

A PRIVATE WORKBOOK

The Other Walls

Every room you have lived in had rules on its walls. Most were never written down. You learned them anyway, in your shoulders and your jaw, and some of them walked out the door with you.

A workbook for noticing old rules, keeping small promises, and choosing what comes next.

Better Men of Virginia, Inc.
Petersburg, Virginia

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| Yours to fill. Nobody else's to read.

BEFORE YOU WRITE

How this book works

A kitchen, a corner, a classroom, a cell. Each one taught you what was allowed inside it, and you learned fast because you had to. Those rules kept you on your feet. Some of them still run when you walk into a room where they don't fit anymore.

Three rules, and they don't bend.

1. **Write the rule, not the story.** You do not have to put down what happened to you. One line about what you learned to do is enough.
2. **Yours alone.** BMV never collects, copies, or reads this book. Nobody in the house has a right to see it. Show it to someone only if you choose to.
3. **Stop when it gets heavy.** If a page brings up more than you can carry, close the book. That is allowed. Call or text **988** any time, day or night, or ask staff to connect you with a counselor. This book is not treatment and it does not replace it.

BEFORE YOU WRITE

How this book works (continued)

Take one part at a time. There is no order you have to follow and no date you have to finish by.

Your route

- Part one, pages 4-12
- Part two, pages 13-18
- Part three, pages 19-26
- Part four, pages 27-32
- Part five, pages 33-38
- Your new wall, page 39
- Source notes, page 41
- Notes, pages 42-44

You asked for these pages, or you picked them up. That choice matters.

PART ONE / WHERE THE RULE WAS WRITTEN

The house I grew up in

What felt normal at home may have become a rule you carried elsewhere.

Answer in a few words. The same answer can fit more than one question.

To stay safe, I...

To keep people around, I...

To get what counted there, I...

PART ONE / WHERE THE RULE WAS WRITTEN

The block

Think about the places where you learned how to move around other people.

Answer in a few words. The same answer can fit more than one question.

To stay safe, I...

To keep people around, I...

To get what counted there, I...

PART ONE / WHERE THE RULE WAS WRITTEN

School

Think about what earned approval, attention, respect, or a little space.

Answer in a few words. The same answer can fit more than one question.

To stay safe, I...

To keep people around, I...

To get what counted there, I...

PART ONE / WHERE THE RULE WAS WRITTEN

Inside, if you were

Skip this room if it is not yours. You do not need to explain what happened.

Answer in a few words. The same answer can fit more than one question.

To stay safe, I...

To keep people around, I...

To get what counted there, I...

PART ONE / WHERE THE RULE WAS WRITTEN

Another room

A job, the service, a relationship, or another place that taught you rules.

Answer in a few words. The same answer can fit more than one question.

To stay safe, I...

To keep people around, I...

To get what counted there, I...

PART ONE / CONTINUED

One rule, in plain words

Pick one rule from the last pages that still runs today. Write it the way you would have said it back then, not the way you would explain it now.

Made-up example. Never let them see it bother you. Room: inside. Age: 24. Still runs: when my daughter's mother tells me something hard, my face goes flat. Cost: she thinks I do not care, so she stops telling me things.

The rule, in the old words

The room / My age then

PART ONE / CONTINUED

One rule, in plain words (continued)

Where it still runs today

What it costs me now

PART ONE / CONTINUED

Whose voice is that?

The rule will keep talking. Old rules do not leave because you found them. What changes is that you can hear how old the voice is.

The next time it speaks, finish this sentence, out loud or on paper:
“That’s the rule from _____, and I was ____ years old.”

The old rule I noticed today

PART ONE / CONTINUED

Whose voice is that? (continued)

What is different about the room I am in now?

What response fits this room?

| That rule kept you standing in that room. You do not owe it an apology. You also do not owe it the rest of your life.

PART TWO / THE ROOM DECIDES

Same man. Different walls.

A room can shape what feels normal. When something went wrong, like a drink, a fight, or a night you would take back, the room may have been part of it.

Pick one time and look at it through four questions. Write as little as you want. Noticing the setting gives you another place to make a change.

What did I think was happening?

Where was I, and who was there?

PART TWO / THE ROOM DECIDES

Same man. Different walls. (continued)

What did that room make feel normal?

What room would have made something else feel normal?

PART TWO / CONTINUED

Your rooms now

A room can be a place, a group of people, a time of day, an app, or a certain car. Notice which settings pull you toward old rules and which support the man you are building.

Rooms that pull the old rules forward

Rooms that hold the new ones

PART TWO / CONTINUED

Your rooms now (continued)

One supportive room I can choose this week

PART TWO / CONTINUED

One change to the walls

Make one practical change this week. Move the chair. Take another route home. Change the first thing you open on your phone in the morning. Make a boundary around one contact.

Choose something small enough to do and clear enough to notice.

The change

By when?

PART TWO / CONTINUED

One change to the walls (continued)

What will help me follow through?

Afterward: what did I notice?

PART THREE / THE PROMISE YOU KEEP

A promise you can check

A promise you keep is a mark on your own wall. Big promises tend to break under their own weight. Small ones, kept every day, stack up until you believe them.

Write who you are, not what you will try. “I’ll try to make my meetings” is a hope. “I am a man who shows up when I said I would” is something you can check every night.

If you want, tell one person you trust. You choose how much to share.

I am a man who... (your words)

PART THREE / THE PROMISE YOU KEEP

A promise you can check (continued)

One action that would show that today

A person I could tell, if I choose

PART THREE / FOURTEEN DAYS OF SMALL PROMISES

Days 1-4

One promise a day, small enough to keep today. Check it at night. If you miss it, name what got in the way and choose your next step.

Day	Today I will...	Kept?	What helped, or got in the way
Day 1		☐ Yes ☐ No	
Day 2		☐ Yes ☐ No	
Day 3		☐ Yes ☐ No	
Day 4		☐ Yes ☐ No	

PART THREE / FOURTEEN DAYS OF SMALL PROMISES

Days 5-7

Day	Today I will...	Kept?	What helped, or got in the way
Day 5		☐ Yes ☐ No	
Day 6		☐ Yes ☐ No	
Day 7		☐ Yes ☐ No	

PART THREE / FOURTEEN DAYS OF SMALL PROMISES

Days 8-11

One promise a day, small enough to keep today. Check it at night. If you miss it, name what got in the way and choose your next step.

Day	Today I will...	Kept?	What helped, or got in the way
Day 8		☐ Yes ☐ No	
Day 9		☐ Yes ☐ No	
Day 10		☐ Yes ☐ No	
Day 11		☐ Yes ☐ No	

PART THREE / FOURTEEN DAYS OF SMALL PROMISES

Days 12-14

Day	Today I will...	Kept?	What helped, or got in the way
Day 12		☐ Yes ☐ No	
Day 13		☐ Yes ☐ No	
Day 14		☐ Yes ☐ No	

PART THREE / CONTINUED

Decide on a calm day

You can make some choices before the hard moment arrives. Pick a situation you expect to face. Write down the action you want available when it happens.

Made-up example. If I feel a conversation heating up, I will ask for a pause and agree on when to come back.

If this happens...

Then I will...

PART THREE / CONTINUED

Decide on a calm day (continued)

What needs to be ready beforehand?

After fourteen days: which promise will I keep practicing?

PART FOUR / BEFORE THE HARD TALK

Your first sentence

The opening of a hard conversation can shape what follows. Say what the talk is for. Show you heard the other person before you give your side: “I hear that you’re worried about _____. Here’s where I am.”

Try these openings. Change them until they sound like you.

Probation officer

“I want to be straight with you about where things stand, and ask what you need from me this month.”

Job interview

“I’m glad to be here. I’ll tell you plainly what I bring, and I’ll answer questions directly.”

My kids’ mother

“I want to understand what is not working and talk about what the kids need from here.”

A man in the house

“I don’t want this to turn into a thing. Can we figure out the kitchen so it works for both of us?”

A landlord or collector

“I want to settle this in writing so we both know where it stands.”

Someone I hurt

“I’m not asking you to forgive anything. I want you to know I understand what it cost you.”

PART FOUR / BEFORE THE HARD TALK

Your first sentence (continued)

My version, for a talk I have coming

[illegible]

PART FOUR / CONTINUED

Get ready for the talk

Choose one conversation. Be clear about what you want to discuss, and leave room to hear something you did not expect.

Who I want to speak with

What I want out of this talk (one sentence)

PART FOUR / CONTINUED

Get ready for the talk (continued)

My first sentence

What they may be feeling when they walk in

PART FOUR / CONTINUED

If the talk drifts

If it drifts: “We said we’re here about _____. Can we get back to that?”

If it heats up: “I want to finish this right. Can we take ten minutes?”
Stepping away to come back is not losing.

What I will say if it drifts into old fights

What I will not say, no matter what

PART FOUR / CONTINUED

If the talk drifts (continued)

When I will step away and how I will arrange to return

Afterward: what worked, and what needs another conversation?

PART FIVE / HOW THEY WORK YOU

Notice the move: 1-3

Other people may try to write on your walls. Naming a pressure tactic can help you pause and decide.

1 A string of small yeses

Sounds like: “Just hold this for a minute.” “Just ride with me.” “Just sign here to see if you qualify.”

What you can do: Count the yeses. Ask where the next one leads. A small yes does not require a bigger one.

2 Borrowed authority

Sounds like: A uniform, a title, “I know the judge,” or a letter that looks official.

What you can do: Check the person yourself, using contact information you found independently.

3 Everybody is doing it

Sounds like: “All the guys are in.” “Thousands approved today.”

What you can do: Ask who “everybody” actually is. What other people do is not enough reason to agree.

PART FIVE / HOW THEY WORK YOU

Notice the move: 1-3 (continued)

A move I recognize / My response

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

PART FIVE / HOW THEY WORK YOU

Notice the move: 4-6

Other people may try to write on your walls. Naming a pressure tactic can help you pause and decide.

4 The rush

Sounds like: “Today only.” “Walk out and the deal is gone.” “I need an answer now.”

What you can do: A deadline is a reason to check carefully, not to skip checking. Ask for time and written terms. You can decline.

5 The feeling first

Sounds like: A story that makes you angry, scared, or proud, right before the ask.

What you can do: Notice your chest and jaw. When you feel heated, pause before signing, sending, or acting.

6 Two pieces left for you to connect

Sounds like: “He was seen arguing with her. Details after the break.” Your mind fills the gap.

What you can do: Ask yourself: did anyone actually say that? What would I need to see to know it is true?

PART FIVE / HOW THEY WORK YOU

Notice the move: 4-6 (continued)

A move I recognize / My response

[illegible]

PART FIVE / CONTINUED

Before a yes that costs

Before any yes that costs money, freedom, or your name, ask yourself:

☐ Do I have it in writing?

☐ Have I had time to read it away from the pressure?

☐ Did I check the person or company myself?

☐ Would I still say yes with my body calm?

☐ Would I be comfortable telling someone I trust?

If an answer is no, pause and find out what is missing.

The decision in front of me

PART FIVE / CONTINUED

Before a yes that costs (continued)

What I still need to check

My answer for now, in my own words

THE WALL YOU WRITE ON

What goes on this wall?

You have lived by rules written on other walls, and some of them kept you alive. This page is a wall with nothing on it yet.

An old rule I am done letting decide

The new one, in my words

THE WALL YOU WRITE ON

What goes on this wall? (continued)

The room where I will practice it

Date / One action I can take next

| The old rules do not have to decide what comes next.

SOURCE NOTES

Where the studies come from

The pages on small promises and on pressure tactics draw on the studies below. They concern particular situations. They do not establish that this workbook changes behavior or produces clinical outcomes.

Freedman, J. L., & Fraser, S. C. (1966). Compliance without pressure: The foot-in-the-door technique. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4(2), 195-202.

Moriarty, T. (1975). Crime, commitment, and the responsive bystander: Two field experiments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 31(2), 370-376.

Thaler, R. H., & Benartzi, S. (2004). Save More Tomorrow: Using behavioral economics to increase employee saving. *Journal of Political Economy*, 112(S1), S164-S187.

Keep your answers somewhere you control. Use a notebook if you prefer. Share only what you choose.

The Other Walls. Better Men of Virginia, Inc., Petersburg, Virginia. First edition, September 2026.

| Put the book back where your notebook lives.

NOTES

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Anything that did not fit somewhere else.

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