

# 10 RULES

## FOR BRILLIANT WOMEN

A WORKBOOK TO HELP YOU  
Live Your Brilliance, Share Your Ideas & Change the World Now

BY TARA SOPHIA MOHR



## 10 RULES FOR BRILLIANT WOMEN

Early in my writing career, I wrote an article called "10 Rules for Brilliant Women" at *The Huffington Post*.

The article took just a few minutes to write, but it was years in the making—years of watching my brilliant women friends, colleagues and coaching clients struggle to share their voices fully in the world—to own their brilliance. And of course, it was informed by years of being in that struggle myself.

The article struck a chord with thousands of women around the world.

Women need an active process to actually start living their brilliance more fully. That's why I created this workbook, with a few questions for you to consider for each of the ten rules, to help you apply the concepts to your daily life.

Go be brilliant! The world needs your voice.

Love,  
Tara



## 10 RULES FOR BRILLIANT WOMEN

I coach brilliant women, lots of them. Dedicated, talented, brilliant women.

Most of the time, they don't know their brilliance. They are certain they "aren't ready" to take on that next bigger role. They are more attuned to the ways they aren't qualified than to the ways that they are. They are waiting for someone to validate, promote or discover them. Sound familiar?

It's time to step up, brilliant women. Here are ten principles for owning your brilliance and bringing it to the world:

### 1. MAKE A PACT

No one else is going to build the life you want for you. No one else will even be able to completely understand it. The most amazing souls will show up to cheer you on along the way, but this is your game. Make a pact to be in it with yourself for the long haul, as your own supportive friend at every step along the way.

### 2. IMAGINE IT.

What does a knock-the-ball-out-of-the-park life look like for you? What is the career that seems so incredible you think it's almost criminal to have it? What is the dream you don't allow yourself to even consider because it seems too unrealistic, frivolous, or insane? Start envisioning it. That's the beginning of having it.

### 3. GASP.

Start doing things that make you gasp and get the adrenalin flowing. Ask yourself, "What's the gasp-level action here?" Your fears and a tough inner critic will chatter in your head. That's normal, and just fine. When you hear that repetitive, irrational, mean inner critic, name it for what it is, and remember, it's just a fearful liar, trying to protect you from any real or seeming risks. Go for the gasps and learn how false your inner critic's narrative really is, and how conquerable your fears.

### 4. GET A THICK SKIN.

If you take risks, sometimes you'll get a standing ovation, and sometimes, people will throw tomatoes. Can you think of any leader or innovator whom you admire who doesn't have enthusiastic fans and harsh critics? Get used to wins and losses, praise and pans, getting a call back and being ignored. Work on letting go of needing to be liked and needing to be universally known as "a nice person."

### 5. BE AN ARROGANT IDIOT.

Of course I know you won't, because you never could. But please, just be a little more of an arrogant idiot. You know those guys around the office who share their opinions without thinking, who rally everyone around their big, (often unformed) ideas? Be more like them. Even if just a bit. You can afford to move a few inches in that direction.

## 6. QUESTION THE VOICE THAT SAYS "I'M NOT READY YET." I

know, I know. Because you are so brilliant and have such high standards, you see every way that you could be more qualified. You notice every part of your idea that is not perfected yet. While you are waiting to be ready, gathering more experience, sitting on your ideas, our friends referenced in rule five are being anointed industry visionaries, getting raises, and seeing their ideas come to life in the world. They are no more ready than you, and perhaps less. Jump in the sandbox now, and start playing full out. Find out just how ready you are.

## 7. DON'T WAIT FOR YOUR OSCAR.

Don't wait to be praised, anointed, or validated. Don't wait for someone to give you permission to lead. Don't wait for someone to invite you to share your voice. No one is going to discover you. (Well, actually, they will, but paradoxically, only after you've started boldly and consistently stepping into leadership, sharing your voice, and doing things that scare the hell out of you.)

## 8. FILTER ADVICE.

Most brilliant women are humble and open to guidance. We want to gather feedback and advice. Fine, but recognize that some people won't understand what you are up to (often because you are saying something new and ahead of your time). Some people will find you to be not their cup of tea. Some will feel threatened. Some

people will want to do with your idea only what is interesting or helpful to them. So interpret feedback carefully. Test advice and evaluate the results, rather than following it wholesale.

## 9. RECOVER AND RESTORE.

If you start doing the things that make you gasp, doing what you don't quite feel ready to do, and being more of an arrogant idiot, you are going to be stretching out of your comfort zone – a lot. Regularly do things that feel safe, cozy, and restorative. Vent to friends when you need to. Acknowledge the steps you've taken. Watch your tank to see how much risk-taking juice you have available to you. When it's running low, stop, recover and restore.

## 10. LET OTHER WOMEN KNOW THEY ARE BRILLIANT.

Let them know what kind of brilliance you see, and why it's so special. Call them into greater leadership and action. Let them know that they are ready. Watch out for that subtle, probably unconscious thought, "because I had to struggle and suffer on my way up...they should have to, too." Watch out for thinking this will "take" too much time – when the truth is it always has huge, often unexpected returns.

Clear a path by walking it, boldly.

- Tara Sophia Mohr

## RULE #1: MAKE A PACT

No one else is going to build the life you want for you. No one else will even be able to completely understand it. The most amazing souls will show up to cheer you on along the way, but this is your game. Make a pact to be in it with yourself for the long haul, as your own supportive friend at every step along the way.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What are some of the things you have done to support the people you love most in your life? What would it look like to do those same things for yourself?
- What are the roles you'd like to play, in relationship to yourself? Pick five words that resonate for you. (Example: *I'd like to be a champion for myself. An ally. An enthusiastic cheerleader.*)
- What are some of the old roles you'd like to let go of? (Example: *I'd like to let go of being a censor, a tough critic, a skeptic.*)

## ASSIGNMENT

Each day this week, pick one of your five words for your new relationship with yourself, and use it as your guidepost. Let's say on Monday you choose the phrase "steady friend." Throughout the day, check in with yourself – how would you be acting, what would you be doing, what would you be saying – if you were being a steady friend to yourself at this moment?

## RULE #2: IMAGINE IT

What does a knock-the-ball-out-of-the-park life look like for you? What is the career that seems so incredible you think it's almost criminal to have it? What is the dream you don't allow yourself to even consider because it seems too unrealistic, frivolous, or insane? Start envisioning it. That's the beginning of having it.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What does my knock-the-ball-out-of-the-park life look like?
- What is the career that seems so incredible I think it's almost criminal to have it?
- What is the dream I don't allow myself to even consider because it seems too unrealistic, frivolous, or insane?

## ASSIGNMENT

For one week, just simmer on your answers to these questions. Set aside all thoughts that come up about *how* you might make it happen and *whether it's possible* and just welcome your vision.

### **RULE #3: GASP**

Start doing things that make you gasp and get the adrenaline flowing. Ask yourself, "What's the gasp-level action here?" Your fears and a tough inner critic will chatter in your head. That's normal, and just fine. When you hear that repetitive, irrational, mean inner critic, name it for what it is, and remember, it's just a fearful liar, trying to protect you from any real or seeming risks. Go for the gasps and learn how false your inner critic's narrative really is, and how conquerable your fears.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- What is a gasp-level action I need to take in my relationships or family life?
- What is a gasp-level action I need to take in my professional life?
- What is a gasp-level action I want to take in my personal life?
- What one gasp-level action am I willing to commit to doing this week?

### **ASSIGNMENT**

Pick a gasp-level action for today, and go for it.

## RULE #4: GET A THICK SKIN

If you take risks, sometimes you'll get a standing ovation, and sometimes, people will throw tomatoes. Can you think of any leader or innovator you admire who doesn't have enthusiastic fans and harsh critics? Get used to wins and losses, praise and pans, getting a call back and being ignored. Work on letting go of needing to be liked and needing to be universally known as "a nice person."

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- The criticism I'm most afraid of receiving is:
- I'm afraid that this criticism would prove that I really am...what? (Example: "If I'm called self-indulgent, it would prove to me that I really am selfish." "If I get a horrible book review, it would prove to me that I'm a fraud as a writer.")
- Brainstorm ten other ways you *could* interpret this criticism. For example, maybe the other person was threatened by you, or didn't understand what you were saying, or just isn't the type that is going to be a fan of you.

## ASSIGNMENT

Think of a few writers you really admire for their brilliant work and their ideas. Go to Amazon.com and read a bunch of the one star reviews of their work. Then read a bunch of the five star ones. See how even those thinkers you most admire have both huge fans and harsh critics.



## RULE #5: BE AN ARROGANT IDIOT

Of course I know you won't, because you never could. But please, just be a little more of an arrogant idiot. You know those guys around the office who share their opinions without thinking, who rally everyone around their big (often unformed) ideas? Be more like them. Even if just a bit. You can afford to move a few inches in that direction.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Take the arrogant idiot test. Choose A or B, whichever you feel best applies to you.

A: I propose my own unique ideas only when they are well researched, fully formed, and tested in some way.

B: I propose my own unique ideas when they are still forming, untested, un-researched – and I'm not entirely sure if they are right or not.

---

A: I feel qualified to speak mainly on the things I have formal training or deep expertise in.

B: I think my smarts, critical thinking skills, and unique way of looking at the world give me something valuable to contribute on a wide range of subjects and I share my opinions and ideas – even when I don't have training or deep expertise in the topic at hand.

---

*Where did you answer "A" and would like to move more toward "B"? What would that look like for you?*

## ASSIGNMENT

Three times this week, exercise your arrogant idiot muscles.

## RULE #6: QUESTION THE VOICE THAT SAYS, "I'M NOT READY YET"

I know, I know. Because you are so brilliant and have such high standards, you see every way that you could be more qualified. You notice every part of your idea that is not perfected yet. While you are waiting to be ready, gathering more experience, sitting on your ideas, our friends referenced in Rule #5 are being anointed industry visionaries, getting raises, and seeing their ideas come to life in the world. They are no more ready than you, and perhaps less. Jump in the sandbox now, and start playing full out. Find out just how ready you are.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Things I hope to do one day but think I'm not ready to do now are . . . (*start the business, have more responsibility, write the article, start the blog, charge more for my services, ask for more money at work, lead x, create y*)

I think I need more \_\_\_\_ in order to go for these things:

- *expertise*
- *experience*
- *practice*
- *mentors*
- *money*
- *time*
- *maturity*
- *experimentation*
- \_\_\_\_\_ (*add any other factors to this list*)

### ASSIGNMENT

Pick something important in your professional life that you assess yourself as being "not ready for yet" and test that assumption. Choose something that, at a gut level, you feel a longing to do or to create.

## RULE #7: DON'T WAIT FOR YOUR OSCAR

Don't wait to be praised, anointed, or validated. Don't wait for someone to give you permission to lead. Don't wait for someone to invite you to share your voice. No one is going to discover you. (Well, actually, they will, but paradoxically, only after you've started boldly and consistently stepping into leadership, sharing your voice, and doing things that scare the hell out of you.)

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- If I wasn't waiting for anyone to invite me to share my voice, I would . . .
- If I wasn't waiting for anyone to give me permission to lead, but instead claiming leadership where I feel called, then I would . . .
- If I believed that I needed to first – boldly and consistently – step into leadership, share my voice, and do things that scare the heck out of me, and then I'd be discovered for all my brilliance, then I'd start doing things like . . .
- If I stopped waiting for any kind of permission, validation, or green lights from the world – and just started sharing my brilliance fully now – that would look like . . .

## ASSIGNMENT

Pick three items from the list above – those that feel scary and compelling – and commit to do them in your life. Give yourself a timeline for each.

## RULE #8: FILTER ADVICE

Most brilliant women are humble and open to guidance. We want to gather feedback and advice. Fine, but recognize that some people won't understand what you are up to (often because you are saying something new and ahead of your time). Some people will find you to be not their cup of tea. Some will feel threatened. Some people will want to do with your idea only what is interesting or helpful to them. So interpret feedback carefully. Test advice and evaluate the results, rather than following it wholesale.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In the future, I'll incorporate guidance that . . .  
*(Examples: feels right in my gut, resonates with me personally, feels like it was offered in a spirit of support)*
- I'll opt out of using guidance that . . .  
*(Examples: feels like it is trying to squash me or shut me down, comes from someone who doesn't seem to get me or my work, scares the hell out of the dreamer in me)*

## ASSIGNMENT

Identify a time in your life when you took advice that you knew in your gut wasn't right – but you deferred to the expert, took the advice because you were people pleasing, or just doubted your own knowing. Write or imagine the story of how you'd like to do it differently next time.

## RULE #9: RECOVER AND RESTORE

If you start doing the things that make you gasp, doing what you don't quite feel ready to do, and being more of an arrogant idiot, you are going to be stretching out of your comfort zone – a lot. Regularly do things that feel safe, cozy, and restorative. Vent to friends when you need to. Acknowledge the steps you've taken. Watch your tank to see how much risk-taking juice you have available to you. When it's running low, stop, recover, and restore.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- I know that my risk-taking juices have been depleted and it's time to recover and restore from these clues: *(Examples: when I stop thinking clearly, when I start resenting all tasks, when everything starts feeling risky and scary. Consider how the need to recover and restore signals itself to you.)*
- The things that most help me recover when my risk-taking juice has been depleted and I need to restore are: *(Examples: cuddling up under a blanket and watching Netflix, taking a hot bath, laughing with a good friend, cooking, wandering the farmer's market, going to yoga.)*

## ASSIGNMENT

Pick a day in your schedule when you are going to be taking some big risks, doing your gasp actions, or going out of your comfort zone. Consciously schedule "recover and restore time" that day. See how it feels to drain the juice in your risk-tank, and then fill it back up. Try this a few times to learn how the process feels for you, and to identify what actually helps you restore (sometimes it's not the things we think!)

## RULE #10: LET OTHER WOMEN KNOW THEY ARE BRILLIANT

Let them know what kind of brilliance you see, and why it's so special. Call them into greater leadership and action. Let them know that they are ready. Watch out for that subtle, probably unconscious thought, "because I had to struggle and suffer on my way up . . . they should have to, too." Watch out for thinking this will "take" too much time – when the truth is it always has huge, often unexpected returns.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- This week, I'll tell these three women about their brilliance:
- I can let [name of brilliant woman] know she is ready for way more than she thinks she is.
- A brilliant woman whose voice the world really needs, and whom I can remind of that is:

### ASSIGNMENT

Go tell those women about their brilliance. Tell them directly and specifically!

### BONUS ASSIGNMENT

Invest! One other way to let a woman know you believe she is brilliant is to invest in her business, education or activism. Some great organizations to explore: Kiva or the Global Fund For Women.

## CLEAR A PATH BY WALKING IT BOLDLY.

Tara Mohr is an expert on women's leadership and well-being. She is the author of *Playing Big: Practical Wisdom for Women Who Want to Speak Up, Create, and Lead* (PenguinRandomHouse), named best book of the year by Apple's iBooks. Tara is the creator and teacher of the global Playing Big leadership program for women, and creator of the Playing Big Facilitators Training for coaches, therapists, managers, and mentors. She is a Coaches Training Institute-certified coach with an MBA from Stanford University and an undergraduate degree in English literature from Yale. Her work has been featured on national media from *New Your Times* to *Today Show* to *Harvard Business Review*. She lives in San Francisco with her husband, son, and daughter.

## WANT MORE?

- Visit Tara's website, [taramohr.com](http://taramohr.com)
- Get the *Playing Big* book, [taramohr.com/the-playing-big-book](http://taramohr.com/the-playing-big-book)
- Read more about Tara's leadership programs for women at [taramohr.com/courses](http://taramohr.com/courses)

