

From the Heart. . .

. . . Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



The Power of Reflection when times get tough

Since this month's lifeskill is on "Reflection," you will read stories from people who through these tough economic times are creatively working through it, over it, and around the difficulties that have forever changed their lives and lifestyle. People begin to "creatively work through it" when they start to "think outside of the box." Yet, often times you have to work through the torrential emotions that accompany the journey—frustration, anger, sense of hopelessness, just to name a few.

Do you have a story to tell about how you, your family, your business have done some deep soul searching finding your priorities and opportunities in the midst of great challenges? If so, send your story to me so I can share it with our readers. Feel free to request anonymity with your names and location. Here's the first one.

Let's actually start with what a county worked through to bring about greater opportunities and cooperative coalitions. Finding ways to work together during tough economic times, George Austin (Hathaway News Service, Jan 22, 2009) shared in his article piece, *Finding ways to work together during tough economic times*, a great example of what local governments can do to help each other weather the economic storms.

One example was reported by Dennis Luttrell who worked in a regional government in Colorado as a county commissioner, where building inspectors,

sanitation inspections and environmental positions were shared among cities and towns. In addition, as director of the Buzzards Bay Coalition in Massachusetts, Luttrell said towns worked cooperatively to protect a natural resource that was precious to them. They shared knowledge, equipment and manpower to accomplish that goal, particularly with oil spills and grant to support their efforts.

A considerable amount of money, time, and effort were saved. In addition, cities and town could purchase office supplies, sand and road salt together in order to save money. "He said just the discussions that cities and towns have through talking about ways to work together could give them new ideas for saving money." Keep in mind that joining together also garners greater political influence.

Joseph Michaud, chairman of the Dartmouth Select Board, said "Literally, any service that a city provides could be consolidated with a neighboring city and town at a savings and with no loss in quality." However, as with any region or township, there are unique considerations involved that need to be worked through in order to share knowledge and partner in various service contracts. Not a few times, you find officials who do not want to give up any measure of control. When it comes to city and county governments working together, if they don't find ways, often times the state and federal government will impose their own collaboration/coalition requirements. It would be much easier on everyone if our own local representatives worked it out.

According to the Workforce Texas report (Oct 16, 2009), The Texas seasonally adjusted unemployment rate rose slightly to 8.2 percent in September, up from 8.0 percent a month ago; but has continued to trend well below the U.S. seasonally adjusted unemployment rate of 9.8 percent. That still means that about 996,000 Texans are still unemployed (not seasonally adjusted). So, there are lots of stories out there. I

encourage you to seek out those whose story may even spark some ideas for you or your friend. And by all means, send them my way.

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The Power of Perseverance—Keep Walking

. . . ***There is more to it than meets the eye.*** After thirty-five years of marriage and being a committed wife and mother, Carolyn came to a critical moment of reflection. What was that reflective moment? Carolyn's revelation was that her attempted perfect performance was crushing her. She had no more capacity to hang in there. She thought for many years, "I refuse to become a statistic label, "divorced!"

Her hanging in there was also fueled by her fear (determined belief) that her two children will also be crushed if she confronted the situation or even walked out. Therefore, the years kept passing, and the torment grew until she had no more smiles to paste on her face for the world to believe, "they are such a perfect couple." Divorce did happen, but there is definitely more than what meets the eye with this story.

When is it time to persevere? When is it time to stop, to quit? These questions may seem straightforward. Yet, they are much more complicated in their perspective and impact. Every situation is unique in its own way and adopting someone else's journey can be tricky, at best. So, as I share Carolyn's story, keep that in mind. I encourage you to own your own journey that just may surprise you along the way.

Carolyn wanted her marriage to continue. Feeling responsible for it in every way, she actually enabled her spouse to continue the road to ruin. Don't we all at some point in our relationships believe we must fix the other person? Isn't that our job? The answer

of course is NO. Maybe, just maybe, there's another approach that will free both to keep walking, whether together or separate.

Well, Carolyn began to see that she actually couldn't continue the same old way, as much as she tried. A breakthrough started with the perseverance of her pastor and a gifted counselor. With initial adamant reluctance, Carolyn began her rough road to recovery. Keep in mind, she not only lost her marriage, her credit, but also material possessions and the means to pay her bills, buy food, or go the doctor. Carolyn had to start over without knowing what each day would hold, let alone her future. Fortunately, a special couple stepped up and gave her a room in their home to help her begin her road to recovery. Her recovery was an eight year journey.

Today she is in a place of wonder and contentment she never imagined she could have. Sure, the challenges to creatively work through these very difficult economic times are still there in some measure. Yet, the inner strength Carolyn now has will keep her walking forward, seeing the possibilities, and reaching for those opportunities that come in interesting packages.

Carolyn's faith in God is center-point with her every word. She believes one of God's greatest gifts to us humans is our free will to choose...not just whether to take this job or the other. One of the greater challenges for us all is to choose how we respond to the reality of what we are facing...even when it seems all hope is gone. The choice to *Keep Walking*—that is the challenge. What truth do you see in the midst of your not-so-friendly reality and the many questions you have?

If you find yourself in a similar situation, whether a troubling marriage or anything else, remember the journey is yours to discover the path through your reality to the truth that will prepare you for making choices. Your choices will directly impact your current

reality and ultimately your destiny. And in between embracing the truth and your choice is opposition. You will not always find friends, family, people eager to support you; and may even be in opposition to what you believe are your choices, your possibilities.

They may say to you, “You’re crazy. Don’t do it!” or “Stick it out; everything will be just fine!” “Drop the jerk. You don’t need him/her!” “You won’t make it on your own.” “Oh, it isn’t so bad. There’s always a good side to the situation.” The list of so-called “advice” goes on. No matter how well-meaning they might be, the choices are still yours. The choices to make and how you will keep walking is very personal and intimate—often times just between you and God’s personal hints of promise to you.

For Carolyn, she saw her reality as it really was, heard the truth as a promise, faced the opposition, made her choice—and is walking it out each day. Today, she shares her story and journey through her Choose To Be ministry, www.choosetobe.org, that invites us to “**Choose To Be...**regardless of *who* you are or *where* you are right now - you can choose to "step out of the Box" and become... **All God Intends.**” No matter what your faith persuasion may be, you are personally living your reality in all your relationships. Don’t hesitate to ask questions, seek the answers you are looking for, and begin your journey of promise. You too will then want to pass your story along to someone needing hope and a promise to *Keep Walking*.

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Reflection—Taking Time

The holidays are fast approaching. Paula loves this time of the year and looks forward to bringing out the decorations. She starts planning whether she will do Thanksgiving or her sister, cousin, parent does Christmas; or the other way around. Paula loves having family together and this is always the most favorite time of the year for her.

Paula's work load at the county hospital is piling up as usual, but she is determined to set aside time for the holidays at home. Yet, in the last couple months, she also noticed that her back was hurting more than usual; and doesn't seem to occasionally feel the bottom of her foot as she walks. Then, one day while walking across the street from work, her leg goes numb and foot doesn't bend right when she walks. Something is going on.

So, she goes see her doctor. He immediately wants to do an MRI, x-rays, etc. to see what's happening. A few days later, while at work, the doctor taps on her door while he happened to be doing rounds. "Can I visit with you for a moment?" he asks. Paula says sure, wondering why the personal visit, knowing it's about her. He sits down to tell her that she may need surgery very soon on her back where she has some disc displacement in several areas. And that's probably one of the reasons why her back hurts more, her gait is off, and the leg and foot are starting to go numb.

Paula sits there for a moment or two in silence, thinking “Why now?” But she knows she can’t ignore this. So, Paula decides to finish out the last few tests the doctor wants to do before the final decision for surgery is made. She goes home, tells her family, and starts to worry about the “what ifs.” Yet, after the final tests come in, Paula knows surgery is her only option, and it must be done now only days before Thanksgiving. Recuperation time will undoubtedly go throughout the holidays into January and beyond depending on the outcome of the surgery.

Then add the fact that there is little money in the budget to pay for the portion of the bill coming her way. In addition, over the last couple years, her investments, particularly retirement fund, have significantly been affected by our nation’s economic downturn. Paula also doesn’t have any disability coverage because of the bout she had with ovarian cancer five years ago. What does she do?

Does this story sound familiar to you or a friend? Well, this story is happening right now for Paula. She knows she has to keep working for the next couple years before retirement is even possible. Paula has the personality type that keeps on keeping on, no matter what. Yet, she has come to a roadblock she can’t seem to ignore or get around somehow. And when her doctor said she can’t let this go on much longer or continued muscle damage will occur that could be permanent—that did it! Paula knew this holiday season would be different, in more ways than one, that’s for sure.

Paula began to reflect on her frustrating attitude about her situation. At first, she was angry for being robbed of her most favorite activity for the year. However, being a healthcare professional in physical therapy, she knew she had to get beyond her frustration and anger. The healing process will be much longer if she stays in the place she is right now. Paula recalls helping more than a few patients get beyond this point.

Now, it's her turn. With that obvious epiphany, a smile came over her, saying "Well, now you know how your patients feel!"

Paula has begun her journey of reflection, taking the time to find opportunity in the midst of the health and financial obstacles that will present themselves in the months ahead. She made her first big step in reordering her holidays by handing off to her spouse, adult children, and cousins to do both Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. Paula will be reclining in her bed and easy chair most of the time, in between own her physical therapy and doctor appointments; and staying committed to the exercising she is required to do. Hopefully, even some feel-good only massage therapy will be part of the therapeutic process.

As part of her reflection journey, Paula has also lined up (prior to her surgery) next to her bed and easy chair all the books to read, letters to write, people to call, and journaling she hasn't done for the past six month. And her spouse has gone out grocery shopping and bought all her favorite foods—promising to create her favorite dishes. She now looks forward not so much to the surgery, but what her family will surprise her with to make the journey a little less scary and difficult on many fronts.

So, if you find yourself in a similar situation as Paula, rally your family together to gain their understanding, love, and support. Release yourself from any predetermined obligations that you just can't do right now. Then pull off those books from the shelf you have wanted to read for the past year or two; and get ready for your own special times of reflection—taking the time to find the opportunities especially designed for you during your healing journey.

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Reflection on Supporting the Arts

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I consider the Arts one of the most valued cultural assets within our communities.

So, I would like to share with you how the Arts and artists have made all the difference in our lives. The significant part the Arts play in the quality of our lives must not be diminished by the tough economic times we are experiencing.

Many of the largest corporations believe the Arts to be a vital part of their corporate culture. Just to name a few, the Business Committee for the Arts (affiliated with Americans for the Arts) just awarded 10 corporations their prestigious 2009 BCA award...Adobe Systems Inc (San Jose, CA) , Applied Materials (Santa Clara, CA), Arketype Inc. (Green Bay, WI), Brainforest Inc. (Chicago, IL), Dollar Bank (Pittsburgh, PA), Duke Energy (Charlotte, NC), Hanesbrands Inc. (Winston-Salem, NC), Reliance Standard Life Insurance Company (Philadelphia, PA), UMB Financial Corporation (Kansas City, MO), and Williams & Fudge Inc. (Rock Hill, SC).

In addition, the BCA Leadership Award was given to Thomas A. James, chairman and chief executive officer of Raymond James Financial in St. Petersburg, FL; and the BCA Hall of Fame to Movado Group, Inc., based in Paramus, NJ. For nearly 45 years the National Endowment for the Arts has awarded grants to support a network of 5,000 local, state, and regional arts agencies that serve as the infrastructure of support for the arts and arts education in America.

Nearly all 50 states have used either cultural development programs or visual arts programs to boost their commercial appeal. In fact, the 32 states that have Public Arts programs have appealed for more arts funding in the last decade. The arts have been proven to be an economic benefit; they attract visitors, residents, businesses, and investments to the states.

It begins with the value of the arts as fundamental to our humanity and sense of community. People are drawn to the arts first and foremost for meaning and expression. We all have the passion to create, be captivated, to find pleasure in beauty and creative expression. Art at its root enriches our lives. It taps our emotions, enhances our intellect and becomes the “gateway” to our community’s heart and soul. As Pablo Picasso said, “Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life.” When our communities and physical environment showcase the Arts where visual, performing, literary, or any other venue is present, everyday life becomes more enriching for our family and business.

Here are examples of documented benefits for us all:

1. Expanded capacity for empathy; cognitive growth
2. Creation of social bonds; expression of community meaning and legacy
3. Improved test scores—arts and learning
4. Improved self-efficacy, learning skills, enhanced mental & physical health
5. Development of social capital; economic growth and synergy between business and the arts

According to Americans for the Arts report, “In 2007, *Arts & Economic Prosperity III* found America’s nonprofit arts and culture industry generates \$166.2 billion in economic activity every year and generates 5.7 million jobs.” This evident data

demonstrates that the arts mean business for our communities. This also documents the key role played by the nonprofit arts and culture industry in strengthening our nation and local economy, as an economic driver in communities—a growth industry that supports jobs, generates government revenue, and is the cornerstone of tourism.

So, if you would like to know how your own local community is engaged in this dynamic partnership process in support of the arts and our local economy, contact the *Hill Country Council for the Arts* (HCCArts, www.hccarts.org) to see how they are bringing together all the Arts for the cultural and economic benefit of your community. The BCA just awarded them the exclusive regional BCA affiliate, representing the entire Texas Hill Country, including San Antonio and Austin. They are also currently spearheading a strategic plan for a Boerne public arts master plan in support of the arts throughout our communities. The potential contribution and impact going forward is significant.

Become part of their journey in making all the difference in your own community. Become an HCCArts volunteer to support your local artists and arts organizations through our partners, such as the Boerne Professional Artists, Boerne Community Theater, Majestic Ranch Arts Foundation, and many others throughout Comfort, Kerrville, and beyond.

Then get connected with HCCArts' very own Business & the Arts Committee to extend your support to our local and regional small, medium, and large businesses who have given money, time, and materials on behalf of the arts and artists in your community—such as SBS Construction, Toyota Boerne, Scenic Loop Café, The Creek

Restaurant, Bear Moon Bakery, just to name a few. Contact HCCArts, volunteer, and contribute to the Arts throughout the Texas Hill Country.

HCCArts is currently seeking volunteers to enhance and expand in these areas:

- Marketing/promotions of the arts and other regional arts organizations
- Long-term planning
- Events Coordination
- Website management assistance
- Volunteer coordination
- Education/Outreach

They have a volunteer form on their website you can complete and submit the areas you are interested in (<http://www.hccarts.org/support>).

Come join in with a great group of people who are passionate about the arts and want to make a significant contribution to the quality of our lives throughout the Texas Hill Country.

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