

From the Heart...

... Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Reflecting on Such a Time As This!

How can I pass up a chance, during this month's topic of *Reflection*, to reflect on our nation's election results? Well, here goes. I'm writing this prior to Tuesday, November 4 voting day. So, let's see how close I come to reading the times and the journey we are about to embark on. Each hour that passes, I sense more and more people are anxiously awaiting the results. Some are outright scared about our livelihood and future. Some say we are going to be very surprised at the election outcome definitely not predicted by the media or the polls. Some are just saying they will be glad when the elections are over, and we all can get back to a more normal life—not centered on which candidate to hate the most.

What a time we live in! Returning to our normal life may not be what everyone wants. There is a sense that, no matter who is elected, we are all going to be on a different path than we assume. What does this really mean for us all? Maybe, we just might not take things so much for granted anymore. Now, that is something to reflect on.

For many of us in November, we may also begin to think about making New Year's resolutions that we may or may not keep. The most common resolutions tend to

be: stop smoking, get fit, lose weight, enjoy life more, quite drinking, get organized, learn something new, get out of debt, spend more time with the family, and help others.

Yet, as worthy as these resolutions are, I believe we are coming away this November with a broader viewpoint beyond our own self. In the past couple weeks, here is what I've been observing in my life and those around me that may just happen because of this election year traumas and surprises. Do any of these statements ring true for you?

- We are going to be more carefully watching how we spend our money.
- We are going to be more engaged with helping and serving others, sharing our core values with each other at home, our neighborhoods, our communities, our nation.
- We are going to more clearly know what is most important in our lives and act on it.
- We are going to be more proactively informed and vocal on what our political representatives are actually doing, locally and nationally.
- We are going to be more proactively interested in what's happening around the world, and how events will impact our nation and lives.
- We are going to be more a part of the solution rather than the problem—taking personal responsibility for our lives in every arena.
- We are going to stop complaining and doing the blame game; be more positive in our outlook; forgive and be forgiven; and be kinder to others, even when we disagree.

These were just a few comments from others and thoughts of my own that seem to be repeated lately. What others have you heard and thought about? Feel free to send them my way. I will be glad to consider passing them along to readers in the next several articles on *Reflection*. And, if your candidate of choice didn't make it, be of good cheer. This is your opportunity to start making a difference right now in your family, your community, your nation and the world by embracing a broader commitment of New Year resolutions shortly coming your way for such a time as this.

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What do you see in the mirror?

Although you men may not spend as much time in front of the mirror as us women, I bet you still check yourself out every once in a while, right? And what thoughts come up when you do reflect on your reflection? Do you tell yourself, “Man, are you looking good!” Or is it more like, “Ug, where in the world did that stomach come from?!”

Well, don’t think you’re the only one that probably avoids that glance in the bathroom mirror, particularly in the morning. It seems the older we get, the more we just as soon not have any mirrors around. Yet, don’t we women just have to give a glance when passing a store window to make sure we look ok?

Professional dancer Tonya Hagey has stared at one often enough to know that the relationship between a woman and a mirror can be agitating. Just imagine a group of women wearing nothing but tights and leotards in a room surrounded with unforgiving mirrors. “You can almost hear the groans and comparing stares! This is a dancer’s life, and sometimes her worst nightmare—a constant battle between constructive critiques and demoralizing taunts.” Hagey shares mirror reflections in her article, *Mirror, Mirror, Learning to love what I see* (<http://womentodaymagazine.com/selfesteem/dancer.html>), “As a dancer myself, I know firsthand how that reflective glass can act as both a trusted friend and a deceptive enemy. I experience times in the rehearsal studio when my

reflection seems to mock my every move, my every curve. Yet, other moments when I look in the mirror I am filled with appreciation and awe for the way my body stretches and bends and carves out space.”

Most of us may not have a dancer’s body like Hagey’s, but her discoveries about herself in the mirror holds true as we all dance through life. I offer my paraphrased summary for us all:

- The mirror acts as a necessary tool, providing feedback on alignment and positions. But dancing is elevated to a new level when the dancer is able to see *through* the mirror, past the two-dimensional external guide, and into the multi-dimensional self—your true self where you become comfortable in your own skin.
- When we don’t love ourselves, those around us tend to lose respect for us, which in turn causes us to lose respect for ourselves in a downward spiraling cycle of self-hate, taking on more so-called “opportunities” that leave less and less time to care of your body, mind, and soul. You lose when you are constantly eating on the run, not getting enough sleep and dancing (working) long hours, with a health condition that only is getting worse. You then neglect important relationships and never have time to read, write or pray. You may even begin to resent dancing in life, one of the greatest joys in your life—finally resenting yourself—exhausted, unhappy, out of control, and retreating from life.

- Get past the negative perspective of self and come to accept and love your vehicle, your body, and dance from the inside out. You will witness and experience great power, beauty and freedom in this discovery.
- An essential part of the journey is to set protective boundaries for your fragile self-esteem—choosing only those important relationships that support your rediscovery and re-investment in your life, recognizing their integral role in helping you regain a healthy, whole lifestyle—nourishing, even pampering, your body, mind, and soul.
- You make a priority to challenge your mind, and to carve out time for your soul to grow and body to regain health and wellness through
 - good nutrition and exercise, which has a profound impact on your mental and emotional health as well.
 - candlelit baths as often as needed.
 - wearing clothes that make you feel fabulous!
 - visiting museums; reading good books; taking fitness classes and going for long walks.
 - writing in a journal.
 - listening to your favorite pieces of music.
 - buying yourself flowers.
 - enrolling in a poetry course at a local college.
- We are so much more than our outward appearance (no matter how much our outrageous cultural ideals place unrealistic and unhealthy expectations on us).

- We need to recognize and appreciate our many dimensions, giving equal attention to our intellect, our spirit, and our physical well-being. We are unique and have permission to love ourselves.
- You are more than what you do, more than what you own, or where you live. Your life is more of just accepting and “being” you rather than any “doing.”
- Dancing through life is also not all about you. On this journey, however, you will find that loving yourself becomes self-centered and narcissistic when it stagnates within you. Loving your whole being results in a healthy love for others around you. It becomes a life flow, a cycle that feeds you and pours out to nurture those surrounding you. And that is the essence of real beauty.
- When we are looking for peace, there is a way to balance your life. No one can be perfect or have a perfect life. Yet, we all have the opportunity to experience perfect peace through a vibrant faith in God. For Tonya, her peace rests in her personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

So next time you meet your image in the mirror, reflect on what lies beyond that reflection awaiting you—“the potential for power, love and freedom.” And remember, your own dance in life is yours to choose. Enjoy your journey of discovery.

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Have you said thank you to those you always expect to be there?

With Thanksgiving just around the corner, we typically think about expressing gratitude to our spouse, our children, our close relatives. And well we all should, gladly. Yet, what about those that serve us every day in our own communities? Do they ever get a thank you? Or just complaints? If you just ask any grocer, pharmacist, gas station employee, they will undoubtedly say thank you's are few and far between all the complaints they routinely get.

Let's change that this Thanksgiving season! Here's your assignment for the rest of the year, particularly during the next couple weeks. Below, you will read a list of services we always take for granted...for example, that the gas station will be open, the pharmacist will have your prescription ready, and your grocer will have the produce and items you routinely buy.

I want to hear these people say they got an unusual number of sincere and genuine thank you's that made their job serving you and the public much nicer this go around. Think about all the places you frequent and regularly buy goods and services. I am sure I haven't covered them all. So, add any to the list of people to say thank you to. Write down this list on a separate piece of paper. If you know someone in particular, put

their name down and the date you commit to saying a special thank you. Whether by word, deed, or gift, you will then see many more smiles this holiday season than ever before—in spite of what is going on in our nation.

We all know with our nation's financial crisis looming over us all, it may not be easy to think about someone else—particularly someone who doesn't always deliver your mail on time or at all, or those at the pharmacy who may lose your prescription. Yet, we have to remember that there are people inside that Valero or Chevron station, facilitating our ability to pump our own gas and maybe even get a cup of coffee on the go. And, by all means include the letter carrier. There is nothing like a kind word to someone who may not be doing exactly what you want, that will surprisingly move them in the right direction of responsibility and improved service to you and others. You may ask, "Why should I make the effort?" This is why.

As a nation, we are in the midst of a major move of negativity, anger (even rage), depression, fear, and doomsday talk. Although we must be wise in how to address our difficulties, we must never relinquish a hopeful heart toward the future and our treatment of other fellow human beings. One of the first steps is to treat others as you would like to be treated. Yes, here comes the Golden Rule again—and at a very timely moment in our nation's history.

Begin to proactively engage in not only working to preserve your own livelihood, but also begin helping others who serve your needs and may even seek your help. It all begins with offering a kind word in compassion, understanding, and gratitude for their very presence as a living, breathing human being. So, rise up and say a thank you to even those who may not seemingly deserve it! Amazing things happen when you do.

Maybe this will even be your opportunity to reduce the number of gifts for yourself under the Christmas tree, and spend some on others that may just need a little more hope. They will then genuinely know someone was thinking about them, appreciates their service, and cares about what they are going through too. Remember, this is really not about you. It's about that other person who goes to work every day so you can have the service (albeit, not always done well) you need.

If you take this to heart, you will be a very busy person over the next several weeks and months. But you will also be one of the happiest too...experiencing the joy of encouraging others and bringing hope to those special ones that are always taken for granted. If you personally experience something special you would like to share as you say your thank you's, by all means email me so I can pass it along to my readers. Please, no complaints about their service on this one! Happy Thanksgiving to one and all!

- Local Grocer
- Pharmacist
- Gas station employee
- School teacher and administrative staff
- City utilities and other services that bill you
- Nonprofits that make all the difference
- Car repair person
- Veterinarian

- Your doctor, nurse, massage therapist, nutritionist, any healthcare/wellness provider you know
- Restaurant owner, server, cook/chef, even fast-food servers
- Health food store owner
- Insurance agent
- Discount clothing store you frequent
- Gift shops you routinely visit
- Bank clerk
- Post office personnel, letter carrier
- Video store clerk
- Telephone, Internet server representatives
- Gardener
- Parks & Recreation people that make it possible to enjoy the outdoors
- Police, Firefighters
- Artists in all media—visual, performing, literary
- Directors, Staff, and Volunteers of Cultural centers—museums, theatre
- And, don't forget your neighbors, for sure!

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Hearing a lot about OTHER people's bias lately?

Throughout this election year and definitely lately, I hear and read about the so-called “bias” of people in politics and the press. They are accused of being too Republican or overboard on giving attention to only Democrats. And whatever happened to the Independents? Do they still exist (according to the press, that is)?

So, since this month's topic is *Reflection*, consider this to be my commentary on what really is “bias.” First, let's start out at the gate with one single truth: If you are a human being, you have bias! Whether you think it is unfortunate or a blessing, you will have to dig deeper as to why you believe what you believe, and decide for yourself. Yet, that is the truth. Our own personal and professional “bias” shows in our genes, our words, our deeds, our lifestyle. Whether for good or ill, “bias” in life comes with the territory. And there are unlimited “different strokes for different folks.” Wow, does that date me!

Webster Dictionary defines **Bias** as “an inclination of temperament or outlook ; especially a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment; prejudice—an instance of such prejudice.” According to Wikipedia, “**Bias** is a term used to describe a tendency or preference towards a particular perspective, ideology or result, especially when the tendency interferes with the ability to be impartial, unprejudiced, or objective. The term “**biased**” is used to describe an action, judgment, or other outcome influenced by a

prejudged perspective. It is also used to refer to a person or body of people whose actions or judgments exhibit bias.

In psychology, cognitive bias is has the tendency to interpret new information in such a way that confirms one's prior beliefs, even to the extreme of denial, ignoring information that conflicts with one's prior beliefs. The fundamental attribution error, or correspondence bias is when people tend to explain others' behavior in terms of personality, whereas they tend to explain their own behavior in terms of the situation. We each can probably relate to any one of these.

In most all definitions, they tend to lean toward the negative when referring to the term “bias” as a judgment or prejudice. I consider this unfortunate, since none of us can really get totally free from our biases or preferences in life. Why? First, we all have to make decision on what we believe and how we live our lives. And, again, because I believe we human beings are actually conceived with certain physiological biases that are genetically programmed into us at conception.

Yet, that doesn't mean we are stuck with them all. Much of heredity is tempered by our environment—physically, emotionally, mentally, psychologically, spiritually. At every step in life, we have the freedom to choose what we believe and how we behave. If we are really honest with ourselves, we can't just blame our parents, our circumstances, politics, the press, the weather, or even the devil (which some often do with the quip, “the devil made me do it!).

When we really look closely at our family of origin, we are still integrally part of our familial gene pool. Have you ever wondered why your grandchildren may relate more to you than their own parents? Although, we know there may be relational reasons

why. Often times, it has to do with their genes matching up with yours. Compare pictures of yourself at their age. Do you both seem to look alike? If so, you just might also think alike. Yet, keep in mind, there is lots of room for maneuvering our perspectives on many things as we grow up based on the values we embrace and the relationships we choose early in life and senior years.

This is why I diverge from the traditional definition of “bias.” I see it as something more neutral and even positive for every human being. Again, why? To me, bias simply represents how you express your core values with each other. So, if your core values lean Republican, you will be Republican. If your core values lean Democrat, then you will be a Democrat. Now, for the rest of you who are such free thinkers—you just may decide to create your own mix, politically speaking—a little here, a little there. If you do, you just may find you do the same in other areas of your life. And since this is still a free nation so far, you have that inalienable right. So, go for it!

For me, although I am a registered Republican for right now, please consider me a “Conservative Hippie” from the sixties. This term was recently coined by an artisan client of mine. And I felt it fit me quite nicely also. Back then, no one knew how to label me. I was an art major with a business minor, get that! It was a real “trip” integrating those two worlds in my life; but I had loads of fun doing it!

For many frustrated students and colleagues over the years, I just didn’t fit the mold, and many others didn’t either. They were perpetually curious about where I stood on any particular topic. We had many lively constructive conversations in our free speech forums until it got very ugly at times around the Vietnam War topic. When I look

around me today and how some are behaving, it tends to bring back memories of those times both good and bad.

In spite of the bad times, looking back, it's a wonderful thing to be free to know who you are; and to be able to comfortably disagree, agreeably, with those across the aisle or down the street, or on the opposite side of the world. This is a lesson I feel we will be learning again with the uncertainties before us within our nation and around the world. So, feel free to hold on to who you are and what you believe in expressing your "bias" as long as it holds true to your core values and your respectful treatment of other human beings with their "biases."

You just might find common ground in your core values if you give it a chance. You just may find a way to work together on those areas you both deem important for your families, our communities, our nation. That is what our political system, free press, and free country is all about.

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