

CHAPTER 4  
THE JOURNEY:  
TAKING THE FIRST STEPS

Dr. Leary says that...

**O**ften, we realize that something is missing from our lives. We might be yearning for a new and better relationship with our family members, or a new job, or to accomplish something that we have put off for years. For many women, it is the desire to get a college degree.

Sometimes, finishing a degree is both a necessity and a deeply felt desire. This was the case for a woman I will call Isabela, who attended a women’s college, Bay Path University.

Let me tell you her true story.

Isa quit college when her grandmother was diagnosed with cancer. She immediately moved back home to support her family and help take care of her grandmother. Although she was glad to be there, she said, “I felt horrible about not being in school. It made me feel a failure, a disappointment.” One day, Isabela was bringing in the mail when a piece of paper fell out of the mailbox. It was a postcard about a weekend college program. She suddenly realized she could still be there for her family *and* finish her degree.

She wrote, “If I’ve learned anything from my own story, it is that when life happens, you may be knocked down by an unexpected bump in the road or by life’s twists and turns, but don’t allow yourself to be knocked out. Get back in the ring, keep fighting, and keep doing your best to achieve all that you know you are truly capable of!”

You may be asking yourself, how did Isabela do that? How can I do that?

Isabela set a goal for herself—achieving a college degree—and then she talked to those who could help her accomplish that goal. She figured out how to get the support she needed. She convinced her supervisor to reimburse some of her tuition by showing him how her education helped the company grow. She figured out, with a financial aid officer at the University, how to pay for her education and find the best grants and loans to help pay for her investment.

Here are the five steps that helped Isa overcome her fears, make decisions and plans, and become the boss of her destiny:

**The First Step. Make decisions and Avoid Procrastination**

Angie Morgan and Courtney Lynch, two former U.S. Marines, use their military training and their work as leadership consultants to tell us that “Decision making can be stressful. You will rarely

have 100 percent of the information you need to make a perfect choice.” So, we often put off making that choice.

Yet, leadership gurus Morgan and Lynch also instruct us that “Avoiding decisions means that you’ve handed off decision-making power to others. That means others are controlling YOUR future.”

Don’t give away control of your life. Do your research on colleges and programs and make your decision based on what you have learned. Once you decide, it is easy to break the big tasks into small action steps.

### **The Second Step. Take Responsibility and Avoid Blaming Others**

It can be easy to avoid going back to college and to blame others for our difficulties. Maybe it’s a divorce, no money, a family illness or issue, no encouragement; any of life’s challenges that have delayed your college education. Change that mindset. Think positive. Be persistent. Focus on the person you want to be.

### **The Third Step. Overcome Your Fears**

For many women, taking the first step is the hardest part of the journey. Whether it’s fear of failure, worry over children, a demanding job, no time, or no money, remember you are not alone. Many other women in similar circumstances have had the same fears and have succeeded. They have taken that first step, and then another, and another. Just like Isabela, you can, too.

### **The Fourth Step. Use Flexibility in Managing Life’s Demands**

Once you have made the decision to go back to school and have applied, how should you view your life during this journey? Authors Kosseck and Lauth outline how you can become the boss of your own life in their book, *The CEO of Me*. They say to think about using flexibility in your life. What does this mean? It means figuring out what works for you when earning your college degree. For instance do you want to blend the learning experience with the rest of your life? OR, separate learning, work, and family completely? Or, do them sequentially, dedicating time from others to focus on one area at a time?

### **The Fifth Step. Take Charge of Your Life.**

Take the concept of being the CEO of your life one step further. CEOs must be visionaries who organize their staff to accomplish goals. In your life, that staff may be your family, your colleagues, and your friends. Make sure you find the right people to help you achieve those goals. Seek out those who believe that you can achieve your dream. Share your vision with them so they feel they are a part of it. Help them see that your degree will be a dream come true for you, **and** improve their lives and community.

Remember:

- Do your research, then act.
- Take responsibility and avoid blaming life and others.
- Face your fears.
- Use flexibility in managing your life tasks.
- But most important of all, become the CEO of **Your** Life!

With her college degree, Isabela has a job she loves, and is helping her family as well as other women in her community.

What will you do with your degree?