

THE ART OF NOT GIVING AN F ON INSTAGRAM



PERSPECTIVES AND EXERCISES TO HELP YOU NAVIGATE THE
TOXIC SIDE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

By THE COZY HOME CHRONICLES

*"You do not drown simply
by plunging into water; you
only drown if you stay
beneath the surface."*

PAULO COELHO



INTRODUCTION

Social media is a relatively new technology in the grand scheme of human existence so it's pretty safe to say that the verdict is still out on the long term effects of social media usage. Well, not exactly. While many users praise social media's ability to connect with others, share ideas, and cultivate a sense of community, some research and anecdotal evidence points to a serious downside of social media usage: its association to mental health issues including depression, anxiety, and low-self-esteem. While I have my own theories as to why this is, I'm not here to argue whether the benefits of social media outweigh the negative effects. Chances are, if you're like me, you've decided to stay on social media for a reason. But that doesn't mean you should walk straight into the belly of the beast ill-equipped. There is too much at stake. So what's the solution?

First, I believe it's important to recognize what makes platforms like Instagram so insidious. They quite brilliantly exploit an innate human desire for connection and validation. Add in consumption culture, vanity metrics, and very little accountability and you have yourself a perfect mental health storm. In this short workbook, you'll find my ideas and strategies for navigating this storm. I'll be up front here; this is no magic solution. You're not going to read this and come out the other end suddenly immune to the toxicity and negativity you experience on platforms like Instagram. Like all worthwhile things in life, this will require conscious effort and practice. While this workbook is centered around Instagram, the strategies are applicable across all forms of social media. My hope is that through this workbook, you'll find strategies to sift through the facades and not just stay afloat but find benefit in meaningful connections and quality content.



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STRATEGY #1

*"Whatever anyone does or says,
I must be emerald and keep my
color."*

MARCUS AURELIUS

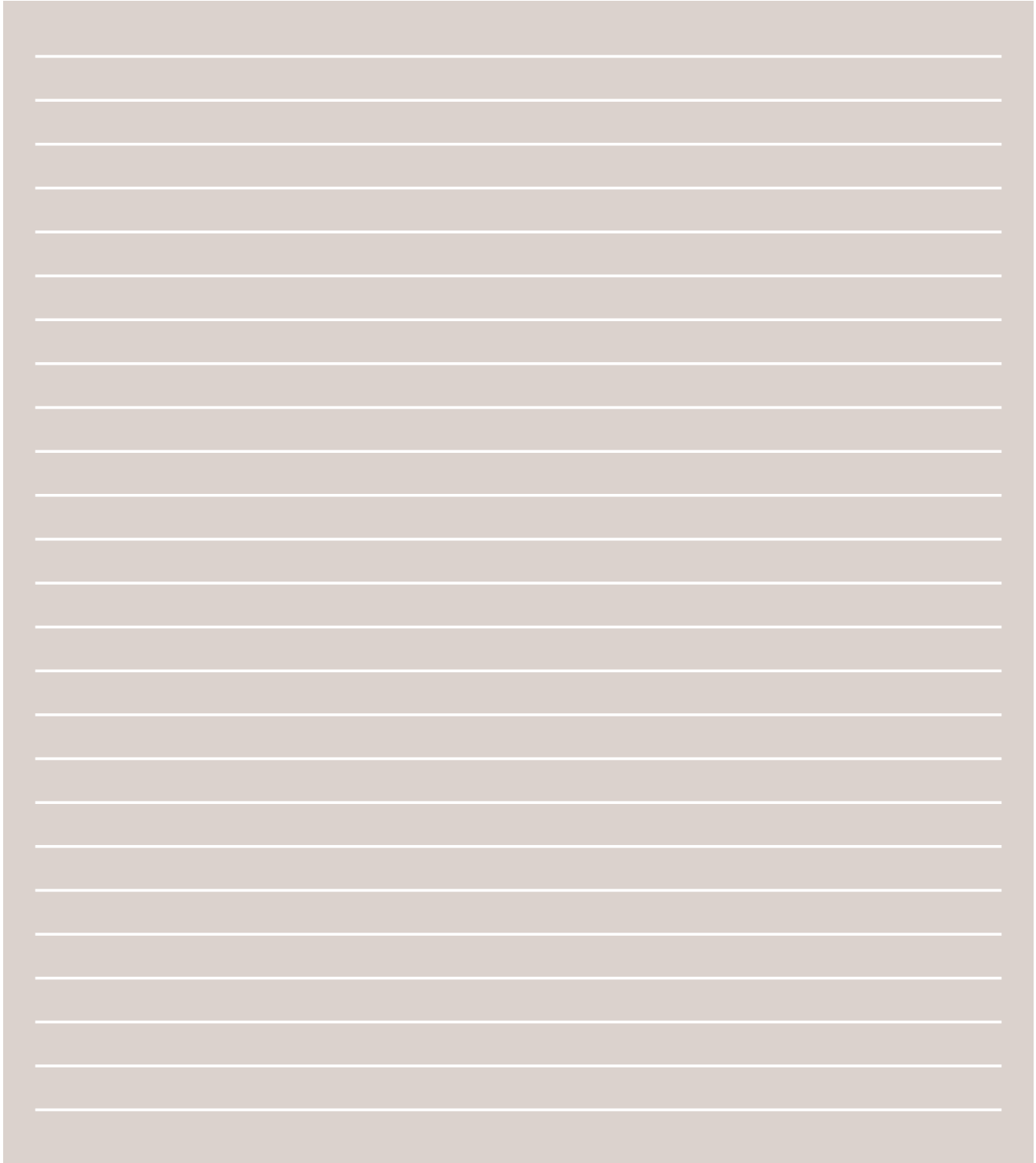
CHECK YOUR INTENTIONS

With over 3 billion social media users, it's inevitable that you will cross paths with many people who may not share your values. That's okay. But it's important that you don't feel pressured to sacrifice who you are for the sake of fitting in. Instagram is only a high school popularity contest if you play along as such. You'll see all sorts of ugly and immature behavior on social media from rude judgmental comments, trolling, buying followers, dishonest product reviews, conspiracy theories, racism, etc. No matter what ugly behavior you witness, remember that it is a reflection of that user. You are responsible for you alone so make sure that you participate in a way that's true to your values. One's moral code should never be decided by what is popular or acceptable by the majority and this applies on social media as well. Setting and checking in with your intentions can not only help you use social media more strategically and intentionally but it can help you be more critical when it comes to choosing what kinds of content to consume and/or create.

Strategy 1 Exercise: Discovering your “why”

Take some time to think about your intentions on social media.

- What do you use it for? To connect with friends and family? Share ideas? Self expression? To start or expand your business? Make a difference?
- What are some values that are important to you? Which ones are non-negotiable?



STRATEGY # 2

*"To photograph is to frame, and to
frame is to exclude."*

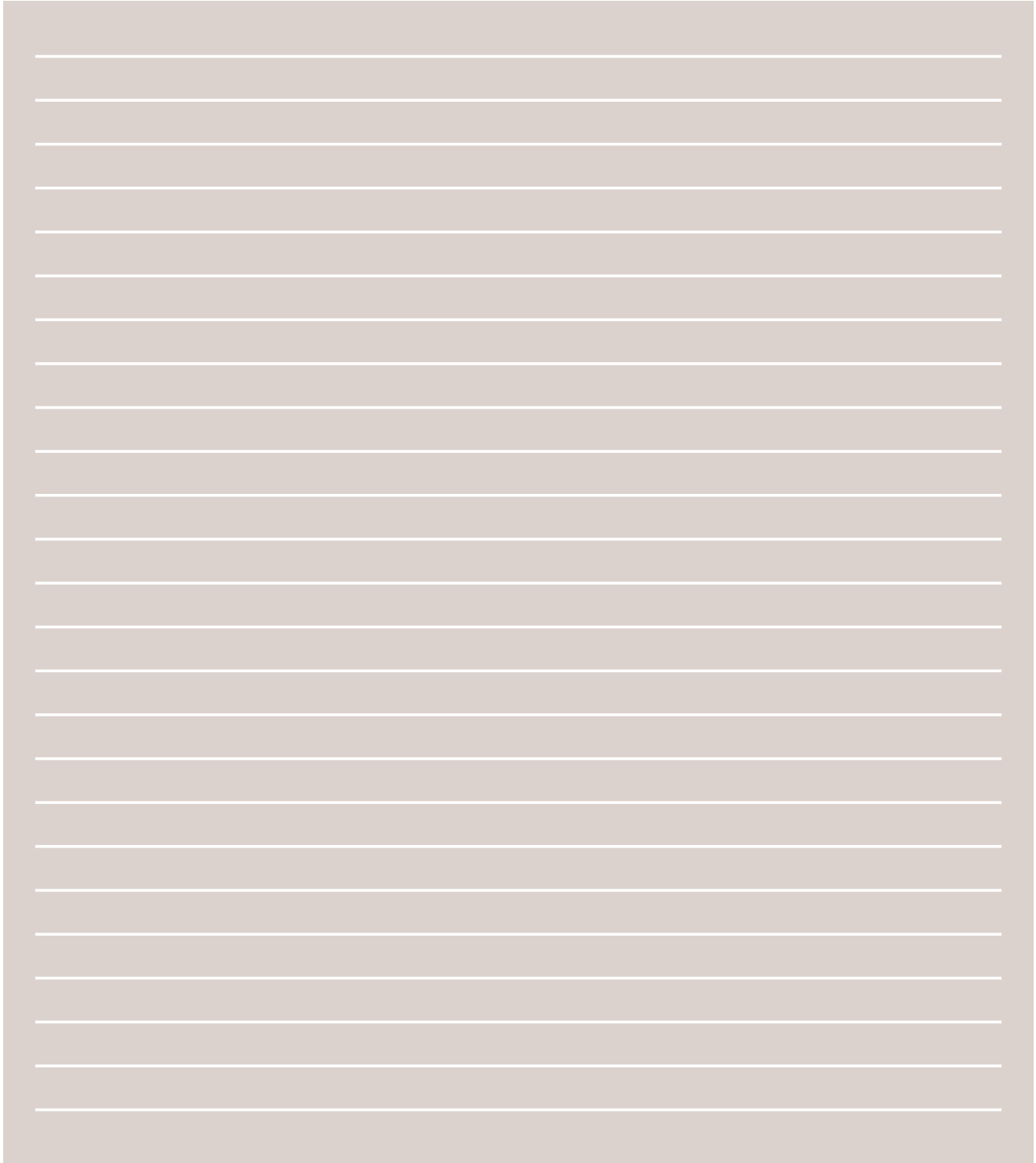
SUSAN SONTAG

CONSIDER CONTEXT

A great deal of what we see on social media is filtered and curated. We see what others want us to see and we do not see the full picture. As a result, we tend to make unrealistic comparisons based solely on external conditions. While there are many social media users who are performing highly exaggerated or fabricated lifestyles, the truth of the matter is that many ordinary people and content creators are sharing a moment in time, a final product and not the process. For example, when we see an image of someone graduating from university or a beautifully cooked meal, what we don't see are the years of hard work, challenges, and refinement of various skills to get to those points in time. When we recognize this context, we can learn to challenge our distorted thoughts and the inner voice that tells us we are inadequate. We can begin to see the simple things we do as extraordinary and take pride in our own strengths while appreciating the uniqueness of each person's journey.

Strategy 2 Exercise: Deconstructing your own story

Take 10 minutes to think about your background and life-defining moments. Ask yourself what are things you choose not to share with others and why? Now list some things you're good at and describe some of the invisible work that happened behind the scenes to get there. It's easy to see that no matter how much we share, others will always have an impoverished view of our life and vice versa.

A large rectangular area with a light beige background, containing numerous horizontal white lines for writing. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the area, providing a space for the user to write their response to the exercise.

STRATEGY #3

*"Why are you so enchanted
by this world when a mine of
gold lies within you?"*

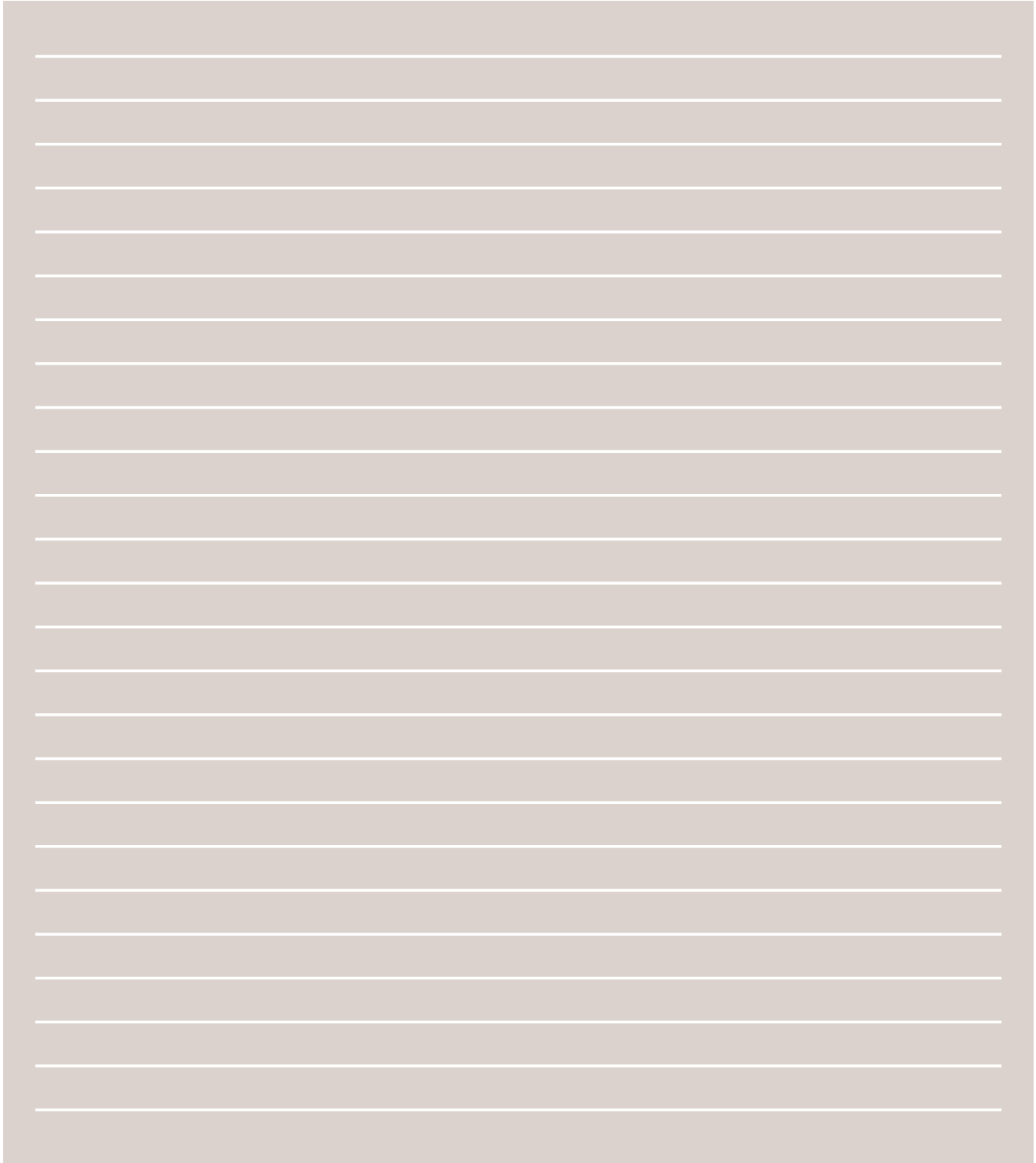
JALALUDDIN RUMI

CULTIVATE CONTENTMENT

For all the talk of self love and self care on social media, there isn't enough critique about how this talk reeks with FOMO culture. FOMO, or the fear of missing out, is "the anxiety or motivation social media users feel when they want to belong to some group, event, or even a moment that others are posting about. It arises from feelings of social exclusion, isolation, or anxiety and can be so intense that people will abandon what they're doing to join or consume a fleeting moment on social media (1)." The implication of beautiful people advertising their must-haves in the name of self love and self care is this: If you buy or do X you will be happy/healthy/beautiful. We think that if we have the fanciest coffee machine or a closet full of trendy clothing or a clean beauty skincare routine, we will somehow be happy. As long as we see ourselves as consumers and as long as we tie our self worth to what we own or what we look like, we will spend our lifetime chasing after happiness and we will be miserable. Once we recognize that our value and joy come from within, we can filter through these toxic messages and become active agents in our journey to cultivate contentment and lead a fulfilling and meaningful life.

Strategy 3 Exercise: A practice in contentment

Take 10 minutes to jot a list of 5 things you love about yourself and your life at the moment. Read through your list and consider ways to remind yourself of these when you feel discontented following a leisurely scroll on social media. When you're only focused on what you don't have, you fail to appreciate what you do.

A large, light beige rectangular area with horizontal white lines, intended for writing a list of 5 things.

STRATEGY #4

"If you understand others you are smart. If you understand yourself you are illuminated."

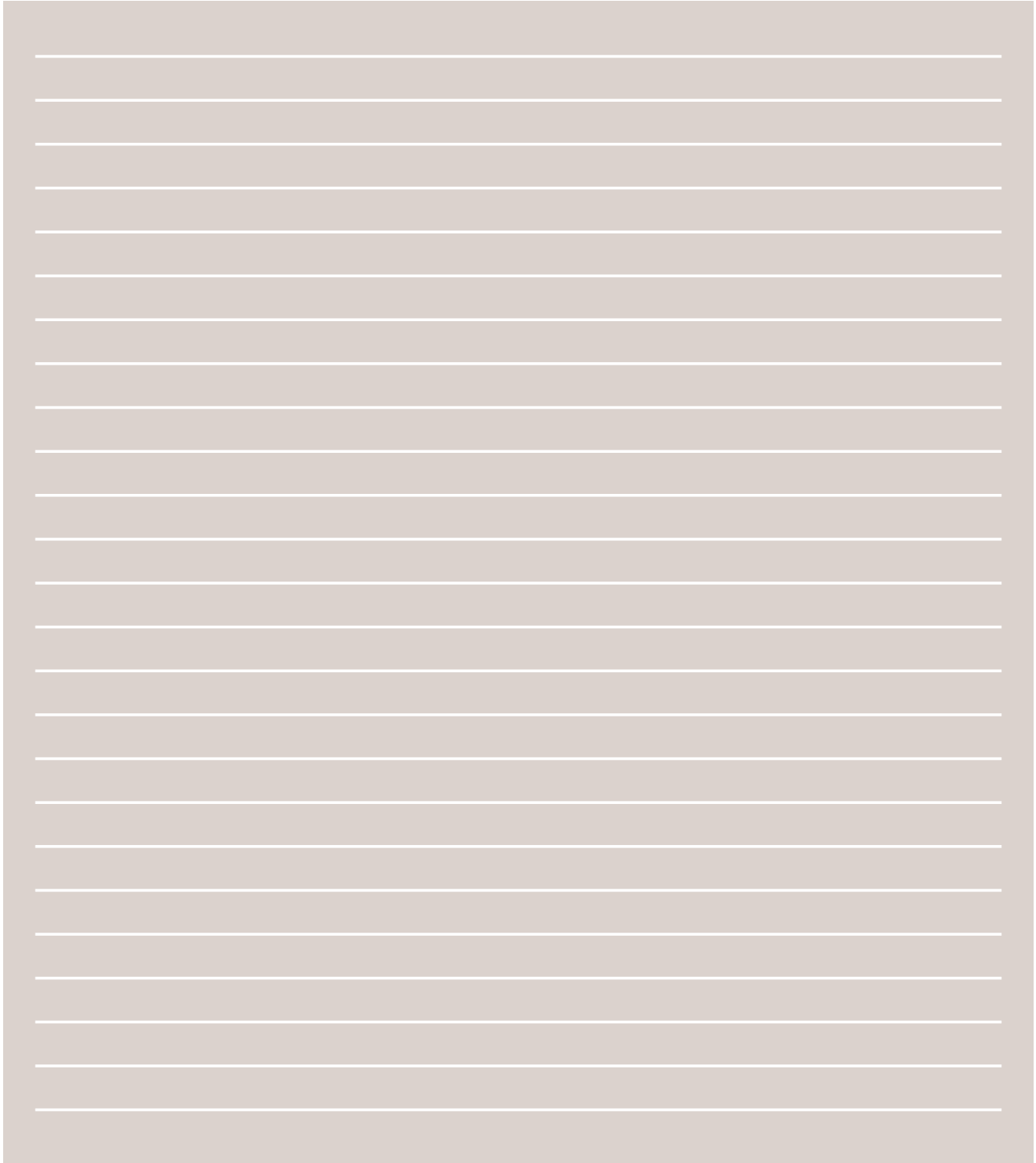
LAO TZU

SET BOUNDARIES

Even if one is aware of FOMO culture and is content with what they have and who they are, this does not guarantee immunity from negative emotions on social media. When you're on a platform where people are desperately vying to become instafamous and where influencers glorify and profit from consumption through affiliate marketing, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by the vanity of it all. Knowing your triggers and what kinds of content make you feel inadequate or go against your values are crucial to setting effective boundaries. When you are in tune with yourself, you will be able to determine whether you need to mute or unfollow certain accounts, hire a social media manager if you're a small business or simply set time limits on your usage in order to prioritize your own mental, physical, and spiritual well-being.

Strategy 4 Exercise: Recognizing triggers

Take 10 minutes to scroll on Instagram and describe what kinds of accounts resonate with you and which ones do not. Set time aside to mute or unfollow accounts that you find triggering or uninspiring. Consider your triggers and strategize how you can realistically limit these kinds of interactions in your daily life.

A large rectangular area with a light beige background and horizontal white lines, intended for writing notes. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the area.

STRATEGY #5

*"If you don't like something,
change it. If you can't change it,
change your attitude."*

MAYA ANGELOU

REFLECT AND REEVALUATE

Now that you're aware of your intentions on social media, you've considered context and you've determined what boundaries to set, it's important to carve out time for reflecting and reevaluating. We live in a changing world and we simply cannot assume that the solutions we derive now will work indefinitely. You might find that in one season of your life even 30 minutes of social media per day is too much for you. It's also possible that your perspective might change and you'll have to adjust your attitude and priorities accordingly. The point is: The work never stops but a little mindfulness can go a long way in helping you feel empowered and intentional as you navigate platforms like Instagram.

Strategy 5 Exercise: Seven days of reflection

Document how many hours you spent on social media per day over the span of a week. At the end of each day, write a brief reflection about how you felt and what you learned about yourself.

SUNDAY:

MONDAY:

TUESDAY:

WEDNESDAY:

THURSDAY:

FRIDAY:

SATURDAY:

NOTE:

Disclaimer:

I created this workbook out of a desire to share how I challenge what I find to be pervasive and deeply toxic aspects of social media culture. I have always found the advice "don't compare" to be a completely disingenuous, unproductive, and unrealistic solution to the effects of social media because it places a burden of blame on the user without acknowledging the role that the structure and culture of social media plays. I want to emphasize, however, that this workbook is not a replacement for professional help and if you do suffer from anxiety, depression, or any other mental health conditions that you seek a licensed and trained professional. I want you to think of this workbook as a starting point for a serious conversation with yourself regarding the role you want social media to play in your life. There's no right or wrong answer and it will vary for everyone but at the end of the day, I hope you will feel empowered and confident if and when you choose to participate on social media platforms like Instagram.

Sources:

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