

# From the Heart. . .

## . . . Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



### Talking...has it been worth the time?

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, February 5, 2010)

Here's a typical scenario for how fast time flies each day: Alarm goes off at 6am. Just enough time to stretch, grab a cup of coffee, take a shower, get dressed, make sure the kids are ready for school and in the car to be dropped off, and check cell phone messages that have started coming in on the way to work. Made three emergency phones calls about scheduling a board meeting ASAP, one of the kids left their Algebra book at home and needs it ASAP, and phoned sister who just left a message this morning about a doctor's report she just got. And this is only the first two hours of the day!

Sound familiar? Notice in this scenario that lots of conversations went on as time ticked away. Were the conversations short and sweet, long and lousy, or engaging and encouraging? Consider your average day. How do you communicate? Was the talking worth the time and relationship? How do you communicate when the stakes are high? We all tend when in a rush to try and get the job done ASAP and move on to the next one—without really sensing that we may not be present in the moment. We are more typically on automatic pilot as we talk away time. We really don't recognize the potential value missed in those moments.

In those moments, we all have certain listening filters we automatically step into, particularly when in a hurry. We understand communication is essential for building relationships. However, the **what, why, when, with whom,** and **how** you communicate

are intimately attached to your beliefs, where you live, your life experiences, education, connections, even your personality style. The way you use your time in communicating is directly impacted by these factors.

As you can imagine, each of us have our own way of communicating and exhibiting certain “listening filters.” Here are some examples of the most common filters offered by a fellow coach, Chris Lucerne:

- **Rehearsing: Instead of truly listening, you are thinking about what you will say next.** You may put on the appearance of listening, but your focus is on your response. You respond to what you think you heard, not necessarily to what was actually said. "OK, I've got to tell them to calm down if they want to resolve this ... no, that won't validate their feelings. First I'll say, "Sounds like you've got a right to be sad or hurt or whatever." Then what? What would be the right thing to say after that?"
- **Denying Content or Feelings: Here you discount another's feelings by telling them that what they feel is wrong.** Denying the content of a conversation just because you don't agree with it also tells the other person they are wrong. "Oh, you shouldn't feel that way." "You don't really think that!" "You can't tell me that you're getting upset over that."
- **Derailing: Derailing means avoiding a topic by abruptly changing the subject in order to avoid being uncomfortable.** "You need a vacation from your problems. Have you planned one for this year? Let me tell you what I did when I went to the mountains last summer. "
- **Evaluating/Judging: Judging is the mental-emotional act of looking down at**

**someone**, from a superior perspective and finding fault with him in some way.

Judging can also be an excellent defense against your own feeling of inadequacy.

"Well that's ridiculous to get upset over." "I can't believe you're being so irrational about \_\_\_\_\_."

- **Sparring:** Sparring means that you enjoy debate and argument. You value the process of arguing, defending your point of view, and pushing it on to others. "Let me play devil's advocate here, what about \_\_\_\_\_?" "I think you ought to consider the opposite perspective."
- **Nitpicking:** Nitpicking means choosing some small aspect of the other person's presentation and finding fault with it so as to obscure the overall message. "What does mean?" "What do you mean by that?" "Why do you think that?"
- **Being Right:** It is an effective defense against looking at yourself -- your beliefs, politics, behaviors, and feelings. You won't listen to criticism; you won't take feedback; you block out alternative points of view. Since you can't hear such information, you can't effectively grow and adapt. "There's only one way to resolve this. You've got to \_\_\_\_\_." "I wouldn't handle it like that." "It's not the right way to do it. You should \_\_\_\_\_"
- **Giving advice:** Instead of listening, you like to "help" by giving advice. Sometimes this is done in an important and superior manner leaving the other person feeling not listened to, even put down. Even if there is no superior manner, you may tend to give advice too quickly. You don't understand what advice is needed, if any, because you haven't truly listened. "You know what you should do?"

You should\_ " "If I were you I'd\_." "My advice to you is to\_\_\_\_."

With all listening filters, we are just talking away time without engaging in genuine dialogue that connects us with each other. With genuine dialogue, each encounter is definitely worth the time for both. Genuine dialogue is essential when the stakes are high.

In Kerry Patterson's book, *Crucial Conversations, Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*, crucial conversations are about tough issues. They may not only be challenging, frustrating, annoying, even frightening, but "the results could have a huge impact on the quality of your life" for better or worse. While emotions run high in these types of conversations, Patterson and the other authors believe "If you know how to handle (even master) crucial conversations, you can step up to and effectively hold tough conversations about virtually any topic."

William Isaacs, author of the classic book, *Dialogue*, and founder of the Dialogue project at MIT, agrees. "In a dialogue, people are not just interacting, but creating together"—forever transforming the person, relationship, career, organization, and community. **Both Isaacs and Patterson direct us to first examine our own motives and heart intent on what we believe.**

Starting from the "inside-out" applies whether you are asking your friend to be more supportive, or want to present your ideas on expanding the vision for the organization. Do you think you are right and always want to "fix them" or "bring them over to your side?" To discover gems for making communication well worth the time, I recommend both Patterson's and Isaacs' books to read.

The key points are also discussed in my lifeskills manual, *Celebrating Your Journey, Lifeskills in Synergy*, available on my website. You will find it well worth your

time. Being that our focus for the month is time management, the next article will delve into how time management is really “life management.” See you then.

--

Sharon L. Benedict, MS, ACC, is a certified life wellness coach-consultant, specializing in life skills, wellness, and creative arts development for individuals, businesses and organizations ([www.harvestenterprises-sra.com](http://www.harvestenterprises-sra.com)). She welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at [seekreachachieve@gvtc.com](mailto:seekreachachieve@gvtc.com).

# *From the Heart. . .*

## *. . . Life Skills for Today*

*By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC*



## **Having the Time of your Life?**

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, February 12, 2010)

***The Time of Your Life*** was a 1939 five-act play by American playwright William Saroyan. The play was the first drama to win both the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. Much of the action of the play centers on Joe, a young loafer with money who encourages San Francisco bar patrons in their eccentric behaviors. Joe encounters and helps (sort of) a number of colorful characters, including a would-be dancer, prostitute, frenetic young man in love, an old man who looks like Kit Carson, and an affluent society couple. The play since went on to film and television in the decades ahead.

Although I wouldn't say this play represents the best way to "have the time of your life," it definitely does give us a slice of life for some people. How is your slice of life? Can you say you are "having the time of your life?" Isn't it interesting how the words, time and life, are together in this phrase?

Since this month's focus is on managing your time, how would you define time management? Having the time of your life just might give you a hint. Here's what I think it is . . . **LIFE MANAGEMENT**. One wonders how any of the characters in the play just mentioned would survive, let alone thrive. Two of the most troublesome barriers to thriving in life are what I call "Muddling Through" & "Controlled Chaos." We all deal with

the realities of what I call “controlled chaos.” We all eventually burn out trying to live a “catch up” existence. Without knowing our specific dreams and goals, life’s journey will have little conscious purpose or direction. That’s what I call “muddling through.”

What other barriers can you think of that you may have experienced yourself?

Here are just a few:

- Too many discretionary commitments (including use of iPods, MP3 players, cell phones, computer games/browsing/chat rooms/TV)
- Career/work is always on overtime; you bring work home; spend hours commuting to work
- Financial limitations; mismanagement of finances
- Major health and/or relationship challenges
- Little or no spousal participation/support for tasks and responsibilities
- Unable or unwilling to seek support or help
- Physical clutter; lack organizational skills; personality style doesn’t lean in that direction

Are any of these familiar to you? If so, pick a couple of these barriers and share your thoughts with your spouse or trusted friend for feedback and ideas on how to remove these barriers. Once you come up with two possible actions, begin next week to put one of them into action. Ask your friend to help you stay accountable to your commitment to free yourself of that barrier in the months ahead. Be sure to make sure your actions support your life dreams and goals, short-term and long-term.

The key benefit of this exercise is giving you the ability to ***stay focused*** and have

the greatest potential for achieving your lifetime goals. Other benefits you will experience are:

- Reduced stress for you and your family.
- Enhanced passion and lasting commitment for your dreams & goals.
- More time for you.
- Improved productivity at work and home.
- Better alignment of activities by coordinating tasks and activities.

So, begin today “having the time of your life” strategically managing your time and life!

--

Sharon L. Benedict, MS, ACC, is a certified life wellness coach-consultant, specializing in life skills, wellness, and creative arts development for individuals, businesses and organizations ([www.harvestenterprises-sra.com](http://www.harvestenterprises-sra.com)). She welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at [seekreachachieve@gvtc.com](mailto:seekreachachieve@gvtc.com).



# From the Heart. . .

. . . Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



## Time management from the inside out

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, February 19, 2010)

What motivates you the most in managing your time? For many of us it always being in the “urgent” mode; which often times ends up putting what’s really important on the sidelines. And life then just rushes by with many things left undone.

One thing we really all know is...Whatever motivates you drives your choices in life. Are those motivators *intrinsic* or *extrinsic*? Extrinsic motivators are all about the “**Shoulds**,” coming from the outside/external pressures. You...

- **You always tell yourself “I have to” or “I should.”**
- **Need continual outside/external pressure to take action.**
- **Discover that lasting behavioral changes never happen.**
- **Are more focused on the product, outcome, and the future.**
- **Have no fun in it.**

Intrinsic motivators come from the inside/internal “wants”. You...

- **Are motivated from the inside.**
- **Always say to yourself “I do this because I want to. I do this because it is important to me.”**

- **Discover lasting behavioral change always happens.**
- **Are more focused on the process, seek mastery, and are fully present in the moment.**
- **Enjoy it.**

What do you believe are your **extrinsic motivator**? What do you believe are your **intrinsic** motivators? Be as specific as possible for both. Write them down and spend some quiet time reflecting on how you can increase your intrinsic motivators. Seek out help with family or a close friend. Here's a hint to increasing your intrinsic motivators: Wherever you have fun and find joy, connect it with the task to be done. Give it a try. One example is...if you love to dance. join a dance class or find a dance hall; and start exercising! Just decide not to drink and dance! It's safer that way! And if you do, by all means don't drive!

Making an intrinsic *Mindset Shift* is essential for getting free from *muddling through*; and making lasting changes in your life before time catches up with you. Yet, be kind to yourself. We all experience extrinsic and intrinsic motivators in certain areas of life. The goal is to have more intrinsic ones that help us gauge our time and action for any task or activity—living from the inside out.

Time as well as money management is really life management *the SMART way*:

**Specific, Measurable, Attainable/Actionable, Realistic/Relevant, Time-phased**

The SMART way involves taking a look at the time and resources needed for each activity and task, in the present and throughout your life. Sadly, for many Americans today, no more than about 10% establish a life plan. The majority fall into one of these—**no plan, wrong plan, outdated plan**. Keep in mind, ***People rarely achieve what they do not***

***plan and work for.*** Consider how you do or don't plan the way you use your time during this coming week. In the next article, SMART time management will be discussed in more detail.

--

Sharon L. Benedict, MS, ACC, is a certified life wellness coach-consultant, specializing in life skills, wellness, and creative arts development for individuals, businesses and organizations ([www.harvestenterprises-sra.com](http://www.harvestenterprises-sra.com)). She welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at [seekreachachieve@gvtc.com](mailto:seekreachachieve@gvtc.com).

# *From the Heart. . .*

## *. . . Life Skills for Today*

*By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC*



### **Time your life the SMART way**

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, February 26, 2010)

As you look around the corner of your world, your community, your home, your family, are the words *hurried, harassed, out of control, and overwhelmed* frequent visitors? As offered by my friend, coaching colleague, and president of *Choose To Be* ministries ([www.choosetobe.org](http://www.choosetobe.org)), Carolyn Sledge, how about exchanging those words for *happy, hallowed, ordered, and overflowing*? I encourage you to be one of those 10% who commit to an ongoing strategic life plan.

The time estimated for doing certain tasks or activities are often over- or underestimated. The intensity of the activity may be more than expected. Your energy and emotional level also impact your mental and physical abilities for finishing the task or activity. Commuting back and forth to work is a major American pastime. According to the Bureau of Transportation, about 3.3 million Americans travel 50 miles or more one way to get to work. They commute these distances 329 million times a year. This averages over 61.6 billion annual commutes to and/or from work, with about 19% being “stretch commutes”—meaning 100 miles+ one way. Then add the hours we watch TV.

These are just two ways time flies for the average American each day. How about giving yourself a break by purposefully charting the use of your time, the SMART way?

For most of us, time management involves managing yourself, others, doing some

planning/goal setting, and getting the desired results or outcomes. Goals involve the *what, why, when, where, with whom, and how* of SMART goal setting. So, let's start with what SMART means to get you started in the right direction.

**The “S” of SMART:** Goals should be clearly defined and emphasize what you want to happen and why. Specifics help you focus on what you are going to do. Use direct action words to describe What you want to do. For example, “I want to lose 10 lbs” is specific, not “I want to lose weight.”

**The “M” of SMART:** Goals that are Measurable say it is manageable through a short-term as well as a long-term process. When you can measure your progress, you can then build confidence that shows change has occurred; and continue to stay on track toward reaching your target dates.

**The “A” of SMART:** Goals that are most important to you, Attainable and Actionable say you have begun to figure out ways you can make that goal come true. You develop the attitudes, abilities, skills, and financial capacity to reach them. You start to see previously overlooked opportunities for bringing you closer to your goals. Attainable goals are mastered in bite-size pieces; and not so far out of reach that your motivation and confidence is shaken along the way. Good intentions do count, but those nagging gremlins will try to tell you that it's too much for you and just forget it. The goal needs to stretch you just enough so you can feel you can do it. You are in direct control of your step-by-step actions. If you seek to lose 20lbs in just one week, we all know that it's not only unattainable but also unrealistic. A goal of losing 1lb every one or two weeks is definitely attainable and realistic in achieving your ultimate goal.

**The “R” of SMART:** Realistic goals are relevant doable goals. It's not a vertical

climb but an achievable slope with the skills needed already available. Your overall strategy and goals allow for a gradual progress toward achieving your goal. This strategy stretches you and even pushes you a little but won't break your commitment or ability to keep moving forward. It supports where you are in the moment. Setting a "never again" goal, whether with eating cake or chocolate, needs to be clarified when setting the specifics. Too difficult of a goal sets you up for feelings of failure. Instead, think about what outcome is best for your own health and wellbeing. What other ways can you state your goal and are more realistic? How about focusing on the positive rather than the negative? It may be more realistic to currently commit to eating an extra piece of fruit per day as you work towards reducing your intake of cakes and cookies. But make sure the goal takes some effort! Set the goal high enough for a satisfying accomplishment.

**The "T" of SMART:** Timely goals set in a time frame that successfully moves you through the short-term and long-term strategies. For example, you can start with next week, in three months, six months, then two years. Choose whatever supports your specific, measurable, attainable, realistic goal. Don't be too vague; set a time that says this goal is important in your life and has a sense of urgency motivating you to action now and with each step.

**Remember, it is important to understand that although planning may set the course, it doesn't always control the outcome.** Achievements are great, but life is truly lived by the lessons we learn and the relationships we are blessed with. And strategic planning definitely helps tip the scale more in your favor. Be encouraged that life changes do not happen all at once. Success is possible, one step at a time. Most life goals are built on small daily steps toward a larger goal. As you look over your daily life, you may have portions of your goals already set in place! In the next month's articles, the focus will

be on career & money management. So, stay tuned to see how SMART time management directly impacts your career choice, job satisfaction, and the way you spend your money.

--

Sharon L. Benedict, MS, ACC, is a certified life wellness coach-consultant, specializing in life skills, wellness, and creative arts development for individuals, businesses and organizations ([www.harvestenterprises-sra.com](http://www.harvestenterprises-sra.com)). She welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at [seekreachachieve@gvtc.com](mailto:seekreachachieve@gvtc.com).