

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



2015 New Places, Sights, & Sounds

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Jan 2, 2015)

Are you ready for 2015? I know I'm not at this point. We just sold our house and moved into a new home. And as you can imagine, we are still living out of boxes, with almost half being my husband's books and my weaving equipment & supplies! Let's not mention all the clothes we brought with us we haven't worn in years.

With all the prep we needed to do prior to selling our other house and moving plans, we said, "No problem. Let's just move it all and sort later." Well, here we are now, staring at over a hundred plus boxes, small, big, and very large, wondering where to start.

Daughter to the rescue! Kimberly came up for Christmas with gifts in hands and a few decorations since Christmas stuff was somewhere in the pile of boxes in the garage. She brought with her a giant dose of organizational skills, Christmas cheer of heart, and positive thinking! Which . . . we badly needed before our marriage was at risk. We had to constantly remind each other, "Remember, I am your friend!"

So Christmas was spent categorizing, sorting, and finding out what treasures where in about 50-75 boxes. Couldn't believe how much we could have not moved from old clothes, books, pictures from who knows where, garage tools I couldn't begin to

name, and even rags we just couldn't let go of. You never know when you will need a good rag to mop things up!

Ho, Ho, Ho Christmas! . . . moving date wasn't really our idea. But you know how the best laid plans of mice, men, and women don't always pan out the way it's written in your day planner! And here we are staring at the first week of 2015.

Again, I am definitely seeing 2015 as a moment to moment adventure . . . one box at a time, hanging one picture at a time, and negotiating with my hubby on where everything will finally find a resting place. So, while we have just entered the New Year this week, I hope you are ready for a grand 2015. May you have a smile on your face and a spring in your step. And I will try to turn my frown upside down, with a little bounce to my step as well. These will be among my 2015 resolutions as I seek to count my blessings and nurture kind relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and strangers alike.

Happy New Year dear readers!

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Choosing Your Friends

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Jan 9, 2015)

What one thing always gets your attention when choosing a friend? Is it their looks, charisma, wildly curious nature, or their quiet, unassuming personality that doesn't ever make unsettling waves? Is it their high intellect that enables you to ride the crest of their smartness? What motivations drive you to say "Hello, want to be my friend?"

I know some of these questions are a bit whimsical. Yet, don't we find ourselves caught looking at their looks and charisma or high intellect a little too much at times? We then miss the more quiet, behind the scenes soldiers of life. Both personalities can offer rich rewards in our lives. It really depends on what our core values are and where we are looking.

Let's start with the friends you already have . . . not acquaintances, but friends. Name them off and with one word describe the value each brings to your life. How do you nurture their friendship so you also bring value to theirs? Which friends have you neglected lately? Is it time to say hello again to see how life is going for them?

Choosing friends and the time you spend with those friends have everything to do with seasons in life. With every decade that passes, the list of friends often change. You may just not see some as often. Their life direction may have changed and a new

season has begun which doesn't necessarily include you or them. This is a very natural flowing part of each season. These changing seasons are particularly tied to life as we age. Think about your childhood friends. Is there one or two still with you at age 30 or 60? If so, you are rare in the annals of friendship.

In Psychology Today, Singletons, *Born to Be Friends, The childhood roots of friendship in and out of school*, by Susan Newman, Ph.D. (Feb 13, 2013, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/singletons/201302/born-be-friends>), offers how parents influence the formation of childhood friendships and life skills throughout adult years. One of those ways reflects how mobile our world is. "4. Given the mobility in our society, few children remain friends with their pre-school or even elementary school friends. But, what lessons from those first friendships help them form and maintain strong friendships when they are older?"

Newman continues with, "It's true that early childhood friendships are not usually stable. But those friendships not only help kids form friendships when they're older, by teaching them empathy, story-telling, perspective taking, and how to adjust one's own behavior to the situation at hand, but also help them become psychologically and cognitively healthy in other ways. For example, the sense of belonging that comes from having a friend boosts all-around psychological well-being. Having friends increases a child's moral reasoning skills. . . Since friendship gives kids the security to alter their points of view, it also sharpens their critical thinking skills."

So, as you think about friends from years gone by and connect with new ones, may you find that your core values are seen and lived by those you choose as friends.

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What's at your core?

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You may ask, "What in the world is she asking?" If you are, here's a reframe. "What do you value the most?" There are so many things we consider important in our lives. For most of us we know family, faith, and friends are at the top of the list.

Yet, when we take some time to dig a little deeper, we may need to ask ourselves, "Is what I value most reflected by my relationships and what I believe?" We all feel we need to belong. Whether belonging is experienced with family, friends, at work, church, or some other group that has a shared interest, what we believe and hold to will more than anything keep us connected with the best motives possible.

However, our basic human need to belong may sometimes drive us outside our core values and distance us from those who love and care for us. We must honestly consider why a particular relationship causes us to abandon what we believe and deem of greatest value.

In years past my husband and I were trying to help a couple save their marriage. Yet, one continued to sabotage the relationship. One would think that with a loving spouse, several adorable children, a nice home, and all of the basic needs met, this wandering spouse wouldn't wander away. But she did, time and time again. The wanderings didn't involve going after someone else. Basically, she was a compulsive

spender, along with writing hot checks. She was always being bailed out by friends and spouse, for years. Finally, one big hot check caught up with her and off to jail she went. Fortunately, that experience became a wakeup for her. After you was released, we heard she was on the straight and narrow. Although her marriage didn't last, she awoke and moved forward in her life. She began to live her core values and discovered she had value as a human being and a life worth living well with integrity and humility.

What core values do you think of when you say the word "integrity." Give this acronym a try. Here are a few of my core values I aspire to, all wrapped up in this one word:

Industrious

Nurturing

Trustworthy

Encouraging

Grateful

Responsible

Influence

Thankful

Young-at-heart

Each day I consciously commit myself to reflect these values in all my relationships. As you can imagine, there are those days I seem to behave just the opposite! Sometimes, I just feel lazy and not very grateful. When those days show up, who wants to be young-at-heart!?

Those are the days when family, friends, and close associates (even strangers sometimes!) remind me of the person I aspire to be. Hopefully with gratitude and humility I get back on my integrity track. Whatever your INTEGRITY core values may be, may you also have family, friends, close associates, even strangers help you stay on the straight and narrow.

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Questions to ask your Friend?

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Jan 23, 2015)

In the life coaching world, there are questions coaches pose to help their clients move forward in their lives. These questions basically reflect on the what, why, when, where, with whom, and how of their lives. What if you gave these questions a try the next time you are out and about with a friend, spouse, or other family member? What do you think their responses would be? You may be very surprised on many counts.

Powerful coaching questions not only open up opportunities yet to be discovered. They may also elicit a challenge for you both. You may begin to recognize certain barriers to your relationship needing resolution. You may also discover your friend has held onto a special dream yet to be fulfilled.

Each question has a purpose. One question may be to help anticipate the “what ifs.” Other questions may draw out the person to assess a situation. Questions that help clarify can be especially powerful.

One important tip is to be aware of your tone and body language when asking questions. What mood are you in at the time? We may think we are simply asking a question. Yet, we may often be unaware of how we actually come across. It also depends on the mood of your friend. That’s when timing comes into play for you both.

Want to give it a try? If so, welcome to the adventure into the unknown!

Here are a number of powerful questions to consider, focused on a specific purpose as follows (modified from *Co-Active Coaching* by Laura Whitworth):

Anticipation

- What might happen?
- What if it doesn't work out the way you wish?
- What if that doesn't work?
- And if that fails, what will you do?
- What is your backup plan?

Assessment

- What do you make of it?
- What do you think is best?
- How does it look to you?
- How do you feel about it?
- What if it doesn't work?

Clarification

- What do you mean?
- What does it feel like?
- What seems to confuse you?
- Can you say more?
- What do you want?

What specific area comes to mind for your friend? I bet you can imagine all kinds of reactions with a number of these questions. What specific area comes to mind for yourself? Yes, turnabout is fair play. Be open to your friend posing the same questions

to you about something you are facing. Be sure to not only keep the mood in mind and timing, but also the level of trust you have developed with your friend. Does your friend have the same level of trust and safety in you?

If so, you are both about to embark into the “fire of conversation,” as William Isaac so eloquently defines in his classic book *Dialogue, the art of thinking together*. “Generally, we think of dialogue as ‘better communication.’ But there is much more to it. Dialogue, as I define it, is a conversation with a center, not sides. It is a way of taking the energy of our differences and channeling it toward something that has never been created before. It lifts us out of polarization and into a great common sense, and is thereby a means for accessing the intelligence and coordinated power of groups of people. Dialogue fulfills deeper, more widespread needs than simply ‘getting to yes.’”

For Isaacs mastering dialogue takes you through the “architecture of the invisible” where you must clearly see your heart’s intent or motives for what you believe and how you communicate it. You must begin there in order to master crucial conversations. You must also be willing to “jump into the void” of the unknown and allow space for the energy, possibilities, and safety to emerge.

For many of us we have a rough time listening. As someone mentioned to Isaacs “People do not listen, they reload.” Yet, when you both actively listen with respect and patience, your questions are well received as genuinely caring inquiry. You both end up creating something together you couldn’t have done any other way. There is no way for anyone to predict the outcome for you both. But isn’t it worth the risk to “jump into the void” together? The rewards are awaiting you both.

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Questions to ask your Friend?, part 2

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Jan 30, 2015)

As mentioned in the previous article, the life coaching world utilizes questions to help their clients move forward in their lives. These questions basically reflect on the what, why, when, where, with whom, and how of their lives.

Powerful coaching questions not only open up opportunities yet to be discovered. They may also elicit a challenge for you both. You may begin to recognize certain barriers to your relationship needing resolution. You may also discover your friend has held onto a special dream yet to be fulfilled.

Each question has a purpose. Previously, there are questions that help anticipate the "what ifs." Other questions may draw out the person to assess a situation. Questions that help clarify can be especially powerful. It is always important to be aware of your tone and body language when asking questions. What mood are you and your friend in? How do we actually come across? Timing can make a break a friendship at times. Want to still give it a try?

If so, here are the next set of powerful questions to consider focused on a specific purpose as follows (modified from *Co-Active Coaching* by Laura Whitworth). Think about and choose one thing you and your friend want to address with any of these questions.

Evaluation

- In what way?
- Is this good, bad, or in between? In what way?
- How does this fit with your plans/way of life/values?
- What do you think that means?
- What is your assessment?

Exploration

- May we explore that some more?
- Would you like to brainstorm this idea?
- What other angles can you think of?
- What is just one more possibility?
- What are your other options?

Example

- Will you give an example?
- For instance?
- Like what?
- Such as?
- What would it look like?

Elaboration

- Will you elaborate?
- Will you tell me more about it?
- What else?
- Is there more?

- What other ideas do you have about it?

Fun as Perspective

- What was fun about . . . ?
- What was humorous about the situation?
- How can you have it be fun?
- How do you want it to be?
- If you were to teach people how to have fun, what would you say?

The questions for *Fun as Perspective* should be given some special attention in any conversation. Asking powerful questions can become intensive and often uncomfortable at times. It's important to shift slightly to encourage a more positive dialogue and brainstorming experience. *Fun as Perspective* questions do that.

Again, remember to be open to your friend posing the same questions to you about something you are facing. Be sure to not only keep the mood in mind and timing, but also the level of trust you have developed with your friend. Does your friend have the same level of trust and safety in you?

If so, you are both entering into the "fire of conversation," as William Isaac so eloquently defines in his classic book *Dialogue, the art of thinking together*. Through the "architecture of the invisible" you will see your motives for what you believe and how you communicate it. This is your beginning toward mastering crucial conversations that will hopefully allow space for the energy, possibilities, and safety to emerge.

Within this unknown you both create something together you couldn't have done any other way. Isn't it worth the risk and the rewards to "jump into the void" together? I

believe it is. That is why for February's lifeskill, *Time Management*, other powerful questions will be posed . . . a very nice way to spend our time, right?

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