with yourself twenty-four hours a day. It's like a marriage, only closer. Just as we tend to take our longtime partners for granted in some ways, we figure that *we're* always around, so taking time for ourselves is sometimes not the highest priority. We say it is, but our actions often prove otherwise.

Too much giving of your time and energy to others and your responsibilities, without putting back nourishment into yourself,

will quickly drain you and negatively affect all other relationships in your life. When you say, “My time is not as important as everyone else’s, and neither is replenishing my balance,” this imbalance will manifest as your reality, as chronic fatigue, resentment illness, and anxiety. You will never seem to have time for yourself and you’ll be off balance, yet you’ll be giving to everyone else. It’s a common thread among people who are nurturers and givers by nature. It’s also a vicious cycle—one you can begin to end today.

This week, write in your calendar—in pen—a soul appointment with yourself. It should last at least an hour. Keep it as sacred and nonnegotiable as you would a business meeting with an important client. Doing this sends a message to you, your loved ones, and the universe that you are committed to your well-being, that you value yourself as highly as you do anyone or anything else. Others will then begin to see the value in you even more, because there is now even more value inherent *in you*.

These appointments are a step beyond the time you already spend with yourself, such as driving to work or cooking dinner for the family before everyone gets home. The soul appointment is special because you will do only those things that are soul food, which will increase your life energy. During this time, you will get to know yourself better, deepening your internal dialogue and receiving insight and inspirations that you could more easily overlook during the rest of your week.

Go somewhere that gives you joy, quiet, a few laughs, a much-needed rest, or whatever you require most at the time your appointment arrives.

take the wheel

Road Trip Relationships

Embarking on your road trip is for you and you alone. But you will want to communicate to your family and friends what you’re doing, so they can in turn give you the space and time you require to really take your trip in a quality way.

Living in the now requires that you let people clearly know your intentions, without saying too much. It's your process, but it will affect others, so go ahead and relate. When talking about the road trip, you do not have to over-explain yourself. This can be hard, if you find creating boundaries and keeping energy for yourself to be difficult tasks.

Here are a few relationships you may have, and how to handle sharing the road trip with them in one minute or less.

Kids. It's extra hard to concentrate on yourself when children are in the picture. For the trip, you'll need time to reflect, which means you must have some time alone. Choose your adventures and self-study to coincide with their naptimes or school days, or get a babysitter to help you make the space you need. If you have a partner, enlist his or her help to give you even an hour a day to nurture your commitment to yourself.

Kids understand what they've experienced, such as going to school. When you feel it's time, let the kids know that you're in school, too—self school. They'll want to know what it's about, and you can say, "It's where I learn to be the best of myself so I'm happy and can be the best possible parent to you." Let them know they're important and that they can help you by giving you study time like they have. You will let them know when "school's in," and they can give you the space and time to do whatever your homework is for that day.

Be firm with them and really take the space, even if they don't want to help or they act out. Hold your ground. This teaches kids that learning about oneself, and how to take one's life work to its highest potential, is a lifelong course of study and an important one to respect.

Adults. Keep it short and sweet. Any more than a minute or so of explaining yourself begins to move you more into a seeking-acceptance mode, and you may not get that right away. Think of



Road Rule

The more words you use, the less energy you keep. When you speak, aim more for a haiku than an epic.



it as a haiku: something powerful that can be expressed in just a few lines. Say something brief and clear, listen to their response, and then respond succinctly.

Be compassionate; as you decide to change things, even if others seem angry, judgmental, or hurt, or they try to subtly undermine your efforts. Stay unwavering and calm, showing them that you may be shifting but your love for them won't be. Once you have an understanding of one another, suggest going out to a nice dinner or something else to reassure people that they're still important to you.

Downers. Downers are a subset of adults who try to take you down every time you feel like going up. We can feel sorry for Downers because they must not like themselves very much, or they're scared. Only very insecure or frightened people can't honor others for their accomplishments, period. Whenever you change, expect to hear negative comments—sometimes from the people closest to you. Anyone can jump on the Downer train for a moment, including you!

If someone says something that's meant to let the air out of your tires, don't waste your precious energy on it. You know by now that wherever your attention goes, it will strengthen whatever it's focused on. You don't want to give a Downer any more power. My advice? Ignore them, period. You don't owe these unskilled comments any more of your time. If you ignore the Downers, they will either go away or shift into more constructive ways of dealing with you. Just don't let their bad choices work, and they won't.

Explaining yourself will only make you sound defensive and expend your energy; it will not change their minds but only gives Downers more fuel for their opinions. Excuse yourself, and move forward.

Emergency Roadside Assistance

The road you're embarking on is a powerful one. At times, it can be exhilarating and filled with epiphanies, and at others, you may get lonely, overwhelmed, or feel you can't go on. I know I just told

you to go it alone, and the majority of the time, do that. There are, however, times when strategically reaching out can help. Just do it mindfully, in a way that doesn't undermine your efforts to self-center.

Breakdowns happen to all of us, and they can slow you down or even stop you in your tracks. They also begin to turn your perceptions toward your fears. It's natural to feel upset sometimes. But if you're wallowing in your emotions all the time, they can begin to create the opposite of what you want. It's best to meet a breakdown head-on, using the following tools, and to get back onto the road as soon as you can.

In order to stop the mudslide of negativity, the first thing you should do when confronted by difficult thoughts and emotions is to call Triple A. Go back over your map and see which of the three As—aligning, allowing, or acting—you are either resisting or not practicing in full. When you recognize breakdowns for what they are—momentary pockets of fear and resistance to living the life you really want—you will more easily put them aside and get back behind the wheel. After all, even feeling like giving up is just a feeling, not your master, and you can use some of the following tools to help recognize a breakdown, then realign yourself. This practice of putting things into perspective by yourself first will make you stronger.

Breakdown #1: The Flat

You felt like a million bucks when you met that cute guy or girl last week. He or she took your phone number—then didn't call. Now you're spending your precious evening sitting by the phone, waiting for it to ring. Your sense of strength and purpose dwindle with each second that ticks by, as if the ringer is connected directly to your self-esteem.

The Fix. Realize you're letting someone else's behavior dictate your happiness. Then pick up that same phone and call someone who cares. If you turn away from what's making you feel bad, and toward what will make you feel better, you'll regain your sense

of strength. It tells your soul you will not run toward negative or distancing people for acceptance. Ask your best friend to meet you somewhere fun. Then unplug the phone from the wall, and get up, get dressed, and get out of the house. Go to a place that makes you remember how good it is to live, instead of waiting to feel alive until someone else decides you will. Remember the shotgun seat? Step out of it, walk around the figurative car, and get back behind the wheel. And while you're at it, thank the universe for saving you a whole lot of trouble by revealing someone who doesn't vibe with you. Hey—maybe your fun place even has people you can flirt with, and who will flirt back. There *are* others, you know.

Breakdown #2: Sugar in Your Tank

Everything was going so well. You decided to lose some weight and became committed to a healthier lifestyle, and now you're fifteen pounds lighter. Awesome! Then, perhaps something happened to stress you out, or maybe you just got nervous about how well things are going. So you and your subconscious just spent the evening frantically making up for lost time with your old buddies Ben and Jerry. You feel bloated and full of self-loathing, and want to throw in the towel altogether.

The Fix. Know that everyone backtracks sometimes. But it's over now, if you choose it to be. Don't make it any worse than it is right this second. Immediately, let the past be the past and make more constructive choices in your brand-new moment of now. Remember, your emotions will hear you when you say, "I'm so fat and terrible," and you'll get more of those feelings.

Instead, change your mind immediately, before the inner critic gets a chance to do more damage. Give yourself a break and realize that change is a balance of the majority of your actions over many days, not some kind of constant perfection—*no one can do that*.

Make a switch: go dance the night away or play a pick-up basketball game with your buddies to burn it off—your solution

should happen ASAP, to remind you that rebalancing is just a decision away.

Breakdown #3: Coolant Leakage

You meant to make it to yoga class but somehow found yourself screaming at your sister on the phone. Now you missed both the workout and the bliss, and instead you got stuck in the same old family dramas that always were dead-ends and always will be.

The Fix. Final-curtain the drama. Hang up (respectfully), turn around, take a bow, then step off the stage. Walk out to your car, say to your imaginary public, “Thank you. It was so nice just to be nominated.” Then drive straight to the next yoga class. After the bliss takes effect, call your sister back and say something nice, even if she doesn’t. Keep it up, balancing space with compassion until the reactivity has faded and you can communicate again from a place of gratitude for who you are to each other.

Throw Out Your Broken Tools!

When you reach for a tool to help maintain your balance, make sure that what or whom you reach out to will help you get to where you want to go, not hold you back. Ten after-work beers instead of two? That doesn’t solve anything; it just covers the problem that will come back later, in some other, bigger way. Or reaching out to your joysucking ex-girlfriend in a time of need? Not the best idea.

Dependency-promoting tools are instantly gratifying, but they stunt your growth and cause other issues to sprout up alongside the ones you already have. So using them doesn’t assist you in the way you want them to. They actually *add to your problems*. Read that again. They add, by upsetting you and those who care about you. They attract more of the same into your life. Over time, they

can make you physically ill, stressing everyone out further. This is not about guilt; it is a study of choices, and the effects of those choices. If your goal is to deal better with times of strain, of self-doubt, and of fear, then replace your broken tools.

Swapping your more destructive, ineffective coping mechanisms for powerful ones that help you deal with your dramas, gets them to lessen instead of build up, and makes people you love happier as a side effect is a very, very good tool to have at your disposal. Here are a few other tools I suggest keeping in your garage.

Speed Dial

If you could press a button and get instant access to feeling much better about yourself, while your stresses melt away, would you do it? I would. It's called "speed dial," and on the other end should be between two and four people who know you well, love you unconditionally, and, most of all, make you laugh.

The dialees are not to be overrelied upon, since you want to build self-reliance, but called into action right when you need them most. Find something in town that sounds fun to you, maybe *only* you, then call your carpool buddies and go. You may not want to get up, but to break out of a bad funk, it helps to have a change of venue.

Newton's second law of motion states, "The rate of change of the momentum of a body is directly proportional to the net force acting on it, and the direction of the change in momentum takes place in the direction of the net force." In other words, when you want to make a positive change, you must do something positive to get moving in the right direction.

Newton isn't aware of this, but his "force" is sometimes known in modern times as "getting off your keister." Whether it's going to dinner in a fun place or just meeting on a park bench to talk, a proper carpool will gladly meet up with you, as long as they

know it's helping their friend into a happier state of mind. You'll feel better soon; you just have to make the right move.

Jump-Starters

These tools have the uncanny ability to uplift your mood in mere seconds. They're simple, and quite obvious, yet many people veer off into habitual drama ruts when a more constructive solution is right in front of them.

All you need to break an emotional cycle is to introduce something that makes you laugh, hope, feel thankful, or dance. Have a more fun, life-affirming experience, and you will feel much stronger, no matter what you're dealing with. To invoke the flow of life in your favor, you must first change your mood. Give yourself five minutes to wallow, then grab a positive tool. Have these tools at your service in advance, so you can employ them as needed for any and all breakdown moments:

- That romance novel you stopped (on purpose) just before the bodice-ripping part, or any great book or magazine that diverts your attention (yes, the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition counts).
- Break out the covert collection of cheesy movies you're ashamed to admit you own but can't wait to watch.
- You bought yourself a gift certificate to your favorite store or salon. It's good for one of the following: power drills, lingerie, car parts, furniture, bikini waxes, or a new hair color. Now go cash it in.
- Compile a hand-pasted and decorated "My Trip" scrapbook containing photos and mementos of all the people, places, and things that remind you how great your life can be, and that you're loved.
- Make a CD of your top-ten favorite road-trip tunes of all time. Then play them. On repeat. As many times as it takes to make you dance.

- Write “A Love Letter to My Favorite Person”—from you to yourself. Mean it, then seal it in a beautiful envelope and open it whenever you need a boost. Then write another one to have around for later.

Your Getaway

When it comes to wanting space, we may not like it when other people ask us for it, but we all need it. Creating space around yourself, especially at a moment’s notice, is an art, and one you can begin to think about beforehand. Virginia Woolf beautifully described this personal hideaway or private moment alone as “a room of one’s own.”

I think your getaway can be anywhere you feel inspired, calmed, and creative. It can be somewhere you go to think alone or a place you can enjoy with people you love. For me, it’s a neighborhood pub in Brooklyn with speakeasy decor and a great jukebox. It’s a place that’s seen a lot of life, which inspires me to examine mine, and enough smart, interesting people to encourage my slowly improving struggles with the *New York Times* crossword puzzle.

We all need a private relationship with ourselves and a room of our own where we could read a magazine and eat jelly doughnuts if we wanted to or ponder life without distraction. Sometimes you need to do what you like, when and where you like. You must be in a safe, clear state of mind and heart to do the work of living your dreams, so when you need it, go out and get it.

Take this week to search for your getaway. It might be as close as your bathtub or far across town. It can be quiet, loud, anything you wish—perhaps the sound of Monster Truck pulls allows you to think. Just find your place, go regularly, and keep it to yourself.

You might sometimes choose a getaway where you go to volunteer. It can be a children’s cancer ward, the Humane Society, a care center for the elderly, a maternity ward, a community garden

project, or a homeless or abused women's shelter, or you can become a Big Brother or Big Sister. Volunteering enriches your community and in return you gain perspective of what's really important in life.

Road Trip Diary

Buy a journal and take a moment to write down a list of the tools that will work best for you. Create new ones—whatever will help keep you on the road in times of resistance and doubt. Put down your immediate thoughts: what struck you about this chapter and what you feel you could do to make some changes in your life, starting today.

You don't have to wait until you break down to visit the garage and take out your tools. They're great confidence and independence builders, too. In fact, practicing maintenance now will help you avoid more energy drain and emotional storms later. Spend some time each week at your getaway. Make a soul appointment—and keep it. Get that silly movie—and watch it tonight.

Now that you've got some tools under your belt, perhaps you'll feel more confident about going on the trip. Actually, you're already on it. Gearing up for the journey is just the beginning. As you move farther down the road, and on to new adventures, remember that although you go it alone, you've got a whole community of road trippers traveling down the highways and byways all around you. Welcome to the road trip. We're all in it together.

