



A few months ago, I saw a Facebook update from my friend, A'Driane Nieves, where she referenced her **Family Charter**. A'Driane is a [multi-disciplinary artist](#) and [activist](#), and a dedicated mother of three. I always appreciate the thoughts and insights she shares, and I found myself wanting to learn more about her Family Charter — how it works, how it has changed over the years, where the idea came from — that sort of thing. In my curiosity, I emailed her with a list of questions and begged her to write up her thoughts as a blog post. Her response is so good! Here's what A'Driane says: “Does it fit the charter?”

That's the question my husband and I have asked ourselves and each other over the last three years. It's what has guided every decision large and small as we've navigated parenting, job changes, two moves across state lines (our most recent was cross-country), couples therapy, taking care of our physical and mental health, and even finally getting the dog our boys have been asking for over the last 5 years. It's our guide for nearly everything we do and it's what has kept us moving forward even during the most difficult and stressful of situations.





I was first introduced to the concept of having a personal and family charter, while taking [Brené Brown's Daring Way course](#) with a life coach back in the Spring of 2015. So what is it? An extension of her [Manifesto series](#) — the Wholehearted Parenting Manifesto, the Daring Greatly Leadership Manifesto, and Manifesto of the Brave & Brokenhearted. It's a summary of **how you'd like to live** and **what you'd like to do throughout your life** based off of your own determined set of core values.

The purpose is to use the family charter to help you develop goals and make decisions that are aligned with your passions, skills, desires, and of course, the values that are important to you. It's also designed to help you learn how to say “no” to what doesn't suit, serve or help you live out your value system.

When it comes to developing a charter for yourself or your family, some questions to ask are: What's most important to you? How do you want to live? What fills you up? What do you want to be known for? If you have children, what do you want to instill in them? What do you want to emulate and model for others to look to? What do you want to experience?

After developing my own personal charter, I introduced the idea of a family charter to my husband, and over a series of in-depth conversations, we got honest about what we desire and see for ourselves individually, for our boys, and for us as partners. My husband and I are very much opposite of one another, but working through this together helped us both realize that while we may approach life from differing perspectives, many of our passions and individual values intersect and compliment one another. It took us



awhile to develop our family charter, and even now we revisit it; tweaking and refining as we grow, as our children get older, and as we experience what it's like to actually live, based on what matters most to us.


While living this way has become our default over the last few years, I won't pretend that it's easy to do. Making personal, career, financial, political, parenting, marital, and other life choices and decisions, based on our family charter, sometimes requires sacrificing what may be most convenient. Sometimes it means skipping the quick fix in the short term, for what's best for us, individually and as a family, in the long term. Sticking to it while also revising it, as our lives take shape on the foundation we've built, takes an incredible amount of work. **It also requires vulnerability, transparency, trust, and some pretty frank conversations.** There are times we have been able to work through charter-based decisions on our own, but there have been other times, where having those conversations led to working through issues that required the expert guidance of a therapist.



At this time, our family charter includes goals around our individual and collective health & wellness, investing our resources in our passions (mine = painting, writing, and being a mental health advocate; his = fitness, artificial intelligence, mobile development & programming, and mentoring youth with an interest in tech),

advocating for our children's need for support services (two of our sons are autistic,





and the third has ADHD and anxiety), charity, what kind of environment we wanted to cultivate in our home, and more.

Our most recent “real world” example of our family charter being put to the test came after the 2016 election. We had been living in California for nearly two years. My husband had been working at a long time friend’s start-up that paid well but had zero health benefits. We were paying for them through COBRA coverage obtained through my husband’s previous corporate employer.

Through earlier conversations, my husband had revealed that after working in his field for 25 years, he had little interest in simply making money, or advancing his career through an executive path in a corporate company. For him, while he found value in making money to help provide for our family, what was equally important to him was finding meaning in and through his work.

Over his career working as an entrepreneur and contractor, with 60-80 hour weeks in a corporate setting, lucrative pay, and benefits, we knew that kind of position definitely helped us cover our expenses, but ultimately wasn’t leaving him time or space to focus on his health and wellness, passion for artificial intelligence and robotics, mentoring, or spending time with us. He had no outlets and it was making him miserable.

After a lot of discussions, he left corporate life for a start-up that afforded him more flexibility; but when we woke up on November 19, 2016, still stunned over the result, the first thing he said was, “I have to go back to corporate. I need a job with health benefits.” Our plan before then had been to acquire health insurance through the Affordable Care Act after our COBRA coverage had expired, but with the incoming administration we both knew we had to change our situation to something that was more secure. We knew what it would mean to him, to make such a big pivot in our charter, but we considered the fact that we have neuro-diverse children who require specialized services, and concluded having more affordable and secure healthcare was vital.





So my husband went back to corporate life. But this time, he was (fortunately) able to find a job that still affords him some flexibility to focus on what's most important to him — and to us.

The conversations around that pivot and the election results lead to even greater clarity, refinement and also expansion of our charter. It actually became more specific and precise.

1) We realized our boys might need greater support and stability as they eventually moved into


adulthood, so we decided owning a home and putting down some roots was now a priority.

2) As a bi-cultural family, social justice and fighting against injustice and to advance the rights of minorities, and differently abled individuals, is crucial to us. So we decided that one of the best ways we could combat the policies of the incoming administration was to further wield our economic privilege by funding causes, initiatives, programs, and politicians whose values are rooted in those things.

3) We also decided that we want to help our extended families and communities navigate the impact of the current administration, but realized that in order to do so, and to really make effective use of our economic privilege, while also providing greater stability for our boys, we'd have to cut our expenses.

Living in California had been incredible for our family, but **the cost of living would not enable us to fulfill the expanded tenets of our charter.** So we moved back across the country to New Jersey where housing and the cost of living is more affordable, and we both have extended family. There are other components of our charter





that pushed us to move, but those are the main ones we use as guideposts.

Our boys are currently 11.5, 8.5, and 4.5 years old. Initially, my husband and I developed and worked through our family charter ourselves, before sharing it with them and asking for input. I think starting with the two of us was necessary for where we were at the time. However, when we decided to move to New Jersey, from the beginning we started talking with them about our options, our concerns, what we needed, how we wanted to find more ways to serve others, etc.


Our older two sons were rattled by the election at the time, and talking to them about their feelings and concerns, discussing what we could do as a family, and getting their feedback, helped solidify our commitment to the next phase of our initial charter.

While our family charter is not something that is written out and posted for them to see, it is frequently discussed openly and will continue to be as they age. **Our hope in doing so is that we model for them how thrive in their own lives, and also how to ensure others do as well.**

Since our move to New Jersey a year ago, our boys are thriving in a school that provides the services they need, we've survived our first year of home ownership, and have reconnected with family and friends. My husband is focused on mentorship and building pipelines for minorities into tech. I've opened an art studio and gallery in Philadelphia that serves women artists of color. And we have been able to allocate more of our financial resources to supporting and building structures that enable others to gain the resources they need to thrive; especially in the face of what our country is currently experiencing.

As I stated before, it is not always easy, but operating from and living out a defined charter has strengthened us. It has brought us closer together as a couple, and as a family. It helped us discover our purpose and for that I am ever grateful.





Your turn, Dear Readers. **What are your thoughts on family charters?** I think this is something Ben Blair would be so good at — at both creating a charter and committing to it; using it to guide decisions. Have you ever tried to develop a family charter? Or a personal charter? If yes, have you used it to help you make decisions, or used it as a guide? Or did you create one and then mostly ignore it? Does this type of thing appeal to you? Or does it feel restrictive? Have you ever read someone else's family charter and been inspired? I'd love to hear.

P.S. — A'Driane's artwork is featured on this post, and you can [see more on her site](#).

[13 COMMENTS](#)

