



LEON

SELF CARE HANDBOOK

FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

INTRODUCTION

The Leon Self Care Handbook: From Surviving to Thriving was created to support community wellbeing. Through Leon's journey, he realized he had been living in a state of trauma. He had focused on healing the community, without first addressing his own healing. In a moment of transformation, he made a pivotal decision to first choose himself before choosing to please others. This moment was a metamorphosis to realize that he no longer wanted to just survive, which felt depleting, but instead changed his focus to creating a life of thriving.

In this journey, he utilizes many tools for healing from conventional therapy to everyday practices of journaling, reading, fitness, meditation, time management, reflection and over all wellness practices to transform his life. Leon's ongoing healing practice has been synthesized into this handbook to share with the world.

“MY MISSION IN LIFE IS NOT MERELY TO SURVIVE, BUT TO THRIVE; AND TO DO SO WITH SOME PASSION, SOME COMPASSION, SOME HUMOR, AND SOME STYLE”

- MAYA ANGELOU

ABOUT LEON FORD

@Leonfordspeaks

Leon Ford, a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania born on March 16, 1993 is an accomplished author, international speaker, community organizer and 2019 City Council candidate for Pittsburgh's District 9. He is a well-respected activist, mental health ambassador and social advocate for change, who has devoted his life to the betterment of his community.

His knowledge of social disparities and injustice comes from personal experience. When Leon was 19 years old his life drastically changed. On November 11, 2012, he was unjustly shot five times by the Pittsburgh Police during a racially charged traffic stop. Though this horrific case of mistaken identity has left him physically paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair, Ford hasn't allowed his circumstances to deter him from having a positive impact on his community.

Through mentorship, he has sparked a movement cultivating leaders, organizers and social entrepreneurs by empowering them to use their voices, platforms, and resources to evoke change and reshape their communities for generations to come. Ford's latest partnership with Duquesne University, bridges the gap between the community, students, professors and local leaders through "The Voices Project." This program provides an open space to discuss literacy, social reform, gentrification, police brutality, and several other social disparities.

While Ford is passionate about educating the community, he has also devoted time to work with police officers to help provide clarity on cultural competency. His work includes working with PA legislators to draft policies that modify the use of force laws, which intern increase opportunities for justice during officer involved shootings. Ford continues to display true leadership through his work, while also being a source of healing, hope, and inspiration.

Leon Ford's work has not gone unnoticed, he has received several awards including: President Obama's Volunteer Service Award (2017), The Root 100 (2018), and Pittsburgh's 40 Under 40 (2019). Ford is a member of The Aspen Institute's Inaugural Civil Society Fellowship and serves as an entrepreneur in residence for Bronze Investments.

A NOTE FROM BREAKOUT:

When we set out to make LEON the film in 2019, we headed to Pittsburgh in the midst of Leon Ford's campaign for City Council (District 9). We were not there to make a political campaign video, but to capture this heralded 25 year old community activist. We were excited to bear witness to his next chapter. A day after our filming completed, Leon dropped out of the race, leaving the Pittsburgh media stunned as to why.

It is inescapable, when unraveling the history of Leon Ford, to ignore the unjust police shooting in 2012, that left him paralyzed from the waist down. While we knew we were going to be filming a powerful story, we had no idea that internally Leon was battling an existential need to confront his mental healing from a lifetime of trauma. This transition re-shaped Leon's journey and the direction of the film.

"You must give up to go up," a challenge put forth today by Leon. His entire young adult life has been a fight to be loved, recognized, appreciated, and free. This film captures Leon coming into a new season of growth. He is a beacon of hope for those confronting mental health, and an inspiration for living your truth.

JOIN THE ONLINE COMMUNITY



@LEONFORDSPEAKS

#LEONTHEFILM

Wellness works best when supported by a community. Share your thoughts, progress and feelings with us @leonfordspeaks and #leonthefilm. We would love to see you in action, hear or read your journal entries, learn feedback and follow along with your progress. You can stay updated with us and see what others are doing by searching the hashtag. Our online space is for healing, so please enter with compassion and respect for each other.

The Pledge

Please read outloud

**WE MUST GIVE UP TO GO UP.
WE MUST GIVE UP TO GROW UP.
WE MUST GIVE UP ON THE WAY UP.
AND GIVE UP EVEN MORE TO STAY UP.
I CANNOT TEACH WHAT I DO NOT KNOW.
I CANNOT LEAD WHERE I WILL NOT GO.
I AM BECAUSE WE ARE.
WE ARE BECAUSE I AM.
I AM MY BROTHER'S KEEPER.
I AM MY SISTER'S KEEPER.
I AM DESTINED FOR GREATNESS.
BECAUSE I ATTRACT WHAT I AM.**

**“WHAT I LOVE MOST ABOUT READING:
IT GIVES YOU THE ABILITY TO REACH HIGHER GROUND
AND KEEP CLIMBING.” - OPRAH WINFREY**

Self Help Guides:

1. The Four Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz
2. The Power of Now by Eckhart Tolle
3. The Seat of the Soul by Gary Zukav
4. As a Man Thinketh by James Allen
5. The Miracle Morning by Hal Elrod
6. The Art of Living by Thich Nat Hanh
7. W.A.S.H. by Maisha Howze

Healthy Living:

1. Spark Joy by Marie Kondo
2. Vegan Soul Kitchen by Bryant Terry

Reflective Poetry:

1. Eternal Sunshine by Londrelle
2. And Still I Rise by Maya Angelou

Adventure and Reflections:

1. The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho
2. The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari by Robin Sharma
3. The Celestine Prophecy by James Redfield
4. Ishmael by Daniel Quinn

Non-Fiction:

1. Untold by Leon Ford
2. The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin
3. Brothers and Keepers by John Edgar Wideman
4. The Master Plan by Chris Wilson
5. Pathologies of Power by Paul Farmer
6. The Motorcycle Diaries by Ernesto Che Guevarra

Leon's Meditation Guide

Meditation can calm your mind and help bring focus to your thoughts. It is linked to stress management, lowering anxiety, clear thoughts, and calming your emotional reactivity. It also has many biological benefits like boosting your immune system, lowers blood pressure, and reduces heart risks. It can also help you sleep better. Meditation promotes spiritual benefits like increasing self-awareness, compassion, and allows for time to reflect upon your life in order to work out resolutions. It's a time for yourself. A daily practice of meditation can change your life.

We recommend starting small and working it into your daily schedule. Some people like to meditate first thing in the morning before they even speak to another person. Some people like to do it at the end of the day. Choose the time that works best for you. It can be as short as 10 minutes or even up to an hour. Try to set aside the same time every day to make it a routine. Listen to your body and do what is accessible and feels right for you.

“THE GOAL OF MEDITATION IS NOT TO GET RID OF THOUGHTS OR EMOTIONS. THE GOAL IS TO BECOME MORE AWARE OF YOUR THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS AND LEARN HOW TO MOVE THROUGH THEM WITHOUT GETTING STUCK.”

- DR. P. GOLDIN

Tips for Practicing Meditation

- Find a quiet place and meditate in silence. We recommend meditating without technology, so it is accessible anywhere & anytime.
- If you prefer to meditate with music or with a guide, play relaxing music or follow a guided meditation app.
- Sit comfortably, use a back support if desired, practice good posture.
- Place your hands upon your lap, palms can face up.
- Close your eyes- with eyes closed look towards your third eye, the top of your head, or your chin. You can also just let your eyes relax.
- Take deep breaths. Breathe evenly so your exhale is as long as your inhale.
- As thoughts come into your mind, some will be random and some will be intentional. Anyone that doesn't serve your purpose, take notice of, then let it go.
- Take notice of your body, any sensations good or bad.
- Relax.
- Be kind to yourself.
- Remember to breathe.

Questions to ponder while meditating?

- Check in with yourself, how do you feel?
- What do I really want from life?
- What is my higher calling?
- If I had all the money and time in the world, how would I express my unique talents?
- Who would benefit from them?
- Reflect upon what you are thankful for?

Recommended Meditation Apps

- Calm
- Headspace
- Eternal Sunshine

Activity

- Meditate for 10 minutes.
- You can do it silently, with instrumental relaxing music or with a guided meditation.
- Utilize the tips for practicing meditation.
- Write in the weekly schedule the times you plan to meditate everyday.

HEALTHY BODY HEALTHY MIND

Movement

Getting your body moving is an essential cornerstone of mental health. It is known to help elevate your mood by creating endorphins and can normalize sleep patterns. It improves circulation and increases blood flow and oxygen to your body. It can relieve tension, stress and boost your energy levels. There are an array of activities you can do to get your body moving. So work within your comfort and ability level, and consult your doctor to make sure you are able, if needed.

**QUOTE: ONE DAY OR
DAY ONE, YOU DECIDE!**

- PAULO COELHO

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Stretch every morning when you first get up to get your blood flowing.
- Any amount of movement is better than none. If you only have a few minutes, it will still be worth it.
- Listen to your body.
- Start small and work your way up. If you haven't moved in a while, you can start with 5-10 minutes and work your way up to 30 minutes - 1 hour.
- Commit to some form of movement on most days. 3-5 days a week are great even if you just do something small.
- Some movement activities include: calisthenics, lifting weights, yoga/stretching, hiking, dancing, sports, pilates, boxing, walking/running, biking, martial arts, swimming/water sports, qigong, etc.
- Focus on your breathing.
- Drink water.

Activity

- List 3 movement activities you enjoy.
- Using the Weekly Calendar: Select an activity of your choice and write down which day you plan to do it. Schedule in time for movement, as if it were a business meeting.
- If you need workout ideas: Search youtube or workout apps for suggestions or guided routines. Bookmark or save the videos you like, so you can easily find them when you want to workout.

THE POWER OF WATER

All cells and organs need water. According to Medical News Today, water lubricates the joints, forms saliva and mucus which helps with digestion. Water creates moisture in your eyes, nose and mouth. It delivers oxygen to your body and it cushions the brain, spinal cord and other sensitive tissues. It helps to regulate body temperature, remove waste from your body, and can prevent kidney damage. Another benefit is that drinking water from the tap is FREE.

The old recommendation for 8 cups of water per day is a good start, but new research suggests that your specific water needs are more individualized. One way to calculate your specific body water needs is to “divide your weight in pounds by 2 and drink that amount in ounces.” If you weigh 140 lb, then you should drink approximately 70 oz of water per day, 9 cups. This number should increase if you exercise, live in a hot climate, are pregnant, breastfeeding or have other health conditions that need additional water. Please consult with your doctor if you have questions about your specific body needs. Your water intake is probably good if you rarely feel thirsty, your urine is colorless or light yellow and has little odor. Always listen to your body.

According to the Center for Science in the Public Interest, sugary drinks can lead to obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and tooth decay. Sugary drinks include juice, sports drinks, sweet teas, energy drinks and soda. In fact, just one 20-ounce bottle of soda has 16 teaspoons of sugar. Therefore we recommend, giving up sugary drinks and replacing them for water. If you prefer having more flavor in your beverages, you can add slices of whole fruit or vegetables like strawberries, oranges, cucumber, mint or a lemon wedge. You can make a whole pitcher and enjoy it throughout the day.

**“DRINKING WATER IS
ESSENTIAL FOR A
HEALTHY LIFESTYLE.”**

- STEPH CURRY.

Activity

- Calculate your recommended daily water needs.
- Use the Weekly Calendar to Track how much water you drink daily.

SLEEP

Getting good quality sleep is essential for your health. Most adults need about 7-8 hours of quality sleep. Good regular sleep helps support your immune system, improves your memory, helps maintain a healthy weight, reduces stress, elevates your mood, and brings clarity to your thoughts. Here are some tips to help you get into the routine of getting an appropriate amount of sleep for your body.

**“SLEEP IS THE BEST
MEDITATION.”**

- DALAI LAMA

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- Set a “go to sleep” alarm. It goes off at night to remind you it’s time to go to sleep.
 - Stay away from caffeine late in the day.
 - Create a comfortable sleep environment like a dark and quiet room, think of it as your sleep sanctuary.
 - Exercise regularly.
 - Remove electronics from the bedroom like laptops or tvs. They can cause distractions that keep your mind awake.
 - Wind Down with a nighttime routine. It could be a time to read a book, journal, or do something relaxing. It is a moment for self-care.

Activity

- Using the Weekly Calendar: Track how much sleep you get each night this week.

SOCIAL MEDIA VACATIONS AND BOUNDARIES

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“LIGHT ATTRACTS LIGHT. BUT SOMETIMES YOUR LIGHT ATTRACTS MOTHS AND YOUR WARMTH ATTRACTS PARASITES. PROTECT YOUR SPACE AND ENERGY”

- WARSAN SHIRE

Social media provides outlets to stay connected, but is it negatively affecting your mental health? A review study from Nottingham Trent University suggests there is a social media addiction disorder. Social media can make one compare themselves to others and can increase feelings of social isolation. Since many of us use social media for our work or to stay in touch with friends and family, having a balanced relationship with it is important.

HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO CREATE BALANCE WITH SOCIAL MEDIA:

- Limit your screen time. There are phone programs that measure screen time. You can track and limit the amount of time you use the phone and certain programs. Check to see how much time you spend on your phone or use social media, you may be surprised.
- Be intentional about what you consume. Is it nourishing or depleting?
- Check in with yourself. How do you feel when using it?
- When using it, ask yourself the 4 p's: Is it positive, productive, purposeful (in alignment with my spiritual purpose), and/or profitable (gaining a positive exchange for your time).
- Go on a social media vacation. Take a break over the holidays or whenever you need one. It will be there when you get back.
- Do not use it when you first wake up or before going to bed. It will influence your morning state of mind or your evening thoughts.
- Protect your time and energy. You do not need to respond right away. You can take your time to get back to people and respond on your own terms.
- Set boundaries with what you post. Anything you post will live online forever, your future bosses or partners may check it, and someone may screenshot it.
- Before you post something, ask yourself, would you mind if this was on the evening news tonight? Would you feel comfortable revealing this moment to the world?

JOURNAL: A 1 MONTH CHALLENGE

Journaling is a powerful tool for mental health. It helps you step outside of your thoughts and work through them. Journal entries can be bookmarks in your journey. Your journal is a safe space to voice your truth. Incorporating a daily practice of journaling can be transformative, so we challenge you to journal every day for 1 month. Even if you can only spare a few minutes, it can bring clarity to your day.

Below are a list of writing prompts, questions and thoughts. There are 25 prompt questions, which allows you to select your own topics for the remaining days of the month. The prompts are a guide to begin your journaling practice, but feel free to go in any direction you choose. You can use them in or out of order. Feel free to utilize the questions that speak to you and omit the ones that do not.

The questions may push you to go deep and reflect within yourself. If journaling brings up issues that need deeper support, we recommend seeking professional therapy, a powerful tool for self healing. Journaling is a judgement-free space to share your truth. It is a way to pull emotions outside of yourself, so you can reflect and heal.

THE PROCESS OF JOURNALING SINGLE HANDEDLY CHANGED MY LIFE. THOSE PAGES IN MY COMPOSITION NOTEBOOK AND EVEN THE NOTES ON MY PHONE SERVED AS MY FIRST THERAPIST - CONSUMING MY THOUGHTS, IDEAS, FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS AS A JUDGE FREE COMPANION. TO THIS DAY MY PEN AND PAD SERVES AS ONE OF MY CLOSEST COMRADES.

- LEON FORD

“IF YOU DON’T GET IT OFF YOUR CHEST, YOU’LL NEVER BE ABLE TO BREATHE.”

- UNKNOWN

1. **Leon’s Pledge**

Writing Activity: Read the pledge out loud, and write what it means to you.

We must give up to go up. We must give up to grow up. We must give up on the way up. And give up even more to stay up. I cannot teach what I do not know. I cannot lead where I will not go. I am because we are. We are because I am. I am my brother’s keeper. I am my sister’s keeper. I am destined for greatness. Because I attract what I am.

“I CAN BE CHANGED BY WHAT HAPPENS TO ME, BUT I REFUSE TO BE REDUCED BY IT.”

- MAYA ANGELOU

2. Mental Health

Writing Activity:

What does mental health mean to you?

How can you rise above mental health challenges?

3. Imposter Syndrome

Writing Activity:

Have you ever felt that you don't deserve or aren't ready for the opportunities or accolades?

How have you been preparing for this moment?

What do you need to learn to prepare for the next opportunity?

4. Patterns and Cycles- Like the moon, we wax and wane.

Writing Activity:

What patterns and cycles appear in your life?

Are there patterns you have broken?

Which patterns and cycles are you still working on?

5. Depression/ Feeling Stuck

Writing Activity:

Have you ever felt depressed or stuck?

What did you or are you doing to work beyond it?

6. Acceptance

Writing Activity:

Do you accept yourself?

Does the acceptance of others change your behavior?

How has acceptance affected you?

7. Active Listening

Writing Activity:

Think of the last person you spoke to.

When listening, were you present in the moment?

Were you actively listening?

What did you observe aside from the words you heard?

8. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Writing Activity:

How has PTSD affected your life and those around you?

What does healing look and feel like?

9. Normalization of Therapy

Writing Activity:

What are your preconceptions of therapy?

Have you spoken to someone whether a professional or mentor, who has helped you work through your problems?

What realizations have unfolded?

10. Trauma, Grief and Loss- Trauma comes from gains and losses.

Writing Activity:

Have you ever lost someone or something that you loved?

What does healing look like?

How do you honor memories?

11. Police Brutality

Writing Activity:

Have you ever experienced/witnessed police brutality or harassment?

How did it make you feel?

What does a just police state look like?

12. Self Love and Self Care

Writing Activity:

What does Self Love feel like?

What do you love about yourself?

How do you care for yourself?

13. "The Village" Ase

Writing Activity:

What does equality mean to you?

What does unity and togetherness look like?

What does community feel like?

14. Love

Writing Activity:

What does love look, smell, taste, feel and sound like?

How do you keep love in your heart?

How do you show love?

15. Leadership

Writing Activity:

In what ways do you lead?

What makes the best leaders?

16. Being Seen / Heard

Writing Activity:

What images arise when you think of yourself?

What are the things you say about yourself that need to be updated?

What do you want to present to the world?

17. Give Thanks

Writing Activity:

What are you thankful for?

What have your blessings meant to you and those around you?

18. Vulnerability

Writing Activity:

What do you fear about being vulnerable?

How can being vulnerable allow you to share your truth?

19. Live your truth

Writing Activity:

Are you living your truth?

What would you need to do to be closer to living your truer self?

20. Lies you tell yourself

Writing Activity:

What lies have you told yourself, that you have started to believe?

What learned beliefs are you holding on to, that do not serve your purpose?

21. Continued Learning

Writing Activity:

What lesson have you learned recently?

What do you still need to learn?

“TODAY I DECIDED TO FORGIVE YOU. NOT BECAUSE YOU APOLOGIZED, OR BECAUSE YOU ACKNOWLEDGED THE PAIN THAT YOU CAUSED ME, BUT BECAUSE MY SOUL DESERVES PEACE.

- NAJWA ZEBIAN

22. Forgiveness

Writing Activity:

Have you forgiven yourself?

What are the things you struggle with forgiving?

How could forgiving serve your wellbeing?

23. Healing

Writing Activity:

What do you need to heal from?

What could you do today to heal yourself more?

24. Ego

Writing Activity:

When your ego appears, what questions do you ask yourself?

25. Abundance

Writing Activity:

How is your life abundant?

When you feel scarcity, how do you shift to abundance?

WEEKLY CALENDAR

"IF YOU TALK ABOUT IT, IT'S A DREAM. IF YOU ENVISION IT, IT'S POSSIBLE.
IF YOU SCHEDULE IT, IT'S REAL." - TONY ROBBINS

Affirmations of the Week:

	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
8 AM							
12 PM							
4 PM							
8 PM							

Sleep - Track your hours:

SUN _____ MON _____ TUE _____
WED _____ THU _____ FRI _____ SAT _____

Water - Track glasses drank per day (H):

SUN _____ MON _____ TUE _____
WED _____ THU _____ FRI _____ SAT _____

Goals of the week that take you closer to your purpose:

Reading of the week:

I am thankful for...

LEGEND:

TRACK YOUR SELF CARE
ACTIVITIES FOR THE WEEK.

JOURNAL = J
MEDITATE = M
MOVEMENT = MO
LEISURE = L
READ = R

MONTHLY CALENDAR

“THIS YEAR, I WILL LOVE THE WORK IN PROGRESS THAT IS ME.”

-ANONYMOUS

MONTH / YEAR: _____

S	M	T	W	T	F	S

Goals of the month that take you closer to your purpose:

Notes:

Reminders: