

The background of the cover is a photograph of a sunset over a large body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange and yellow glow that reflects on the water's surface. The sky is a deep blue with some light clouds. Several birds are seen in flight against the sky. The foreground shows a rocky shoreline with some sparse vegetation.

THE
NON-FRICTION
— LIFE —

Available,
Not Entangled

Mini-Book One

MELANIE CRAWFORD-HAHN

THE NON- FRICTION LIFE

Available, Not Entangled

Mini-Book One

Melanie Crawford-Hahn

First Digital Edition

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Cover photograph by the author, taken on Sheguiandah Bay, Manitoulin Island, Ontario.

DEDICATION

For my children.

David • Hope • Elijah • Emmett
You have been the greatest teachers of my life.

Every system I've questioned, every pattern I've tried
to understand, and every lesson I've
slowly pieced together about responsibility,
boundaries, and how people function together has
been shaped by the years I've spent raising you.

This book — and the ones that will follow — are part
of the legacy I hope to leave behind.

Not because I expect you to live exactly the way I do.
But because if these ideas help you move through the
world with a little more clarity, a little
more confidence, and a little less unnecessary
friction than I did while figuring them out...
then every lesson was worth learning.

Love, Mum

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INTRODUCTION

Why friction quietly drains our energy

I didn't sit down to invent a philosophy.

I was mostly trying to live my life without accidentally becoming the unpaid emotional project manager for every human being within a 50-foot radius.

When you're raising kids, running a household, keeping animals alive, and navigating the normal chaos of everyday life, you start to notice patterns in how systems behave.

Some systems run smoothly.

Others quietly (or savagely) eat your energy alive.

Here's what I've discovered.

Most of the exhaustion people walk around with isn't actually coming from life itself.

Sure, life is complicated.

Kids are complicated.

Relationships are complicated.

Careers are complicated.

Running a household can sometimes feel like managing a small municipal government where half the staff refuses to attend meetings.

But complexity isn't the real problem.

The real problem is friction.

Friction is what happens when energy is forced through a system that isn't designed to carry it.

In mechanics, friction is the force that resists motion.

Too much friction and the machine overheats, stalls, or grinds itself into dust.

Which, coincidentally, is also what happens to people who spend too many years carrying responsibilities that were never assigned to them in the first place.

If you've ever pushed a grocery cart with one wheel jammed sideways, you already understand the concept.

The cart technically still moves.

But you're sweating in aisle seven while everyone else glides toward the free sample station as though life makes sense.

That's what a lot of modern life looks like.

People pushing carts with broken wheels, wondering why everything feels so hard.

The strange part is that most of the time, the wheel isn't broken.

It's just pointing in the wrong direction.

This mini-book is about learning how to notice that.

Not the dramatic chaos.

The quiet resistance.

The places where energy keeps disappearing into systems that were never designed to hold it.

Because once you start seeing friction clearly, a shift begins.

You stop pushing harder.

You start repositioning the machine.

And when the machine is aligned correctly, the same amount of effort suddenly moves you much further down the road.

This is the idea behind The Non-Friction Life.

Less resistance.

Smoother movement.

And conveniently, it also works as non-fiction.

Because everything in these books comes from real lived experience.

And we're going to start with one of the biggest sources of friction most people never question.

Overfunctioning.

THE COST OF OVERFUNCTIONING

Most people think overfunctioning means being helpful.

Responsible.

Reliable.

The person who keeps everything together.

It even sounds noble.

But if you zoom out far enough, overfunctioning is usually just a very polite way of doing three times the work that's been officially assigned to you.

Nobody had to ask you to do it most times.

It just... happens.

For example:

Managing other people's emotions.

Anticipating problems that aren't yours to solve.

Smoothing conflicts between adults who could absolutely be solving them themselves.

If life were a workplace, the overfunctioner would be the employee quietly performing multiple roles and positions while the rest of the staff attends a meeting about "team morale."

In most cases, nobody asked the unsuspecting overfunctioner to do all those extra jobs.

But once they start doing this, everyone gets very comfortable with the arrangement.

This is how people accidentally become the structural support beam of systems that were never stable to begin with.

And once you're the beam, the building and its occupants develops a very strong emotional attachment to your continued existence.

Remove the beam, and suddenly everyone wants to talk about how important teamwork is.

...A MELANIE MOMENT

Here's a real example of how overfunctioning quietly showed up in my life.

Brian (my husband) used to struggle to address the kids directly when it came to things like yard work or snow clearing.

Not because he's unwilling or incapable.

Just... hesitant.

Mildly unsure of his footing within those fickle blended family dynamics.

So I filled the gap.

Simply because it was easy for me.

I anticipated the need, cushioned his hesitation, and asked the kids to pitch in on his behalf.

Instant relief.

I'm a hero.

Brian was grateful.

Which makes sense.

I had just saved him from discomfort.

Hero work.

And I felt momentarily thrilled with myself for being so helpful.

cue fanfare

Look at me.

Solving problems.

Keeping the household running smoothly.

Practically a public service.

~jazz hands~

The next time the situation came up, I did it again.

Same result.

Relief for him.

Problem solved.

~continued internal fanfare~

Eventually, though, something shifted.

After a while I started to feel... annoyed.

Like why am I always the one herding the kids into helping?

What once felt like a noble contribution was starting to feel suspiciously like regret.

With the help of therapy, self reflection and hard work I eventually created a boundary and managed to step back.

But the boundary was way harder than it should have been.

Because I was the one who had quietly created the system that required the boundary in the first place.

Watching that pattern unfold taught me this...

Human systems don't usually assign responsibility.

Responsibility migrates to the person who notices the gap first.

And that's often where overfunctioning begins.

AVAILABLE VS ENTANGLED

Availability is healthy.

Entanglement is exhausting.

Availability says:

“I’m here with you.”

Entanglement says:

“I will now personally ensure the entire electrical grid of your emotional life continues functioning indefinitely.”

A while back my kids said they’d like to try doing a meal prep day if I was willing to buy the groceries.

Availability would have meant picking up the groceries.

Instead, I sourced special containers.

Bought the groceries.

Cooked the food.

Portioned the meals.

Labeled the containers.

The whole nine yards.

What started as “I’ll support this idea” turned into me running the entire meal prep operation.

Availability supports the person, the plan or the idea.

Entanglement takes over the entire system.

...A MELANIE MOMENT

When Brian first started using his CPAP machine, a quiet shift occurred.

The machine steadily became my responsibility.

Not officially.

No meeting was held.

No contract was signed.

It just happened the way these things usually do.

At some point I started noticing whether he had put the mask on.

If he fell asleep without it, I’d hear the snoring from across the hall.

And my brain would immediately go into management mode.

Do I go tell him? Do I ignore it?

Is he going to sleep badly tonight?

Which, if you think about it, is a strange job description for another adult.

~ Nighttime CPAP compliance supervisor ~

Then one night, in the wee hours of the morning, I felt myself evolve just a tiny bit as I began to realize...

The machine belonged to HIM.

The sleep belonged to HIM.

The consequences belonged to HIM.

But somehow the monitoring had migrated to me.

Not because anyone assigned it.

Just because I noticed.

So I had to do something surprisingly difficult.

I had to train myself to stop managing it.

To let him hear his own snoring.

To let him decide whether the mask went on.

And once I did, the dynamic shifted.

Instead of monitoring his system, I could start celebrating his success within it.

When he showed me his results on the app in the morning, I could be proud of him.

When he woke up and put the mask on before morning, I could notice the progress instead of managing the process.

Because caring about someone and managing their life
are not the same thing.

That distinction is the difference between being
available...

and becoming entangled.

THE SYSTEM QUIETLY ASSIGNS THE RESPONSIBILITY

If you look closely at most human systems, a pattern becomes visible.

Responsibility rarely gets assigned to the overfunctioner.

It simply migrates.

Not officially.

Not through discussion.

And often not with conscious consent.

It just quietly takes up residence in your personal operating system.

The moment one person reliably steps in to solve a problem, the system learns something important.

That person will handle it.

So the responsibility slowly shifts in their direction.

Not because anyone formally asked them to take it on.

But because they proved they could.

Over time the system adapts.

The person who notices becomes the person who manages.

The person who manages becomes the person responsible.

And when that happens, something predictable follows.

Exhaustion.

Resentment.

And the quiet realization that the responsibility was never actually assigned.

It simply migrated.

SHARPNESS IS A SECURITY PROTOCOL

People who have spent years overfunctioning often develop a specific kind of sharpness.

Not cruel.

Not unkind.

(Despite what your inner monologue might be telling you.)

Just sharp.

A little quicker to say no.

A little quicker to push back.

Sharpness isn't your personality.

It's a security protocol.

Your nervous system has realized that the system you've been operating inside has been running without adequate boundaries. *(Also known as resentment prevention.)*

So it installs a firewall.

Suddenly you're less interested in fixing problems that were never yours to carry.

You hesitate before volunteering.

You notice the moment someone else's responsibility starts drifting toward you.

You feel the impulse to step in...

But for the first time, you pause.

Not because you stopped caring.

But because your system is finally learning the difference between being available and being entangled.

From the outside, this can look abrupt.

People who benefited from your overfunctioning might even call it “attitude.”

But what they’re actually witnessing is something much healthier.

A nervous system that has started protecting its resources.

Sharpness is often the first visible sign that a person is recalibrating the system they’ve been living inside.

And recalibration always feels a little uncomfortable at first.

Especially for the people who were getting used to the old arrangement.

REALIGNING WITH BOUNDARIES

Once people start recognizing the patterns we've been talking about, things begin to change.

They pull back.

Not dramatically.

Just... enough.

Enough to stop automatically solving every problem.

Enough to stop stepping in before anyone else has the chance to.

Enough to notice when responsibility starts quietly drifting in their direction.

For the first time in a long time, they pause.

And that pause can feel uncomfortable.

Not because something is wrong.

But because the system they've been living inside has grown used to operating a certain way.

When one person has been carrying a disproportionate share of responsibility, the system eventually stabilizes around that arrangement.

Everyone adapts.

Expectations form.

Roles quietly solidify.

So when the overfunctioner begins setting boundaries, the system experiences a moment of recalibration.

Sometimes people are surprised.

Sometimes they're confused.

Occasionally they're even a little irritated.

Not because boundaries are wrong.

But because the system had quietly reorganized itself around the absence of them.

Realigning with boundaries doesn't mean abandoning the system.

It means returning responsibility to its proper place.

You can still care.

You can still support people.

You can still participate fully in the relationships and systems that matter to you.

The difference is that you're no longer carrying roles that were never actually yours to begin with.

Instead of absorbing responsibility the moment it appears, you allow the system to adjust.

And systems do adjust.

Sometimes slowly.

Sometimes awkwardly.

But over time, something healthier begins to emerge.

Responsibility settles where it actually belongs.

Participation becomes voluntary instead of automatic.

Support replaces silent ownership.

And the person who once felt like the human load-bearing wall of the system discovers something unexpected.

They were never required to hold up the entire structure.

They just happened to be the first one who noticed the crack.

...A MELANIE MOMENT

Earlier I told the story about the kids wanting to try meal prep if I would buy the groceries.

What I didn't fully explain was what happened after I enthusiastically over functioned and turned their simple idea into a full-scale logistical operation.

Containers.

Labels.

Portion measurements.

At one point I'm fairly certain I was about three decisions away from issuing laminated operating procedures.

Eventually I stopped running the operation.

Not because the kids complained.

But because I was slowly becoming resentful, burdened, and constantly frustrated about food not getting eaten - and no one seemed particularly impressed that I had essentially built a small food-distribution infrastructure inside our kitchen.

So I tried something radical.

I bought the groceries.

And then I stopped.

I chose to function.

Not OVERfunction.

(For the record, I'm making this sound much smoother than it actually was. The real process involved several internal debates and at least one dramatic stare into the fridge. We'll unpack that particular circus later.)

No container research.
No portion math.
No meal-prep command center.

Just... groceries.

The kids wasted no time building their own version of the system, and at first I was fully prepared for their imminent failure.

It was far less organized.
Far less precise.
And showed absolutely no concern whatsoever for matching lids.

But here's the thing.

...it worked.

Food got made.
Food got eaten.

My ego got a quick reality check when civilization continued as usual.

That's when it really hit me.

My system hadn't improved the situation.

It had created a misalignment.

Which is often what overfunctioning actually does.

When the overfunctioner steps back, the system doesn't collapse.

It simply recalibrates once that particular piece of friction is removed.

THE NON-FRICTION POINT

In mechanics, friction is the force that resists motion.

If you've ever tried to pull open a door that clearly says PUSH, you've experienced it.

You pull.

Nothing.

You pull harder.

Still nothing.

Now you're pulling with your whole body weight as if the building personally insulted you.

Then someone quietly points at the sign.

PUSH.

You give the door the smallest nudge...
and it swings open effortlessly.

Nothing about your strength changed.

You were just applying force in the wrong direction.

Life works like that more often than people realize.

Sometimes the solution isn't more effort.

Sometimes the system simply needs to move in the direction it was designed to move.

That moment is what I call the non-friction point.

CLOSING

This mini-book is the first entry in The Non-Friction Life series.

Each book explores a different place friction appears in modern life.

Once you learn to see friction clearly, a shift begins.

You stop pushing harder.

You start adjusting the system.

And movement becomes surprisingly simple.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THIS MINI-BOOK

If this mini-book resonated with you, the next step isn't perfection.

It's awareness.

Once you begin noticing where friction appears in your life, you'll start seeing patterns that were previously invisible.

You may notice moments where responsibility quietly migrates toward you.

You may catch yourself stepping in to solve problems that were never actually assigned to you.

You may even feel the familiar pull to rescue a situation simply because you know you can.

That awareness is where change begins.

Not through dramatic confrontation or rigid rules, but through small shifts in how you respond.

Sometimes the shift is as simple as pausing.

Sometimes it's allowing another person the space to handle something themselves.

And sometimes it's recognizing that the system you thought required your constant management is actually capable of recalibrating without you.

None of this happens perfectly.

It's a process.

One that unfolds gradually as you begin noticing friction and experimenting with small adjustments.

That process is what the rest of this series continues to explore.

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

If something in this mini-book felt familiar, you're not alone.

Most people have experienced some version of overfunctioning in their lives.

It often begins with good intentions.

You notice a gap.

You help.

The system adapts around the help.

Over time, what began as generosity quietly becomes expectation.

This book simply shines a light on that process.

Not to blame anyone.

But to make the pattern visible.

Because once a pattern becomes visible, you gain the ability to interact with it differently.

You may start noticing the moments where friction appears.

You may find yourself experimenting with new ways of staying connected to the people you care about without becoming responsible for everything around them.

That exploration is what the rest of this series is about.

The conversation doesn't end here.

In many ways, this is simply where it begins.

COMING NEXT IN THE NON-FRICTION LIFE

MINI-BOOK TWO

RE-ALIGNING WITH BOUNDARIES

Stopping overfunctioning is the first step.

But systems that have quietly relied on your overfunctioning don't always adjust immediately.

Sometimes they push back.

Sometimes they panic.

And sometimes they simply wait to see if you'll step back in and resume the role you once filled.

Because when responsibility stops migrating toward one person, the system must decide how it will function instead.

Mini-Book Two explores what happens after the shift begins.

How relationships recalibrate.

How responsibility slowly returns to the people it belongs to.

And how to remain available to the people you care about without sliding back into entanglement.

Because seeing friction is only the beginning.

Learning how to live differently once you see it is where the real work begins.

I'll see you there.