

The 'Ex-Factors'

Your guide to increasing harmony with your ex

The Six Factors

The six factors that contribute to the make or break relationship with your ex.

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Boundaries

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The 'Ex-Factors'

Your Guide to Creating Harmony with Your Ex



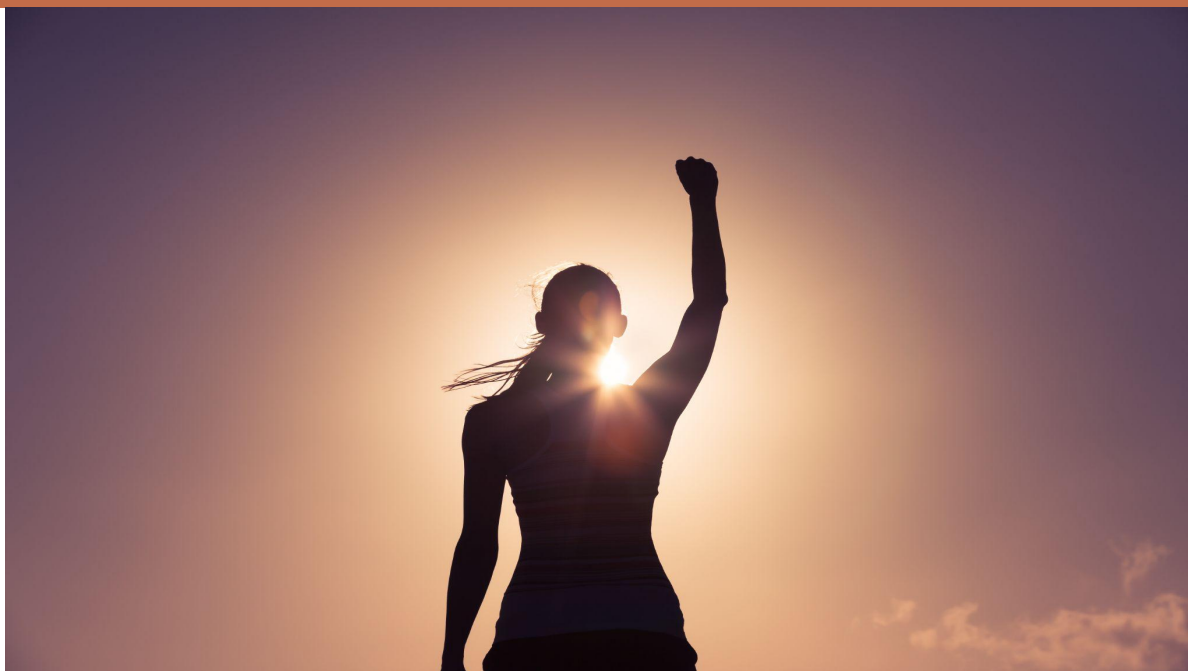
Hey! I'm Cheryl Garland, and I'm so happy you are reading this - because it means you're seeking to improve your post-divorce relationships and start an incredible journey to finding your "new normal". With this guide and my **online programs** you'll be able to overcome post-divorce chaos *without* completely losing it!

In this guide you will find all my top tips and guidelines for establishing healthy boundaries with your ex, finding a balance between standing up for yourself and maintaining harmony, and tips for navigating the ongoing negotiations that are inevitable.

I am personally so excited to have you join our community of single moms and being a part of writing your next chapter!

**Hit your *RESET* button.
Let's GO!**

What's Inside



What's Inside this Guide?

SIX FACTORS

We are going to start with a brief overview of what I believe are the six main influences in post-divorce relationships being great, or not. We all know the basics of good relationships like “communication,” etc. We are skipping over some of those basics and diving into what you personally may be experiencing and what is unique to this specific type of relationship.

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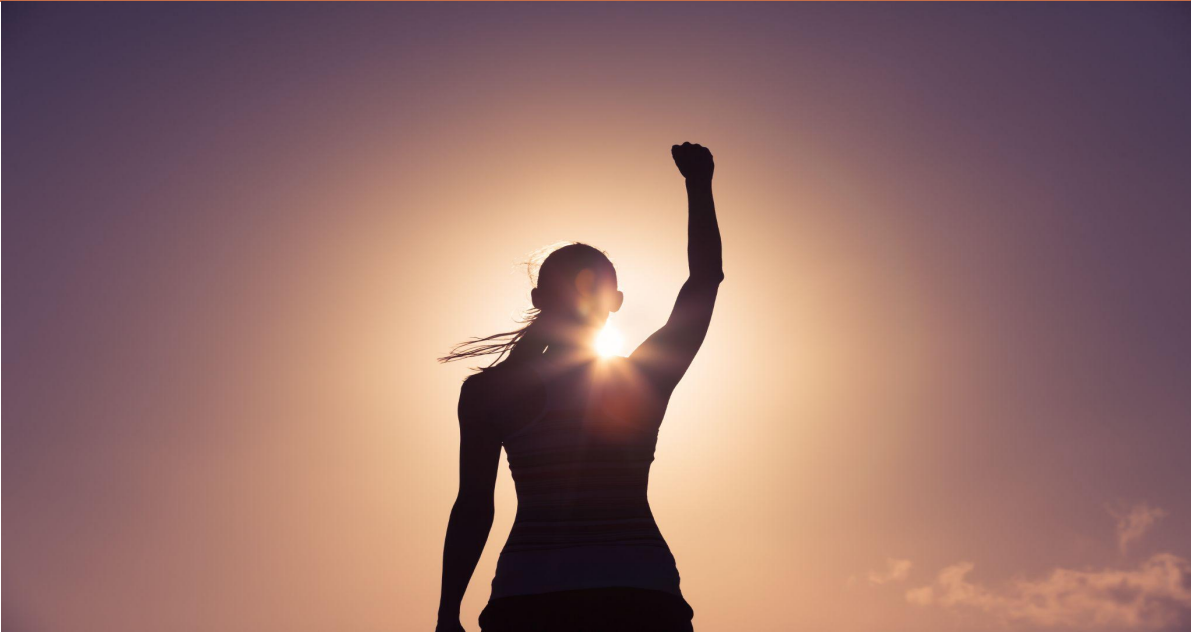
We are then going to get real about, well, everything. This is going to be a focused guide to what you need to consider with every interaction with your ex. This takes a lot of practice, but first you will need to internalize what applies to your situation and knowing the adjustments you need to make to get to good. It won't happen overnight, it will take work. It will be worth it.



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What's Inside



ACCOUNTABILITY

You will find you need to vent about the divorce and your ex. That will naturally be part of the process as you work through issues, and that relationship has had a distinctive imprint on your life. The primary focus here is going to be on making your own adjustments to the way that you process decisions, interactions, and internal dialogue so that you have an improved relationship with your ex.

WHY?

I often wondered, “why am I the one who has to do all of the work to make this better when he is the one who... [fill in the blank]?” ***I GET IT!*** I had one “why” - my little girl. Despite the mistakes I did make along the way, and the slow pace at which I learned how to show up in the best way for her, at nearly 17 she is well-adjusted, confident, independent, and is not afraid to speak her mind. Her dad and I split when she was 1 ½ years old. How many “why’s” do you have? Are you ready to do the work to show up for them in the best way you can?

Let's get to it.

THE SIX FACTORS

#1

EMOTIONS

Yes, we're going to talk about our FEELINGS! Feelings that are generally unreliable and ever-changing. In one moment we are super *fine* with how things are going. The next, we could bust out in tears for no apparent reason. The most important thing to remember is that our feelings can and will change, and we need to understand that changing feelings are the only constant when it comes to our emotions.

#2

BOUNDARIES

In order for your ex to have good boundaries with you, you have to be the one to model to him/her what your boundaries look like. This could be living space, especially if you are residing in what was the family home; methods of communication; personal space; friendliness, etc. Our children observe so much more than we could imagine, so be authentic to who you are.

#3

BLAME

Blame. Here is the hard truth. You are both responsible for where your children are today, and what their experience is. It might go all the way back to... "Did I make a good choice in partnering with this person in the first place?" Either way, you are here today, with shared children. You need to work through whatever blame you are holding on to and tend to the needs of your children **today**. Your children are not responsible for your relationship with your ex.

#4

NEGOTIATING

Inevitably, there are going to be times that you will need something from your ex, and there will be times your ex needs something from you. Additional time with the kids to cover daily circumstances is normal and always keep in mind what the most desirable experience is for the kids. When it comes to money, that's where it can get messy and you need to be creative to keep it civil.

#5

SMALL TALK

Rule of thumb here: If there is information that your kids know, that they might "share" with your ex in casual conversation, that may also be sensitive information for your ex to learn... Be the bigger person and be forthcoming with those details. Not doing so puts your kids in the middle as they are getting the genuine reaction of their other parent's anger or surprise. They don't deserve to be on the receiving end of that, and it is not appropriate.

#6

KIDDOS

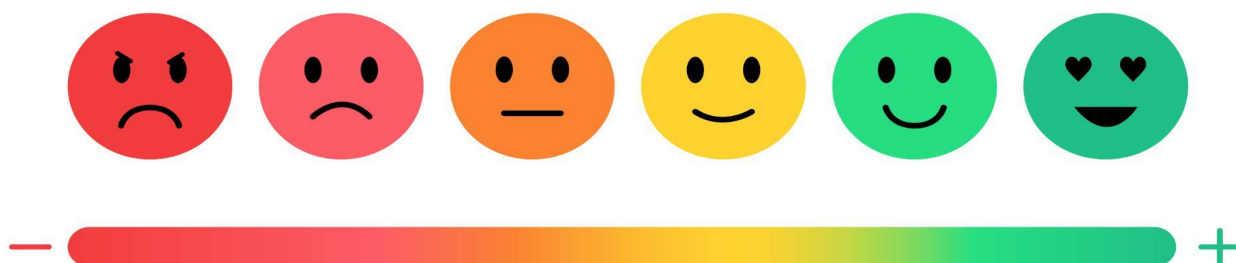
It will happen. Your ex, or maybe even you, will attempt to use the parenting schedule, or money, to manipulate your ex into behaving in a certain way. Why do we do this? Read the previous Factors 1-5. Here is the bottom line on this: NO. Do not ever put your children in the middle of adult discussions or issues. They are not your messenger or delivery person, and they certainly should never know who is paying or how much anyone is paying in support. It is NONE of their business. They are in the business of being kids. Period. Keep adult issues with the adults.



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FACTOR #1: EMOTIONS



Going back to my days in School Counseling, we had charts to help kids name their emotion. As adults, we forget to pay attention to what is going on internally, especially as we are just trying to keep our shit together long enough to feed the kids, get them to school, and show up to work. Our emotions impact **how** we show up to everything in our daily life, and I can almost guarantee we experience the spectrum multiple times in a day.

You just got a text from your ex that sends you into a tailspin in a matter of seconds. Do you stop to ask yourself 'Why?' That is where we will focus. Learn to stop in that moment. Don't react. Ask yourself "Why is this text/email causing this type of reaction in me?" Is it influenced by the type of morning you've had? Are you overly stressed about the kids? Are you worried or stressed about work? Does the request have a direct impact on your life/plans? On the following worksheet, you will have an opportunity to dive deeper into your emotions that are going on in the background so the auto-response of [*anxiety/anger/annoyance/responsibility*] can stop taking control of the tone of your conversation with your ex.

Pull yourself together, check in, and reply in a way that is productive toward an outcome.

EMOTIONS WORKSHEET

JOURNAL ENTRY:

Take an honest assessment of the internal, gut reaction that you have when your ex reaches out. For me, my initial reaction was riddled with anxiety, fear, despair, and exhaustion. I felt he was reaching out to negotiate yet another thing, pass judgement on his assumptions about my life, or to tell me again that I'm doing everything wrong. I let this go on for far too long before I realized that so much of his emails/texts/phone calls had little to nothing to do with our daughter. They were all attacks on me, therefore almost none of them warranted a response. That was a huge lightbulb moment for me!

Consider these questions as you journal:

1. What is at the core of my reaction? Name that feeling (or feelings) and dive into why, now that you are not together, are you feeling that way?
2. The feeling may be completely valid, but is it useful to getting to a resolution? Why or why not?
3. If your reaction is related to things from the past, what are steps you can take to move past the feeling, at least for the sake of dealing with the issue at hand?



FACTOR #2: BOUNDARIES



I felt like this snail (left) trying to find his way when I attempted to set boundaries with my ex. It was ever changing, I never knew which way was the “right” way, and I was therefore never effective, until I was. Until then, I got about as far as this little snail in the sand with as much effort.

This part is hard, especially when:

- You are living in the home that was previously the family home.
- You are in the middle of negotiating “something” and need to maintain an open line of communication.
- You can't seem to say anything without “setting him/her off” (ie living in some sort of fear/shame pattern).
- You have never set boundaries with your ex before, so this feels incredibly scary and intimidating.

Establishing these boundaries is critical for you to be **the best you possible** for your children. Remember, you are the role model for them, and allowing their dad to impose on your life in unhealthy ways will establish that same pattern for them.

Keep this in mind as a baseline for establishing boundaries. ***Here is the KEY:***

Unless the situation or information directly involves the well-being of your children, it is not necessary for you to share with your ex, even if directly asked! This is one, SIMPLE rule... but it MUST be followed! If your children are involved, it is fair game to be asked about...yes, this does include introducing your children to new partners. Conversely, if your children are not involved... there is no reason for your ex to be meddling in your personal affairs. Period.

BOUNDARIES WORKSHEET

JOURNAL ENTRY:

Today, we are going to highlight two areas: 1. Boundaries for yourself and 2. Boundaries for your children.

I know you probably know this, but we cannot control our exes. The best we can do is to know our boundaries, and know what we are going to do when they are crossed. Control what you can, and let go of the rest. Write your responses to the below.

FOR YOU:

1. What needs to be in place for you to feel safe and comfortable in your home? Think about how your ex might be coming into your space to gather the kids, or coming in uninvited altogether.
2. How do you prefer to communicate with your ex under various circumstances? When is it more appropriate to call vs text/email?
3. What information are you willing to share about your life? What questions do you feel are inappropriate?
4. How will you communicate this with your ex? Think through a detailed conversation and what that will look like.

FOR YOUR KIDDOS:

1. For those that are a bit older, One tool that I have used in the past is a "Divorced Children's Bill of Rights," to help them understand what they should be asking for and expecting of their parents going forward. If it is appropriate for your child's age, you may consider offering something like this to them. It can contain things like:
 - a. I have a right to my own space when transferring from one house to another to allow me to emotionally transition. Don't take it personally.
 - b. I expect that you will not ask me about the other parent's social habits. If you want to know about their life, ask them.
2. Younger children are going to process things differently, and likely will adjust their coping several times as they mature. The best way to support your younger children is to remind them that they do not have to censor their conversation with their parent. It is tricky here as I know the other parent may try to take advantage of this, which is why it is imperative that **you** have established good boundaries.

FACTOR #3: BLAME

The dreaded blame game.

Divorce is hard. It doesn't matter if you are the one who initiated it, if this was "a long time coming," or if you were completely caught off-guard. Divorce is becoming normalized, and everyone seems 'happier' once it's over. Right? Is that *actually* right? No one is talking about the inner struggle that goes on. When I'm talking blame here, I'm not just talking about the blame between you and your ex, but also that blame that you carry internally.

You have children, you and their other parent are now asking those kiddos to deal with so much because you married the wrong person. Because you two couldn't figure it out. I GET IT! I moved out with my daughter when she was 1 ½ years old, setting her up for a lifetime of shared households and all that goes with it. Self-blame is powerful, and it sucks.

Then there is the entire issue of dealing with blame between you and your ex, because that is also entirely real. Firing shots via email or text for things that happened months or years ago that have led you to where you are today. Even if you have moved past those events, it will often kick up again when new significant others are introduced to the equation. More interesting is when other people's kids start having an impact on your children's lives and well-being, as families eventually spend time together and merge.

Let's get ahead of all of this - the more you can prepare for and anticipate potential issues - the better off you and your children will be!



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BLAME WORKSHEET

JOURNAL ENTRY:

We are going to be looking at this from two perspectives, as you have probably guessed. First, the potential blame game between you and your ex. Second, letting go of the self-blame that you may be carrying with you.

OTHERS:

1. When you think about the 'cause' of your current situation, I'm going to assume at some level your ex is at fault. The way that they did or did not treat you, provide for you, etc. Write that all down. Get it out of your system!
2. Walk away from your journal for 24 hours, then read everything you have written.
3. When you come back to your journal, write down the answers to these two questions in the most authentic way possible.
 - a. Is all of this true? Is all of that really the cause of why I am here, in this place, with these children, feeling these feelings?
 - b. What role did I play in this life experience?
4. Write about a future scenario where your ex is involved with someone, who has children that behave badly. Your children either do not like them, or begin to act out for attention. How will you avoid blame and deal with the issues at hand?

YOURS:

1. Self-blame and self-criticism can also be unhealthy, especially if you were in an abusive situation. Write down all of the things you blame yourself for, including your current circumstances. Write it out, then without stopping....
2. Read it back. Is it true? Write down other factors that were going on that caused you to behave in the way that you did.
3. Write down the things you should own and need to be accountable. Now follow each of those with, "and I forgive you."

Mindset: : There is ZERO doubt in my mind that at any point in time, you were doing the very best that you could in that moment with the skills you have. The second part of that is: so was your ex. We are not here to fix your ex, but just a reminder that this is hard on you both, you will cope in different ways, and keeping your children's well-being as the center of your intentions is key.

FACTOR #4: NEGOTIATING

Most people go straight to the money conversation when we think of negotiations. There are many considerations and situations where you may need to negotiate, including help with the kiddos around special occasions or work schedules, and that can be true of each of you. Keep in mind that the parenting agreement in the decree is the usually the final authority on how things will go when there is disagreement on a path forward. If you and your ex come up with other arrangements that are the best for the kids, you can certainly make those decisions together.

Money is where the most arguments happen after a divorce, and negotiations are requested. Steps to circumvent compromise/negotiations when it comes to child support.

1. **Know the facts.** Understand what is written in the decree and how payments *should* be made. Pay an attorney an hour of his/her time to help interpret as you need.
2. You are not obligated to track or disclose "how" the money is being used. This is a controlling request, so do not engage. A reminder that it is a court-order to support your child(ren) is enough.
3. Do not engage in any sort of sympathy of your ex's financial situation and how child support is putting undue pressure on living expenses. Keep discussion around money matter-of-fact. I understand money evokes a lot of emotion for people, but the less you play into those emotions (on either side), the better.



Mindset:

You need to be able to provide a safe, stable environment for your children; it is both of your responsibility to make sure you can afford to do that.

NEGOTIATING WORKSHEET

JOURNAL ENTRY:

The most important thing to remember here is to control what you can, and let the rest go for your own sanity. This journal entry is going to be focused on what you can control and help establish boundaries for what is or is not negotiable for you.

Write these answers down! If you can anticipate and address these questions with yourself first, it becomes so much easier to deal with your ex in the throws of emotion related to negotiations. Know yourself first, understand your own boundaries. If you are prepared, you will be less shaken when you are confronted with these situations.

1. What are the situations where you may need to ask for additional help from your ex? Consider work schedules, holidays, vacations, and special events.
2. If you are able to anticipate the same from your ex, what do you anticipate he/she might ask for in terms of additional help from you with the kids?
3. What is non-negotiable? Are there sacred holiday traditions, represented in how the schedule is set up in the decree, that you are not willing to negotiate on? How will you address this if it comes up in conversation?
4. When you or your ex start new relationships, often holiday schedules collide. Are you willing to accommodate those requests? As you write about this, keep in mind what is best for your kids, not just your holiday wishes.
5. What needs to be in place for you to have successful negotiations? Consider the type of communication (text, email, in person), and set boundaries for raising voices, etc.
6. What will your reaction be when asked about where you are spending "support" money?
7. What will your reaction be if you are approached about accepting a lesser amount of support or if there is refusal to split costs as expected?

There is a lot packed into these questions. Take your time and answer thoughtfully. Laying the groundwork for boundaries and compromise will go a long way to reducing your stress around negotiations.

FACTOR #5: SMALL TALK

What do I mean by “small talk”?

This fifth factor on relationships with our ex partners simply relates to how we behave around each other, who should know what, and what is actually none of their business!

It is important to be polite and show mutual respect when you are in the same space, presumably with your children present. Polite “small talk” is appropriate and necessary, although we all know it can feel uncomfortable at first. It is not necessary, however, to go overboard and pretend like you are still best friends! Your kiddos will see right through it.

Mindset: : Your kids have every right to share their experiences in life, whether it be at your house or your ex's house, with whomever they like. This includes sharing things with your ex that are part of their life experience. **Two Rules: 1)** Do not say these words: “Don't tell your dad/mom.” This immediately puts them in the middle. **2)** Be proactive in sharing information that you think will be upsetting to your ex. WHY? Because this saves your kiddos from having to be the messenger AND getting the potentially ugly reaction that they really don't deserve.

So what gets to be “none of your ex's business” if your kids can share whatever they want? Neither you nor your ex gets to dig in with questions about what the kiddos share about the other parent. It's just off limits. It will probably happen, which is why there is one final section here. Help your kiddos prep, with whatever is age-appropriate, to help them say “no” if they are getting quizzed by the other parent. I spend more time on this in the next section, but something simple here can work. “You'll have to ask mom, it's not mine to share.” or “I don't want to talk about that anymore.” to help move the conversation along.

Generally, and let's be honest here... if you don't want your kids to share something, it's a lot easier if they aren't aware. Talking about dating, money, or any other “adult” topics should be kept age-appropriate and not discussed generally.

FACTOR #6: KIDDOS

This is the single most important and simplest rule of all.... And the hardest. **KEEP YOUR KIDS OUT OF THE MIDDLE!**

Understand that there are many ways kids are put in the middle, so we need to understand that first.

- Do not badmouth the other parent in front of your kids. They have a right to love you both.
- Jealous of the other parent's relationship with your kids? Just remember that a solid parent/child relationship is GOOD for your kid! Get over it.
- Protect them from inappropriate information, including bad behavior by either of you.
- Your child is not your confidant, spy, or messenger. If you have something to communicate to the other parent, be an adult and send a text, email, or call directly.
- NEVER talk about financial support around your children. It shakes their world to think that they are a burden, and they are not a commodity.
- Do not apologize for the other parent. It implies a derogatory judgement of the other parent. If you apologize, make sure it is only for your behavior.

Help your child set boundaries! Empower them to let the other parent know that they are not comfortable answering questions or sharing information. This is going to be your best judgement to do what is age appropriate, but being open about this is paramount to success. Talk with your ex, share with your children that this applies in BOTH households!



SMALL TALK & KIDDOS WORKSHEET

JOURNAL ENTRY:

Friends - This one is where it all comes together. Yes, this has been all about how to deal with the ex.... But the reason even that is important is how everything related to your ex impacts your kids. They are the true reason that any of this is important to work through.

For the journal entry today, we are going to prepare ourselves for how we will prevent ourselves from inappropriately engaging our kids in the relationship with their other parent, AND how we will respond to them when they do. Write on each of the following:

1. What are some ways that I now recognize I am inappropriately putting my kids in the middle of my baggage.
2. How will I prevent this from happening in the future?
3. Make a list of the ways that I see my ex is putting the kids in the middle.
4. For EACH item on the list above, write down your thoughts on how you would like to address each topic.

Consider:

- What is the most productive format to approach the topic? In person (NOT around the children), email, phone conversation.
 - Side note: I personally do not like text as my kiddo has access to my phone. Consider that the kids may see the conversation coming in on the other side, even if they are not with you when you send it.
 - Be calm and factual.
5. Helping your kids be empowered to stop inquisitions in both households.
 - Between you and your ex, make sure your questions are focused on the child's experience in life and NOT about the other parent.
 - Empower your kiddo to exit a conversation that is about the other parent. Do not accuse them of being rude when they exit an inappropriate conversation. Help them with the words they can use as their red flag words in those situations as appropriate.

Next Steps



CONGRATULATIONS!

Completing these exercises is a great step in the right direction to empowering yourself and your kiddos to have successful relationships within this new space of divorce.

I would encourage you to review your journal responses regularly, and to even go through these exercises again as you gain some additional time and perspective after the divorce. You may be surprised how your answers change as your children grow also.

Visit my website to keep up to date on new programs being offered! www.livexperienceachievepurpose.com



Thank you!

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I look forward to continuing on your journey to being the best version of yourself!

Cheryl Garland

Coach / Owner

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