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# Women to Watch

## Five deep thinkers reveal how they find balance amidst life's chaos— and how you can, too.

EDITED BY STACEY KENNELLY

One says to buy less stuff. Another teaches how to get your stress in check. A third just wants you to make your bed. These women know the importance of living in harmony—physically, mentally, personally, and professionally—and how you can streamline your life for maximum happiness and well-being.

**Ayesha Curry / Dr. Sara Gottfried / Christine Carter / Mariam Safinia / Maura Wolf**

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## Follow Your Passion

New-Media Foodie: **Ayesha Curry** on cultivating a clean family life.

**Bio:** Founder, Little Lights of Mine; NBA wife and mother.

There's a knock at the door, and Ayesha Curry apologizes before leaving mid-interview, labradoodle Reza bounding after her. A contractor has lost his drafting triangle, and she looks around, spotting it near a basket of toys.

Curry returns to the couch, pulling close a supersoft blanket. Then, with a big grin and a little squeal, she exclaims, "We're having our kitchen remodeled!"

That's an exciting project for anyone, but especially for this 26-year-old former actress, who is a rising star on YouTube with her cooking and lifestyle channel, Little Lights of Mine. Filmed in her Spanish-style home in the Orinda hills, Curry's videos share her step-by-step recipes for breakfast soufflé, shrimp salad, and homemade almond milk, plus a host of other topics (her "little lights") that bring her joy in her journey to live a clean, balanced life grounded in family and faith.

Her personality renders well on-screen—warm, expressive, optimistic, and a little goofy—as she raves about the sizzle of meat in a hot pan or busts a move while a blender whirs. Sometimes, Curry's husband, Golden State Warriors point guard and NBA All-Star Stephen Curry, and their two-year-old daughter, Riley, make cameos—like in her most popular video, "Chef Curry With the Pot," a rap spoof that has 1.3 million views. Which isn't to say that the channel isn't distinctly her own project.

"It's very organic, and that's how I wanted it to be," she says. "I haven't had Stephen push it, and I'm not forcing it. The people that are subscribing like what I'm doing, and that's more rewarding."

Curry credits a childhood love of The Food Network—particularly Emeril Lagasse and Giada de Laurentiis—and reruns of Julia Child for teaching her how to cook and experiment with flavors. The birth of her daughter brought an obsession with label reading, and paying attention to what's in the food and products Curry offers to her family.

"Motherhood made me picky," she says. "Just before Riley was born, I became a crazy person. I threw a bunch of stuff out and made my own cleaning products. There was barely any food in the fridge. Everybody was annoyed with me."

Eventually, Curry found balance. She grows much of her own produce in her home garden, and generally buys organic for



the “dirty dozen,” but doesn’t fret about the rest. Products from The Honest Company have supplanted many of her homemade body scrubs, oils, and balms. And her family prioritizes active fun, from playing golf and taking horseback riding lessons to walking at the Lafayette Reservoir. Attending church together on Sundays is also a priority.

Curry says faith has kept her and her husband grounded amid the glamour and globe trotting of the NBA. The two met in church youth group in North Carolina, and married at the same church in 2011, after reconnecting while Stephen was playing NCAA hoops and Ayesha was booking small roles on TV shows such as *Hannah Montana*. “Faith is everything for us, really. It’s what our relationship and our entire family are founded on,” she says. “Especially in Stephen’s profession, it’s easy to be pulled away from that, so we hold each other accountable and make sure we communicate and pray with each other.”

The Orinda community, too, has been a support for the young family, who are living far from relatives. Beyond

having the convenience of nearby parks, a library, and a community center—“and Starbucks,” Curry emphasizes, with an expression of mixed joy and guilt—they’ve connected with other families, including the previous owners of their home, who moved just down the street.

“I wanted a sense of community where, when Stephen’s gone, I know we’re still taken care of and kind of looked after,” she says. “We totally get that here.”

While there are away games and evenings spent at Oracle Arena, the family members are together more often than one would think, and they like to keep a low profile. They enjoy spending time at home, watching HGTV and sharing meals together. Curry’s go-to weeknight recipe is a pan-cooked steak with roasted potatoes and vegetables. For game nights, she makes a big pot of pasta with red sauce (“I’ll sneak veggies in there”) and lean meat.

Soon, Curry’s kitchen will be more functional and large enough to accommodate her growing food career—and family. She recently launched Little Lights of Mine—branded olive oil made from Sonoma Arbequina olives, with proceeds going to Share Our Strength’s No Kid Hungry campaign, as well as a line of aprons in collaboration with San Francisco’s Lundy Way. And a cookbook and a cooking television show are in the works, although details are hush-hush. She’s also expecting a second child in July.

For now, though, it’s all about that remodel. [ayeshacurry.com](http://www.ayeshacurry.com).

—LeeAnne Jones

## Outfit and Shopping Information

**Blue Dress Left:** DVF Aria silk dress, \$398, and Kate Spade Eyelet Garden necklace, \$198. **White Dress Right:** Akris mesh-insert jersey dress, \$1,190, and Givenchy Crystal Frontal necklace, \$98. All from Nordstrom. 1200 Broadway Plaza, Walnut Creek, (925) 930-7959, nordstrom.com.

## Know Your Body

Cortisol Conquerer: **Dr. Sara Gottfried** on taking control of stress.

**Bio:** M.D.; *The New York Times* best-selling author; founder, the Gottfried Institute.

Dr. Sara Gottfried's life changed in her thirties after a trip to the doctor's office. The married mother of two was overtired, overstressed, and overweight.

She was taken aback when her doctor advised her to just eat less, take a spin class, and get on antidepressants. A physician herself, Gottfried realized she likely would have given the same recommendation to her patients. But she also realized there must be a better way for women to get their vitality back. She went looking for answers and began testing what she learned on herself to see what worked.

Today, Gottfried, a Berkeley resident, is the founder of The Hormone Reset Diet and author of *The Hormone Cure*. She uses her warm, funny, and fierce personality to spread her message about the effect stress and out-of-whack hormones can have on a woman's well-being.

"I've been taking care of women for more than 20 years, and I'm board certified in everything that can go wrong with the female body," she says.

**Q: How did you know you needed to make a change?**

**A:** I realized how much time I spent thinking about weight loss and that I was addicted to my stress. Once I realized that I was creating my problems with my thoughts, I knew I could dismantle them with my thoughts.

**Q: Where did you go looking for answers, and what did you find?**



### Tips for Living Your Best Life

#### **1. Start the day right.**

Mornings set the tone for the rest of the day. Before the kids wake up or breakfast needs to be made, take 10 minutes to say a prayer or give thanks, stretch, or just sit in quiet.

**2. Make your bed.** Whenever you make your bed, you've already accomplished a task and done one productive

**A:** First, I ran some tests on myself and discovered my cortisol [the stress hormone] was three times what it should be. It was clear to me that I couldn't achieve vibrant health while being a stress junkie. We become so comfortable carrying around extra stress that it feels normal.

I studied what creates cortisol and what controls cortisol, and started applying my theories to myself. I spent a full 28 days balancing cortisol, but once I stabilized it, everything changed.

**Q: How can women balance their own cortisol?**

**A:** Get as honest about cortisol as you would with your retirement plan: Ask your doctor to do a blood test to test your cortisol. You will have to work to be

thing, which will make you want to get the rest done.

**3. Be present.** Frequently remind yourself to put your phone down, turn off the television, and cherish your moments with the people you love.

comfortable with less of it in your system.

The quickest way to reduce cortisol is to eliminate caffeine and sugar. We can reset our hormones with the way we eat, move, think, and supplement—with an emphasis on the eat (sorry!).

It's [also] very important for us to spend time with our girlfriends. I recommend that women set up scheduled times for socializing and fun. I have a standing date with a friend once a week. We've been doing it forever, so it's a part of our schedule.

**Q: Have you achieved balance in your life?**

**A:** This is an ongoing project. Even though it's a cliché, balance is a process, not a destination.

I set the welcome screen on my phone to remind me to take three slow, deep breaths. I also have a nonnegotiable 30-minute morning meditation practice. I have found this [to be] essential to managing my cortisol level.

Our needs constantly change throughout our lives, and what we need to learn is how to be adaptive. Now that I'm in peri-menopause, I feel that I need to meditate, stop, and breathe more often, [and] I find it's soothing like a bath—which I take



daily.

And here's a shocker: A drill-sergeant mentality doesn't work for the female body. Women have to learn to ask for more help: We don't need to do it all.

**Q: What else would you like women to know?**

**A:** Women struggle with weight, and this struggle keeps us from greatness.

There are seven key hormones [estrogen, insulin, leptin, cortisol, thyroid, growth hormone, and testosterone], and each one has a unique three-day protocol to balance it. By following my Hormone Reset Diet, which addresses these top seven hormones [that can be] out of whack, we are able to lose weight without the struggle. [saragottfriedmd.com](http://saragottfriedmd.com).

—**Dorothy Calimeris**

## Find Your Sweet Spot

Happiness Expert: **Christine Carter** on making life less complicated.

**Bio:** Sociologist; senior fellow, UC Berkeley Greater Good Science Center; blogger, author, and keynote speaker.

I was pretty sure I'd be able to spot Christine Carter, UC Berkeley's renowned happiness expert, when she walked into the café where we were meeting to talk about her new book, *The Sweet Spot: How to Find Your Groove at Home and Work*.

Her jeans and blazer uniform—the outfit she wears every day to save time from thinking about clothes—might give her away. But I was looking for the engaging demeanor she describes in her book—being present and connecting with people. So I grabbed a seat in the back and kept an eye on the door.

A woman entered, wearing a blazer, scarf, and jeans, and strolled to the juice bar. As she ordered, she leaned forward to talk to the server, smiling. Definitely Carter. Soon, she and I were talking about how the rest of us can find that sweet spot, where our lives don't feel so frantic and overly busy, as if we are racing as fast as we can from one thing to the next.

**Q: *The Sweet Spot* is packed with great advice. What is the main thing you hope readers will learn?**

**A:** I want people to understand that the road to happiness is not paved by overwork. We will not get there by leaning in if that means leaning away from the things that really bring us joy in life.

I actually work a lot. But it doesn't feel hard. The ease component is missing in our culture, and it's taking a toll. We are exhausted and overwhelmed, and we are not fulfilling our potential in our careers or in our families.

**Q: Tell me more.**

**A:** We're too busy to vote. We're too busy to remember to bring a water bottle or a reusable bag. It's that state of "overwhelm" and "busyness"—and that "I'm going to make the most powerful effort" mentality—that leaves a lot to be desired in life.

And not only that: We're working really hard to create lives that we don't have time to enjoy. So my main message is that whether you're after the enjoyment piece of things—and happiness, and fulfillment, and meaning—or you're after success and productivity, it's the same road.

## Tips for Living Your Best Life

- 1. Get your estrogen back on your side.** Eat a pound of vegetables every day, and detox once every few months off alcohol.
- 2. Tame your cortisol levels.** Consider committing to 10 minutes of meditation per day.
- 3. Try exercises that don't raise cortisol.** Surprisingly, running raises cortisol, so try a more adaptive exercise, such as yoga or a barre class.
- 4. Hang out with your girlfriends.** Time with female friends raises oxytocin and counters the negative effects of cortisol.
- 5. Define your boundaries.** Don't be sidelined by a schedule packed with overgiving.



These things are not mutually exclusive: You can't focus on work if you don't also find ways to work that bring ease into your life.

**Q: My family's motto is "work hard, play hard." What do you think? Good motto? Bad?**

**A:** It's about working smart. Sometimes, the smartest thing to do is to really focus hard. And that means just doing one thing at a time. Sometimes, the smartest thing to do is generate a creative insight, and that's going to require at least 10 minutes of staring into space.

It's about understanding where you're making a really powerful effort and where you have effortless power, and always trying to move toward that effortless power. Because that's sustainable.

**Q: It seems like we're making life harder than it needs to be.**

**A:** We're making it a lot harder than we have to because of two huge lies our culture tells us.

The first is that busyness is a sign of significance, importance, productivity, and success. It's a mark of character.

It's a badge of honor that we wear. And by busyness, what we really mean is that we're sort of in pain.

**Q: What's the other big myth we're told?**

**A:** That more is better. We're always looking for a more prestigious job. We assume that would be better: more prestige, more celebrity, more likes on Facebook, more of everything. Certainly more work, so we can earn more money and buy more stuff.

I've learned that when I stop and consciously question whether or not in any particular instance more would be better, I almost always find that I already have enough. Not only is more not better, but it's completely irrelevant, because I have what I need.

**Q: Because you're living in your sweet spot.**

**A:** It's because I am. Not 100 percent of the time, and it's really obvious now to me when I've fallen out of it. I'm like, "OK, I'm really exhausted. Why? Oh!" And then I can always find it. *christinecarter.com*.

—**Susan Safipour**

## Tips for Living Your Best Life

- 1. Make decisions about routine things once.** Buy the same brands at the grocery store, get the same outfit in different colors so you don't have to decide what to wear every morning, and prepare the same basic meals most weekdays.
- 2. Develop a way to give a "good no."** As in, "Thank you for asking, but that isn't going

## Locate Your Inner GPS

Philosophy Guru: **Mariam Safinia** on connecting with your busy mind.

**Bio:** Founder and teacher, Northern California School of Practical Philosophy.



for free at the nonprofit school, one of more than 70 campuses worldwide. Classes are inexpensive; the first 10-week series costs only \$10. Some of her students are longtime friends. Comforting casseroles are shared at lunch, and sometimes there's even cake.

Safinia knows firsthand the difference The School of Practical Philosophy can make. Formerly an architect in Iran, she left her

to work out for me right now.”

**3. Program your phone to go into silent mode an hour before bedtime. Enjoy the peace and quiet.**

Mariam Safinia welcomes her students warmly, often with a hug. The School of Practical Philosophy may be hidden away in a Pleasanton business park, but it's a welcoming place for those looking for ways to learn to live a more aware and purposeful life.

Safinia asks students to consider life's big questions: *Who am I? What am I doing here? How can I be happy?* Inspired by thinkers from the East and the West, her classes teach people practical ways to ease their modern lives—especially how to tame that noisy and often critical voice inside their heads.

“If you can see it, you can't be it,” she says about confronting negative thoughts. “If you see judgment or frustration, then you have a hope of stepping away from it.”

“Most of the time, we don't hold ourselves responsible [for what goes wrong] but think it's the other person,” Safinia says. “Whatever you put your attention on grows. If you put attention on, ‘Why did this happen to me?’ that begins to grow. When you're aware and see your mind going down dark alleys, bring it back.”

Safinia established the NorCal branch of The School of Practical Philosophy more than a decade ago. Everyone, including teachers, works

hometown during the Iranian Revolution. She landed in London, where she built a successful real estate career and encountered the school. Ten minutes into her first class, she was hooked.

“I was already a bit of a spiritual tourist, attending one of the first lectures Deepak Chopra gave,” she says. “So I turned up at the lecture and sat in front with big shoulder pads—I was a successful businesswoman—and a few minutes in, I put the notepad down and just listened. I became aware of the commenting in my own head. I’d never been aware of that before.”

After she was diagnosed with cancer, the school moved the class downstairs for her. “It sustained me through chemo and all that,” she says.

“The exploration of inner space is bigger than all the space out there. Once you discover this, you live a different life with no fear,” she says. “I can’t remember the last time I was angry. That attitude has helped me with cancer.”

When Safinia and her husband retired from paid work in London, they moved to California to join their kids and grandkids. She began teaching practical philosophy courses, which led her to open the Pleasanton branch of the school in 2004. The response from students has allowed Safinia to add courses in San Jose and San Francisco.

The courses start with series one, Wisdom, which offers exercises in awareness, remedies for negative feelings, and ways to live more purposefully. In this class, Safinia urges her students to “listen to the sound of your voice when you’re speaking. If you notice your voice getting shrill, that’s your ego getting involved. If you listen to the sound of your voice, wisdom kicks in and helps you modulate.”

Safinia leads students in short exercises to help them connect with their senses and focus their minds with meditation. “Connecting your busy mind to one of your senses is the only way to come into the present,” she says. She advises students to practice meditating in the morning and in the evening before dinner, sitting for at least two minutes to reduce the noise in their heads.

“Within a week or two, this turns on the light inside; we become aware of being angry and can step away,” she says.

Safinia also coaches students in her Wisdom class to ask themselves: What would a wise person do? “What would the grown-up in you say you should do?” she asks, noting that it’s better to listen to the wisest voice within, rather than the negative thoughts that surround us. Most of the time, the wise voice tells you what not to do. “This is your GPS.”

“Once you clean the windows of the mind and heart, the sun shines and the world changes,” Safinia says. *practicalphilosopher.org*.

—Linda Lenhoff

### Tips for Living Your Best Life

- 1. Allow the mind to rest each day.** Meditate, starting at two minutes, in the morning and in the evening before dinner.
- 2. Listen to the sound of your voice when you’re speaking.** Notice if you become shrill. If you hear judgment or anger, try to move away from that.
- 3. Do one thing at a time.** Doing many things at once increases stress.
- 4. Always be on the lookout for new teachers in life.** Strive to keep your mind and heart open.
- 5. Consult that wise person inside of you.** Ask what she would do, rather than listening to what your negative thoughts might tell you to do.

## Take Time To Reflect

Leadership Coach: **Maura Wolf** on balancing competing commitments.



**Bio:** Leadership instructor, Saint Mary's College; leadership consultant, life coach, and author.

It's Thursday evening at Round Hill Country Club in Alamo, and Maura Wolf is standing in front of a group of working mothers, urging them to think deeply about the messiness of their lives.

She asks the women—many of them in office wear, glass of wine in hand—to turn to one another and talk about a passion they have yet to explore and why. In the murmur of the room, a few themes arise quickly: cooking, hiking, and making time for a spouse.

The women point to a lack of time, which is spent managing inboxes, running to playdates, and grocery shopping. Other pitfalls of being too busy come up: Letting the laundry sit. Forgetting birthday parties. And what seems to bother them the most: not being the one who picks up her kids at school.

"Mommy guilt," one woman says. The others nod.

Wolf nods, too. She's heard this before.

"Stop putting pressure on yourself to do it all—to carry it all. We're all in this, trying to figure it out," she says. "Be gentle with your mess, and create open space in your life for

reflection."

Wolf knows about work-life balance: She lives it. A married mother of two and licensed yoga instructor, she teaches leadership at Saint Mary's College, works as a leadership consultant for organizations, and serves as a coach, helping people to start living the life they want.

Wolf is also an author. Her most recent book, *What Matters Most: Everyday Leadership at Home, at Work, and in the World*, is written for the person who is struggling to balance his or her work-life stress and the decisions that come with competing commitments.

Written in 42 vignettes, Wolf's book includes her real-life experiences and explores how leadership concepts, such as thinking critically about problems that don't have a clear solution and developing a reflective practice to promote better decision making, can be applied in both personal and professional settings. Blank pages are placed between the book's

chapters, encouraging readers to take the time to write down their thoughts.

One of Wolf's favorite chapters is "Get Out the Watercolors." In it, she describes a day when she found herself home from work with sick kids, frustrated that she didn't have time to write. Then they started to paint, and she created a list. "I began writing down ideas for the book, but I was painting them in watercolors," she says. "It enabled me to work in a new way that day."

Later that afternoon, while pushing a stroller, she contemplated the experience. "I thought about how it related to the workplace. I thought about all the meetings I've run that lacked inspiration," she says. "And then, I thought about the meetings where I've gone in and put Play-Doh on the table, or taken people into a redwood grove and asked them to design a PR campaign based on leaves. Everything shifts."

Wolf hasn't always had this clarity—she learned about work-life balance the hard way. At 34, she found herself living a career-focused life in Boston and had just been accepted to Harvard's School of Education. But she was single and had little time for dating, and yearned to start a family. In a moment of profound loneliness one night, she realized she needed a change, so she packed up and moved to California, where she reprogrammed her life with creative outlets and began working at Saint Mary's College.

Wolf earned a master's in leadership there, and shortly after graduating, with a one-year-old at home, she felt an overwhelming creative impulse to write. So she started jotting down ideas. Eight years later, those passages have become *What Matters Most*. Wolf says she hopes it will inspire others to become more conscious about the choices they make and encourage them to cultivate a reflective practice that helps them examine their actions on a deeper level.

"Many people think, Oh, I have to do meditation or yoga or journaling," she says. "And those things work great. But for some people, it's sitting in a bar once a month with a buddy and talking about what seems to be working in your life, and why."

Doing talks like the one at Round Hill Country Club is just another way Wolf spreads her message to people about the importance of stopping to think about what they truly want. Once people become more aware of their highest aspirations, they can make better decisions about how to behave in the moment—what to prioritize and what to allow to fall to the wayside.

"The truth is, what matters most changes constantly," Wolf says. "Finding balance is all about taking the time to reflect." *in-balancecoaching.com*.

—**Stacey Kennelly**

### Tips for Living Your Best Life

**1. Find clarity.** Pick an image that speaks to you, and post it somewhere you'll see it. We have unconscious desires that are deeper than the conscious ones. Sometimes, a picture in a magazine or a photograph nails it.

**2. Notice the cost.** Take a minute to notice what is being lost today by not doing something that matters to you. You don't need to do anything about it: Just notice the cost.

**3. Make it small.** Think about something that you want that seems out of reach—writing a book or that vacation with your partner—and whittle it down to a goal you can accomplish this week. It may be sitting down to write that first paragraph or a 15-minute date with your significant other.