

This 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Competition* is also the fourth book in *The Art of Happiness* series designed to help you master happiness in life.

It will challenge you to think about competition that arises in various ways in your own life and will inspire you to enjoy greater happiness and freedom as you view the topic anew.

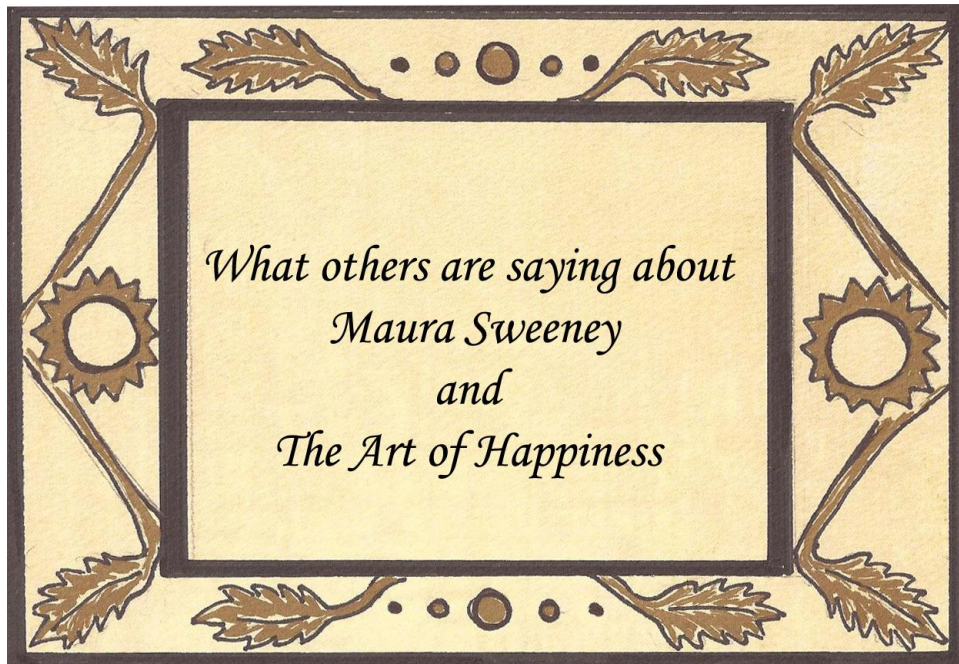
Read this book and discover you are more powerful than you know.





1. What others are saying about Maura Sweeney.
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Initially called the *Ambassador of Happiness* by the UNESCO Center for Peace, Maura Sweeney now officially holds the Trademark for a title that embodies her lifetime vocation.

A popular media guest, Maura is also a Law of Attraction endorsed coach and creator of the [Foundations of Happiness](#) self-study ecourse.

Here's what others are saying about this Next Gen Thought Leader and purveyor of living happy from the inside out.

"Maura finds joy in the journey of life." ~ Ron Laker – Retired CEO

"Maura is dynamic and really inspiring." ~ Sharon Kistler – Founder, Amazing Woman Success Network

"Happiness is an art that Maura has mastered and she invites us all to become artists of happiness, too." ~ Amy Bryant – Author

"With insightful anecdotes and a charming style, Maura breaks down vital life lessons into content that is easily managed in the frenzied pace of the digital age. " ~ Anonymous Amazon Review

"Not your typical self-help book. This one is positive, fun and light-hearted on how to be happy." ~ Laura Kepner - Author

“Maura shares a wealth of wisdom and practical tips to help all of us move out of our comfort zone and live in freedom.” ~ Linda Brown – Certified Life Coach

“Maura’s energy and ideas have boosted my confidence in breaking out of my shell.” ~ Cristin Stillman – Owner, The Legacy Law Firm

“Maura is multi-faceted and brilliant. She helps you think for yourself and prompts you to focus on things that are really important.” ~ Joanne Weiland – CEO, LinktoExpert



For more about what others are saying about Maura Sweeney’s work, visit her web site by clicking [here](#).





Welcome to my book series *The Art of Happiness*.

As far back as I can remember I've been heading toward happiness.

While others might have been seeking money, power, fame or position, I've had the simple goal of being happy.

You may be young or old, rich or poor, male or female. You may be experiencing gain or loss, fame or obscurity, power or vulnerability, health or illness. Despite changes the world can bring, we have the ability to choose how we process each life experience by determining how we view things from within.

I am not the only one who believes happiness comes from within because there are a few others who share my sentiment:

"Most folks are as happy as they make their minds up to be."  
~ Abraham Lincoln

"Happiness doesn't depend on any external condition; it is governed by our mental attitude."  
~ Dale Carnegie

"We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves."  
~ Buddha

“Happiness depends on oneself.”

~ Aristotle

As you read *The Art of Happiness*, you’ll discover many invitations to change the way you think.

You’ll explore the art of living happy – from the inside out.

Each book in this series takes on a different subject, like *Comfort Zones*, *Judgment*, *Competition*, *Values*, *Influence* and *Nonsense*.

I start by asking you a question or two, so you can focus on the particular topic.

Next, I share a narrative or several anecdotes on the subject and allow you to think about your own experiences while you follow along.

I continue with a few thoughts for you to reflect upon, knowing you will draw from yourself new light on the subject.

Finally, it’s time for you! In my next segment, I pose reflective questions and action items to equip and empower you along your journey of living happy – from the inside out.



As you follow the process, you'll find yourself becoming more confident. You'll begin to see the connection between your inner thoughts and your outer life experiences.

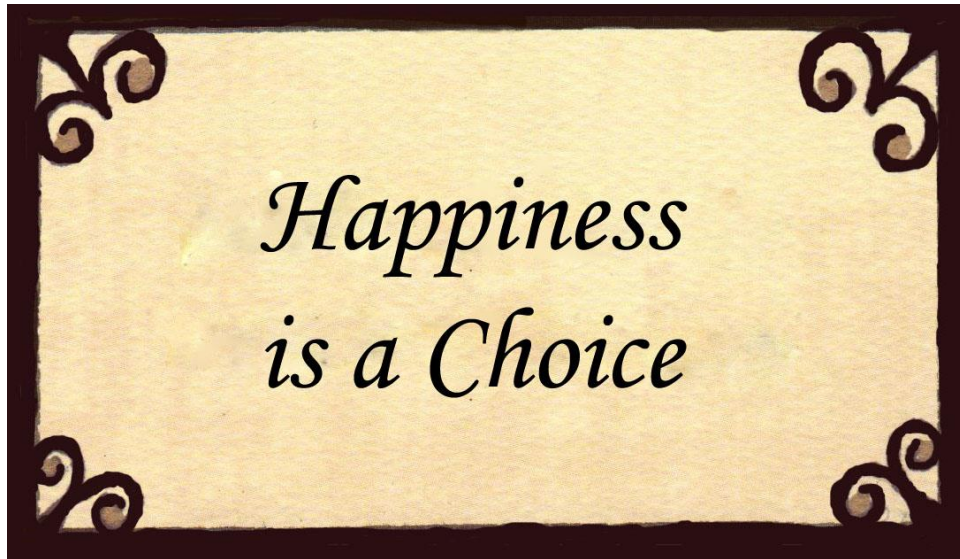
No matter where we've been, each of us can learn to see life through a more positive lens. When we believe that happiness is found within, we allow ourselves to see gifts, growth, and personal rewards - even during life's most stressful and challenging times.

I hope the words in this *Art of Happiness* series echo something you've thought about, pondered or even wished for yourself.

My words speak to the heart that truly wants to be happy.

Remember, living happy from the inside out is an art that requires time and mindfulness to master.





It's arrived upon by personal decision, often a repeated one.

As an inspirer, my desire is to help readers of *The Art of Happiness* series find their own happiness in life.

I'm not a motivator who creates external feelings of excitement that vanish once the moment has passed.

As an inspirer, my aim is quite different because I work internally.

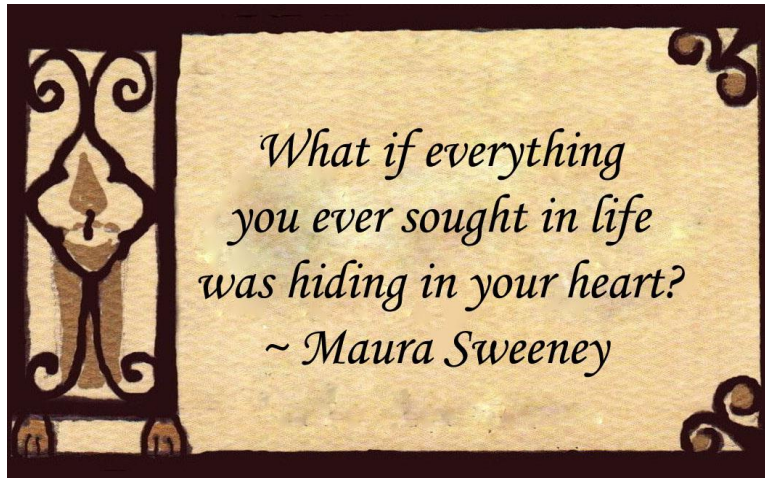
I help you unearth your own private thoughts and transport you to the core of your understanding.

When my words, stories and questions resonate with you, they become a candle of illumination within, lighting your way to happiness.

This book series challenges you to choose a brighter path. In time, you will discover the empowering knowledge you already possess.

Eventually, you'll be able to live according to your own light rather than having to rely on the light of others.





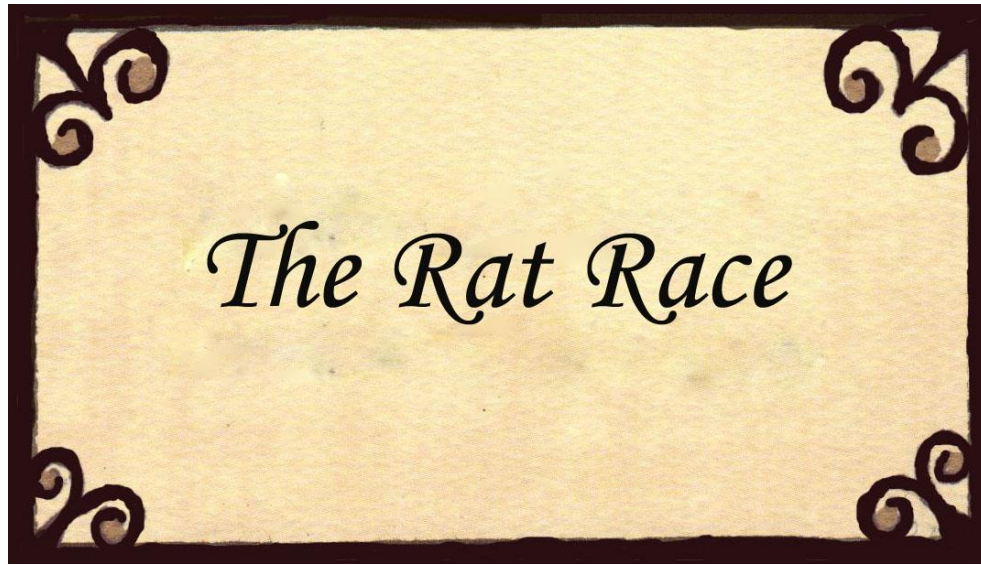
We can live in a world running after the human race, finding ourselves racing in a perennial circle and getting nowhere.

Or, we can harvest the light and life that exists within us and discover the happiness, purpose and peace that has eluded us.

You are more powerful and resourceful than you know.

Be happy and enjoy *The Art of Happiness* book series ~ Maura





# *The Rat Race*



Who started what we refer to as the Rat Race?

I'm not sure of its genesis, but I'm certain the Rat Race is not all it's cracked up to be. For example, have you ever stopped to realize you were working hard for a goal you really didn't want?

Maybe I'm too old or just too cynical, but I've watched people run after all kinds of nonsense. Remember when drinking water became a fad and we were told a healthy body required at least 8 quarts of H<sub>2</sub>O a day to stay healthy? Women carried giant plastic jugs of water everywhere, some strapping them over their shoulders or around the waist. I wondered how many ended up with back and neck problems. How many wild dashes did they make to the ladies room? All for a passing fad.

Water fad aside, I've seen the Rat Race show up in far more pernicious ways. People have joined clubs they didn't believe in, married people they didn't like and taken jobs they hated because they others persuaded them. They believed a position sounded impressive or thought that money or power would fulfill them.

An early example I recall of someone getting caught up in the Rat Race was a friend of mine from college. Convinced that a career in law and the money it could garner could bring him a certain amount of social status, he turned miserable before his 30th birthday. Despite his

designer clothes, new Mercedes and tony digs in the most exclusive section of Boston, he hated having to represent the same dead-beat clients who lied to collect workers' compensation.

"Why don't you quit? Do something else?" I asked him, rather innocently, years ago.

"Maura, you don't understand," he protested, "I'm earning a huge income."

I asked him again why he wouldn't change his area of practice or move to another firm. Apparently, I still didn't get it. The retort was the same. "You don't understand. I'm making a lot of money."

He was right; I didn't understand.

The guy was totally unhappy.

He was disgusted with his clients and his line of work, but refused to leave it because the Rat Race of social importance figured too prominently in his mind. He pursued outwardly those things that would make him feel important, but sacrificed greatly on something else – his personal happiness.

Races are great when we enjoy the prize at the finish line. They're empowering when the pursuit of a goal brings us personal satisfaction and joy. But when choosing to run a race for social acceptance or approval of others and nothing more, we can potentially lose in a big way.

We can lose our sense of identity and lose our true happiness.

So is it possible to pursue what we want for the right reasons?

As I share some personal experiences involving life's Rat Race, I encourage you to come up with some thoughts of your own on the subject.





I awakened one morning with the word competition rolling about my head. It was an odd term for somebody like me, whose background and orientation was anathema to the notion.

*Competition?* I wondered.

I looked up the word to find it involved striving, vying with another or others for profit, prize, position or the necessities of life.

Competition is generally regarded as a rivalry, a contest, a match or any other trial of skill or ability. Finally, it's described as the rival of two or more businesses striving for the same customer or market.

The notion of competition frequently shows up in the sphere of sports. We think of teams and individuals in football, soccer, tennis or golf playing against rivals for a specific title or prize.

For me, most childhood friends would recall the uncoordinated and myopic *Miss Irrelevant* during recess games on our school playground. I was nearly always the last player picked by captains of opposing teams. Most of the time, I was afraid of softballs heading my way and, rather than running toward them, I'd look to avoid them hitting me.

Even worse, if I had to name my best sport during junior and senior high school, I'd have to default to square dancing in Phys Ed. There

was neither competition and nor fear of stray balls heading toward my unfit frame.

Years later, I was coaxed by a staff member to form a company softball team. In the interest of demonstrating management bonding and goodwill, he also asked me to participate.

After warning him about my lack of athletic prowess, I conveniently slotted myself in the number 9 spot. Happy to support the cause, I could remain last batter up and, alternately, serve in deep, deep, deep right field -- where the ball and I were least likely to meet!

Recently, I was caught cheering for both the USA basketball team and their opponents from the Dominican Republic during an international masters basketball tournament in Prague, Czech Republic.

"Nice," joked one of the players to my husband, who was also on the court. "We work our butts off to compete at this level and Pollyanna Maura's out there clapping for the other players."

My husband could only laugh at the familiar but oddball behavior. He'd come to expect it from a wife who advocates for everyone's success – each in his or her own place and time – both on and off the field or court.

Even when a loved one is involved in a sports competition, I still want everyone to win.



I admit it. I just wasn't designed to compete in sports. Maybe I wasn't designed to compete at all. So why did this crazy notion of competition pop into my head, the person least qualified to write on the topic, I wondered.

A bit of soul-searching provided the answer to my question.

I wasn't to write about competition the way the world viewed it. I was to write about competition the way *I* did.

I was to write about the only type of competition that mattered to me: The Competition of Life.

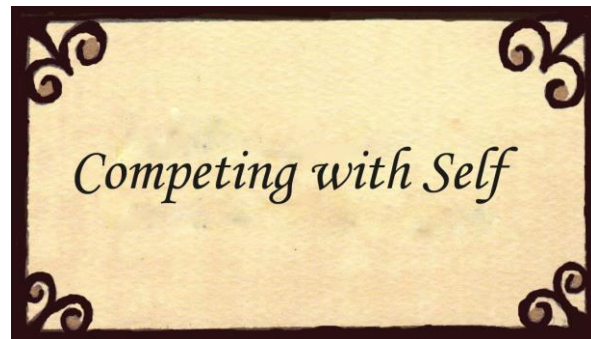
Further, I could tackle the subject (no pun intended) with a long-term eye toward life's bigger picture. This long-term view was perhaps an angle that was often overlooked but could offer some merit.

You see, I've only had only one rival in life.

And that single rival was myself.

I could compete only with my lower and more common, developing self. And, as if engaged in some private game of talent, I've spent a lifetime finding new ways to exercise and grow against a previous version of my lower self.





In one of my earliest quests to self-improve, I practiced staying under water in our backyard pool. Holding on to the ladder in the deep end, I'd silently count how long I could remain submerged without breathing.

I vividly recall my Nana, banging furiously at me through the kitchen window, yelling like she was going to have a heart attack: "What the hell are you doing down there for so long? You're going to drown, and I don't know how to swim!"

Okay, so maybe you're not impressed with my attempts at personal lung expansion. But it makes my point. I was a little girl looking for ways to grow in any way available.

On a more moderate note, I decided to teach myself how to type during the summer of 6th grade. I picked up a correspondence course textbook and applied myself before a sturdy Royal typewriter.

For the young and uninitiated, typewriters arrived sometime after the printing press but way before computer keyboards were introduced.

Further, this particular typewriter's design was standard rather than electric; it responded not to touch, but to physical attack. An old school typist would have to dutifully and firmly exercise every finger - right down to those previously weak and flimsy pinky fingers - if he or she wanted letters to appear on paper.

So each evening after dinner, I'd progress through a few pages of the typing book. Clocking myself in both speed and efficiency, I always tried to better my stats. It was exciting and empowering.

I loved learning a new skill and enjoyed marking progress along the way.



In college, I took advantage of a five-day ski trip during winter break. I knew no one on the trip except my friend Patty Dean who lived across the hall. While Patty (who eventually became captain of the Boston College ski club) and other ski club members took to the tall mountains each day, I rendezvoused with fellow beginners.

Sporting rented skis and mismatched, hand-me-down outerwear, I braved the bunny slopes of Vermont's Mount Snow. Each morning, I took my place in ski class among a group of newly assigned 8-year old friends. Though also beginners, many of them zipped along with far more skill than I did, plus a lot less stress.

This experience proved alternately frightening and freezing. Though fearful of losing control while whisking downhill, I pressed myself to shiver and stumble along the mini slopes until the sun went down each afternoon.

Did I care that evening hours at the lodge were spent listening to everyone else's daring feats on the expert diamond runs? Absolutely not! I totally respected these people.

My experience was a good one for me. I felt personally empowered for having braved the minor bunny slopes. I felt brave in overcoming my fear of jumping off the chair lift. I felt stronger internally in learning how to scale a mountain side-ways and for maintaining my skis sufficiently pigeon-toed to keep from moving too fast down those "perilous" 10-degree declines.

Further, I was having fun on a level all my own, injecting personal tales with the group each evening. Who couldn't share a post-traumatic laugh with me about making frantic, emergency calls to those in front of me on the slopes. They cringed and cackled at my minor terrors while skiing.

Slipping on ice, I'd be yelling to those ahead of me, "Get out of the way!"



"Watch out! I don't know how to stop!"

"I'm so sorry I ruined your run!"

For the stationery girl who barely left her front porch as a child, taking advantage of skiing while visiting a new state added to my sense of personal accomplishment.

I was competing with my smaller, isolated, more fearful self – and coming out a winner!

I'd never seek to be an Olympic competitor or even a great snow skier, but I was truly happy knowing I could successfully learn the basics.



Soon thereafter, with some coaxing from my fit, future husband, I took up jogging.

Started very reluctantly with a half-mile jog on campus, I advanced to a mile, two miles and finally three.

A few years later, I completed Tampa's annual 9-mile Gasparilla Race and, on another occasion, finished a half marathon. It made no difference where I began in the race or even where I finished. My satisfaction arose from marking my personal development from former inanimate amoeba to a more mobile Maura.

Completing these jogging events served as major mental – as well as physical – victories for me personally.

In early adulthood, I even participated in a unique biking opportunity.

While still living in the northeast, I cycled the 70+ mile trip from Philadelphia to Atlantic City (or was it the other way around?).

It wasn't necessary for me to repeat the journey but, rather, to know I had personally pedaled it.

I could look back and say, "I did that."

All of these served as steppingstones, showing me that I could arise into a stronger and better version of myself.



There were other ways in which I stretched beyond my previous notions of self.

Years ago, I leapt at the opportunity to brave a 9-day trip to Africa's more remote locales.

For someone like me who appreciates clean sheets and a comfy mattress, this was definitely new territory. The trip involved visiting two islands so remote that one had no name and the other was merely referred to as "Fly Island" for the plague-like swarms of flies that visited upon each day.

Having a belief that the waters of Lake Victoria were of the devil, they never left their island homes. Not only had the natives not heard of the United States; they didn't know the continent of Europe existed, either. References to automobiles and air travel were also foreign concepts.

Our small group left Uganda's mainland and traveled on boats formed from hollowed out tree trunks. Upon arrival, I marveled at how simply these people fished, cooked and lived. For spiritual worship and entertainment, they danced endlessly to the beat of their homemade drums.

Of particular interest and amusement was an opportunity to meet with village little ones. They had never laid eyes on a white person like me and were astounded by my approach.

We didn't speak the same language, but I understood their thoughts and enjoyed watching their animated conversation. With great curiosity, they inspected my alien appearance. One child looked at me as if to ask, "Can I touch your hand?" I chuckled and extended it her way. With great anticipation, she and another child took hold of my hand and forearm, first inspecting it and then rubbing furiously against my skin.

As if seeking to clear off dust, they expected brown skin to appear. When no such color appeared beneath my pale façade, they were amazed and convinced: I was an alien creature!

Next, I had an engaging idea. I removed a photo of my white, 8-year-old daughter. She was more akin to “one of them.” This time, they chatted and debated among themselves anew about this oddly pale creature. She was like them – but not!

The experience was delightful fun for everyone involved. We all got a big laugh out of the encounter, but presumably for different reasons!

During the next several days, I felt time-warped, as if transferred to a denser dimension. I was given a tent to pitch, another clumsily constructed, but personal feat. I also learned to use open fields as my outhouse. Island locals didn’t bathe and neither did I. By the end of our week, I was tearing my remaining baby wipes in half, sharing one piece with my tent mate and making judicious use of the other half for myself.

The new exposure felt deep and intense, but surprisingly enjoyable on a number of levels. I loved being around these kind and friendly villagers and partaking, if just briefly, in their simpler existence.

Moreover, the distant voyage strengthened me. I discovered I was capable of braving more primitive elements when away from my typically plum, American lifestyle.

You might wonder how visiting remote African villages, sleeping in a tent or using an open field as an outhouse relates to the idea of competition.

But it does in every way.

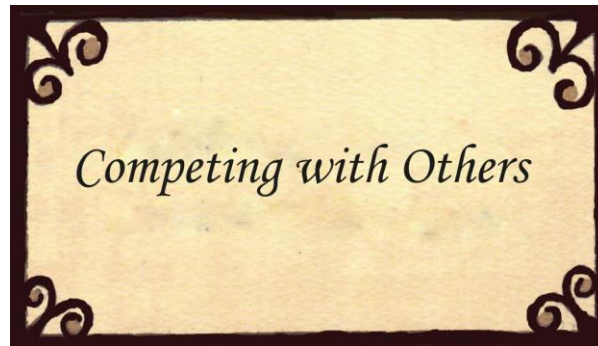
Previously, I thought myself too timid, tender or otherwise unfit for this type of adventure. Instead, I discovered some of my untapped mettle!

Ideas about personal growth and development vary by individual. And not everyone will jump at a trip to a remote destination or unfamiliar terrain.

What’s important is how we choose to compete with ourselves and grow into something greater and more expansive. We can use any of a

number of challenges or opportunities turn the process into a creative and personally crafted journey.





*Competing with Others*

So far, I've offered varied glimpses into experiences aimed at improving upon the lesser, or underdeveloped, version of myself. Each experience helped me break through previously held constructs and see myself in new and dynamic ways.

The previous narratives all involved competition with the self.

Now, however, we'll travel to some of the more common arenas of competition. Specifically, this is where we interact with others. In a more familiar context, this is where we enter spheres involving the notions of scarcity, or, "not enough" for everybody involved.

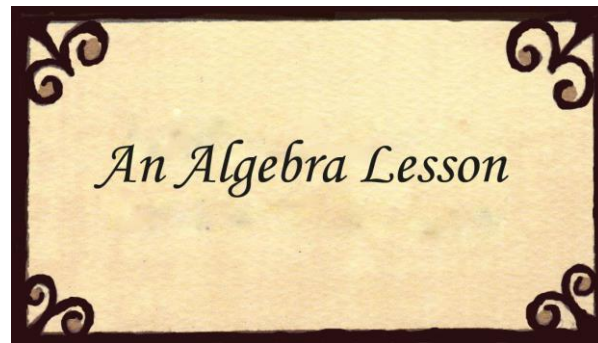
This is where competition can turn negative, unattractive and demeaning to the self as well as others.

I'm reminded here of three specific experiences. At one level or another, each will likely ring familiar. However, the outcomes to these episodes may surprise you.

Rather than responding in knee-jerk or shortsighted fashion to competition's promptings and temptations, I will share some of my own, unconventional twists to such dilemmas.

Reading them may help you revisit some experiences involving competition in your own life and help you see new alternatives in the process.





When it comes to social interaction, I've been a slow learner, fashioned with too much naivete. Like an elder brother looking out for his younger sister, a male friend once cautioned, "Maura, not everyone thinks like you do. Not everybody is nice."

Somehow, I remained unfamiliar with the rules of competition until I started high school. Even more surprising, I might have been unaware that competition even existed.

At 14, my parents took me out of public school and insisted I join the ranks of "nice girls" at a place where I could receive a presumably superior education. As a result, I enrolled at a small Catholic girls' prep school in northern New Jersey. The school was run by nuns and, in my estimation, felt constricting and unusually cliquy.

My freshman class schedule included first period Algebra followed by second period study hall. Each day, I'd sit beside a fellow classmate who shared the same morning math class and study hall in our school library.

As a matter of course, this petite, pretty, bright and purposed young girl regularly sought my help on homework assignments. Personally, I enjoyed Algebra; I envisioned it as a carefully crafted, equalizing puzzle that self-resolved when actions were followed in proper sequence.

I was more than happy to help this tiny classmate solve homework problems. In fact, it was my pleasure. Doing so made me feel useful and friendly -- until one day when the tables unexpectedly reversed.

"Kitty (name change)," I quietly interrupted. "I don't understand what we were taught today. Would you mind helping me out with some of these problems?"

"I can't help you," Kitty responded flatly, then returned, pencil in hand, to her assignment.

"You didn't get it either?" I'd asked innocently, expecting to hear her agreement concerning the lesson's obscurity.

"No," she responded, "I'm not going to help you."

"What do you mean?" I asked, still behind in understanding.

Kitty huffed slightly, but enough to remain polite. Then she explained the obvious.

"I'm not helping you because I'm in competition with you."

"Competition for what?" I asked, still not comprehending.

Her words obviously echoed from her mother's self-preserving advice. In simple terms, she explained. Giving me assistance rather than keeping knowledge to herself might eventuate in my having an advantage over her in a future college application process.

*College?* We were first semester high school freshman and I couldn't conceive yet of such a distant future. Why is she talking about competing for college, now?

I was dumbfounded. With all the available colleges out there, who suggested we were even going to apply to the same one? Even if we did, I reasoned, were colleges now accepting only one student per freshman class?

Still dazed, I considered her logic as well as her argument. In my previous months of service to this pint-sized, pre-pubescent pup, I never realized she'd been regarding me as a commodity.

Kitty hadn't viewed me as a fellow student, or even an emergent friend.

She saw me, instead, as someone to be used.

My aptitude was viewed as her shortcoming. It would need to be exploited, not valued or appreciated. And, apparently, neither was I.

I felt shocked by the girl's unexpected disclosure, but realized she considered her reasoning to be normal. We were in a competitive world and her assignment, likely taught at home, was to come out on top.

I wondered how this otherwise bright, well-groomed and well-spoken young girl could behave in such a low-minded fashion.

More than that, I was saddened.

Kitty had learned this twisted life lesson on competition at home from her own mother. I was startled to learn that a parent would deliver such undermining advice.

Rather than encouraging her daughter to do her best and exercise leadership by helping others, this insecure woman was teaching an otherwise capable child to play dirty.

I'd previously respected this girl, but now she appeared shallow in character. What a loss -- not to me, but to her. She would likely grow up doubtful of her value, worth and stature. Pretense and deceit rather than well-earned merits would become the bane of her future, the fuel for an adult unease.

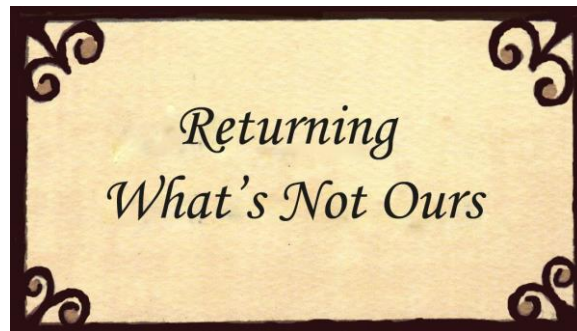
Unfortunately for this schoolmate, my free font of mathematical tutorship dried up that day. I had no interest in being used.

What a shame this girl didn't understand the most basic premises of Algebra as a healthy formula for competition: equality and reciprocity.

From now on, Kitty would have to figure out math problems on her own.







The next instance involving competition arrived around a dozen years later.

I was living in Florida and working as a District Manager for a national telecom company. One of our accomplished sales reps had just been promoted to the National Accounts division at the company's Chicago headquarters.

Not long after Rick's departure from our city, I received a monthly manager's override check. It contained an additional payment of \$3300. Knowing the check was in error, I quickly identified the source of the discrepancy. The manager override emanated from this former Florida sales rep.

Since Rick had transferred during the middle of a calendar month, the commissions department had tallied every one of his orders back to me. Sales he brought in while part of my district were fine for me to accept, but sales accrued from National Accounts were not.

To remedy the error, I immediately placed a call to the corporate office and spoke to my contact in the Commissions Department.

"Yvette, I'm calling regarding a manager's override error on my latest statement."

"Oh, sorry, Maura," the familiar voice responded on the other end of the line. "Can you give me list of the accounts we missed?"

"You didn't miss anything. You paid me too much."

"Excuse me?" she stopped. "Paid you too much?"

"One of my reps was promoted to National Accounts. I'm still getting paid on sales he made while in my district, but there's an extra \$3300 here that's attributable to his new manager."

"Maura, I've worked in this department for four years," Yvette interrupted. "You know how many calls we get here every month with people arguing that they've been underpaid or cheated? Nobody's ever called to tell me they were overpaid. Why would you?"

"Because the money's not mine. It belongs to someone else."

"Technically," she reasoned, "you could claim this payment. All sales made that final month could be attributable to you."

"Perhaps. But I had nothing to do with his last order. It belongs to National Accounts and the National Accounts Manager should be compensated, not me."

"This is truly one for the books," she sighed.

"Rip up your check and I'll send you a smaller one in the overnight mail. This is gonna be the talk of the week around here; maybe the month."

I would have been happy with a bigger bonus check. But accepting a benefit attributable to someone else would have made me feel small, pecuniary and, worse, a liar to myself.

I closed the month a few thousand dollars less "rich" in cash but stepped into the following month feeling solid, sure-footed and wealthy in other ways.

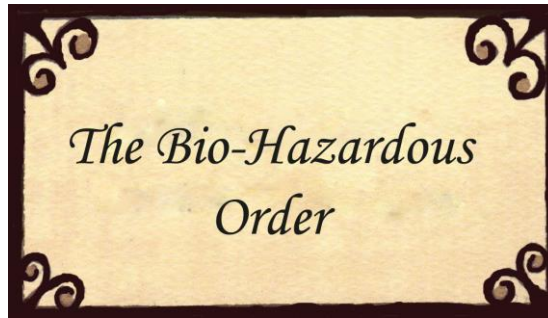
It made me feel great to know the Chicago National Accounts Manager would receive some bountiful news. Additionally, my attempt to correcting the ledger, even if supposedly against my favor, resulted in a rare form of personal currency.

Those in the corporate office recognized I was a tangible management force, worthy of trust. Secondly, they knew my leadership orientation extended beyond self-interest.

This decision involving competition with another manager and looking out for his interests as well as my own, would play a powerful and significant role in a future moment of professional crisis.

But that's another story.





*The Bio-Hazardous  
Order*

It's time for my third and final recollection with the tricky and sometimes nefarious concept known as competition.

Move the calendar up a few years and I'm still in the telecom industry, but now at a different corporation. The operation had been carefully built from the ground up. I cultivated the center with quality-minded staff whose commitment and energy consistently resulted in winning sales and customer retention results. Though issues were always being addressed, we all enjoyed the benefits of a fun culture typified by healthy competition, positive energy and collective sense of goodwill.

Until one fateful day.....

A small, but potentially malignant, issue entered our otherwise hallowed space. It arose between two sales associates in this otherwise collegial branch office.

Both of these associates were special women: smart, professional and capable. Without realizing it, the two had inadvertently worked on the same account, each within their respective sales territory.

When the contract came in for the sale, it arrived as an individual order from the client and could only be processed as a single account.

My call to the corporate office revealed that, though both reps could get paid their fair share for the business, the actual order could be credited to just one rep.

A local decision would need to be made on that score.

At first, this caveat as to which rep would get credited for the sale appeared as a mere blip on the branch radar of equilibrium. These professionals, like everyone else in our office, were amicable team players.

But somehow, things turned from unfortunate to ugly.

Our friendly team spirit started yielding to tension.

And that tension yielded to conflict. A form of discontented chatter began which undermined the positive and supportive culture we'd all grown accustomed to and appreciated.

Growing impatient with their inability to work the matter out, I invited both women back to my office and listened as each stated her case. Afterward, I provided a few suggestions of my own, the last of which was that the two agree to resolve their issue or I'd resolve it for them.

Unfortunately, the tension between them did not abate. To the contrary, it escalated, and quickly. The order became a symbol of determining dominance, preeminence and personal triumph to another's loss.

Passionate conversations about the infamous order made their way around the sales team and support staff. The effect was creating discontent toward the company and fomenting a rising tide of divisions as sales reps choosing relative sides with each of the offended.

As if by stealth, this seemingly innocuous order was morphing into a fatal bio-hazardous cancer on a mission to destroy our previously peaceful work environment. Positive energy, generally aimed toward achieving business goals, was suddenly replaced by an unwelcome negative force. It worked counter-productively, sucking the life from individual motivation and group aspirations.

Two and a half days of this growing insanity was sufficient.

I called both women back to my office and asked them to sit before me again.

This time, I picked up the phone and called my contemporary in Atlanta.

"Susan, this is Maura," I noted. "I'm calling with a gift."

"A gift?" she asked, surprised by this unexpected gesture. "What kind?"

"It's an order."

"An order? From an account up here?"

"No. It's an order that we can't agree upon down here. It's not huge, but it's a decent sized new account. I'd like for you to have it."

Emerging from their respective funks, the two women sitting in front of me turned white with shock. They knew they were both losing it all. Suddenly, as if the cancer miraculously found a cure, the two rivals turned into instant compatriots.

Formulating a last minute re-do, they quickly engaged in rapid-fire, whispered discussion, hoping to remedy their previous dispute.

But it was too late.

They not only lost the coveted order; now they forfeited the commissions they were both entitled to receive.

My conversation with the Atlanta manager continued.

"Maura, why are you giving this order away?" she asked. "Don't you realize you're shorting yourself on this, too?"

"I don't care," I told her, miffed. I was offended by the degraded condition of our office's morale and lack of professionalism.

"If that order stays in Tampa, it'll kill us all." I told her. "It's not worth the price."

I did, however, add a proviso to my call, a condition upon the disbursement of the gift.

"The only thing I request of you is this: Give that order to one of your reps who's been putting forth his or her best efforts. Use it as an incentive. Be sure to award it publicly during one of your meetings and tell the rep 'Congratulations and Best Wishes from the Tampa Team'."

And so it was.

The case of the competitively challenged order was now closed.

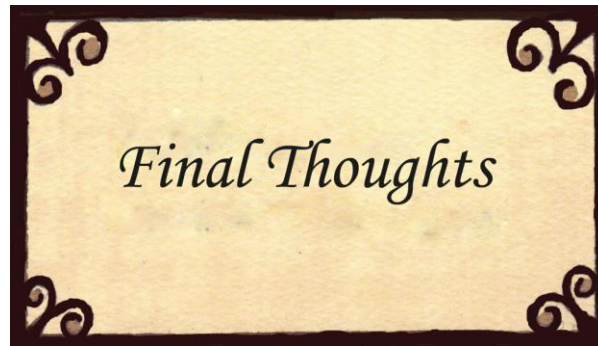
The two, formerly offended sales reps slipped quietly out of my office without a word and the negatively charged office cancer lifted, immediately.

News of my unorthodox disposal of the bio-hazardous order quickly circulated among the rest of the previously offended. Quiet gasps of shock and awe followed, but all further disputes and complaints did not.

By the following morning, peace was restored to our Telecom-land. Its returned was a welcome breath of fresh air.

We never had another dispute, or at least one that couldn't be resolved between the reps themselves.





## *Final Thoughts*

Here are some final thoughts on my seminal encounters with competition.

Do I know what ever happened to Kitty, the petite girl who needed to compete with me in freshman Algebra? No. For one, I didn't stick around long enough to find out. By sophomore year, I'd returned to public school so I never learned what college or university we both supposedly couldn't attend together.

Did Kitty learn reciprocity – and respect – for others? I don't know but I hope so. I've sometimes wondered: *Is she the next generation of her own mother's insecurity, modeling small behavior to her offspring, teaching them to compete in negative fashion, too?*

A good ending to Kitty's story would be hearing she learned that the only one worth competing against was a small-minded vision of self – and personally winning big!

How about the overpayment of a \$3300 check that was never really mine? It was never really mine. Period. In my future, I would not have to wonder, worry or second-guess my motives. Taking advantage of that quasi-gained override could never be questioned by anyone in my corporate future. Guilt attached to gain could never bring me gladness and I'm sure I chose the latter.

Finally, what about the infamous bio-hazardous order? While small in the light of time and passing in the scope of money, it provoked unnecessary egos, undermined working relationships, and threatened the health and well being of an otherwise thriving group of professionals.

Furthering strife at the expense of peace was entirely too high a price for me to pay for any order – big, small or otherwise.



As a happy side note, someone in the Atlanta branch was unexpectedly rewarded for doing his or her best. Turning a Tampa bio-hazard into a bonus for Atlanta contemporaries (and presumable competitors) improved our relationships, stature and respectability within the region.

Oddly, my unwillingness to tolerate in-fighting over a single order whose proceeds would be quickly spent but whose bitterness long remembered went a long way toward defining the kinds of professionals we were in that office.

Unorthodox and seemingly disadvantageous, the move ultimately made us all a lot happier, stronger and united. We all felt the wisdom that arises when refusing to succumb to selfishness, strife and self-centeredness.





A summary...

In the span of a lifetime, we are presented with countless individual and social opportunities. Each invites us to define who we are and how we wish to see ourselves within the world.

Sometimes, interests and passions arise from within us, motivating us to lift ourselves to new levels of greatness. We channel our aspirations to become something bigger and more fulfilling to self.

At other times, we are motivated by low-level, socially charged messages to compete in negative fashion with our fellow man.

When external messages play upon our feelings of lack, ineptitude or other shortcomings, we may unknowingly respond in short-term acts of self-preservation.

But when we engage in negative striving, compromised maneuverings and other disingenuous attempts at competing and winning it all – especially at the expense of others – we pay a heavy price. The toll scratches at our self-confidence and leaves us feeling like silent losers.

We lose at the game of competition when it steals our peace, character and joyous personal freedom.

A wise friend once remarked, "Whenever I'm in a quandary about what to do or how to respond to a situation, I always ask myself *What's my motive?*"

It's a great litmus test.

If our motives include growing and extending ourselves into more excellent versions of oneself, I'd say that's a pretty positive reason to proceed. If our motive is to cover up or compensate for a sense of lack and insecurity by taking, extorting or otherwise extracting from those around us, it's not.

When such temptations arise, it's probably a good idea to pause, think again and wait for a more uplifting, wholesome way to proceed.

May your every competitive encounter, and the ways in which you choose to respond, help you to ultimately gain the biggest prize of all.

You!

The last time I checked, no one had rationed the availability and supply of happiness and well-being.

May your life choices always seek more of what's good and may you be among those who increase its beneficial circulation.





Now that you've read my stories about competition, it's time to consider some of your own.

### **Action Items for You!**

1. Close your eyes and place your hand over your heart (lower than your collar bone and a bit above the chest). Then take a few, relaxing breaths. Doing so will quiet your thoughts, shift attention away from the static of the intellect and help you connect with your inner GPS of remembrance.

2. Survey your memories from early life, adolescence, and other segments of time and circumstance with a focus on competition.

When and where did you feel particularly aware and fearful of loss or lack? As an alternative, seek to remember advice or messaging you received regarding competition that left an impression on you. (Let your mind wander to various times and places as they appear before you.)

3. When a thought arises to capture your attention, pause and take note. You have just connected with one of several keys to discover more about yourself, unlock your embedded belief systems and even access a path to your personal happiness, autonomy and self-expression.

4. Proceed at your own pace; you are reviewing a lifetime of belief systems and patterning. Using your own handwriting, write down what you saw, felt and heard. Describe how you responded, and why.

Examine each circumstance and memory from several perspectives – yours as well as those of others. As you travel along in this process, consider other options that bring old ideas to the forefront; drawing a picture, creating an audio recording or finding a photo that captures the feel, sound and/or imagery to clarify and brighten this memory or create a new intention.

5. Consider the why's of your behavior in each situation. For example, did you cheat, extort or otherwise compete because of peer pressure? Presumption of a prize your ego needed? Think about how some of your words, activities and intentions might have undermined your sense of peace and self-worth.

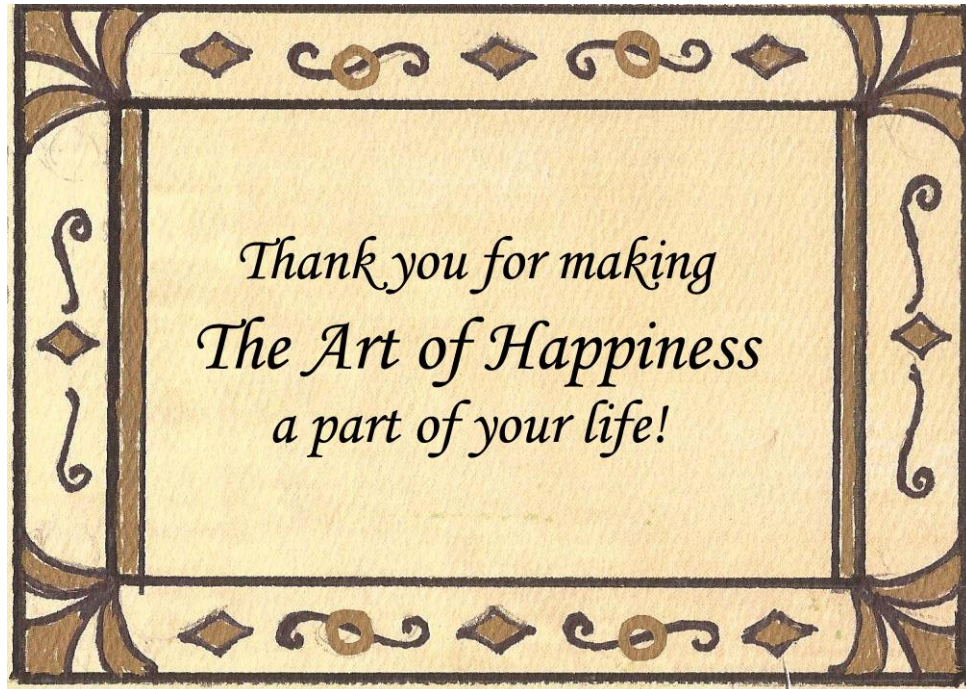
If you could do a redo, how might you respond or react today? Why? How does that re-do feel? Consider making appropriate new choices that reflect a change of intention or a new focus on personal character.

6. Ask yourself: How can these former experiences be used for good today? How can I learn from negative behavior and also model something better now for myself and for others to emulate?

Finally, ask: Is there a way to un-do, correct or atone for things in my past where I may have harmed others? Time and circumstances making re-do's impractical. However, when a heart is poised toward something of a higher order, novel and uplifting ideas will emerge.

NOTE: Take your time. This is an open-ended inquiry designed to release your heart, soul and imagination. Expect new possibilities to arise that will convert an old concept and transform it into something meaningful and happy for your life today.





Thank you for purchasing Volume 4 in *The Art of Happiness* series. May you find your life brightened by entering its pages.

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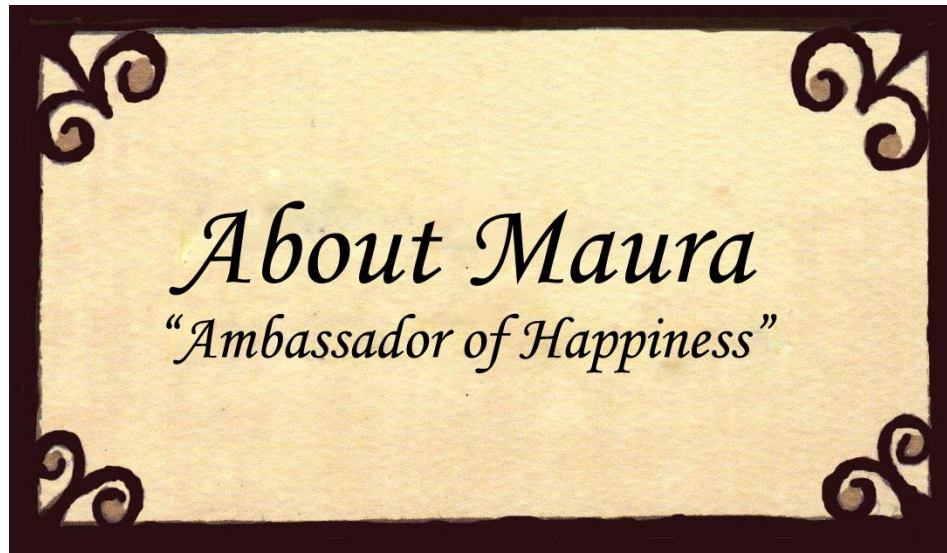
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The advertisement features a dark blue background with a stylized globe on the right side. The globe is decorated with various travel-related icons: a hot air balloon, a clock tower, a sailboat, a castle, and a horse. A red button with a white checkmark and the text 'BOOK NOW' is positioned in the lower left quadrant. The website address 'www.vivaster.com' is located at the bottom left.



Thanks again for supporting my message "Living Happy – Inside Out."





As a child growing up in New Jersey, Maura dreamed of boarding planes, having fun and meeting friends in foreign lands.

She never would have imagined that fifty years later, the UNESCO Center for Peace would call her the *Ambassador of Happiness*.

A 1980 Boston College graduate, Maura left law school mid-stream to exit a career path she was groomed for to find her own brand of happiness. This pivotal decision formed the catalyst for what would become her ultimate vocation: to help others "Live Happy – Inside Out".

With her experience as a corporate manager, business owner and home schooling mom, Maura now purveys reflective questions and good news stories that uplift, inspire and empower.

Incorporating her travels to 50+ countries, Maura helps others see what unites people and shares what's best in us all.

Maura and her husband Jim met when they were students at Boston College. Married since 1981, they enjoy life on Florida's Gulf Coast while supporting each other in their respective empty nest careers.

Maura loves playing witty wordsmith for Jim's [MIKE Sports Comics Book Series](#). As publisher, her goal is that anyone – even non-sports fans like her – can understand appreciate and MIKE's clever narratives.

An expert traveler and consummate organizer, Jim makes sure his highly creative wife Maura remembers her keys, gets out of the garage on time and knows what city she's in – even when that city is her own.

Their daughter Kaley, a journalist living in New York, loves to travel too. Her parents often wonder how she got from New York City to London for just \$20 or how she's managed to make so many friends in remote places. Now completing her masters at Harvard, Kaley co-founded [Empowered-Voices](#), a non-profit supporting community development projects for women in Uganda's Mubende district. Her mom is a very proud Member of the Board of Directors.



As the *Ambassador of Happiness*, Maura is easy to find on the web.

See the following page for the many places you can locate her podcasts, videos, blogs and books.





For more of Maura, click [here](#) or on the frame above to be directed to her web site where you can access Maura's:

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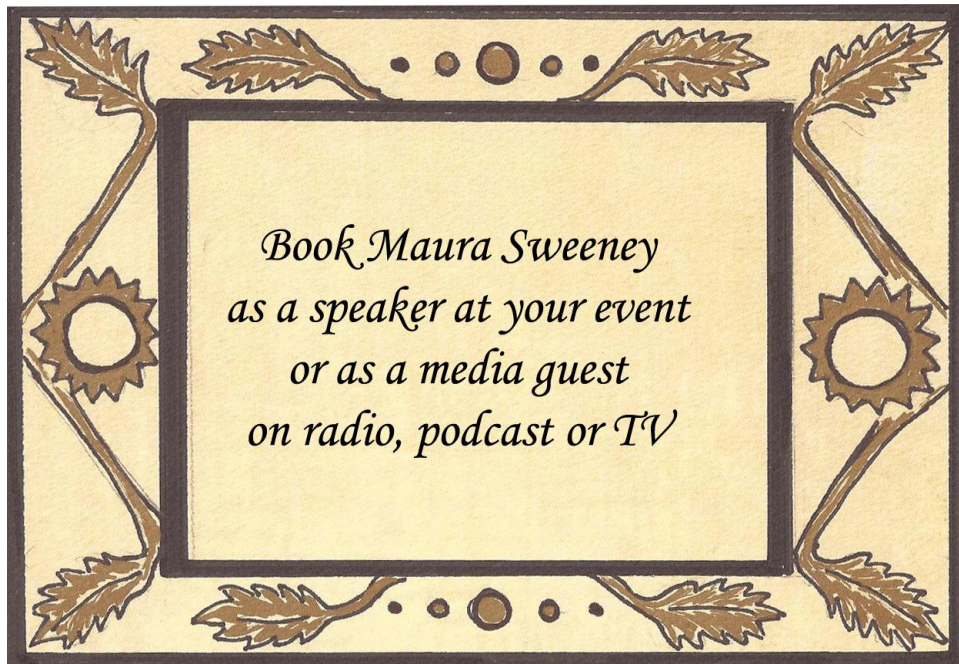
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Enjoy more on the path of living happy – from the inside out!





"Maura's tips and strategies are not just nuggets. They are golden." ~ Judy Hoberman – Founder, Selling in a Skirt

"Maura is tenacious, energetic, ambitious and humble at the same time. She has a wealth of experience and is a great story teller." ~ Paul Rigby – President, International Thought Leader Network

"Maura possesses an incredible gift of zeroing in on what you are great at, then encouraging and inspiring you to live your best life." ~ Dan Sherman – LinkedIn Author & Social Media Guru

"I love Maura's amazing energy, encouragement and joy that she brought to my country and me." ~ Biljana Marojevic – Serbian Journalist, Tanjung News Agency

"After listening to Maura, I feel like a Neanderthal in front of a 25th century pioneer." ~ Antonio Garcia – Attache, Belgian Embassy

"Maura has a zest for life and an optimistic outlook." ~ Mike O'Toole – Host, The Launching Point Podcast

"Maura promotes a refreshing, positive message of happiness and choice that beckons you to influence those around you. She has a message that is particularly engaging with students in Southeastern

Europe. ~ Dr. Lynne Montgomery – VP, Cortugli Business School in Zagreb, Croatia

“Maura’s joy and happiness for life are infectious.” ~ Christina Nitschmann – Host, Savvy Central Radio

“Maura was an amazing guest. To other hosts, I say book this woman now!” ~ Marc Mawhinney – Host, Natural Born Coaches Podcast



An accomplished speaker for business meetings, university gatherings and special interest groups, Maura speaks both in the United States and internationally. Click [here](#) for her Speaker Page.

A Happiness Expert and Next Gen Thought Leader, Maura speaks on:

Leadership, Influence and Paradigm Shifts

Identity, Reinvention and Personal Branding

Exiting Comfort Zones and Achieving Happiness Within

Also, Maura appears regularly on inspirational, self-help and empowerment podcasts and radio talk shows where she discusses the topics above as well as what it takes to live happy from the inside out.





Please write her at [maura@maura4u.com](mailto:maura@maura4u.com) and include the words **Speaker Question** in the subject line of your email.

Indicate the nature, date and location of your event, the size and demographic of your audience and the length and expectation of Maura's presentation.







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