

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Ready to add a big dose of positivity and empowered perspective to your day? You've come to the right place. Welcome to She Said / She Said podcast. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. Here, we tackle everything from imposter syndrome and confidence building to the best advice on how to lead yourself through life pivots. Including the ones that knock you flat. For the past three years, I've talked to hundreds of experts about their stories. Here, you'll find their actionable advice and lessons, as well as my own tools that you can put to use in your own life. Stick around, I think you'll find this investment in you well worth it.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hi friend, our year is certainly off to an interesting start. And it's making it especially challenging to be as positive as we know we need to be to tackle the challenges that lie ahead. I predict that we'll have lots of opportunities to use all that agility that we developed in 2020 as we head into 2021. So how are you doing on resolutions? Have you made any for the new year? If you're looking for some perspective on how to make them stickier, be sure to check out last week's episode, Episode 133, where I share my own practice for how you can set yourself up for success in the year ahead. I'd love to know what you're doing to make your own goals a reality.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

A new year is also a great opportunity to learn or refresh some key life skills. So with that, today, we're going to tackle the right way to do some very common things that are required in life. Pretty much no matter who you are. My guest today is Erin Zammett Ruddy. She is a magazine editor, writer, and the author of a terrific book called The Little Book of Life Skills. She has compiled an incredibly thoughtful list of some 152 skills and things that you need to know how to do. And let me just reinforce how incredibly comprehensive this list is, it's not just the organizational things, but it's really soup to nuts. Everything from how to tackle that junk drawer or two, that's driving you crazy to how's the best way to do your own nails? How to stop obsessing, how to argue more productively. Plenty of opportunity for that right now. And how to deliver really difficult news to someone.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Erin is here with me today to talk about her book and to talk about her personal story, including how she dealt with a life threatening illness, how it's informed her work and why the little things in life, and doing them correctly, really matter. Erin, welcome to She Said / She Said podcast.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Thank you so much. I'm excited to be here.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Well, I'm so happy to have you. I am crazy about this Little Book of Life Skills. Why did you write this particular book?

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

So I realized when I was 40 that I was not quite a proper adult yet. I felt I was still overwhelmed and shooting from the hip and frazzled often, in my daily life. I had three kids, I have a house, I have a job, I have all the things that on paper, feel like you're supposed to be functioning as an adult, and yet I wasn't getting through my day with any ease. And I mean, we all have those areas of our life where we feel

stuck or disorganized. And I just felt like I spent 20 years as a magazine journalist, and my job was to go out to experts and ask them how to do all the little things better.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

So I was like, "Okay, what if I," clearly I didn't take their advice over all these years. Because I was still... But I was like, "What if I put all of that in a book? What if I went out to each of these experts, found some new great experts, and just said, "Let's break it down into very small things we can do, throughout our day." It wasn't like how to host Thanksgiving, how to paint your house, how to redo your mortgage. It's like how to write an email, how to get up in the morning so that you feel refreshed all day. Things like that, the little stuff that we all do every day, but breaking it down into the order in which you're supposed to do it, why you're supposed to do it that way, why it matters.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

So that is what I decided to do, I put together this big list of all the things that I wanted to know how to do a little bit better and we turned it into a book and that's The Little Book of Life Skills. And it's really fun, and I constantly say that I wrote this book because I need this book. And I am not the expert, I'm learning. I'm a work in progress, but it's mostly, and you know, you've read the book, it's mostly me saying that my voice comes through, I hope and it's basically like, "You guys, oh, my goodness. Did you know this? I didn't know this. How great is this? How great is it that that's why you're supposed to do X, Y or Z?" I just thought it was, I don't know. So that's why I wrote it. And it's been actually really helpful. And I know we both have super flagged copies and-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Exactly.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

... I reference it every day. I wrote the thing and I'm still learning.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Well, I think one of the amazing things about it is that I'm certainly old enough to know how to do, well, really all of the things in this book. And I'm older, I've 10 years on you. But at the same time, there's a way to do them that's really the right way versus the good enough way or the not done at all way. And I'd love for you to talk to this notion of why it matters. Why should people focus on actually doing it the right way? And what difference that actually makes.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

I think for me, it's about doing the little things well frees up your frustration level. It frees up your mental to do list. There were times when I would be emptying the dishwasher and angry or trying to get out the door in the morning and flustered. And it's like, why? And if you stop, take a deep breath, be a little bit more considered and careful about how you're doing these things, you're going to be less frustrated. That's basically the payoff. The payoff is, "Oh, I'm not cursing or frustrated or racing around." And it's this idea.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

My dad always was a big proponent of doing things right the first time. Anything worth doing is worth doing well, he would take his time... Growing up, a hose, if we watered the plants and then I would just put it on a pile he would always say, "Erin, let's figure this out. You have to empty the hose first, make sure all the water is out, then you can twist it. And if it's not twisting right, then you have to take it all out." And I'd be like, "Oh, my God, dad." But doing those little things well, then the next time you come back, your hose is organized and it's easier to grab.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

So there is sense of pride you get from doing all these little things well, and you're not frustrated. And I think one thing I've realized as I've gotten older is this is life. Life is going to the grocery store, sending a tough work email, offering condolences to a friend, making a cheese board. Whatever it is, all these things, that's life, that's real life. So if you can break it down and do these things with a little sense of joy and pride and well, then you're going to feel better all day. It's essentially selfish. It's how do I feel... Everyone knows when you do something well, you're like "Yes." So I just think it's about finding joy in all of these moments and pride that you may not have had before, because it just seemed like a task you had to get through to get to the next thing.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right, right. I mean, it's both joy enhancing and it's also confidence boosting. When you really feel like you're down and out, everybody knows the magic of tidying up, it's hard as heck to do and if I could show you around this room, you'd be so horrified. But it is what it is. And a lot of us are living with that. But it can make a really big difference in terms of your overall mindset in the way that you approach your day.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Absolutely. And those little things, cleanliness begets cleanliness. Productivity, if you start your day in a certain way there's a ripple effect throughout your day and throughout your life. And that's why, for me, I am not somebody who can take on a giant Marie Kondo, empty the contents of your whole bedroom onto your floor closets. It would still be there, I'd be divorced, it would have been a nightmare. So I was more like, "Let's tackle my junk drawer. I could do that one tiny thing." And it's true.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And I think the other thing that's cool about it is one of my experts said this about the pantry, organizing your pantry. I always thought that was just for Instagram, just show off. And now we see The Home Edit people and I'm drooling over all of those things, and I want that, but it's about ease. And it's about if you take the box of granola bars, and you empty it into a basket, then when you go to grab a granola bar out of the box and it's empty, and then you're like, "Ah," frustrated, "I didn't know it was empty. I was just at the grocery store. Ah." It's more about being able to see what you have, have it easily accessible. And also, yeah, you might get a little hit of joy when you open your pantry to cook because you're like, "Damn, that looks good. That's so organized. I did that."

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And finding these little hits of joy in places that we didn't expect them and it could be even just like I have navigated a four-way stop in here. And when you can do that well and give the wave or have a laugh because you're all saying, "You go," "No, you go," "No, you go." It just makes your day better. And we all, gosh, we all need ways to make our days better and more joyful right now. So-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Absolutely.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

... yeah.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So your timing is absolutely impeccable. And I know enough about the process of putting a book together to know that you probably started this project before COVID. But let's talk about how it started in the beginning and then changes that you presumably had to make in order to get this published during this environment? Because the book came out in September, is that correct?

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Yep. Yep.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. So maybe talk a little bit about that. And the timing of all of this.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Yeah. So originally, it was meant to be published in a normal world. And that's how I wrote it. So my edits were done in April, my final edits. We shut down in March. So I did those. But the book had a lot of stuff in it already, that, who would have known how many people needed help loading and unloading their dishwasher, doing a load of laundry, patching a hole in the wall? All these things that were all stuck at home, and now you're like, "You know what? I would love to know a better way to clean my countertops." Because I do it 3000 times a day. It's all I do, I think I spent most of my time in my kitchen during the pandemic.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

So what we did is, my agent and I, my editor and I, we looked through it and thought some things could go. One of the life skills was how to shake hands properly. And I loved that, because we've all shaken hands with somebody, and they do it terribly. And you're like, "Oh." But back in April, we're trying to sit there and the rest of the world were like, "Okay, well, where are we going to be in September? Surely we'll be back to normal. But will we be shaking hands?" I don't know, probably not. So we cut that. We cut a few things. And you know, from reading the book, there are definitely mentions. I mean, I referenced the pandemic, I referenced us being home so much, I already had a big section on working from home, because I've always worked from home. Or I have for the last 12 years. And I think that's important. But we beefed up that section a little bit.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And one of the things I'm most proud of with this book is the whole second part of the book is on interpersonal skills and personal skills and being a good person to yourself, being a good person to others, calming breath, meditation, getting yourself through a tough time. All of these things that I felt strongly are life skills that we need, that maybe I wasn't necessarily taught as a kid. The generation, my children are learning a lot more of this social emotional stuff, but I really felt like it was important, and man has that come in handy_

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Oh, yeah.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

... during the pandemic.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

So I was so glad that that stuff was already in there. But yeah, I mean, I thought I'd be traveling the world right now. We have a plan A and a plan B, and I remember as we got closer and closer to the pub date, where I had to have a real sit down, virtual sit down with everybody, and they were like, "Yeah, Erin, this is going to be virtual." And I was like, "No." I mean, writing the book was so fun, but I was most excited for my party and meeting people and talking to people. I'm an extreme extrovert and I get so much energy from other people and talking about this stuff. And I've missed that, but we've all missed so much.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And I'm grateful to have the online community and to be able to do podcasts like this.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Well, maybe talk a little bit about what your advice is for others as you had to make a big pivot. I mean, practically, well, really everybody, not practically. Everybody I've talked to during COVID talks about how they made those pivots. And some were bigger than others. Some have completely retooled businesses, they've thrown plans and goals and business strategies out the window and completely re-crafted them. I mean, everybody has been disrupted in a big way. Maybe what were the tools that you went to or what helped you reorient yourself, as you knew you had to make this pivot, there was a lot of disappointment not being able to roll out this book the way that you would had wanted to. But what did you draw on? How did you find that institutional or intestinal fortitude, if you will, to make that pivot?

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Yeah. I mean, you know my story that I'm a cancer survivor and I was-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And I'd love to talk about that too.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Yeah, yeah. So I was diagnosed when I was 23 and I was working at Glamour Magazine. And I had envisioned myself being a big writer, editor, all of these things. Anyway. I mean, that all happened, but it happened in a way that I wound up writing about cancer, I wound up turning my cancer experience and

journey, if you will, into a column for Glamour Magazine that I wrote for over 10 years, a blog, I was one of the original cancer bloggers-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Wow.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

... first Glamour bloggers, back when people didn't do that, really. And so I had set that precedent for myself already, which is like, "Okay, you have one vision of your life," one vision of how things are going to go and then something else happens. And obviously, we dealt with the cancer, and I had to go to all these different doctors and get on medication and deal with all the different things with the cancer, but I was also able to use it to help others to continue writing, to incorporate it into my career really. And I loved that. And so I tried to remember what that was like. I'm very good at creating expectations that are hard to achieve, I would say. And so it was just-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Setting high goals.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Yeah. High goals.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

High goals. Yes.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

So when the pandemic hit and I had to come to terms with not having the book launch that I wanted, this is something I say to a lot of cancer patients who are newly diagnosed, because I do a lot of work with the cancer community. And my type of cancer it's chronic myelogenous leukemia. And it's one of the quote unquote, people always say, "Oh, it's a good cancer to have." Some people say that. For me, it is a good cancer to have. I take a pill every day, I'm still alive. I don't have many side effects. I have three children. I'm doing great.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Are you technically in remission? Or how do they describe this type of cancer? Because you will be on a treatment, presumably for many, many years to come.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Yes.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

But you don't have cancer currently, is that right?

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

It is very confusing. I call myself a patient slash survivor. Because I am in a deep, deep, deep remission. Any regular or person could not find my cancer. I do a PCR test, which everyone now knows what PCR is, thanks to COVID. But I do every three months of PCR tests, and those tests come back undetectable. But I cannot go off my medication. I tried actually, because there's something called treatment free remission, which is not being cured because you're really not cured with this type of cancer. But they call it treatment free remission. And who wouldn't want to not have to take their giant cancer pill every day? You know what I mean?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

So I tried that and I failed. Which a big cancer doctor, who I'm friendly with said, "You didn't fail, the trial failed you." And I was like, "Okay." Because I'm like, "I failed the trial." And she was like, "You didn't fail, the trial failed you." And I was like, "Okay." So I'm back on my meds, I've been back on for four years now. But it's funny, I actually am going to do another trial. I'm going to start as soon as possible. My doctor is at Sloan Kettering in New York City and he's doing a trial. I'm going to combine the current drug I'm on called Gleevec with a very minor other drug, it might even be a vitamin D supplement or something, I don't know. For a year, and they think that has some one two punch type thing that my previous experience or my previous time I didn't have, and then I could go off again.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

So anyway, that's the long answer of saying, I do still have cancer, sort of. It always feels weird, I fill up medical forms and it's like, "Do you have cancer?" And I'm like, "I mean, I do, but not really." Do you know what I mean?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And I have friends, as I'm sure you do, who've had 1000 times worse than me. Who've lost their lives. And I'm like, "That's not what I'm dealing with." But at the same time, I did have a pretty wild experience back in my early 20s. And so I do try to remember what I have survived and what I have endured and what life lessons. And pivoting is one of them. Do you know what I mean?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And being able to pivot. And so that thing that I tell patients always when they are diagnosed with CML is I say, "Look, it sucks, you have cancer, that sucks. Trust me, cry, feel bad for yourself. Do whatever you need to do, but also know that you're going to be okay. You're going to be okay." I have a tough time saying that to people who are diagnosed with stage four, we all know the terrible, horrible cancers. I would never say, "You're going to be totally fine. What are you talking about?" I'm more realistic than that. But with CML, 99% they're going to be fine. But I don't take away their grief and I don't take away

their need to feel sorry for themselves because they should, because it sucks and it's unfair. And that's what I did with the book. It was like, "You know what? I'm going to be pissed off for a little bit." Even though I have it, is it as bad as so many other people in the world, what they're dealing with? No. But it's my thing that I'm dealing with. And so I'm going to feel bad for a minute, and then I'm going to pivot. And I'm going to be all over Instagram and Zooms, and IG Lives and all of that.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And so I did, I pivoted. But I think it's important, and you know this, and I talk about this in the book, too. It's like, "We have to feel those feelings. We can't just say, just because somebody has it worse, doesn't mean we can't also feel bad-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

For sure.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

... for ourselves." And I've always felt that way with cancer. And a lot of times, when I was in my early years, people would be like, "Oh, I have the flu, and I'm throwing up. But sorry, I shouldn't complain to you, because you have cancer." I'm like, "I take a pill every day, and I was at the bar last night. So you don't have to feel. You have the flu, you're throwing up and you have 104 fever, that sucks. You can totally complain." So I don't believe in that. I think everybody has a right to feel bad about whatever situation they're in, even if people are worse off. And I tried to talk to a lot of people about that over the pandemic. I think so many of us were like, "Oh, we're so lucky, we shouldn't feel bad." And yet here we are depressed and anxious and unable to sleep. So it's like, "No, that's real too."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right. I loved how you... I mean, clearly, or at least I assume, you drew from your personal experience of not only having difficult conversations with people of sharing difficult news like a diagnosis of a life threatening illness, but advice that you give to people about how do you talk to somebody when they've given you this news. And maybe talk a little bit about how you drew from your own experience, whether it's consoling someone who's lost someone or whether it's somebody who discloses to you that they're going through a divorce, or maybe it's you, who's going through a divorce, and you are sharing this news with the people who need to know, maybe talk a little bit about your perspective on that. And how you handle that in the book.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

I would love to talk about that one. Because I love that. And I have used that one a lot. I reached out-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So timely [crosstalk 00:22:16].

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Oh, so timely. I reached out to Rachel Wilkerson Miller. And she's fantastic. She's the author of *The Art of Showing Up: How to Be There for Yourself and Your People*. And we talked forever about supporting a friend when they tell you something crappy they're dealing with, that's the title in the book. But the number one thing you're supposed to do is just keep your reaction neutral.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

If someone calls you and says like, "Oh, I was just diagnosed with cancer." Oh, my God. You don't want that freakout reaction. My parents were, and still are, one was very... My mom was like, "Okay, all right." When you tell her anything bad. My dad would be like, "Jesus Christ, blah, blah, blah." He flipped out. So you always knew which parent to go to with your crazy news. We didn't tell my dad that I had cancer for a week. He was on a business trip. Or maybe not a week, but like two days. My mom and I were like, "Oh, my God, oh, my God, how are we going to tell him? He's going to lose his mind. He's going to freak out." So you want to keep your reaction neutral.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

This is the follow up question I love, so how are you feeling about it? When someone tells you something, how are you feeling about it? Or how has it been for you? And asking them, "Do you want to talk about it?" And trying so hard not to come at it with your own story, your own advice, your own, whatever it is, you're supposed to just listen, not give them unsolicited advice. And this I love, people poo poo the I'm so sorry thing. People think that you shouldn't say that, you have to come up with something more clever and more helpful. But when in doubt, saying I'm really sorry that you're going through this, is okay. It's not the sentiment, will come through.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And then her last step, which I love is check in on them tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that. And I have a friend who has stage four metastatic breast cancer right now, and I text her, we talk all the time, she's my childhood friend. And I just text her like, how are you today? How are you this afternoon? I know how she is in life, not great. You know what I mean? She's not doing great, but if I can say, how are you this morning? So I try to keep it focused on that. And that's something I learned from the book, which I love. And just showing up is so important. And whatever way you can do that now, even if it's a text. I mean, we talked about that, being a good friend, honestly can be screenshotting a funny meme and texting it to your friend and saying, this made me think of you.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Just connecting and reaching out and that has been so important in the last 10 years, has it been? 10 months? I don't know. How long have we been in this pandemic?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

A really long time.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

A really long time.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Not quite done.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Yeah, exactly, exactly.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

We haven't talked about, or as much, about the structure of the book and how you put it together. You did reach out to these 152 experts to get their perspective, but talk about the way in which you structured the book and why.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Okay. So the book is structured from the moment you wake up in the morning until the moment you go to bed at night. And it's everything in between-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Love that.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

... including, weekends and fun stuff. But it starts with getting out of bed in the morning and then it ends with reviewing your day, setting yourself up for a good night's sleep and reviewing your day. And I just like I'm so disorganized in my brain, and often in my life, but I love structure, I crave it. I was good with my babies, I was good. Because I was like, "I could do that. I could give them that routine." You know how babies thrive on routine. I'm like, "I thrive on routine." So I'm like, "Let me at least," because my brain is all over the place, "let's make this chronological and go through a day."

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And I love that you don't have to read them in order at all. In fact, I say that in the intro, "Look, I'm the last person who's going to judge the order in which you read a book about the right way to do things." You know what I mean? I'm not going to do that. And you can pick and choose things but I wanted it to feel like they're all little things. Nothing is major. You could pick one thing today, you could pick, you know what? Oh, Hoda. Hoda talks about starting your day off with a positive attitude. And it's just saying three things you're grateful for. She goes through all her different steps, but that's something that you can do in the morning, every day. And it makes a huge difference. It starts to reframe how you see your day, how you look for the good instead of the bad. And it's just a nice way to set it up. And I also just feel like it's, I don't know, it was a no brainer for us when we discussed how to set it up. Because I was like, "This is about doing everything a little bit better. And it's got to start with, literally with waking up in the morning."

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And I confess to you this morning, once you wake up you're not supposed to snooze your alarm, you're supposed to get right up. Michael Bruce is my sleep expert. He's fantastic. And this morning, I was like, "Erin, it is Monday morning." You know when you know? I mean, I knew what time it was before I opened my eyes. But I was like, "Just don't." I was in that half dream, but I was like, "If I open my eyes, then I have to get up because it's in the book. I can't just lie here. I'm an adult, and I have three kids who have to get to school and a job." So I tricked myself. I'm like, "I'm not awake, but I'm not awake. I'm not really awake. I'm just going to lie here." And then I cracked my eyelid and I was like, "Oh, damn it. All right, I'm up. I'm up."

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And so I did that. And it's nice to have all these little things in your head. Do I do them every day? No. Should we all do them every day? Absolutely not. Pick and choose one or two and try it and just see how tweaking the way we do these little things can actually have really big results on most importantly, our mood.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Looking back on this process, as you reflect on all this advice and the process of putting the book together, has it hasn't changed you beyond the little things and the efficiency that comes from knowing how to do it correctly and actually doing it correctly? Is there a bigger shift that you have experienced or that your family's experienced as a result of this?

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

I think for me, it was way out of my comfort zone. Believe it or not. I've been a magazine writer for 20 years, I've been very comfortable flying under the radar a little bit. And I knew I wanted to make a move. I knew I always wanted to write a book, another book. So I wrote a cancer memoir 15 years ago. But this was a big out of my comfort zone project.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Talk about why. Why?

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Well, I had to put myself out there in a major way. And the self doubt was I mean, I was breaking every rule, telling myself horrible negative things about myself. You know what I mean? But I was like, "Oh, no, I'm not." But that was before I had the advice of the book. Not terrible, horrible things. But like imposter syndrome, like what are you doing? Is anyone going to care? But putting together that proposal was hard work. And then writing this, I wrote it in six months-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Wow.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

... because they wanted to publish it. My publisher, Grand Central, wanted to publish it in September, which turned out to be an amazing thing. So I had to write this book in six months and I worked my butt off. And I can admit to myself that I haven't quite been doing that as much in the last 10 years. I've been raising my kids and writing for magazines and blogging and doing different things, but I haven't really dug into work all day, work at night, think work in the car kind of project in a long time. And it felt really good to stretch those muscles.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And then the other part of my comfort zone is I'm emailing people like Dr. Oz and talking to Rachael Ray and Arianna Huffington and Hoda and Bobby Flay. And that is just like, I wake up in the morning, I'm like, "Okay, I have to send this email to the TODAY Show, here it goes." And it's good to get yourself out there again, and do those things, to do those hard things, with whatever you're doing. Because you don't want to feel stuck. And I didn't know I was stuck. And I wasn't stuck. But this just came at the

perfect time. And I just felt like I feel now much more prepared to do take on the next project. And it's nice. I mean, to be able to hold a book that I wrote and got published within two years, and that has been, getting really nice reviews. And it's great. And it's a nice moment, and I try to slow down and enjoy it. I don't think anyone slows down to enjoy the good stuff really too much, right?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

But yeah, so I would say that's been the bigger takeaway for me, for sure.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. You talked about imposter syndrome and dealing with that. But how about, you do have, and you mentioned this, all of the incredible experts that you have interviewed for this book? What about rejection? Did anybody turn you down? And if so, how did you deal with that rejection, because rejection, on top of, if you're already feeling like an imposter, can be a pretty tough combination. And you've got to have some tools for plowing through that. Maybe talk about what your process was for dealing with that. And if anybody turned you down. Maybe they didn't, and you're one of those lucky people. And everyone just says yes to-

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Yeah. No. I definitely got some nos. They were all really polite, nos and often it was like, this person is involved with a project or they're really busy, or they're just, nobody-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Or they're writing a book.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Right. Or they're writing a book. Nobody completely ignored me. And that was really, I was okay with that. And the good thing is, there was nobody that I was like, "I have to have this person." Because of what I've done for the last 20 years, I have a huge network of experts who I can rely on and who I love. And that includes people... I emailed Dr. Oz and I was like, "Can you?" And he was like, "Yep." Because I used to write for his magazine.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And Rachael Ray is somebody that I knew would be able to contribute based on, just what the project is and knowing what she's into. And we had worked together on some stuff in the past. And that was really cool. Once Rachel and Dr. Oz said yes and Duff Goldman was really cool from the Food Network. I had a couple of those people very early on, and that gave me the momentum to keep going. Yeah, I mean, it became almost fun. And Gretchen Rubin, who I love.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, she's awesome.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And that was, I had no connection to her. I just sent a form on her website. And I was like, "Screw it. I mean, what do I have to lose?" And she wrote me back herself and was like, "I love this idea. Let's talk." And, of course, as you know in the book, she's in here multiple times. Because she's just so fantastic and has such good advice. So I think, knowing that I had all those people outweighed the occasional nos I got. And the nos were more from, some random hairdressers didn't want to be in my book, which I'm like, "Okay, whatever." But I have Sarah Potempa, who's incredible. She's the inventor of The Beachwaver. And she and I have done really cool stuff together. I got to demonstrate how to do a blowout on the Rachael Ray show using her tips. You know what I mean?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. It's fabulous.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

So it was like, I didn't need anyone else. I had Sarah Potempa and that was great. So yeah, so it was that part really didn't slow me down. I might have a moment where I was like, "Oh, bummer. Can I move on?"

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, yeah.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Yeah. Because I had to have 152. There was no time. There was no time. There was no time to be too sad. I was like, "All right, on to the next."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And that's a lot. I mean, it's a lot. It's a lot packed into a tiny little book, which is amazing.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Yeah.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Is there one piece of advice that really jumps out at you? We've talked about a number of different themes and how it resonated with you. But is there one thing that you turn to that you're like, "That is just my favorite thing in this whole book."?

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Well, I have a lot of favorites but the one that I think I use on a daily basis besides calming breath, because taking the 16 second calming breath is huge, I would say is the don't put it down put it away, which is Rachel Hoffman, who is my tidy room expert. And she has this mantra which when you walk in a door or when you walk in a room or whatever, don't put it down, put it away. And it's such an easy little nugget of information to remember, it's great to teach your kids, it's great to remind yourself, you could

write it on your chalkboard, but it's just like, don't put that dish in the sink, put it in the dishwasher. Don't throw your coat on the bench, hang it up. You know what I mean? It's so simple, and it really makes a huge difference because those things compound. So I love that one.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And that works with one of Gretchen Rubin's one, we talked about habits in the book. Or resolutions, resolving to do something better. And she talks about the one minute rule. And that is any task that can be done in one minute or less, just do it. And that's a great one to try. If any of the listeners want something to try, just try it for the rest of the day or tomorrow and you'll see how much you get done. Rather than if an email pops up on your screen, it's already interrupted you. If you can answer that email in one minute, just do it. Otherwise, you're going to sit there and you don't even realize but it weighs on you and your subconscious and you're thinking about it.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And I do this a lot to myself where I'll walk past a dish in the sink or a pot. Literally just this morning, my husband made eggs and he left the pot in the sink. I'm sure I had gotten to sink zero, which is another one of Rachael Hoffman's gems that I love, which is get yourself to sink zero at least once a day where your sink is completely cleaned out.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Love that.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Because when the sink is at sink zero, you're more likely to put the dish in the dishwasher.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yes.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

But if there's one dish in there, you're like, "Whatever it's over," and just throw all the crap in there. But so I was making myself a cup of coffee and I saw that and I was like, "You know what? While the coffee is brewing, I'm just going to wash that pot." And I did it. And it was a one minute rule, and it's done and now I was back to sink zero. So I love, as a person, it's why I wrote the book, but I love small changes that have big results. And anything I can do that feels easy. I mean, nobody wants to do anything hard right now. So these are all little things that you can do that just have really big results. It's just remembering to do them. It's holding yourself accountable for a little bit of this stuff. It's just easier some days than others, but-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

For sure, for sure. So I'm curious, I was reminded of a piece of advice that my mother always employed with me and still does. And it's still circulates in my head constantly. And it is clean as you go. So if you go in the kitchen to make something, as you're taking ingredients out, you put them in and you immediately put them away and I still hear that advice going in my head. I'm curious, I know you're the mother of three children, you mentioned before. Talk about how they have been impacted by this book. Or maybe the things that you hear perhaps play back to you already. How old are your kids, by the way?

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

13, 10. Nora will be 11 tomorrow and seven. I forget the little-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Perfect.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

I forget the little one sometimes.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Perfect ages to really soak this up.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

I say, I joke that it's required reading, which it totally is. I do have them make their beds every morning. And that's one of the life skills in the book is how to make your bed. It's obviously one of the easiest things you can do to feel productive. We all know about the studies that show that you feel better about yourself, and more competent if you make your bed in the morning. So there's that. And I talk about don't put it down, put it away. We try to do the three positive things. They've eaten a lot of my cheeseboards. My girls know how to make cheeseboards, my son can do Jacques Pepin's scrambled eggs.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Love it.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Yeah. So we do it all the time. And I'm trying to, they see me doing Zoom events and virtual stuff. And I have incorporated them. My 10 year old is dying, or 11 year old, almost, is dying to do an IG Live with me. She's like, "Can I go live on your Instagram? Please, can I just do it?" And I'm like, "Oh, my God." So yeah, so it's been fun. It's been good for them. And I think I try not to talk about it too much, the book with them. But I'm definitely about mom. It's like, "In the book. It says here in the book, come on." But the thing about cleaning, just to echo what your mother said, one of my cleaning experts is Donna Smallin Kuper and she says, "When it comes to cleaning, it's a lot easier to keep up than it is to catch up."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Absolutely.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And I love that. And it's like the more you do it, the less you have to do.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Absolutely. Great advice.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And that is basically the whole theme of this book, the more you do these things, the less you actually have. I love that saying, it's great.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

She's great. It's great, yes.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Yep, yep.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Okay. One-

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Most moms are always right.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Totally. So one final question, as you're looking forward and you think about this book, what's the impact that you hope it will have had, on other people?

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

So I hope it reminds people that we need to... We all know we need to slow down, we need to take some deep breaths. Well, we maybe don't need to slow down as much as we did this last year. Maybe we don't need to know that we're going to just... Maybe we need to speed up. But I think the biggest theme from the book that I love is this idea of being considerate of your future self. And we so often forget about her, we're like, "Oh, she can deal with whatever this crap is later," or we just don't even think about it because we're so busy going from task to, task to task without really thinking about how we're doing any of it.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And so that's one thing that has really come through for me, is being considerate of your future self. It came from Laura Vanderkam, in *How to Say No*. In a section of the book on *How to Say No*, and she talks about that. And she's just, that thing you're signing yourself up for, in six weeks, do you really want to do that? Be kind to your future self. Think about what your future self, what is she going to have on her plate?

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

But it also works for finances. We talk about it with Tiffany Aliche, *The Budgetnista*, she's my financial expert. She's fantastic. Can we talk about asking yourself, do I like it? Do I love it? Do I need it? Do I want it? And where are you going to be when you're 80? She talks about her 80 year old self. Thinking about the future, thinking about that, just for a minute. And it could be as simple as, for me, I'm much more micro with it. When I'm going to bed at night, and I look at my kitchen, I think of my future self and I might get that last dish out of the sink and get myself to sink zero. And I might grind my coffee beans already so that they're ready to go and I don't have to wake anybody up or go to the basement. That's what I do, I wind up if I'm up. And I'm like, "Come on."

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

And then I come down in the morning and I'm like, "Oh, Erin, that was so great." You feel good. And it's doing those, it's a little bit hard in the moment, but the payoff is huge. And it's just trying to be a little bit kinder to our future selves. And I think that that's essentially what this book is about, even though, yes, it's about folding fitted sheets and getting off a Zoom call and arranging a cheeseboard, but all of that really speaks to this idea of taking better care of ourselves and being calmer and more peaceful and having some more joy in the everyday.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Erin, I love that. That's amazing. That's really amazing. It is so nice to spend time with you today. I really appreciate you coming on and talking about the book. It's called The Little Book of Life Skills, and it's really suited for just anybody. I mean, certainly for a recent high school or college graduate, but anybody. As I said before, I learned so much in reading this book. So many things that maybe I could be doing a little differently, or just food for thought. It's a great resource to turn to, when you're like, "Oh, gosh, how should I handle this?" It's got excellent advice from a huge range of experts across everything you can imagine. Truly. So it's wonderful.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Yes.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Erin, thank you so much.

Erin Zammett Ruddy:

Thank you so much. It was so fun to spend time with you. I don't know how I'm going to top this hour of my day now. I really appreciate it. I feel great and energized. So I appreciate it.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I'm so glad. Thanks so much. I appreciate it. If you're new to She Said / She Said podcast, please be sure to check out our past episodes. And before I let you go, I also want to ask a favor. If you're enjoying She Said / She Said podcast, and I sure hope you are, I would be so grateful if you could share us with your friends. And I would also be so grateful if you would go on iTunes and give us a nice review. Just a few quick words and five stars, if you don't mind, would be awesome. Nice words and nice reviews make a big, big difference. They help us move up the charts and they help others who are looking for content like this to find it more easily. I really appreciate you being here as always, and I hope that you found some great perspective and got a positive lift for your week. I'll see you next time. Take care.