

**GOOD
IS THE
NEW
COOL**
GUIDE TO

PERSONAL PURPOSE

**DESIGNING A MEANINGFUL
AND PROSPEROUS CAREER**

**AFDHEL AZIZ &
BOBBY JONES**

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This book is dedicated to our parents, Vada and Bob Jones, and Fathima and Shibly Aziz, who showed us what a life of service can be.

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INTRODUCTION

The house lights dim. The smoke machines billow out clouds of theatrical fog. And then rising from the stage on a podium appears the figure of Kanye West—or Ye, as he is currently known—his hands thrown up as the throbbing beat of his song “Flashing Lights” starts. He’s wearing all black with massive gold chains hanging around his neck.

He sings:

*She don't believe in shooting stars
But she believes in shoes and cars*

Around us are a thousand influencers and guests who have been invited to this “secret” show in Brooklyn, courtesy of the brand we have been working for the past few years—Afdhel on the client side, Bobby leading one of the agencies who helped put this whole show together.

It should be a moment of triumph, a shining high point for a music platform that we have spent years developing, which celebrates the best of hip hop. This moment has seen us work with some of the biggest names in music over the years—Ludacris, Big Boi from Outkast, Nas, Rick Ross, and so many more.

Instead, what we see is this: everyone in the building is looking at their phones, posting the moment to social media, broadcasting their status to the world—look at me, look at my access. They are not actually paying attention to the performance happening on stage. Instead they are too busy reflecting the moment off their shiny egos.

The moment felt hollow.

After 20 years of doing this—using our Passion for pop culture to help create experiences and content for some of the biggest brands in the world—the work didn’t give us meaning anymore, didn’t give us the same joy, the same satisfaction.

You know that moment in the Roadrunner cartoons when Wiley E. Coyote runs off a cliff and doesn't realize it? While his legs keep moving, but there's nothing underneath him?

That was that moment for us.

When the cool stopped being cool.

BOBBY

I remember when I held my son, Miles, for the first time. His big brown eyes peered up at me from beneath his beautiful curly hair, awakening a sense of love so intense it was as though my heart had shifted shape.

I whispered a promise to him in that moment, a solemn vow that I would always, unequivocally, be the best father I could be. But the relentless grind of work, the voracious beast that it is, began to test my promise even when Miles was just a small child.

There was one particular day that's forever in my memory. The norm of my work-life balance had tilted over, dangerously skewed toward work. My agency client, an increasingly demanding brand, was calling constantly.

Evening calls turned into late-night discussions, bleeding into early morning updates, and they peppered my weekends with insistent inquiries about things that, in the rearview mirror of time, weren't important.

The day that stands out in my mind was a late evening, heavy with the humidity of a New York summer. I was returning from a long day at work, just stepping off the train when my street corner came into view. The ring from my phone disrupted my wandering mind in a way that was all too familiar. It was my client, with their normal, demanding tone.

The moment I picked up, before a hello could part from my lips, I was hit with a barrage of questions.

A crisis was unfolding in their company, and they sounded desperate, helpless. It felt like being swept up in a tumultuous sea of requests, each one demanding immediate attention.

As I waded through my client's words, I turned the corner of my street. With the phone still glued to my ear, a small figure distant on the sidewalk caught my eye—my son, Miles, now three years

old with his tiny hand wrapped securely in my wife Renee's grasp. I caught his eyes, and it was as though the world exhaled.

His face lit up with a wide grin and, like a rocket, he shot off, barreling toward me.

He was running with the eagerness of a child who can't wait to see his dad. As he covered the distance between us, the client's voice in my ear was a sharp contrast, drawing me back into her whirlpool of problems. Miles ran toward me, each step with pure joy. But, as he got close enough to jump into my arms, he stumbled and fell.

His hands slapped the ground, followed quickly by the side of his face. The hurt was immediate, his tears, a torrent. I could see his small body curled on the ground, an image that hurt my heart. My client's voice, which had been a steady drone, suddenly seemed to grow louder with distress.

On instinct, I hit mute on the phone and raced to my son's side.

I fell to my knees, not caring about the hard concrete. All that mattered was the tiny boy in front of me. I held him close, making sure he was okay, providing the big comforting hug he'd just been running toward.

Cradling Miles in one arm, the phone still gripped in the other, my client's muffled voice broke through, "Hey, are you still there?" It was in that split second that I realized the stark contrast of the things I held. One was the life I was devoted to, the other, an obligation that increasingly lacked importance. Yet the pull of my work, strangely, didn't go away.

That moment was a wake-up call.

It was clear that if I was to become the father I had committed myself to be, I could not continue to blur the boundaries between work and family, holding them both with equal weight. It was vital, an undeniable truth, that my life must reflect a commitment to prioritizing my

family first, not merely as a concept but in my daily actions, decisions, and interactions.

It was in that conflicting moment, cradling Miles in one arm and balancing work in the other, that a decision became clear within me. I vowed to ensure that Miles would always take precedence, that my attention to him and my family would not be betrayed by unimportant work calls or crisis management.

Shortly thereafter, a slow but profound transformation began to happen in my life. A new way of being began to take shape, one aligned with my core values, my highest priorities, and the promises I had made to myself and the ones I loved.

If circumstances ever required me to be away from my family for work, I pledged to myself that the work I did had to be meaningful, impactful, and purposeful. It had to be a contribution that felt aligned with my deepest convictions and was worthy of the time spent away from those I held closest.

As I recount this story, it is with a deep sense of gratitude.

The incident served as a necessary wake-up call that helped me redefine my priorities. Now, whenever I find myself juggling between work and family, I remember the feel of Miles's small frame in my arms and the urgency in my client's voice.

It serves as a powerful reminder of the promise I made to myself and to my son that day, a promise I am determined to keep.

AFDHEL

The next week, I had to go on a business trip again, this time a long one. I would be away for a week.

At this stage, I was living in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, with my wife Rukshana and our son Nuri, who was three years old at the time.

We had adopted Nuri when he was one year old from Sri Lanka. His brave birth mother spent a year living in my parents' house in Sri Lanka looking after him until we were able to finalize all the paperwork to bring him into the United States.

Then one day she handed him to us, and we got on a plane, and he left the country of his birth to move into our small two-bedroom apartment.

The trauma of separation from his birth mother was severe. Every night, for six months, he would cry for hours, scared and fearful of suddenly being in this new place where everything was different from the warm, tropical home where he spent the first year of his life.

We would spend hours holding him, calming him down, making him feel safe and loved and cared for. We would look out of the window at the falling snow, marveling at the world blanketed in white.

Over time Nuri began to slowly acclimatize to his new home. He began to trust us and feel safe.

But he still hated it when I went away to work. He was too young to understand that was part of what I had to do—to travel around the country, to travel around the world, all in service of my job.

That particular trip, he said something to me as I went out of the door after kissing and hugging him.

He said, "See you next week, Dada."

I couldn't stop thinking about what he said on that entire business trip. In the taxi, in the airport, on the plane, checking into another anonymous hotel.

“See you next week, Dada.”

It kept burning me up inside.

A week was a long time in the life of a three-year-old.

When I got back home, I couldn’t wait to spend time with him. I hugged and kissed him, and we decided to go and spend some father-son time together in one of our favorite places—the little park around the corner from our house.

After he played for a bit, we sat on the bench, overlooking the playground, and talked. He told me about everything he had been doing in his kindergarten class, all the new things he had learned.

I said to him, “Hey, I’m really sorry I had to go away for such a long time on this trip. You know, I had to go to work.”

And he looked at me with his beautiful eyes and said, “It’s okay, Dada. I know your work is important.”

And then he paused and said to me, “So . . . what is your work?”

At that point, something snapped inside of me.

I didn’t have the heart to tell this little boy that my work was about selling more stuff.

That I had missed a week of his life because I needed to do something that had become increasingly meaningless to me.

I started to think about the role model I was setting for him, as a father.

I started to think about the world I was helping create for him and his generation to inherit and whether my work was making it any better.

My eyes welled up with tears.

I was overwhelmed by the moment.

All I could do was give him a big hug.

Something inside of me had changed.

I knew that I couldn’t go on doing this work.

But I still had no idea what I could do next.

But little did I know that someone who I had grown to trust and admire was going through the exact same thing, that journey of self-examination and doubt.

AFDHEL AND BOBBY

Ping!

The email arrived, the subject line reading, “Let’s grab lunch.” We decided on an Italian restaurant in Chelsea, Manhattan’s art district. It was winter in New York, making the idea of a warm bowl of pasta appealing. We hadn’t seen each other for some time. We had both taken a needed break after an eventful year of music projects—from electrifying New York nights spent with Alicia Keys to the pulsating vibrancy of California’s Coachella. It seemed the right time to reconnect. We greeted each other outside with handshakes and hugs, and as we like to say, “It was all love.”

We walked in with the tantalizing aroma of garlic and tomatoes wafting through the air, offering the perfect warm welcome. The *maitre d’* guided us to our table. As we broke bread, the conversation started with a standard “How are you doing?” But a deeper question soon followed: “How are you doing, really?” The initial response was the usual positive and somewhat superficial assurance. But with the second question, the mood shifted. We both leaned back, exhaled, and knew this wouldn’t be an ordinary lunch.

Over the course of two hours, we enjoyed our appetizers, pasta, and drinks. The pasta had been so good that Bobby ordered it twice, giving rise to what we now call “Bobby Jones’ing” a meal.

We shared our collective guilt at feeling that we were not being the fathers that we wanted to be with our sons. We were vulnerable with each other about the fact that we not only felt that we were not being good role models to them—but that we didn’t feel that our work was leaving a better world for them to inherit.

Over the next two hours, we found ourselves diving into the depths of what it truly meant to be a marketer in that moment. We wondered