



Out of chaos, clarity: choosing what matters most

For most of my life, I was fighting a constant battle between my *personal needs* and my *professional ambition*.

I didn't frame it that way at the time, of course. Back then, I would have told you I was simply driven. Motivated. Ambitious. I worked hard because I loved the work, and I really did. I said yes because opportunities were exciting. I pushed myself because that's what success looked like – and because, quite honestly, it felt good to be good at what I did.

From the moment I graduated, I went all in. Management consulting became my world. I traveled five days a week, worked with incredible clients and teams, solved complex problems, and learned at a pace that was both exhilarating and exhausting. I loved the intensity. I loved the challenge. I loved the feeling of momentum.

On weekends, I came home and tried to squeeze everything else into the margins – time with family, time for friends, time for hobbies, time for the things that gave me energy outside of work. And for a while, that model worked. Or at least, it worked well enough that I didn't question it.

Until the model I was living could no longer hold.

When “more” feels like progress

As my career progressed, more opportunities appeared – and I took them; willingly and eagerly!

I moved quickly through the ranks at work. Client impact was addictive, and I was rewarded with more, at higher levels and a faster pace. I joined the faculty at Indiana University, which I absolutely loved. Teaching was deeply fulfilling. I joined boards, took on mentees, racked up certifications, and got involved in various strategic initiatives that gave me purpose. I continued to expand my professional footprint. Each new commitment felt additive, not subtractive. These were things that energized me intellectually and emotionally, so I told myself they didn’t really cost anything.

In hindsight, that was the first quiet lie I told myself.

What I didn’t fully appreciate at the time was that even energizing work consumes time – and time is the one resource you never get more of. Every new “yes” was slowly eating into the space I needed to recover, to reflect, to just be.

Still, I didn’t feel depleted. I felt successful. Validated. On track.

And then life changed the equation.

Being a dad changes everything, even when you expect it to

I always knew I wanted to be a dad. And not just any dad – a present dad, involved, and there in every way for my kids and family. My wife (at the time) and I talked openly and intentionally about it. We even

planned the timing – waiting until I made Partner at EY, until she achieved success in her career, until we believed our professional lives were “set.”

What I didn’t fully grasp was how profoundly children would redefine everything and how much I craved that change.

When my daughter Maizey was born in 2016, I felt deep joy I wasn’t prepared for. I knew immediately that something had to change. One of the first things I did was pass my Indiana University class to two amazing colleagues. That transition freed up significant time, allowing me to be more present and prioritize my young family.

That change felt meaningful, and it was, but it was also contained. Beyond that, my professional life looked much the same. I still traveled. I still prioritized clients. I still operated under the same assumptions about what my career required.

Then my son Miles was born in 2019.

With two kids, the self-inflicted tension became impossible to ignore. There was a growing gap between the dad I wanted to be and the life I was actually living. I felt a constant pull – an inescapable gravitational force – toward being more present, more available, more engaged in my family’s life. It’s what I wanted, but I didn’t see a path towards it. At the same time, I was deeply attached to a professional identity that had brought me success, fulfillment, and a sense of purpose.

I didn’t want to give either up, and I didn’t feel like I could.

And so the internal conflict continued.

Living between two identities

For years, I tried to make it work by sheer force of will.

I told myself I could do both. That I could be an exceptional consultant and the kind of dad I envisioned. That if I just optimized harder, planned better, slept less, and pushed through, I could reconcile the two. Some of the articles I wrote in this very blog, and explored tactics I used to optimize my life, trying to justify that I was making it work.

What I didn't yet understand was that this wasn't a problem of efficiency or productivity – it was a problem of honesty.

I was still operating under a professional model that demanded constant availability, frequent travel, and an implicit [and sometimes very explicit] understanding that work came first – even above my own health. And every time I tried to bend that model, I felt like I was fighting myself.

The truth was there all along. I just wasn't ready to listen to it.

When chaos forces the truth into focus

In 2023, my life entered a period of real upheaval when my wife and I began our divorce.

It was an incredibly difficult time for our entire family. There's no way around that. Out of the chaos came *clarity*, and the opportunity to create a life of *happiness* – but not all at once. It arrived in fragments, quietly at first, before finally settling into something whole and undeniable. What had once been blurred came into sharp focus, and once it did, there was no mistaking it.

Everything that had felt blurry suddenly snapped into focus – my priorities, my values, my needs. I realized something fundamental that I had been avoiding for years:

Work and life are not two separate things, they are one and the same because they come from the same bucket of time. And time had become my most precious asset.

At the time, I was working at McKinsey – an extraordinary firm with extraordinary people. I loved the work. I loved the mission. But it became undeniable that the life of a 5-day-a-week traveling consultant was no longer compatible with who I was becoming.

For the first time, I stopped asking *how to make it work* and started asking *whether it should*.

Redefining my needs without apology

I began redefining my needs from the ground up – not hypothetically, but in practice.

I changed everything so I could be there for my kids. Not occasionally. Not “when possible” or in between meetings. Permanently. In fact, it’s what I’ve always wanted but could never achieve, given the life I was living.

I wanted to be the dad who showed up every day – for bedtime, breakfast, homework, school performances, parent-teacher conferences, and every small, ordinary moment in between. The conversations about fears and dreams. Math homework. Book reports. Valentine’s Day mailboxes. The made-up stories about animals. The Lego cities. The movie nights. The drawings and crafts displayed proudly in the kitchen. And so much more...

Those moments weren’t negotiable anymore.

I started making positive changes to my health for the first time in 2022, and carried that unapologetic prioritization into every change I made. I lost 100 pounds. I changed how I lived. I stopped treating my own well-being as optional.

Professionally, I still wanted to solve meaningful problems, and the desire to help clients and my community was stronger than ever. But I no longer wanted to sacrifice my life, or my kids' lives, to do it.

By the end of 2024, I made a decision that felt both terrifying and inevitable: *I was done fighting myself*. It was time to invest in myself like never before and start something I had dreamed about since I was my kids' age.

Tapping into my superpowers

When I looked honestly at who I am, the answer became clear: build something exceptional.

I have always been entrepreneurial. From lemonade stands to DJ companies (*I'll have to write more about this in the future*), from working as a grocery bagger and cashier at 13 years old to starting a consulting company in college to pay for school, building things that help others has always been core to my identity. It's why I was drawn to management consulting – I was made for it. As a techie, I used my technical expertise to improve others' lives. I loved it. EY and McKinsey were both incredibly entrepreneurial, and they allowed me to create new services, new teams, new ideas, new client solutions...it was amazing.

The idea for acceligence wasn't new. I had conceived it years earlier as something I might build someday – maybe even in retirement. In fact, I built an entire retirement plan around this fantasy.

Then I asked myself a simple question: *Why wait?*

Consulting was changing, and I was changing with it. AI was fundamentally improving how problems were being solved – faster, better, and at price points that meet clients where they are. I had been doing this for years as a tech-forward consultant and expert. I knew the kind of firm I wanted to build, the culture I wanted to create, and the legacy I wanted to leave.

Not just professionally – but personally.

I wanted my children to see work that mattered and improved the world for everyone. I wanted to leave the world better than I found it, in ways both large and small. And not at the expense of me being there for my kids, or else why do it to begin with?

And that's how acceligence was born.

When work stops feeling like work

Building acceligence was intense. I worked more hours than ever before. There were all-nighters, very long days, and moments of real uncertainty. And at the same time, I didn't miss a single moment with my kids.

But something remarkable happened: *it didn't feel like work*.

I had more energy than I'd had in years. I built the brand, the services, the delivery platform, the technology, the alliances, the board, and the team. I leaned into my core strengths – technology, cyber, risk, and strategy – using AI to solve problems better, faster, and more completely.

I put my kids to bed every night. We ate meals together. Howled at movies. And went on adventures, conquering waterslides and gravity-defying monster trucks.

I exercised regularly. I returned to hobbies I thought I had lost. I felt healthier, happier, and more whole than ever before.

For the first time, work and life weren't competing forces.

They were one.

The lesson I learned too late, and just in time

The most important lesson of this journey is one I wish I had learned earlier, but am grateful to have learned at all:

Clarity only comes when you are radically honest about your needs.

For years, I wasn't. I worried about judgment. About closed doors. About what people might think. So, I lived the life I thought I needed to live; it was very fulfilling, but it took a toll.

What I discovered is that the doors that close were never meant for you in the first place. And the doors that open – clients, collaborators, opportunities – are often the ones you've been hoping for all along. I just needed to say what I needed out loud (and keep repeating it)!

Out of chaos came clarity. And that clarity, and the changes that have followed, have been the greatest gift of my life.

As with all works in progress, this story is still unfolding. I'll continue to share it as it evolves. But if you're at a crossroads – if you feel pulled in a thousand directions, stuck between who you are and who you think you're supposed to be – I know that feeling well.

You're not alone. And sometimes, the path forward becomes clear only when you finally stop fighting yourself – and start listening to what's been true all along.



hi, i'm justin
(nice to meet you)

I post weekly **professional insights** and **personal stories** from my life as a management consultant, a dad, and an eternal optimist.



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