

From the Heart...

... Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Looking Back to Look Forward

Since this month's topic is on ***Reflection***, let's take some quiet, focus time to look back over this year in those life skill areas covered each week during 2006. Thomas Paine considered reflection a notable means for experiencing courage in life opportunities and challenges. "The real man smiles in trouble, gathers strength from distress, and grows brave by reflection. "

As you reflect on each life skill noted below, ***what one significant discovery in each area has made a major impact on your life this year?*** Writing these articles each week throughout the year has spotlighted a number of important lessons and personal discoveries for me. As I share each one, consider your own journey of discovery this past year. I would love to hear your thoughts and experiences that have made all the difference in your life.

Relationships/Core Values: I discovered how much the way I communicate with my family influences our relationship together. I needed to face some of my own motives for avoiding important conversations and resolve the block.

Time Management: As busy as this year has been, I committed time to quiet moments and calling my daughters to say hello on a regular basis.

Career/Money Management: My career as a professional life/wellness coach and consultant has been my most rewarding vocation. There is nothing more

rewarding than helping others achieve their own life goals in everyday responsibilities. In addition, being self-employed has required a much more diligent and strategic money management routine.

Recordkeeping: Over the years of utilizing recordkeeping software, such as Quicken, I have seen how keeping thorough and accurate records have not only supported essential integrity in my life, but also has given me a greater sense of security and peace—knowing I am doing all I can to wisely manage finances with my core values and life goals.

Housekeeping: This life skill area was never on the top of my priority or fun list ever. Yet, in the past couple years as I started to simplify my cleaning and organizing routines, I started to enjoy having a more orderly and clean house. I actually do the cleaning with a much better attitude. I guess it is particularly positive when doing the dishes since my husband, John, now does 90% of the cooking after retiring. How nice!

Home/Vehicle/Possessions: Simplify, Simplify...this word has become my mantra for a happy life. Possessions are always fun to buy and not so much fun to care for. So, as the years have passed, reducing the inventory has become a significant boon to my clutter-free life. That's doesn't mean clutter doesn't show up once in a while. Yet, now I keep ahead of it much more than I used to. So, now when friends and family visit, it's a simple routine I share with John.

Family Healthcare/Wellness: When remembering the years regaining my health and wellness, I am forever grateful for my family, friends, those who prayed for me throughout all the years, and the conventional and integrative healthcare

practitioners who journeyed with me back to wholeness. Navigating through the hallowed halls of conventional and alternative medicine was a challenging adventure all along the way. I learned I was center stage to every choice and decision I needed to make. Counsel and advice was wonderful and essential, but the choice to act was still mine. I grew up in many ways during those years.

Meals: I love food like everyone else! Food for me in my early years was always centered around pastries, Big Mac, lots of cheese, and Neapolitan ice cream. So, healthy meals were not my forte. Things started to really change with my journey back to wholeness. The menu definitely shifted to whole balanced foods, a full variety of herbs and spices, low fat/low sodium/low sugar meal planning. With a lot of experimentation and great healthy cookbooks, and classes, I learned the basics. But what is so fantastic is my husband became a gourmet cook and loved every experiment he concocted. Even his presentation was worthy of any gourmet chef's criteria. This year I have begun to learn from my expert husband as I move beyond the basics to improve my taste cuisine with learning how to use herbs and spices with each meal.

Childcare: Since becoming a grandmother in the past two years, my parenting memories and skills have resurfaced big-time. Although, my grandparenting skills still need more practice; and I'll be getting that very soon with my daughter moving back to Texas for awhile. Hooray!!

Recreation/Entertainment: I learned this year that I am not very spontaneous when it comes to having fun as well as planning for fun. Yet, I'll have a lot of opportunity soon with my daughter and grandson living with us. I will definitely

need to do some planning to make sure fun is a regular part of our week routine together. If anyone has some ideas they want to share, just pass them to me anytime. My grandson is eighteen months old right now.

As you look back in order to look forward in your life, remember to count your blessings. As Og Mandino, one of America's memorable motivational authors, "Once you realize how valuable you are and how much you have going for you, the smiles will return, the sun will break out, the music will play, and you will finally be able to move forward the life that God intended for you with grace, strength, courage, and confidence."

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Saying Thank You

With Thanksgiving just around the corner, what better way to reflect on our blessings than to look ahead to how we can share them with others. Robert Louis Stevenson offered this sage advice, “Don’t judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant.” This is the month to not only reflect but look at ways you can say thank you.

Last issue, I spotlighted a number of important lessons and personal discoveries for myself this year—from relationships/core values to my use of time, money, career, recordkeeping, housekeeping, possessions, health, meals, childcare, and recreation. I also asked that you consider your own journey of discovery in each of these life skill areas.

Now it’s time to think about those people who have made all the difference in your life. How would you like to say thank you within the next two months? You will be amazed at how just saying thank you can change a person’s life. There is nothing more important than to be accepted, safe, and significant in one’s life. Your thank you can make all the difference for someone needing just a kind word or deed to lift them into hope, safety, and personal value as a human being—a life forever changed. You’ll never be the same either. Bet on it!

To get you started today, grab a pen and start writing in the space provided below under each life skill area. Write down that person or people, and what way you would like

to say you are grateful for and appreciate their support and presence in your life. Be creative with your ideas in such a way that your expression of gratitude is truly genuine and uniquely designed for that person. Then cut out this article with your notes and place it in a spot where you can refer to it until each thank you is passed along. Put SMART action dates on your calendar to remind you of your commitment (SMART means Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-phased).

If you would like to have a separate *Saying Thank You* form emailed to you to print off, just drop me a request. I'll send it your way ASAP. Enjoy the fun of making someone smile and feel good about their lives. Take advantage of this *Thanks Giving* season and see what incredibly surprising and miraculous things begin to happen for you and your family.

**Saying Thank You
Life Skill Area Commitments**

**SMART
Action Date**

<p>Relationships/Core Values: (Who has been exceptionally supportive of your core values and relationship? How would you like to say thank you?)</p>	
<p>Time Management: (What person has made your days go more smoothly, saving you time and energy? How would you like to say thank you?)</p>	
<p>Career/Money Management: (Who in your professional/personal life has significantly impacted your career opportunities and ability to wisely manage your finances? Feel free to note more than one person. How would you like to say thank you?)</p>	
<p>Recordkeeping: (Who has helped you maintain thorough and accurate records to preserve your integrity? How would you like to say thank you?)</p>	
<p>Housekeeping: (Who has kept your home clean and clutter-free more than anyone? How would you like to say thank you?)</p>	
<p>Home/Vehicle/Possessions: (What person has kept you clearly focused on simplifying your life and possessions, helping you keep your priorities in balance? How would you like to say thank you?)</p>	
<p>Family Healthcare/Wellness: (Who has encouraged you the most to pursue and sustain your health and well-being? How would you like to say thank you?)</p>	
<p>Meals: (Who makes most of the meals and works at making them not only nutritious but also appetizing and enjoyable? How would you like to say thank you?)</p>	
<p>Childcare: (Who contributes the most in taking care of the physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual needs of your children or those of a family or friend?) How would you like to say thank you?</p>	
<p>Recreation/Entertainment: (Who has made all the difference in encouraging you to have wholesome fun on a routine basis; and/or help plan and have fun together? How would you like to say thank you?)</p>	

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What's Ahead for You and Yours?

“We are here to be excited from youth to old age, to have an insatiable curiosity about the world...We are also here to help others by practicing a friendly attitude. And every person is born for a purpose. Everyone has a God-given potential, in essence, built into them. And if we are to live life to its fullest, we must realize that potential.” These words from Norman Vincent Peale not only encourage us to reflect on how we want to make all the difference in someone else’s life, but also look at what’s ahead for you and yours.

I now ask you to consider those life skill areas you would like to continue pursuing in the year ahead—from *relationships/core values to the use of your time, money, career, recordkeeping, housekeeping, possessions, health/wellness, meals, childcare, and recreation*. To encourage you to also do this right now, grab a pen and start writing down specific commitments you want to make for this coming year. If you would like a print out of this *What's Ahead* form, just email me your request; and I'll forward it to you.

Share your ideas with your family or close friend and be open to their input. Then cut out this article along with your notes and place it in a visible spot (e.g. refrigerator, desk, day planner) so you can reflect on what you have set to do this year. Continue to put SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic,

Time-phased) action dates on your calendar to remind you of those commitments you have made for your life and those you love.

What's Ahead Life Skill Area Commitments	SMART Action Date
Relationships/Core Values:	
Time Management:	
Career/Money Management:	
Recordkeeping:	
Housekeeping:	
Home/Vehicle/Possessions:	
Family Healthcare/Wellness:	
Meals:	
Childcare:	

Recreation/Entertainment:

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Find a Way to Tell Your Story

Do you know no one will truly know you without you somehow telling your story. What's your story? Whether you are ten years old or eighty, we all have a story within us. Even if you have barely opened the cover or are nearing the conclusion, your life is already filled with experiences others want and need to hear. Step out this coming month and create a masterpiece from your heart. What a Christmas present that would make! You will never know how your story will touch another heart, teach wisdom to the young and old, and forever change a life.

So, with this month's final topic on *Reflection*, I encourage you to find a way to tell your story to those you love and the world that needs your voice. What is most important to you? How would you like to pass it along? Whatever your talents, gifts, and inclinations, your story will tell your journey of laughter, maybe tears, adventure, forgiveness, gratitude. It's your story. Choose whatever your heart and passion points to.

There are multitudes of ways to pass it along. You may feel more comfortable writing it down. Some personalities are born actors and find ways to put it on film or video, or even through the eyes of a hand puppet. Others may be

a little shy but can make an audio tape or CD. Others are gifted at drawing and can create an illustrative story. Those who are computer/internet savvy, have multiple creative ways to post it online...creating your own webpage for your story.

Remember, your life is an ongoing journey; so you will always have a story to tell. Consider this your first step into sharing your life with others. While you think about telling your first story, here are some questions to review with all the stories you may want to tell throughout your life:

1. What is most important to you?
2. Who would you like to give your story to?
3. How do you want to pass it along?
4. What will be your target finish date for your first story to pass along?
5. Where will you get some help creating your story?

Are you ready? If you are still a little shy, talk over your thoughts and ideas with a close friend or family member who you know will give you support in the way you need it. Feel free to contact me if you would like to brainstorm your ideas together.

In the meantime, check out these resources below to help you get started. There are even some for the ambitious aspiring writer who may want to publish. Next month's topic will cover *Celebration*. So, get ready to celebrate this special season of the year, one filled with joy, laughter, simple pleasures, and sharing your story with those you love.

Resources:

Your Story, <http://www.your-story.net/>

Your Story Movie, <http://www.yourstorymovie.com/>

OurGrandChild.com, <http://www.ourgrandchild.com/familystory/index.htm>

The Writer's Digest,

http://www.writersdigest.com/contests/your_story_display.asp

Colorado State University, Writing Guides, <http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/>

Book - *Writing Magic: Creating Stories that Fly* by Gail Carson Levine

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