



STOP *SWABBING*
SOMEONE ELSE'S
DECK

AND

CAPTAIN YOUR
OWN SHIP!

KAREN LEEDS

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“Life’s Magic Carousel:
How to Grab the Brass Ring Before the Music Stops”

This book is dedicated to my sister and her two wonderful pets.

PREFACE

The plan was to have the cover be a photo of a dog steering a ship (actually my dog Zoe). Here's the wacky back story behind this idea and then why it didn't happen.

There was a woman at the SPCA who decided to teach a dog to drive so that the rest of us human beings would understand just how smart dogs are... Amazing but true! I couldn't believe what I was seeing while watching the video of a dog driving the car! And I thought watching a man walk on the moon was "out there."

This was such a wonderful picture that it gave me the idea for a cover photo. I wanted an image that would grab potential readers and make them smile. I was going to use the following disclaimer: *The book cover was not in any way intended to endorse the notion of dogs driving. For the record, I am fundamentally against 4 legged animals driving a car.*

I was going to take a photo of my shih-tzu, Zoe, who sadly never learned to steer a car (or ship) for a number of reasons – not only was she too small and afraid of water (even a puddle on the step)— but she tended not to listen to me. And a vet once told me that shih-tzus are the dumb blondes of the canine world. And then Zoe had the nerve to die! So, I guess that original photo idea just wasn't in the cards...

But the plan had merit. Why a dog at the wheel, you ask? Many of us feel that we are not steering our own lives. And rightly so – we aren't. We often drift. Shockingly, sometimes we even allow our pets to sit in the seat of honor steering our lives!

I think my sister often felt like that. She had commented that her two adopted dogs were running her life. Her son brought them home from college since they appeared to have been abandoned on campus. They were incredibly close but fairly wild and had taken over her house and life! She was coming home from work at lunch to feed them and racing back to work. She couldn't have a guy come over because the dogs were aggressive with men. And she spent a great deal of money between taking them to the vet and trying to train them to be well behaved.

So, we ended up with a less creative and controversial cover, and now you know why!

May each of us take the helm and steer our lives toward treasure -- those pursuits that bring us passion and fulfillment instead of going wherever life, and our pets, happen to take us.

THE HUNT FOR TREASURE IN YOUR LIFE

(Note: For those of you who are landlubbers and unfamiliar with sea going language, only the chapter headings are in bold, daring, treasure-hunting language.

Fear not - the book will be easy to read but inspiring and exciting given this adventurous theme! So matey - board your ship!)

Chapter One: **Climb the mast to see where you are now**

Chapter Two: **Stop senseless wandering about in the ocean**

Chapter Three: **Draw your unique treasure map**

Chapter Four: **Make sure your ship is seaworthy**

Chapter Five: **Carve out time to search for the treasure**

Chapter Six: **Take the direct path to the treasure**

Chapter Seven: **Toss excess baggage overboard for faster time**

Chapter Eight: **Eliminate distractions as you head to the treasure**

Chapter Nine: **Avoid walking the plank and jumping ship**

Chapter Ten: **Drop anchor and go ashore to find your treasure**

Chapter Eleven: **Take the treasure on board ship and share the wealth**

Chapter One: **CLIMB THE MAST TO SEE WHERE YOU ARE NOW**

(Landlubber translation: What would you see looking at your life journey so far?)

Taking stock of where you are now may not be something you have done. You can think of this as a brutally honest view. Remember we are seeking our life's treasure. Granted this may not be something you've thought about, but now that you are captain of your own ship, it is best to figure out your current location. (Alas, the world is full of people drifting about on logs in the ocean...)

Many of us may look around in light of this treasure-hunting goal and decide that our lives have been fairly boring, or at least not particularly directed the way we'd like. Aye, shouldn't there be bits and pieces that would get your blood flowing and racing through those veins of yours?

Imagine you as a weary captain, having to write one of the following stories about your life to this point:

- I selflessly gave up my dreams to become a treasure hunter (*writer*) so that I could instead care for my crew (*family*). At the time I thought it was what I "should" do but looking back I wish I had followed my passion and written tales about my adventures at sea (*life journey*) instead.

- As a youngster I enjoyed drawing seagulls and clouds but I was told that being an artist was not a "serious" career for a captain. Sadly, I said goodbye to my sketchbook. I acted rebelliously because I resented putting my dreams on hold, but I never went back to creating the sea art that I dearly loved.

- I was seriously bored with my life and finally decided that it was best not to think about my life at all. Instead I sort of dog-paddled my way through life one day at a time. My life wasn't hard, though it lacked a rudder and certainly wasn't fulfilling.

- I wanted to buy my own ship but I didn't have the money. By the time I had saved enough money to do so, I had a family and it seemed selfish to spend my savings on a ship for me so instead I bought a wedding gift for a wench friend (*contributed to a cruise for a good friend who was a woman????*) and a small ship (*canoe*) for my offspring.

- I wanted to design but I gave up my dreams and instead I became a shipmate to someone who designed ships (*an architect – Hey you try making everything about the sea and you'll get the difficulty here!*). Looking at those drawings and finished ships made me realize how much I had wanted to design one myself. (My jealous face looks as though the ship's cook fed me pickles daily, though sadly he didn't.)

- I was so tired every day after sailing runs that I flopped on the deck and watched seagulls until my mind went deliciously blank (*I suppose this might be considered a*

form of meditation). And then I got up the next day and repeated it, like a rat caught in a maze on board ship.

For the most part we rarely shimmy up the mast and take a bird's eye view of our life. And if we do so, we may just continue on our path since it is familiar, digging a deep trough as we repeatedly cover the same territory over and over again.

Our life develops a familiar routine and it can be difficult to even consider making small changes. We cling to the familiar since taking chances can be scary. *(For you landlubbers, it is almost like wearing snow shoes on a groomed trail. We are following someone else's tracks blindly and don't even attempt to try a different trail, even though if we were to look up, we would definitely see other possibilities as we pass by.)*

Chapter Two: **STOP SENSELESS WANDERING ABOUT IN THE OCEAN**
(Landlubber translation: *We each get one life – and this is it! If we are set adrift or stuck in a small harbor, that might be where we remain.*)

As David Brudnoy said, “Life is not a dress rehearsal.”

If you are one of the few that believe in multiple lives then don’t worry, since no doubt you’ll get another chance.

If, like most people, you believe this is our one chance at finding life’s treasure, it stands to reason that we deserve to follow our dreams.

You wouldn’t wear captain’s attire that doesn’t fit and isn’t flattering and embarrasses your crew, right? At least I hope not. (Okay, *there’s* an image I can’t get out of my head...)

Why would you have a life that pulls here, gaps there, is really uncomfortable and would better suit someone else?

I’m not talking about abandoning our families and heading to Hollywood to become actors. (Actually, you’d probably first have to start with community theater...) But so many of us, particularly women, were raised to be kind, pitch in, be care-givers and even put our pets before ourselves.

We have learned not to speak up at work since we are concerned we might rock the boat (pun intended). We might take on the majority of the household chores, though grudgingly. We might attend events we would rather skip. We might take such good care of our pets that they are taking over our lives...

Our selflessness often works well for the other people in our lives - our crew (*co-workers, family, friends, neighbors, etc.*). But what about us – the main character in our once-in-a-lifetime treasure seeking adventure?

At what point do we discover that life may not be a fulfilling, rewarding existence for us? That giving too much of ourselves is like putting one of our crew in charge of our ship’s destiny - draining our spirit and drawing energy away from pursuing our dreams?

Before you jump to the conclusion that becoming captain and taking charge must be very selfish, realize this:

Deciding what you want your life to look like and taking small steps to get there not only makes us happy, it often makes everyone else in our lives (our entire crew) happy too!

Chapter Three: **DRAW YOUR UNIQUE TREASURE MAP**
(Landlubber translation: *What is your passion to follow as captain of your ship?*)

Some of us have spent so little time thinking about our lives that we honestly don't have a clue what we might want. We often have no direction in mind. I'm talking about personal goals or dreams for all aspects of our sea faring lives: relationships, career, lifestyle, parenting, health and spirituality.

Many of us are often so used to putting our wants and needs aside that we rarely give ourselves a chance to dream. Often, we might be working long hours and not have time or energy to focus on what we want at the end of our long days at sea.

There are a number of ways to get at what we really want in our lives.

What have you done throughout your landlubber life? (Think about activities or hobbies such as sports, art, design, dance, building, marketing, music, writing, persuading, entertaining, project managing, sales, cooking, coaching or teaching.)

Usually the things you are really interested in and passionate about have been present in your life for your entire journey (regardless of how little distance you have covered toward your treasure).

Another way to figure out how you'd like your life to be is to pretend you've just won the Captain's Lottery. (*Okay folks – this ain't easy – you try it! Wait, whose idea was this to make everything sea related? Oh yeah – mine.*) Or you just inherited money from a distant sea-going relative who encountered a disaster at sea. Or you were granted a year's paid leave from work and a ship to go wherever you want – and do whatever you'd like to do when you get there! (*Wait – can I have that???*)

Obviously first, you might travel - after all, you now have a ship. (*Or if you prefer to think in landlubber terms - buy a new car or home.*) You might go on a wild shopping spree for clothing (particularly befitting a ship captain) or pay off your student loans (don't want those creditors coming after and confiscating your ship). I'm talking after that initial flurry of activity due to recent money, when the dust settles and maybe for the first time, someone else has to deal with the dust on board ship!

Now – what would you do at the helm of your own ship? How would you spend your time? What do you enjoy doing? What doesn't feel like work? What would you do without receiving pay?

There is always something you enjoy because it brings about that “flow” state, much like you would feel on board your ship when looking out toward sea, where you forget that time is passing and you are peaceful, relaxed and in tune with what you're doing.

It may take a little while to think this through. After all, you are newly captain of your ship. If this is still too difficult, try an alternative:

If you could change one thing in your life, what would it be?

If this still seems too drastic or difficult to wrap your mind around, take a smaller step toward achieving it. Break it into several steps. So, ask yourself:

If you could make 5 small changes what would you do?

Or even 1 small change?

Remarkably small changes make a huge difference in your journey. You will begin to discover that even tiny changes have a ripple effect (sorry, couldn't resist the pun) and will begin to alter your ship's course.

Chapter Four: **MAKE SURE YOUR SHIP IS SEAWORTHY**
(Landlubber translation: *A captain acts confidently and speaks up!*)

You will discover that to be effective as captain of your ship and to find your treasure, you will want to act confidently and speak up. After all, what crew will support us unless we act as if we are in command?

Have you ever noticed that some people have a great deal of confidence? (Even though we can't for the life of us figure out why?)

Feeling confident comes from feeling worthy and that comes from inside ourselves, not from events on the ocean journey or from members of our crew.

It is sometimes difficult to value ourselves if we have received negative messages that have been playing in our heads since we were young shipmates. If this is the case with you, silence that super critical voice in your head by throwing it in the hold, barring the door and refusing to let it back on deck!

For example:

If you were told when you were knee high to a seagull that you were selfish, you may tell yourself that you have to go above and beyond in terms of helping out just to quiet that criticism. But that voice is what you heard when you were young and it is you that is keeping that voice and perspective alive. So, you, as captain, can choose not to pay attention to the voices of your past. (That's the attitude we're looking for!)

Those of us who rarely steer our own lives lack a belief in our own worth, the possibility of our dreams coming true, and the confidence to speak up to achieve those dreams. (Feel free to read this brilliant conclusion again; yes, I am proud of it.)

One of the ways to free up time and energy for our sea faring journey is to set boundaries. But first, we need to determine what boundaries to establish and then we need confidence to speak up in a kind, assertive manner to set those boundaries.

Do you feel that you have to be aggressive when speaking up? Or that speaking up is an aggressive act?

Speaking up is best done in a kind, polite, assertive manner. Aggressiveness is never necessary as captain of our ship. It is aggressiveness that often earns us captains a negative reputation and interferes with our ability to get our crew to feel joyful and loyal when setting sail under our command.

It is often hard to speak up in an important situation so instead, practice speaking up in low-risk situations, like at the wharf when purchasing provisions for the ship.

For example, ask that the fish for our dinner be wrapped in extra paper in foul weather so it will not become soggy. Or speak up when a sailor is in your way and you can't examine the potatoes.

You can also speak up on board ship, for example, when the ship's cook is removing your dinner before you've finished eating it. Never mind that you were bragging about some adventure at sea and need extra time to finish your tasty bread.

At first it will feel awkward to speak up but after a while, it begins to feel more and more familiar and comfortable.

Once you find yourself speaking up with your crew and then with landlubbers in port, next begin speaking up with other ships' captains in a kind, polite, assertive manner.

We gain respect from our crew as well as other ships' captains if we speak up by stating facts without blame, judgment, or exaggeration. And we incur less risk of mutiny or conflict this way, as well.

For example, if you ask your crew to clean up the infernally messy captain's quarters, they may think it just looks comfortably lived in (compared to their quarters that is).

But you will gain respect if instead you say:

Crew, I see a pair of breeches, a potato peel and a wounded seagull in my quarters. Please pick them up with haste now that we have finished our meal. (And this can be said with a smile on your captainly face! No need to be mean – the crew knows they are expected to pick up your quarters.)

Chapter Five: **CARVE OUT TIME TO SEARCH FOR THE TREASURE**
(Landlubber translation: *Set boundaries so that you can spend the greatest amount of time on board your ship seeking your treasure.*)

Setting boundaries is critical to creating time and energy to follow our dreams.

Sometimes as new captains we are not used to drawing boundaries. We are asked by another ship's captain to help fight pirates. We may come across the stranded crew from a sunken ship that wants us to bring them back to port to rest from their weary misadventure. We take care of our crew when they come down with scurvy. We entertain our ship's crew to keep up their morale when they have become seasick or tired on our long journey.

We may not realize how much time we are spending fulfilling others' desires. We find ourselves saying YES when we want to say NO, especially when others ask us to help in quests for their treasure.

We often say yes because we feel we SHOULD say yes. Saying no as a ship captain releases a huge amount of time and energy that we can then spend pursuing our dreams of treasure.

Even crews that appear to require an inordinate amount of support are usually better off if we provide emotional support and empower them to be responsible for themselves. We don't need to stop all assistance but recognize that we are CHOOSING the way we are spending our time, whether it seems that way or not.

It is often valuable to set general boundaries so that we manage sea going relationships effectively instead of having to say no every time. We need to feel confident in order to set boundaries. So, how do we achieve confidence and self-worth as an inexperienced captain of our ship?

To achieve confidence, we first have to act confidently. Our confident ACTIONS bring about confident FEELINGS as captain of our ship.

For example:

If you have to get up in front of the crew to speak to them, if you wait until you feel confident, you may never stand up. If instead, you feel confident, whether you have reason to feel that way or not, as you begin to talk you will gain confidence. When we practice feeling confident, we create confidence in ourselves as captains.

Therefore, in order to create the lives of our dreams, we are kind yet assertive when we speak up, set clear boundaries, indicate what behavior we would like to see from our crew and draw firm lines with other ships' captains.

Chapter Six: **TAKE THE DIRECT PATH TO THE TREASURE**
(*Landlubber translation: Assertiveness is far more direct and effective than aggressiveness and leaves behind fewer casualties in our wake.*)

There is a huge difference between being assertive and being aggressive.

Being kind yet assertive is far more simple, peaceful, and effective than being mean or rude when speaking up, setting boundaries and establishing rules. It is faster and creates a peaceful crew.

The best way to set boundaries is to state clearly what you'd like or what you'll do in increasingly important situations. For example:

- At this time, I can only sail to bring you news once a month.
- I am no longer available to come into port every other day for provisions.
- Every day for three hours, the ship's mate will be in charge so that I can determine the ship's course.
- The ship's crew will have two days off while I spend time with the captain of our sister ship.

Whining, judging, blaming and exaggerating are typically counter-productive. As ship's captain, it is important to just state the facts as succinctly as possible.

I like to put myself in the boots of Captain Hook. It is rarely necessary to explain why you have asked your crew to seek Tinker Bell. Can you picture Captain Hook explaining that they have to hide quickly since he's gotten word that Peter Pan will be arriving soon?

Captains don't explain their reasons. The crew assumes whatever the reason, it must be important. In your situation as new captain, you may sometimes want to explain why. Don't undermine your new sea faring confidence by nervousness. This would indicate to your crew that you believe your reason is not a good one, befitting a captain.

Chapter Seven: **TOSS EXCESS BAGGAGE OVERBOARD FOR FASTER TIME**

(Landlubber translation: Toss worry, guilt, and anger overboard before these powerful emotions subtly contribute to sinking your ship.)

Worry, guilt, and anger are not only unseemly for a captain but they have no useful purpose and are damaging since they take time and energy that we can't afford.

Sometimes as captain, we find ourselves worrying about our ship's direction, feeling anger with one of our crew who fell asleep at the mast or experiencing guilt when we toss him overboard (rightly so I suppose). We may be concerned about pitfalls we encounter on our journey now that our best navigator is treading water and no longer onboard ship for our journey. (In this case, we may have acted a bit rashly but even so, we maintain our confidence!)

Worry, guilt, and anger can be thought of as stowaways. In addition to taking away time, focus, and energy, these three stowaways create unhealthy stress and sabotage our treasure-seeking efforts.

It is one thing to suggest we not worry. It is natural for us to worry since we are typically caretaking souls and new in our role as ship's captain.

That voice in your head telling you of all the things that can go wrong is hard to ignore, sort of like the crocodile that swallowed the ticking clock. But if you can quiet that voice, your journey will not only be much less stressful but also more productive as well.

I remember explaining this concept to my crew. I told them to choose a name for that voice of worry, guilt, and anger. Let's choose Dragaboo. (Or if you prefer you could choose Iglanon or Erdabord or Onthala or Edsamoot or Figalaknot.) And to picture Dragaboo (or whatever you name him) as a small sour creature sitting on their shoulders, whispering mightily in their ears. I told them to explain in no uncertain terms that that they weren't going to listen to Dragaboo anymore and to threaten to pitch him off their shoulders, tossing him overboard as so much unnecessary baggage!

Give up having conversations with "Dragaboo" – or whatever you have named that voice in your head. It is healthier to make decisions and deal with the consequences. Eliminate Dragaboo's constant worry, guilt, and anger since it is time consuming, distracting, counter-productive, stressful, and unhealthy.

Chapter Eight: **ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS ON THE WAY TO THE TREASURE**

(Landlubber translation: Steer clear of telling yourself you should do something else because it takes time away from finding your treasure!)

Definitely remove the words SHOULD and SHOULDN'T from your vocabulary. Replacing them with "I want to" and "I don't want to" is far more powerful. Then you will have time to seek your treasure.

Many of us have been raised with things we should do and shouldn't do. I'm not suggesting that as captain of your ship you run down other ships or engage in other amoral, unethical acts. But it is far healthier, more effective, and efficient to eliminate the word "should" from your vocabulary. And engaging in activities because we feel we should do so takes valuable time away from finding our life's treasure.

We usually have very well-developed intuition. Unfortunately, many of us have learned to disregard what our intuition is telling us.

In terms of deciding on life direction for our ship's journey, going with intuition can be very effective in following our dreams. Certainly, choosing a direction because you feel your crew or other ship's captains believe that you "should" do so makes less sense than relying on your intuition.

So, for example, as ship's captain you may discover that another ship has capsized. You may feel obligated to take them on your ship as crew. Even though you think you should take them with you, you understand that you won't have enough provisions or cabins for both crews on board your ship. Instead, you drop them at the next port and head on your journey.

Chapter Nine: **AVOID WALKING THE PLANK AND JUMPING SHIP**

(Landlubber translation: Don't let relationships cause you to accidentally walk the plank!)

Taking a quill and writing a letter (THAT YOU DON'T SEND BY SEAGULL) is a terrific way of addressing difficulties in a relationship. (This works for relationships with current crew as well as past relationships with ships' captains.)

Writing a letter to deal with relationships works very well for getting out all of the unresolved feelings and emotions. This then frees you to wipe the slate clean. Often unresolved issues from one relationship can poison other relationships on board ship.

It is usually not a good idea to send these letters even though it sometimes seems like a good idea to come clean and do so. The act of writing out everything that you have been feeling works magic. Once you've written down your feelings, you free yourself from experiencing the feelings over and over again. You can put the feelings behind you and move forward.

It is tempting to label some difficult people as "bad." They aren't bad, but sometimes crew members or captains act in ways that are not desirable. Therefore, even though it is tempting, we don't label the individuals as difficult, just the relationships.

By the way, it is far more effective to agree with someone who is criticizing you – to find some part with which you can agree – since it enables them to put away their sword and stop wanting to duel with you. That way you won't dig in your heels and fight but instead will work together. You'll create a peaceful journey by disarming captains or crew that create difficulties for you in your quest for your life's treasure.

Chapter Ten: **DROP ANCHOR AND GO ASHORE TO FIND YOUR TREASURE**

(Landlubber translation: You can't tell the tree from the forest and find the path while you are still onboard ship.)

Sometimes from a distance we see a forest and it looks daunting. When we examine it more closely, we discover that there are numerous paths through the woods.

If we insist on clearing our own path, we may chop down tree after tree in a very difficult and time-consuming manner. How much easier to first see if there might already be a path we can follow!

If we get too close to one tree, we may get sidetracked examining every branch and leaf. We might lose track of our initial goal of seeking treasure. If we make a conscious decision to change our destination, that is fine. But we should at least realize we have changed course.

Don't be bashful. You're the captain. You can enlist your crew to assist in your search.

Chapter Eleven:
TAKE THE TREASURE ON BOARD SHIP AND SHARE THE WEALTH
*(Landlubber translation: Once you've found your treasure, support
others in their treasure hunt.)*

You've found your treasure and are headed for home. Terrific! Your personal search for treasure has ended.

If you are the kind, supportive captain you have most certainly become, you will want to encourage your crew and other ships' captains in their own search for treasure.

This is your opportunity to pass along your knowledge as well as provide emotional support for others to be successful in their quest.

Here is a summary of tips for a sea worthy voyage searching for your life's treasure:

- **CLIMB THE MAST TO SEE WHERE YOU ARE NOW**
(Go up the mast and look where you've been.)
- **STOP SENSELESS WANDERING ABOUT IN THE OCEAN**
(You only get one life, and this is it.)
- **DRAW YOUR UNIQUE TREASURE MAP**
(Find your unique passion.)
- **MAKE SURE YOUR SHIP IS SEAWORTHY**
(Act confidently and speak up.)
- **CARVE OUT TIME TO SEARCH FOR THE TREASURE**
(Set boundaries for an efficient journey.)
- **TAKE THE DIRECT PATH TO THE TREASURE**
(Be a kind and assertive captain.)
- **TOSS EXCESS BAGGAGE OVERBOARD FOR FASTER TIME**
(Lose worry, guilt, and anger.)
- **ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS AS YOU HEAD TO THE TREASURE**
(Don't fill up your trunk with "should.")
- **AVOID WALKING THE PLANK AND JUMPING SHIP**
(Create effective relationships with your crew.)
- **DROP ANCHOR AND GO ASHORE TO FIND YOUR TREASURE**
(You can't tell the tree from the forest while still aboard ship.)
- **TAKE THE TREASURE ON BOARD SHIP & SHARE THE WEALTH**
(Once you've found your treasure, support others.)

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