

From the Heart. . .

. . . Lifeskills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Reflection – aging with an attitude!

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When you look in the mirror, what do you see? What is your first thought? For myself, I marvel at the increasing number of grey hairs on my head and, oh my, those droopy eyelids and other parts of my body! Although my body doesn't feel like it at times, inside I still feel like I am in my 30s. Yet, reality is reflected in the mirror that I am actually double that age.

I also find myself just a little slower on the uptake after some major project just completed. It seems to take me more than a couple days to recoup. But I continue to assume I can just keep my younger pace, particularly when excited about a project I am working on. Once the project is completed, I find myself sleeping longer, moving more slowly, and slicing off another piece of chocolate cake just for the fun of it! Who cares about the calories anyway after climbing that steep peak of a project!

Once I recoup, I get back into thinking I'm 30 years old all over again. What a senior cycle I find myself in. I guess I can relate to what Sophocles (496BC-406BC) said in his *Acrisius*, "No man [woman] loves life like him [her] that's growing old." And may I be kinder to myself here and add "growing older and wiser"? I do love life and appreciate that I get up each morning with the chance to see the sun rise, enjoy the company of my hubby and friends, and work on the next project with enthusiasm.

Yet, when I read what the experts say about aging, I wonder if I am in denial most of the time. Natural Standard is one of our nation's premier resources for Integrative Medicine. Their

definition states, “Aging is the process of growing old or maturing. Humans reach their peak in growth and development when they are in their mid 20s. After this point, the body gradually becomes less functional over time. Aging typically causes weakness, increased susceptibility to disease and infection, loss of mobility and agility, and age-related physiological changes, such as wrinkled skin and gray hair. In the United States, about two-thirds of people age 65 and over take medications for various conditions. Currently, the average life expectancy in the United States is about 75 years for males and 80 for females. Although genetic makeup has been shown to influence an individual's life expectancy, individuals are more likely to live long and healthy lives without disabilities if they take care of their bodies with proper diets, lifestyles, and medications.”

When I read that our peak is in the mid 20s and the decline begins, it sounds so depressing! I then diligently search for exceptions to that rule in the lives of other people. When I do, I also find that those with active physical lives are also actively using their minds as well. But on the top of their priority list is “attitude”—attitude about their life, relationships, and contributing to the wellbeing of others. Their examples have made all the difference in my own motivation to keep on keeping on. And when putting things into perspective, I am amazed at what is still possible for me as I keep my mind, spirit, and body in shape. Every day becomes a singular opportunity and not just a problem to solve or project to complete.

For those of you out there who are in their approaching senior years or in them right now, how are you doing? What happens when you look in the mirror. If you gasp and say, “Who is that person?!”, I empathy all the way. So, let’s join together to counter the odds or at least slow it down, right? In this month’s lifeskill, *Reflection*, let’s focus on where we are and where we want to head in our glorious, once-in-a-lifetime senior years. Next article will target our relationships/core values in our later years. Are you content with your relationships? Are your core values reflected in your relationships and friendships you have acquired over the years as

well as recently? What about in the years ahead? Now is your chance to make any changes before the rest of the years catch up with you. See you around the corner next Friday.

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Relationships in Reflection

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Are you content with your relationships? Are your core values reflected in your relationships you have acquired over the years as well as recently? When it comes to needing a supportive friend, who do you call? And when someone calls you for support, are you available and know just the right thing to do?

Whether seeking support or your friend asking for support, we all must resist the urge to say "This is what you need to do." A friend calls more to gain a listening ear and caring heart than anything else. So, when my first instinct is to try to fix them or critique the situation, I have to zip my lip and let my friend begin the conversation in a safe, judgment-free-zone. Isn't that what we all really want and need?

Each of us has a particular perspective on what is the "right thing" to say or do, and it really depends on what kind of relationship we have with our friend...more of an acquaintance, co-worker, new friend, close friend, sister, daughter, uncle, husband or wife. We also need to remember that this isn't about us. It's all about our friend. This perspective is even more valuable and tricky when your friend asks for your advice.

Another temptation when hearing the first part of the story from a friend is to either shut down or focus on a response, even before the whole story is heard. It is obvious then we are not really listening and often miss those important clues.

With all relationships, the journey can be a smooth sail, a little bumpy one, a roller coaster ride, or a fast careening dive from the skies. The journey involves every facet of life whether at home, work, throughout our childhood and adult years. When we choose a friend, even a spouse, our core values provide us with the foundation for choosing those relationships. Our core values are then reflected in the life we live. Therefore, all relationships should help us live our daily lives in synergy and balance.

When having a hard day, talking with a friend about our feelings may be all it takes to reduce the stress and experience a welcomed connection and sense of wellbeing provided no other way. Being genuinely listened to and understood have a profound impact on a friend and yourself. Here are a few things offered by Elizabeth Scott, M.S, wellness coach with training in counseling . . . to remember when friends are talking about things that stress or upset them:

- Ask them about their feelings, and listen.
- Reflect back what you hear, so they know you really understand.
- Instead of always trying to tie the conversation back to your experiences, focus questions on them and their feelings.
- When they're talking, are you missing some of what they say because you're waiting for them to stop talking so you can say what you want to say next? Stop, and really listen to them.

Consider your answer to these questions as clues when you call your friend for support:

- Does the conversation flow easily, or is it forced?
- Do you feel they truly understand, accept and support you?
- Do you feel you truly understand, accept and support them?
- Do you feel better or worse about yourself when you're with them?
- Do you leave them feeling energized or mildly depressed?
- Do you include them in your life for positive qualities they have, or just to have more people in your life?

As Scott suggests in her About.com article, *Social Support - How to Create Truly Supportive Friendships*, you just might need to let go of some friends. "Not everyone is an appropriate match. If there's someone in your life who makes you feel bad about yourself, doesn't share any of your interests or values, or is someone that you just don't mesh well with, it's perfectly acceptable to put that relationship on the back burner, let it fade altogether, or not develop it in the first place." Yet, before you let go of that friend, do some internal inventory on why you feel bad about yourself to discover if there is some measure of truth in what is being shared that you may be resisting and thereby experience those bad feelings that do not necessarily come from what or the way it was said. This is not always an easy exercise, but will give you solace if you then decide to say goodbye to that friend.

In addition, people do change and move on in their lives in different directions. "Conversely, if you'd like to keep them in your life out of loyalty, albeit in a periphery role, that's OK, too. However, it would be beneficial to remember not to count on them for support, if they're not able to give it to you."

The choice to say goodbye or nurture the friendship further is yours. Just keep your core values handy to size up whether that friendship really does reflect your life values or tempt you to drift from them. In the end, we all know it is important to have several people to count on for support in life. So, as you consider your relationships in reflection, by all means call those special friends who have made all the difference in your life. Call them to just say thank you for the honor of having them as a friend.

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From the Heart...

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Time to Reflect

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One of the lifeskills I cover each February is Time Management. This month being Reflection, let's take some time to do just that. Admitting that our memory may not always retain the details of how we used our time each day, there is an easy way to find out. Whether you use a physical calendar, planning notebook, your phone, or computer Outlook calendar, you can go back through each month in 2011 and get a fairly clear look at how your time has flown through this year.

Take an hour and go through each month and tally what you have done...meetings, errands, appointments, phone calls, texting, just to name a few. Make up your own bulleted list and count off how many you had each month. For me, I had approximately five meetings each month adding up to 55-60 meetings so far for 2011. When it comes to texting, I have about 120 racked up so far. Phone calls...about an average of 5-10 per day. That adds up to about 1820 on the low side to 3640 on the high side so far. The incoming/outgoing phone calls alone ranged from five minutes to two hours. Without more detail tallying, it is hard to determine total hours spent on the phone, but you get the point I am sure.

Now add up driving time, mealtime and cleanup, shower time, getting dressed and getting ready for bed...all those many tasks and activities that eat up the time in each 24 hour day. Where do you see you spending your life the most? I bet much of the hours are in meetings, driving, phone/computer, and home activities of all sorts.

Reflect on where you would like to reduce your time spent. Consider how you use time to get that job done. How are you combining activities so you don't have to retrace your steps. It's called consolidating tasks and activities to use your time more efficiently. Now go back to your tally list, look over each area you wrote down. Choose that one area you want to gain some free time.

What one thing can you act on this week to gain a portion of free time? Talk with your spouse, family member, and/or close friend for accountability and feedback. Then stick to that change for one month, then reflect on how you feel and what outcomes you have experienced with making that change. Ask yourself, "Am I happy with this change?" And if you are, what other areas do you want to garner more time for what is most important to you? Don't forget "ME" time. If you are not happy with this change, write down one key reason why you are not. Then talk with your spouse, family member, and/or close friends to brainstorm ways to make it work for you.

I welcome hearing from you on what you have discovered, so I can share it with my reader in the next article. I leave you with Ralph Waldo Emerson's view on the good times. "This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it."

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From the Heart. . .

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By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Reflection . . . Grateful Meanderings

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With Thanksgiving and Christmas fast approaching, I decided before I got even more busy than I am to quietly walk in my neighborhood and community. As I leisurely strolled through the streets, there were little kids biking, a dad fixing his truck, and a couple putting in a fall garden of colors.

As I continued to walk downtown Main Street, there were lots of people shopping, getting gas for their car and groceries to take home. On another street, I looked through a glass display of various shops selling all kinds of goodies. Among all these shops were a few galleries spotlighting their art and artists.

Going into one of the galleries I found an array of paintings and sculptures displayed that amazed me. Each piece was uniquely crafted and captured my imagination. I wondered what sparked the artist's idea to create that piece. Was it just a whimsical day that instantly birthed the idea, or was the artist in deep contemplation for months coming up with that idea? No matter the means, I slowly viewed each piece feeling how lucky I was to be able to view works of art I couldn't even begin to see myself create.

The revelation hit me how very lucky I am to live in my community and in this nation. No matter how we all may be struggling in this tough economic time, what a privilege it is to have this kind of art right down the street. Also, how privileged we are to have a grocery store and gas station just around the corner.

How amazing it is that we take them all for granted and expect them to be there. Envision how it would be if your local grocery store simply disappeared. I realize the grocery store and gas stations are considered essential parts of our lives. Yet, how many of us consider a museum, a gallery, indispensable? More like discretionary?

Consider your community that has the arts in whatever form it comes in...visual, performing, literary. Envision your museum, your local gallery, your performing arts theatre disappearing all at once. Would you miss them? If so, how did they contribute to your life? Here are just a few that came to me while contemplating the creative beauty around me.

- Art helps us see creativity everywhere...in buildings, walkways, thoroughfares, a home, even a gas station, grocery store. . .nature itself.
- Art enhances our quality of life beyond the mindset of just surviving.
- Art gets us in touch with the gifts expressed through the artist.
- Art helps us broaden our perspective on life and gets us thinking outside the box.
- Art reflects life as life reflects art.
- Art is used in therapy to help resolve personal, relational, and community challenges.
- Art draws people together and ignites conversation.

- Art contributes to the economic and cultural vitality of a community.
- Art and architecture go hand-in-hand to offer clarity to a community's identity and heritage.

Whether you are in a grocery store, gas station, museum, or gallery, look around you. Where do you see art reflected? No matter the space, color, size, location, the creative arts are an integral part of our lives as human beings and community. Take the time to reflect on its impact to your own personal life.

Then get out there and thank your artists for enriching your life and community. By all means, buy their art so they can keep creating for our delight and wellbeing. And if you see that your own grocery store and gas station reflect the arts and contribute to a higher quality of life, even in their architecture, say thank you to them. They too have enriched your life with more than just groceries and gas.

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