

DR. ESTHER ZELEDÓN

~~CHASING~~

CREATING

~~THE~~

YOUR

~~AMERICAN~~

LIMITLESS

~~DREAM~~

LIFE

... ON YOUR  
TERMS!

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To my sixteen-year-old  
self who almost gave up.  
I'm so glad you didn't ...

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**“PEOPLE HESITATE  
TO DISCOVER THEIR  
PURPOSE BECAUSE  
THEY’RE AFRAID.”**

**Dr. EZ**

INTRODUCTION:

YOU

ARE

LIMITLESS

While lying on the floor of my apartment, my long hair trailing on the carpet, I stared at the ceiling, watching the blades of the fan spin around. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see the mess accumulating in my apartment, and I knew why it was mounting: my lack of motivation. The dull humming of the air conditioner and the footsteps of the neighbors echoed in my head. I thought to myself, *Where did I go wrong?*

By any measure, I should have been blissfully happy. I had all the check marks: PhD from a top university, attractive, fit, married to a handsome Latino man, with family and friends that supported me. But I was so unhappy, and worse—misaligned. I had followed the template of the American dream and achieved everything that I was supposed to, and all at the proper time. But my life wasn't mine.

I had given my energy, my time, and my life to everyone else and had helped them follow their dreams. *Why did I defer my own dreams to chase some ideal of the American dream? And what happens now?*

As social activist and novelist Langston Hughes once wrote, “What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? ... Or does it explode?” My dreams had become dried up raisins, and I knew the only way for them to come to life again was to let them explode ...

Before I arrived at that pivotal moment in my life, I had been coaching, facilitating, and mentoring thousands of people. Whether it was elementary school kids when I was in high school, friends, students, and individuals from vulnerable communities in college, high school and college students in graduate school, or close family and people in need, it was the lens through which I saw the world. It's something innate within me. It might sound strange and

mysterious, but I can see and feel misalignment. It's my superpower! And yet, in that moment so many years ago, it was hard to see my own misalignment. I had to undertake the work of understanding my own larger purpose and aligning my actions to it.

Today, I live and breathe purpose. Actually, my entire purpose in life is to help people discover and have the opportunity to live their purpose.

My superpower is kind of like those strange 3D optical images. You know, the ones that you squint and look at trying so hard to see the image lurking in the blur. Then when you finally stop trying—presto! You see the image. My lens is set on alignment, and I can see through the blur and optical illusions. I can help people discover their true reason for being, their ultimate purpose, the authentic version of themselves and strategically realign themselves to begin living their limitless lives.

I have integrated this approach throughout every level of my career: retail and service worker, teacher, professor, international diplomat, environmental scientist, expert on global climate change and localization, and now entrepreneur. I've worked with individuals, groups, leading corporations, and even nations at multiple levels. I've led international teams and advised global leaders on purpose and cohesion.

So, you can imagine how painful it is for me to see people's dreams and purpose wither and die from lack of nourishment and attention. Or to hear the words, "It's too late for me." It's even more painful because I actually experienced it myself. But I know in my heart that no one needs to live an unfulfilled life and the possibility of a limitless life is within your grasp.

Throughout my career, I have seen the transformation that comes when dreams explode into a fiery passion that cannot be extinguished, setting the soul on fire. After helping thousands of people, I can tell you that the only difference between dreams that die and dreams that remain alive is the fuel and direction they are given: time, attention, passion, belief, action, and taking them seriously. Without this fuel, they die. With it, they flourish. It really is that simple.

But sometimes our dreams and purpose get clouded because, along the way, we are given other people's dreams and purpose, passed down from generations of regrets and ambitions that were left not pursued or through society as check marks to achieve, aka *Chasing the American Dream*—and we don't even realize it. Worse yet, we start to live our dreams, and then we are bullied; our voice is silenced, and we give up. We then can't sort in our minds what we were told to be and who we really are, and, to compensate, we start focusing on our day-to-day and what we can control. We get comfortable with our lives and fear uncertainty. As Paulo Coelho states, "You are what you believe yourself to be" and, "There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure."



Our bodies start to show us the signs first.

Our minds catch up later.

We then finally wake up one day  
and realize we are **MISALIGNED**.

We are functioning in one direction on the outside  
with a different direction on the inside.

We are **MISMATCHED**.

Do you know this feeling? Sometimes, it's hard to differentiate. We realize something doesn't feel quite right, and we start to feel stuck, overwhelmed, exhausted, unfulfilled, like we just want more. Or worse, we knew it all along, and we feel guilty or scared or ungrateful for wanting more than we already have. So, we feel that we have no other choice but to live with misalignment.

When we are misaligned, we fail to thrive. We become like tropical flowers trying to flourish in the desert, parched and dry from lack of nourishment. We find ourselves in situations—jobs, relationships, locations—where we know we don't belong, where our minds, souls, and bodies aren't receiving the sustenance they need to thrive.

And I want you to thrive, to feel that your external actions are in harmony with your internal compass, driving you to become the greatest possible expression of who you are. When I talk about alignment, I mean the process of creating the conditions that allow and inspire *you* to thrive. I want you to be limitless, to reach your highest dreams and aspirations and find that peace that only you can bring to yourself.

On that note, did you know there's a phenomenon that occurs,

known as the spring tide, when the Sun, Moon, and Earth are completely aligned with one another? This complete alignment creates the greatest gravitational pull on the Earth and brings the largest tides. The same type of force can happen for you when you are **ALIGNED** inside and out. I know this. I've seen it happen to so many people.

I am here to help make **YOUR** (not anyone else's) dreams and purpose real, to take them from invisible to visible. Do you know that feeling when everything just feels perfect, when the stars align? You can have that feeling every day and, even more, be the boss of your own life so you can build your personal empire, make a difference in the world, reduce stress, and live a fulfilled life. In other words, you can be limitless.

Why would I make such a bold statement? Because this book is for people who want more out of life. Those who have an inner calling to live their full potential and leave an impact in the world. The awake dreamers who may not have all the answers but have a deep desire to fulfill dreams, give more, and live life on their terms. The ones who have that little voice inside their head telling them they are meant for more. There's a reason why MVP (most valuable player) also stands for mission, vision, and purpose. It's time for MVP to refer to things outside of sports and include the true and deepest mission, vision, and purpose for our lives.



**So, what is it that you want? I mean *really* want?**

What will make you have true alignment? Where is your inner compass directing you? Is it toward more free time or financial freedom? Or perhaps it's toward launching a new business or finding your forever soulmate. Maybe you want to leave a legacy for your kids and grandchildren. Or perhaps you want to get your spark back in life and stop putting your dreams on the back burner.

Regardless of what your dreams are, I can tell you right now that there is a tried-and-tested formula that I have used and honed over decades of working with people. This formula will not only help you fulfill your dreams and step into purpose and alignment but sustain them—forever!

I know that may sound like a pretty big claim in the first pages of this book, but it's the truth. And I'm proof that it's possible.

**There is a way you can have your dream life,  
have purpose, and feel aligned if you're willing  
to give it the time, attention, and consistent  
action it deserves.**

There is a life compass you can use to navigate your life and give attention to all the things that are important to you.

Yes, I will bust the myth that says you can't have it all. Because with the right know-how—you can! How do I know? Because I was there... I was on the floor, so lost, confused, and dark.

I've had times when I didn't think I'd be able to juggle my work, family, and dreams. Many times, I was bullied and silenced when I started to live out my true purpose. I overcame many massive challenges and soul-searching times when I was misaligned. I now

believe that what happens to you helps you define what's important, helps you discover what you're made of, and helps you crystallize what and who you really want in your life. I have it all, and so can you!

We must change impossible to "I am possible."

This is my mantra in life. I live it every day, even when it's hard. I have seen the power of making the impossible doable with the people, communities, and organizations I work with.

It starts with clarity of purpose, a vision and mission, and a solid plan that works for you. From high school, to college, to graduate school, to the workplace, people have always questioned my dreams. It's fair to say that I've had more naysayers than champions, but I have consistently proven all of them wrong. Hard work is a given—don't fool yourself into thinking that you can achieve your dreams, purpose, and alignment without putting in the work. But it takes so much more than that. With infinite possibilities, what direction do you choose? How do you know that you're making progress? How do you keep advancing toward your dreams when life gets tough? How do you differentiate other people's wants and dreams from your own? How do you stand tall when you pursue a purpose outside of the common path? How do you balance all the competing demands on your energy and time?

For me, at every stage of my life, the answer—**the formula**—my secret sauce has always been the same:

1. Analyze my purpose
2. Plot out the steps that take me in that direction
3. Align my actions to that purpose

Like many formulas, it seems so simple, but making it happen takes dedication, action, and systems. In the coming pages, I'll help you define the actions that advance your purpose and build the systems to see your progress every day and celebrate the accomplishments that will continue to fuel your dedication.

With passion and commitment, I made it happen. More importantly, I have complete alignment, which brings me happiness, balance, joy, and peace in my every day. No more overthinking and no more spinning thoughts. Alignment gives me the ability to thrive, not just survive.

Now, I'm certainly not saying there won't be challenges. I'm saying that with a solid plan, it *is* possible. One thing people often say is, "Esther, all I need is to get organized... Can't you just help me organize my to-do list and calendar?" I know that so many of you buy a new planner every year, with high hopes of "getting organized" so you can make progress on your dreams. And every year, from around March onwards, that planner stays empty. Your to-do list is just a set of tasks without priorities. Your to-do list isn't part of a plan or strategy, doesn't advance your purpose, and doesn't help you reach alignment. That's why you quit. Because, at the end of the day, you're right back where you started. We can do better.

My experience has proven that this potent formula I am about to show you for mapping your purpose doesn't only belong to individuals. I've used this mapping process successfully in communities, corporations, and even for entire countries. **Yes, it's not your ordinary purpose map!** It's designed to help you (or your organization or group) discover your passion and purpose, align your ultimate legacy, and enable you to thrive and scale your

lifelong impact. It helps you get more out of life without giving up your dreams, sacrificing time with loved ones, or falling into a habit of overwork or self-neglect. Once you have full alignment, the sky's the limit.

**See past today and get ready to unleash the life you love.**

I'm going to show you how to design your own purpose map, which I call the Purpose Sun, so you can take charge of your life and do these three things on purpose:

- Multiply your productivity
- Reduce stress
- Thrive while building the life of your dreams

Make no mistake—I'm specifically talking about **YOUR** dream and purpose. I'm not talking about the cookie-cutter "American dream" or any other prepackaged goal that society, culture, or family says should be your dream. I'm interested in what lights you up, what sets fire to your soul, what makes you feel purposeful, significant, and valued. And I don't mean an Instagram-ready version of a "dream life," where you have to portray an image of perfection. It's not an image of a manufactured moment in time. Rather, it's a way of life, where you live with the certainty that your time and talents matter, and you naturally attract the people and energy that align with your purpose.

As the saying goes, "Create a life you don't need a vacation from."

What is that limitless life and vision for *you*?

PART ONE:

A

SECOND

CHANCE

**B**efore we delve into mapping your purpose and starting your new journey, I'd like to share with you how this book came about. It wasn't an idea that spontaneously downloaded into my mind. It has been a lifelong journey that gave me the practical tools and applied knowledge to know that this works. Full disclosure—I'm going to share my personal and professional story with you so you can see the ways in which I applied this in my life, the struggles I had, and the ways I climbed out and pushed through. Like you, I've had my ups and downs, and it's the pendulum of life to which no one is immune. But despite life's natural uncertainty, I believe there's a way that we can plan and chart the course of our lives to be fully aligned and resilient to the challenges that life places before us. As the adage goes, "We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails." I'll teach you how to ride and overcome the waves, while *you* adjust the sails. Deal?

## THE LEGACY OF DREAMS

I was born in Nicaragua during a time of civil war and revolution. My father was a prominent figure, and we lived in the nation's capital, Managua. Helping others and striving for positive change in the world, literally fighting for justice, is in my family's blood and in its history. My great grandfather, Dr. Benjamín Zeledón, believed deeply in the importance of Nicaraguan freedom and sovereignty. A brilliant writer and politician, he said (translated by the author):

Without Freedom there is no life; without equality there is no light; without national autonomy, chaos reigns ... We fight because Freedom gives us life, Equality gives us Light

and because effective national Autonomy, regained, makes disappear the chaos through which we sail.

More than just words, he lived his beliefs. He became a leader in the revolution, defending his country against what he saw as treason by its own government. Dr. Zeledón was killed by U.S. Marines during the Battle of Coyotepe Hill in 1912, and his body was dragged through the streets around the country to strike fear into the hearts of those who supported the revolution. Instead, Dr. Zeledón became the enduring symbol of pride, patriotism, and bravery that still lives on in the hearts and minds of the Nicaraguan people. His image is emblazoned on the national currency, and his unwavering passion courses through the veins of his descendants. My great grandfather's strength and courage lives within me.





When I was born, I was a very sickly child, and my mom often had to take me to Costa Rica for medical care. I had several health problems, but a critical point arrived when I turned visibly yellow, as though I had been poisoned. A doctor diagnosed me with a small urethra, which made urination difficult and caused a buildup of toxic chemicals in my body. If I didn't get surgery to correct the issue, I would die. The surgeons in Costa Rica and Nicaragua couldn't perform the complex operation, so I would need to go to the children's hospital in Miami and spend six months there. My parents, however, didn't have the money, and the situation in Nicaragua had become extremely dicey. With no clear options available, everyone thought I was going to die. Sometimes, in moments like these, fate intervenes.

My father, although not a religious man, is a big believer in fate, and I get a lot of my beliefs from him. We believe in destiny. We are also practical enough to know that sometimes for fate to intervene,

it just needs a little nudge. You have to tell the universe what you want! I was so sick, and Dad was desperate. He wanted to buy a lottery ticket, but Mom said it was not a priority and too expensive. But Dad didn't give up there. He split the cost with my mom's sister, took the biggest gamble of his life, and bet everything on a game of chance, the outcome of which would determine whether I would live or die. It's interesting looking back on this now because he is equally a high achiever, overthinker, and risk-averse, but he just knew I was special and worth it. He asked me to choose the numbers because, according to him, I was the "lucky one." Lottery ticket in hand, Dad sat back and hoped that the winds of fate would blow in a favorable direction—and they did. He won the money needed to save my life.

Once we received the payout, Mom took me to Miami, where we stayed for six months. During that time, we spent all of the money on medical treatment, but I got the lifesaving surgery I needed, and I survived. My mom also sacrificed those months for me and left my sister in Nicaragua. Fate intervened in a favorable way, but the ideal conditions wouldn't have existed if it weren't for my father's persistence and willingness to take a risk. Call it fate, divine intervention, or just dumb luck—either way, Dad's big gamble and Mom's sacrifice are the reasons why I survived to tell this story and why I put an enormous amount of guilt and expectation on myself.

"I knew it was the future, even  
if no one else could see it."

## LEAVING HOME FOR SAFER SHORES

After we returned home, the situation in Nicaragua deteriorated, and life got more dangerous. The country was still recovering from decades of unrest, dictatorial regimes, and civil war, and Dad received a serious bomb threat. He didn't agree with some of the government's policies and actions, which made him a target. He has the same defiant spirit that my great grandfather showed during the uprising of the early 1900s. (So do I, but more on that later). But when you criticize the government in Nicaragua or anyone in power, you better be ready to protect your life. The country was no longer safe for us, and we had to leave.

Luckily, Dad already had alternate plans. He would get a scholarship to either complete his PhD or go to law school overseas. He applied to several graduate schools and received offers from Oxford, Kent, McGill, Harvard, and UC Berkeley. After considering all of the options, he settled on UC Berkeley, and we moved to the United States and made California our new home. I was around four years old.

Mind you, my parents had already left Nicaragua twice before and returned. They spent four years in Europe, where Dad studied at Oxford and Mom worked as an au pair. During those years, they left my older brother with my grandma. Later, they went to Ohio for Dad's master's to study and publish the story of Afro-Nicaraguans on the Atlantic coast, only to learn a month later that the government didn't have enough money to fund them. This didn't stop my dad. He worked five jobs, and my mom gave up her scholarship so they could help bring this history to light. My dad was not driven by money, and together they returned to Nicaragua

to help the country and its people, only to have to leave once again. After losing three homes and all their money, Mom vowed to never return. Dad did end up moving back for a time, but more on that later.

Because of my earlier health issues, my parents always treated me as if I were fragile and weak. But they weren't like this with my older sister, Sonia. At the time, they saw Sonia as the strong one. In my parents' minds, she would go on to do great things and perhaps even become president one day, but I, Esther, just needed to live and not get sick. I mean, it was a close call. But that was my initial assigned purpose in life: to live.

Adopting a mindset like that comes with negative side effects, and my parents never pushed me as hard as they did Sonia. They never encouraged me to dream big, create lofty goals, or have oversized ambitions. I just had to live, go to college, and get married. Because of this, I developed a "fixed mindset" early on, and transitioning to a "growth mindset" took time and a lot of work. (We'll discuss mindset in depth at the beginning of Part Two). Before you judge my parents, it's really hard to have a sick kid and when I became a mom, I understood the reasons why. I learned how scary it is to almost lose your kid and how traumatic it could be as a parent to face that again. The fear is all-consuming and exhausting. You never want to go through that again or see them suffer. I was meant for more than just living, college, and marriage, but it would take some time for them, and for me, to realize it.

When we first arrived in California, I took a test to determine my English proficiency, as I mainly spoke Spanish. It soon became clear that I wouldn't pass kindergarten with my current language skills

and speech problems. I could barely speak English at all. When Mom realized I wouldn't pass, she promised the teachers that she would get me language learning cassettes and I would learn to speak English well. I was a very disciplined child, so, using the cassette tapes Mom gave me, I practiced and practiced and practiced until I was finally fluent enough to pass the test. My mom taught me how to plan and persist against all odds. It's something I still carry today. Thus, even at that age, if there was a goal, I set my eyes on it. However, once I passed, the teachers demanded that I use English only, which meant that I had to abandon Spanish completely. It was the advice-trend in the U.S. at the time. At home, my parents would speak to me in Spanish, and I would respond in English. Gradually, the language I had grown up speaking faded from memory, and I became English-only. I am now a very vocal advocate against this approach. When my daughter, whom you will learn about later, had her own speech delays, I went against that same advice and chose for her to learn both Spanish and English anyways, and I'm so glad I did. Today, I still have an accent in both languages, but I am so grateful to be bilingual and bicultural.



From kindergarten to fourth grade, we lived on the outskirts of Berkeley in a place called Walnut Creek. Those years were amazing for me. Dad was a graduate student; Mom was getting her MBA and worked at Macy's, and we lived in a small, safe, quiet suburb. Our backyard was big, and we had a lot of green space and outdoor

freedom. To me, it was paradise. I would spend my afternoons daydreaming with my imaginary friends, playing outside in green space and clean air with my bestest friend, and being active. Because Dad frequently took me to the university, I got exposed to that world at a young age. Sometimes, I helped him photocopy documents and find books he needed for research, and other times I rode my bike around campus, exploring the sprawling school grounds, feeling the air on my face, and being outside. The campus had a view of the Golden Gate Bridge and ocean, which was just amazing.

At the time, my parents didn't have much money, but there were plenty of free things to do in the Bay Area. Even on a lowly grad student income, we managed to do a lot of memorable activities, such as visiting Mount Diablo to see the snow, driving near the Golden Gate Bridge, and attending free fairs. We spent a lot of time outdoors, appreciating nature, and I grew up seeing the world through an environmental lens. We never ate out or took vacations, but none of that mattered because I had my best friend, who lived across the street and was of Indonesian descent. I also had my older brother, Maximo, who would take silly videos of me. Most importantly, I had space. The time I spent exploring the natural environment as a young girl would shape the person I'd later become and the path I'd eventually take—I just didn't know it at the time. Back then, being out in nature—experiencing the greenery, life, and the natural energy—was simply a great way to spend the day and gave me the space to be grounded and aligned. I look back on those days fondly.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Esther Zeledón is more than just a senior development advisor, a localization expert, and a transformational coach—she is a catalyst for change. Her deep well of expertise has empowered a diverse range of entities, from governments and donors to NGOs, communities, businesses, and individuals, helping them articulate their purpose and elevate their impact. She is a transformative force that guides others toward lasting, impactful change that inspires them to live limitlessly.

With a PhD and MS from UC Berkeley and a BA from Swarthmore College, Dr. Zeledón's worldview and depth of knowledge is further augmented by her extensive travels and deep connections to people and communities around the globe.

Born in Nicaragua and raised in the U.S., Dr. Zeledón is a proud Latina and mom to Xilónem and Máximo. She readily admits her addiction to chocolate, and when not changing lives, you can find her traveling the world, dancing, and living her limitless life together with her soulmate.

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