



It's
OK
to be
Single

**Ivona's Guide to
Embracing Single Status**

Ivona Gordon

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Gratitude



I have always wanted to write a book and with so many ideas running around in my head I just didn't know where to begin. Then it came to me in a weird and wonderful way. My first book should, without any shadow of a doubt, be about relationships.

I've always been intrigued by human behaviour: why we behave the way we behave and how love seems to make us almost alter our own personalities. We often forget about our own needs as we just focus on the other person and what they want. Wouldn't it be great to shower ourselves with the same show of affection we give to our love interest?

Once I had decided that my book should be about relationships I got down to the specifics: why not focus on building a better relationship with ourselves?

I am so grateful for a number of people who have spurred me into writing my first book.

First and foremost, my parents who continue to support whatever I do. I can do no wrong in their eyes. They just listen to me prattling on and don't criticise me even though I'm sure they worry that I take on more than I can chew. They are the perfect role models and I love them so much.

My children, Rebecca and Marcus, like my parents, had to put up with me talking about my plans, and just repeating the same thing time after time. They may sometimes pretend they are listening but never put me off from making my dreams and goals a reality.

My siblings have been totally supportive of my business ventures. I may voice my concerns to them yet they never tell me to give up and get a full time 'secure' job. They too have faith in me.

I would also like to record my thanks to my good friend Derrick Davis who I have known from when I was a shy sixteen year old at college. Since starting my coaching business he has encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone and make myself visible. He said I had 'a lot of potential' but the way I was operating at the time nobody would be able to find me. He kept urging me to write *that* book. He believed in me when I didn't always believe in myself.

I would like to mention my good friend Natreema, who is the author of *Melanin Monologues*. I was so impressed that not only had she written a book, she published it herself. This was the final signal that spurred me into action.

I must mention my many, many other friends (you know who you are) who gave me their take on being single or being in a relationship.

I am also grateful for those friends who kindly read my draft versions, gave their helpful comments and got me to this stage so that you can now read my book!

Chapter One

What you need to know about me



I wanted to take a different angle to those ‘how to’ books, recognising of course that nothing is really new considering the amount of advice that is now easily accessible by the click of a button. In my opinion, the newness of what you write is based on your own style of writing, your personal experiences and, of course, your own viewpoint. So I’ve taken these into consideration. This is my account of what life has been like for me as a single person. I wanted to share my experience and for you take what you want from this and leave what may not be as relevant to you – yet.

I describe myself as Ivona: The Relationship Coach. Some people will assume that I know the A-Z of relationships and that I have experienced everything first hand! Let me clarify. I have an interest in relationships. I have studied relationship psychology and hold various qualifications relating to communicating and understanding others.

For me, the key ingredients to engaging with people are being yourself, respecting others at all times and being non-judgemental. However, I don’t have all the answers. I can only share with you my own experiences, my discussions with friends and clients, and throw in some facts along the way. But what you will get are some

insights that I hope will benefit you, wherever you are on the personal development spectrum.

This book has been written with people aged forty-plus in mind, and for women in particular. That aside, anyone over the age of eighteen, from any background, men and women should be able to resonate with what I have written in this book.

Over the last few years, I have gone through some ups and downs and many challenges that are inevitable when you reach a certain stage in your life.

One of my main challenges was deciding to leave the Civil Service and therefore changing my career to become self-employed. It has not been plain sailing. In life, you don't always get what you want, especially overnight. You have to work at it. The same can be said about relationships. You don't just wake up in the morning and say, "Today I'm going to meet the love of my life". If only life was so simple – but then again how boring would that be!

So the main challenge for me over the last few years was the transition from a secure Civil Service job with a good salary to dreams of something different.

I really wanted greater flexibility and freedom to unlock my creative side, come out of my comfort zone, work towards my true passions and ultimately be my own boss. I wanted life to be aligned with my values.

After leaving the Civil Service I spent a year researching coaching niches and spending time with family members. Inevitably, I saw the money from my savings being eaten away. I thought I had best find a job whilst working to build my business.

Some years back I remember saying to myself that I would love to work in schools. I wanted to support youngsters and help them overcome any barriers that may be preventing them from reaching their full potential. The universe answered my prayers. I was so fortunate to get a job as coach/mentor working for a national organisation contracted to provide support in schools.

I gained so much experience working with young people and responding to the issues they faced as teenagers, such as wanting to be liked, relationship issues and behaviour and confidence challenges. I was learning even more about how to interact on a professional coaching/mentoring level, not just with adults, but

youngsters too. I was gradually building my portfolio of experience to support individuals from varying backgrounds and being able to adapt to the different styles of communication.

Having completed my one year contract with the national organisation I said “right” now is the time to really get my focus back in place and to continue building that relationship coaching business. A day wouldn’t go by without me thinking about ‘relationships’ and designing workshops to keep the coaching business alive.

I wrote this book because I wanted to celebrate single status and let you know that it is okay to be single.

This is the first of a series of short books that will help you to get through the various stages of a relationship, starting with accepting you are single and enjoying it, through to getting ready to date again, dealing with conflicts within relationships and how to get back on track.

So as you read this book please remain open-minded. Remember what I have written in this book is based on my own personal experiences supported by a lot of reading and study in the background. If sometimes I go into jargon please forgive me. I would like this book to be as authentic as possible.

Here’s a brief synopsis of what I will be covering: what it means to be single, the benefits of being single and all the things you can do. I will also give you little exercises along the way (nothing too difficult) to get you thinking about how you can enrich your life as a single person.

Chapter Two

What Does Being Single Mean?



The Office for National Statistics (ONS) released data that shows 51% of people in England and Wales are single. Now this I find interesting and the way they have interpreted being single even more fascinating. Check out the blog:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-magazine-monitor-31461595>

The word 'single' can conjure up some negative thoughts: broken, not whole, looking for the missing piece of a jigsaw puzzle.

Dictionary.com gives some examples of the word 'single' - 'unmarried or not in a romantic relationship' and 'pertaining to the unmarried state: the single life.'

Something for you to consider:-

What does being single mean to you?

Draw a line down the middle of an A4 page and list the pros and cons. Take time out to jot down your own thoughts before reading on.

Do your pros outweigh the cons or vice versa? What is this saying about you?

Whilst the focus of this book is to look at the benefits of being single there are, inevitably, some downsides to being single. Let me give you some examples to bring home to you the realities of being single. I am sure some of what I describe here will resonate with many of you.

Take scenario one. You have been invited along to a social gathering. Let's say it's a special birthday party. You can bring a plus one. The plus one, in all honesty, is expected to be your partner – 'your other half' – although there is no other half. So you may resort to:

- a) Finding some feeble excuse why you can't go to the gathering.
- b) Bring along a friend instead.
- c) Go there alone.

Should you decide to go alone, be prepared to be surrounded by smooching couples because it's going to be one of those places! Then the slow dance comes on. You gradually move closer to a corner of the room, or if you can get out of the way totally even better. Awkward. Everyone seems 'taken'. They're all paired up. It might just cross your mind it would be nice to have someone to dance with; a partner who knows their place and takes it upon themselves, without prompting, to invite you to dance.

Let's take another example - scenario two. You are again invited along to another gathering. The invitation is for you and your plus one. This time, you actually have a plus one to go along with! Hooray! Sounds good, yeah? So you drag (metaphorically speaking of course) your plus one along, who really doesn't want to go as it's not their cup of tea. However, you're in a relationship of some description and the expectation is that you bring them along. They accept that this is what you have to do.

You arrive at the 'Do' and you look around and all your single friends, who may be in relationships, have come to the party as a group of friends. Why didn't they tell you it was going to be a kind of girly night out? They are really letting their hair down and enjoying themselves and you so wish you could join them, but it would be rude to leave your partner for any major length of time. So what you do is watch enviously in the corner pretending to feel content with your other half.

Two sides of the same coin. Whatever your views are about being in a relationship or not, I know through discussions with other women that they worry about what

people think as they approach being forty and still unmarried. The pressure to 'find' someone can be overwhelming.

I have come to the conclusion that in order to get a real grip on our goals, dreams, and passions we have to stop worrying about what other people may or may not be thinking about us. We can't control their thoughts and feelings. We can only control our own. We have to do what is right for us. So, while there may be this urgency from somewhere to partner up in romantic bliss, take some time out to really get to know yourself first. Yes, you may be single right now but you are still that unique, wonderful person that you have always been. You just need to accept this and embrace who this unique and wonderful person is.

Something for you to consider:-

Please answer the following questions truthfully.

Do you embrace your uniqueness?

Do you feel fulfilled as a single person?

If you've answered 'no' to both these questions then, in my humble opinion, it is essential that you read on. At the end of this book, you will be asked another set of questions, so keep these in mind.

Now please rate yourself against each question using a scale of 0-10 with 0 being a clear 'no' to 10 being rated a definite 'yes', or maybe somewhere in between. If you've given yourself a low rating what action do you need to take within the next two weeks to improve your assessment?

Something else for you to consider:-

Do you really need another half to make you feel whole?

Again have a think through. If you've answered 'yes', ask yourself where is this coming from? Jot down your thoughts.

Chapter Three

Getting to Know Yourself



I know you must be thinking something along the lines of: “Ivona you are not painting a very good picture of being single”. Be patient. There are some definite advantages which I will be sharing with you shortly. Let’s start by examining how you can get to know yourself and to then appreciate who you really are.

Here is a bit of background information before I start.

I was at the very early stages of writing this book when I came across a brilliant self-love programme which reinforced what I previously understood about loving oneself.

As I reflect now on that twenty-one day programme, I feel so grateful that it was brought to my attention at the right time. I am a great believer that some things or someone comes into your life when the time is right to make that entrance. This is what happened to me. Timing was crucial. The programme has opened up my mind to all sorts of possibilities.

I thought I understood all I needed to know about self-love. Yet by working through the programme it encouraged me to love myself fully and unconditionally, warts and all. I found my inner child and that playful side of me which gives me balance in my life.

I also learnt about listening to my inner self.

Being able to connect with what is going on within me means that I can be honest with myself.

I know that I hold the answers to the even more complex questions. I am able to make decisions all by myself! You see, in the past I would want frequent input from others before taking action. Yes, it is good to get views from others and seeing things from different perspectives sometimes confirm what you already know yourself.

The friends, family, acquaintances and colleagues you approach for answers may, unintentionally, encourage you to go down the wrong path. This is because their views are based on their reality and value systems not yours. Be honest. You usually know what is right for you.

To cut to the chase, how do you get to know yourself?

You have to be present. Yes, I know you may have heard this statement before and it can become one of those cliché phrases. Let me explain.

Being present is about being aware of what is going on around you and what is happening within you, at a given moment.

Our minds have the habit of wandering all over the place. We can get hung up on what other people think about us. We may sometimes spend a good amount of our time contemplating what other people are up to rather than focusing on our own lives and what we are experiencing in the moment.

Our self-esteem can often dip to an all-time low when a relationship hasn't worked the way we hoped it would. We may wonder what we could have done to prevent this 'thing' from happening. Or we may be filled with pure bitterness over the way we perceive someone has treated us. So what do we do? We end up reliving the experience again and again and again. What a waste of time and energy!

So how many of you have been in a situation where you've conjured up being in a relationship with someone who really did not want to be in a relationship with you?

Again you may beat yourself up, metaphorically of course, and wished you had listened to your inner voice. You are annoyed because had you read the signs more accurately you would have accepted that the so-called relationship was a non-runner from the start. By being present you are not casting your mind back constantly over the same mistakes time after time. Accept that these things have happened. Reflect and learn from the experience and move on.

There is the danger that at some point in our lives we get so caught up in the past that we are not, in fact, living life the way life should be lived – happily and in the present.

But what about planning, visualising and goal-setting? How do these feature in our daily lives?

We all should have goals. Goals give us purpose and for me, a reason to get up in the morning. Yes, I certainly have a few. I like to know what I am going to do and when and how I'm going to go about it.

I have to admit that in the past I've been so caught up in the future, rehearsing conversations that have yet to happen, that I didn't appreciate all the good things that were happening around me at that moment. I wasn't living life in the present.

Something for you to consider:-

Find a quiet place; somewhere you feel comfortable and relaxed. It could be a room in your home, a coffee shop, the park or anywhere you feel you would not get disturbed. Accept that as your space.

Take a deep breath. Inhale for three seconds and breathe out slowly for counting in your head for three. Be aware of your breathing. Do this at least 6 times and then repeat out loud three times, "I am calm and relaxed".

Now put your hand on your heart and focus solely on yourself.

Think about all the strengths and personal qualities you have within you. If it helps refer to the many roles you play in life and all that you've achieved so far. How have you managed to achieve so much? Be honest with yourself.

If someone were to ask you, "What's so unique about you?" What would you say? After much soul searching I came up with the four Ps for myself: *Personable, Positive, Practical and Proactive*. This has not happened overnight.

I am still a work in progress. I want to be the best mother, daughter, friend, coach etc I can be. Most of all I want to be Me and being Me is about accepting who I am and the many wonderful things I have to offer myself and others.

Sorry. I deviate.

As you go into that space thinking about yourself remove any negative thoughts.

When I coach individuals one of the early exercises I ask them to do is voice their strengths and achievements. Some may initially struggle to list five positive things about themselves and many add phrases such as, "I think I am..." or "I'm quite..." or even "But..."

Why do we often struggle to say what we are good at but have no hesitation identifying our so-called flaws? If we are unable to identify our strengths how are we able to get others to connect with us and love us too?

Something for you to consider:-

Are you still struggling to list your strengths? Let me help you.

Remember a time when you felt appreciated - when you really felt appreciated. What were you doing? Who appreciated you? Name those people one by one. What did they say? When did that take place? How did you feel afterwards? Have you experienced anything similar since? Note that down.

What is all this saying about you and all your wonderful attributes?

What challenges have you faced over the last say, twelve months? They could have been challenges you experienced at work or trying to find work. It could be

challenges at home, such as juggling with your career alongside and keeping a home going, dealing with family conflict issues. Were there any health issues, relationship challenges, or financial concerns? Name them.

We experience challenges on a regular basis. The key is how we overcome them. Looking back, how did you manage to address these challenges? How resilient were you? Congratulate yourself knowing that you are stronger than you give yourself credit for. Celebrate your achievements.

By just reading this book you've shown that you are interested in your own development. That's a step forward in the right direction.

So often we are caught up in other people's lives, supporting them, worrying about them and ignoring our own needs. Don't get me wrong it is nice to do some random acts of kindness but be mindful about becoming a people pleaser. You see, when all our emotions are directed towards helping others our own energy tank becomes depleted.

Starting from today, get yourself a notebook. Get something that you can easily carry around with you. Have a goal or goals for the month, week, and day so that you are moving forward in your life.

As you work towards your goals think about what skills, qualities you need to achieve them. Note down the steps you'll need to take.

If things don't go according to plan immediately, keep pressing ahead. The main thing is that you've attempted to do something different. Some slight adjustment to timescales may get you back on track. Give yourself a warm hug and be proud of yourself knowing you are becoming who you want to become and coping without being dependent on others. Would you have spent so much of your energy if you hadn't taken the time to do this piece of self-development? You are really getting to know yourself; your strengths and areas that need a bit more attention.

Chapter Four

Family



Just a reminder...

This book is about how to be single and be happy. Are you beginning to see the advantages or are you still not yet convinced? If you are like me sometimes I need to be convinced with various bits of evidence several times over. So let me press on to convince you further!

We are now going to look at the importance of family when you're single.

As a single parent, I have had to build up an extra strong bond with my two children. I'm not saying that having a partner, or a significant other, is a bad thing but if you've been a single parent for so long you have to get to know your children at a much deeper level.

This weekend I spent some quality time with my two grown up children – together not separately. Yes, we do argue and get into one another's personal space but it would be strange to not have that strong bond with them. I couldn't ask for anything more. When they do ask to speak to me on a one to one basis there is that unique relationship between a mother and daughter or mother and a son that you cannot buy or in my case break. When we are together there are those unspoken behaviours and internal jokes that others just don't understand. And of course it would be too much of a challenge to explain and they probably won't 'get it' anyway!

Being single is okay when you've got a close knit family living under the same roof. I am aware that there is a danger I could be smothering my children with way too much kindness and attention that may cause problems in future. I know that at some point these young adults will leave home and start to live their own lives and what will I do then? Would it be more difficult to form a relationship? Would I then start to experience the stress of being on my own? Who knows? What I do know is that being single right now (in the present) allows me to give my children the attention that I believe they deserve so that they continue to grow into well-rounded adults.

Yes, being single allows me to devote more time to be there for my parents. When you see that your parents are not as mobile as they once were, and when you consider all the things they used to be able to do and may not do with as much ease now, you realise time is precious. If I want to visit my parents at any time and spend all day with them I can do so without having to fit around what my partner wants to do. Not that I am saying when you have a partner everything is put on hold. I am just expressing that it's great to spend quality time with my parents to give back the support they have given me over the years.

Let me take a trip down memory lane.

There was a lovely street party down my parents' road. It reminded me of the good old days when it was quite normal for East Londoners to have street parties for any occasion. This would be the perfect time for people to really get to know one another in a relaxed and informal setting. It's not the same today. In those days there a great sense of a real community spirit. I am not sure where that's gone.

Picture the scene now. It is spring 2015. I have been invited along to the street party. In true neighbourhood spirit I thought I would drop off a few snacks early in the day to add to the goodies already on display on tables. I promised mum that I would be coming back. Yes, I took my time returning but when I heard her voice over the 'phone almost begging me to come back as soon as I could, I knew she needed me and the rest of the family. So I quickly sorted myself out and made my way only to find that my daughter had got there before me, followed by my son. It

certainly put a smile on her face when she saw us there and could happily say “this is my daughter and her children”. Family time is precious time.

Some things are more important at that moment than others. Whilst I have a business to run, I also have the flexibility to make the most of my single status. This means seeing my parents when I want to see them and for how long I choose to see them. It is okay to be single.

Something for you to consider:-

I am not here to judge yet here’s a question for you.

When was the last time you spent quality time with your family or a group of people you consider to be your family? Aim to make contact at least once a week with your adult children (if you have any, and they are now living away from home), parent, or any other family members that you may have lost contact with. There’s no time like the present, so I suggest starting today.

Chapter Five

Friends



Now, what on earth will we do without our friends? I am talking about the ones that stick with you through thick and thin. These are the friends that understand your unspoken words. I am not talking about the hangers-on, the ones who extract whatever they can from you without a care in the world. Neither am I talking about the so called friends who want something without giving anything back in return. They tend to 'suck you dry' and you end up with little energy to give back to yourself. These are the 'friends' who talk about you behind your back and yet smile in your face and give the impression that they care about you. I think you can picture what I am really going on about here.

Now I have a wide selection of genuine friends of different ages and from different cultural backgrounds, men and women. Some I would put at the top of my list and call them my closest friends. They are unique and have so much to offer in our friendship.

Then there are my ex-work colleagues. They started very much as colleagues and, as you can imagine, you end up spending so much time together you start to form tighter bonds. You begin to understand each others' worlds. Yet, as I write I reminisce over a wonderful friendship I had from my earlier days in the Civil Service. We worked together, lunched together, travelled home together and spoke on the

phone in the evening. In fact, we became inseparable, and although I say I don't do best friends now, she was mine. Eventually, we drifted apart, as you do sometimes when you change jobs, form relationships, face the usual challenges in life and, unfortunately, we are no longer friends. How I wish we could pick up the pieces.

When you are single, friendships become even more important. It is a natural thing to want to be around people who share similar interests, likes and dislikes. As human beings we generally don't like being on our own for long periods of time. Having a good network of people we can turn to is absolutely crucial.

How many times have you witnessed or even experienced the changes in a friendship when somebody meets a potential partner. Suddenly, friends drop off the agenda as you get more engrossed in the excitement of a new romantic relationship. It's natural. You see, hormones are kicking in from all angles and there is this strong desire to be with that special person.

Some romantic relationships pass as quickly as they form; and when this happens who do you turn to for advice, comfort and understanding? Yes, your friends!

I have learnt so much from my friends. They have enriched my life and motivated me to do what I enjoy doing. For example, friends have motivated me to build my business, they have attended my workshops, and they are there just so I am able to offload to them about love, life and relationships. I just love my friends. Being single does not mean you're sad or lonely. With supportive friends, you are never alone.

Something for you to consider:-

Make a list of all the friends you know. Underline those friends you have not seen or made contact with for the last twelve months. Consider the reasons and then ask yourself what is stopping you from making contact? What little step can you take to resume that relationship? Can you send a quick message by text, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger to just say "Hi, how's it going?" Begin today and see what happens.

Chapter Six

Interests, Hobbies and Personal Development



Is there something you want to do out there and yet something is holding you back? It could be the fear of failure. Remember fear is: *False Evidence Appearing Real*. Have you got a negative belief that you don't have the skills or knowledge to try something new? Or maybe you are afraid to come out of your *comfort zone*?

A few months back I watched a motivational film which got me thinking about what is really important to me in life and how to work towards my own personal needs.

Picture this. There's the perfect mum. She puts her family first and yet seems to be constantly juggling different tasks she believes she has to do. As an artist, there is a yearning to start drawing again. By some miracle, she is presented with some paper and pencils and she starts to draw. She loves doing what she is doing but she is not prepared to show her drawing to her husband. It's as if it is not good enough. There is a strong desire to follow her passion – to draw as she used to do in the past, probably before having a family. She yearns for time out for herself to do this. As the vacation with the family comes to an end she asks them to go ahead so that she could remain in the peaceful surroundings to draw for a few more days. Thankfully, her husband understands that this is important and she stays behind for a few more days.

The above story is about personal growth and so much more. So, my point here is this: we often get so preoccupied with other people's lives that we very rarely consider time out for ourselves. We then forget what makes us really tick. I mean *really* tick. Our personal passions remain dormant. When we are doing something we really enjoy this triggers warm glows and feelings of true contentment. It puts a smile on our faces. This, in turn, spirals and creates more happiness within us and around us. Other people benefit. It's such a shame that sometimes when we start dating and forming intimate relationships we put that hobby or interest into the drawer. Should the relationship then go pear-shaped we can be at a loss in trying to figure out what to do to keep ourselves busy and ideally get us smiling again.

Being single is not a bad thing when you've got something else to focus on. It could be resuming study, joining a club or taking care of our health and wellbeing.

Something for you to consider:-

If you are in a relationship think back to what you used to enjoy doing before you were in that relationship. What were your reasons for stopping? What is preventing you from taking these up again?

If you are single what are you waiting for?

List all the things you are interested in doing. Ignore the cost for the moment as I don't want to hear you say "I would like to but it's so expensive", and, to be honest, there will be lots of things we would like to do but for the cost. This isn't about that.

My interests are in acting and presenting. I don't think about my age and that it may take years to get onto that stage or TV, but these are certainly areas of interest. I have in fact managed to be part of two performances at my local theatre and my interest in this area is very much alive!

Aim to come up with at least five different interests or hobbies that you could take up. Now make those hobbies or interests a reality. You may need some encouragement from friends or family to get you going and motivate you to change.

Sometimes, it is easier to have someone accompany you to your newly chosen interest or hobby, but we know this is not always possible. Not everyone will share your interest and I know from experience that you should not wait around for others to be in the right space to join you. Be responsible for your own thinking, decisions and actions.

When your week is filled with things that are of interest to you then perhaps you will be wondering how on earth you're going to fit in dating and finding a partner?

Conclusion

When you are single you have choices.

You have the flexibility to do what you really want to do. You don't need to check with a partner to confirm or disagree with what you should be doing or the decisions you make.

You can spend as much time as you want with your family and reconnect with long lost relatives and friends without having to play the juggling game.

You have time to find out who you are and what you like doing and to discover the areas of your life that need developing.

You have space to find out what is important to you in life. If you don't know your core values how on earth will you know whether the person you meet is really right for you?

Isn't it great to pick up an interest or hobby and just do it because you can!

Something for you to consider:-

You've reached the end of this book. Now I will like to ask you one simple question:

Do you embrace your uniqueness as a single person?

If you have answered 'no' to this question what action could you take to change your answer to a 'yes'? What action do you need to bring up your ratings? What can you do over the next week or two to improve those ratings?

Ivona Gordon: The Relationship Coach

About the writer

I am a certified personal performance coach specialising in love, dating and relationships. Along with my diploma in relationship psychology, I have over twenty-five years experience working within the Human Resources field. I use my knowledge and experience particularly around equality and diversity issues, to adapt my communication style to different groups of people. As a professional coach, I am known for quickly building rapport so that clients receive a powerful and unique coaching experience.

My ultimate aim is to make a difference in people's lives, so that they accept who they are (flaws included) and love themselves fully before they seek to build intimate relationships with someone else.

If you want to get 'relationship ready' then contact me for a complimentary 20 minute consultation session.

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