Self Loyal Studio

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I'VE GOT ME

How I Stopped Leaving Myself Behind - and How You Can Start Coming Back to Yourself

A short Self Loyal Studio read

START HERE

You do not have to finish this.

Read a page. Put it down. Come back later. Underline something that annoys you because it is a little too accurate. The point is not to complete a resource. The point is to notice yourself in your own life.

This is the written part of the I've Got Me Starter Kit. It is here to help you recognise one very ordinary habit: leaving yourself out of your own decisions. The Mini Course gives you something small to try. The Journal helps you notice what happened. The grounding audios are there for the moments when choosing yourself feels more stressful than inspirational.

Use what helps. Leave what does not. You are allowed to come back whenever you need it.

A quick safety note

If saying no, delaying a response, changing a routine, or setting a limit could put you at risk of violence, severe intimidation, loss of housing, financial control, custody retaliation, or serious workplace consequences, do not use boundary practice as a test of courage. Safety comes first. Get support from a trusted professional, local service, legal resource, domestic-violence organisation, or emergency service where appropriate.

Sometimes the most self-loyal move is not a direct no. It is buying time, staying quiet, making a plan, and getting support.

1. How I learned to disappear

I was about eight when I first remember learning that my feelings could wait.

I had just had surgery. I was small, stitched, scared, and looking for a grown-up who could make the world feel manageable. My mother was struggling with her own pain, a difficult marriage, work, two children, and alcohol. There was not much room left in the room for me to be frightened too.

So I did what children are remarkably good at doing when the adults around them are overwhelmed: I adapted.

I became useful.

I watched moods. I helped with my younger sibling. I learned when to step in, when to stay quiet, and how to make myself less complicated. Because I was responsible, people trusted me with more responsibility. Because I coped, people assumed I could keep coping.

Nobody handed me a job description. There was no meeting where the family announced that I would now be part child, part helper, part emotional support department. It simply became normal.

And normal is powerful. You rarely question something while you are busy surviving it.

Later, the same habit followed me into adulthood. When I started earning, helping family financially felt obvious. In relationships, I gravitated towards being the one who understood, soothed, organised, remembered and carried. Then I became a mother and a stepmother. At work, especially in HR, I was once again the person people brought their problems to.

Different rooms. Same job.

I knew how to be needed long before I knew how to ask: What do I need?

For a long time, I thought this was simply my personality. I was caring. Strong. Capable. The one who could handle things.

Some of that is genuinely me. I do care. I like helping. I am good in a crisis. The problem was not kindness. The problem was that I had stopped checking whether my kindness included me.

I could tell you what everybody else needed and still struggle to tell you what I wanted for lunch.

That should probably have been a clue.

When helping became my place in the world

Being useful came with rewards. People praised me. They relied on me. I heard things like, 'You are so strong,' 'You always know what to do,' and 'We do not know what we would do without you.'

Those sentences can feel like love when you have spent years earning your place through usefulness.

But there is a difference between being appreciated and being permanently available.

If people only know how to love the version of you who never needs anything, never says no, never changes the plan, and always picks up the slack, eventually the compliment starts to feel suspiciously like a contract.

Mine did.

The question I was not asking

My life became full of other people: their moods, needs, expectations, emergencies, plans and disappointments. I was in the picture, technically. But I was often functioning as infrastructure.

The question that finally started changing things was not complicated:

> **Where am I in this?**

Not: How do I make everybody happy? Not: How do I prove I am a good person? Not even: Who is wrong here?

Where am I in this decision? What do I want? What can I actually carry? What happens to me if I say yes?

Those questions sound almost embarrassingly obvious once you start asking them. Apparently I had been included in my own life this entire time. Useful information.

2. What leaving yourself actually looks like

Self-abandonment sounds dramatic. Most of the time, it is not.

It is the small moment where somebody asks for something and you answer before checking yourself. It is laughing off a comment that hurt. It is changing your plan because somebody else's preference feels more important. It is saying, 'Whatever works for you,' so often that eventually you are not sure what works for you.

One of these moments does not mean anything terrible about you. We all compromise. We all help. We all occasionally eat the cold dinner because life happened.

The issue is repetition.

- You say yes and feel resentment before the conversation has even ended.
- You explain your no until it sounds like a legal defence.
- You answer messages immediately because somebody waiting feels unbearable.
- You take responsibility for another adult's mood.
- You keep doing a job nobody actually asked you to own because you are the person who always handles it.
- You make decisions based on preventing disappointment rather than what is right for you.
- You are exhausted, but helping one more person somehow still feels easier than saying you cannot.
- You know everybody else's preferences and have to think surprisingly hard about your own.

Sometimes this began as a sensible adaptation. Keeping the peace may have mattered when you were young. Being useful may have brought praise, safety or belonging. Saying yes may genuinely have made life easier.

A habit can make sense and still stop serving you.

Kindness is not the problem

I do not want to become the sort of person who treats every favour as exploitation or every family request as a boundary violation. That is not self-loyalty. That is just selfishness with better branding.

The difference is choice.

When I help because I want to, have the capacity, and can do it without abandoning something important to me, that is generosity.

When I help because I am frightened of what somebody will think, say, feel or do if I do not, that deserves a closer look.

A useful question: If nobody was going to be upset with me, what would I choose?

The body usually knows before the speech is ready

You do not need to turn every sensation into a diagnosis. Sometimes you can simply notice it.

Tight chest. Heavy stomach. Shoulders up. Sudden irritation. That tiny feeling of dread when the phone lights up. Relief when plans are cancelled. A yes leaving your mouth while the rest of you quietly says, absolutely not.

That information matters.

You do not have to obey every feeling. But you are allowed to consult yourself before you proceed.

3. What finally changed

I wish I could tell you I had one beautiful moment of clarity and immediately became excellent at choosing myself.

That would be convenient. Also untrue.

There were years of small warnings. I became a stay-at-home mother because I wanted to be present for my children. That choice changed the financial balance in my marriage. I started a side business. It did not become what I hoped. My husband increasingly handled the money, and comments about who earned and who did not began to affect how I saw my own contribution.

Then there was betrayal in the marriage. The details mattered, but the larger question mattered more: why had I become so accustomed to swallowing what hurt me and explaining away what I already knew?

That was when the question stopped being only about what other people had done.

I had to look at all the times I had said yes when I meant no. The times I had defended behaviour that hurt me. The roles I kept accepting because being needed still felt safer than disappointing someone.

That was painful to admit. It was also useful.

Accountability gave me somewhere to go.

I could not control whether other people changed. I could change how often I left myself behind to keep everything else comfortable.

What putting myself back into the picture looked like

It was not a grand reinvention. It was smaller and, frankly, less photogenic.

- Pausing before I answered.
- Letting somebody be disappointed without immediately fixing it.
- Checking my calendar before volunteering my time.
- Not explaining every decision six different ways.
- Allowing other capable adults to solve problems that belonged to them.
- Eating my own dinner while it was still hot.
- Admitting when I was angry instead of turning the anger into more work.
- Asking myself what I wanted before automatically arranging my life around everybody else.

Some people adjusted. Some disliked the change. A few relationships became more distant.

That did not automatically mean I was right and they were wrong. It meant the arrangement had changed, and everybody now had to decide what to do with the new version of it.

I also got things wrong. I overexplained. I snapped. I carried something I had promised myself I would put down. Then I noticed and tried again.

That is still the practice.

4. Start smaller than you think

You do not need a personality transplant. You do not need to announce a new era at dinner. You do not need twelve boundary scripts laminated and stored in your handbag.

Start with a pause.

Let me think about it and get back to you.

That sentence is useful because it does not force you to know the answer immediately. It simply creates enough room for your own opinion to arrive.

Then ask yourself three things:

1. Do I actually want to do this?
2. Do I realistically have the capacity for it?
3. If I say yes, what am I saying no to?

Your answer can still be yes. Self-loyalty is not a campaign against generosity.

The difference is that the yes belongs to you.

One small experiment

This week, choose one low-stakes request and do not answer immediately.

Use the sentence. Check with yourself. Then respond.

That is all.

Notice what happens inside you. Notice what actually happens outside you. Sometimes the guilt will be louder than the consequence. Interesting.

Use the I've Got Me Mini Course if you want a little structure. Use the Journal if writing down what happened helps you see it more clearly. Use one of the grounding audios if the moment feels overwhelming.

Or do none of those things and simply remember the sentence.

We are not collecting homework here.

Before you go

For years, I thought having my own back would require me to become harder. Less caring. Less available. Less loving.

It did not.

It required me to stop treating myself as the easiest person to disappoint.

I still help. I still love deeply. I still show up. I am simply learning to include one more person in the decisions that shape my life.

Me.

That is what 'I've got me' means to me now.

Not that I never need anyone. Not that I always know what to do. Not that nobody gets to ask anything of me.

It means I do not leave myself behind automatically.

Sometimes I still do. Then I notice. I come back. And I try again.

Small enough to use. Honest enough to matter.

SELF LOYAL STUDIO

www.selfloyalist.com

About this resource

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