

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Reflecting on Moments in TV Time

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Nov 1, 2013)

We all have favorite TV programs we watch. With each program there is also the ever repeating TV commercials. Since this month's lifeskill is *Reflection*, have you ever thought about how much time is used up in commercial time? I recently counted the number of commercials during a show and between shows. They came to about 13 of them, sometimes more. It just seems like the numbers keep increasing, and programs have less and less of the hour.

I decided to do a little research. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey, A.C. Nielsen Co (Sept 7, 2013) the number of 30 second TV commercials seen in a year by an average child is 16,000. The leisure time on an average day in America in 2012 watching TV was about 2.8 hours, out of a total leisure and sports time for the day of 5.1 hours.

Not certain on the accuracy of the following sources, WikiAnswers claims "For the average 30 minute show there is about 8 minutes of commercials, and about 16 minutes for an hour show. So a person can use those numbers to figure out how much time they're spending on commercials." In addition, from an unnamed source, in 1952, 13 percent of the time was spent watching commercials (only 4 minutes out of every half hour!). By 2013, 32% of the show time is devoted to commercials. Then add in all the embedded commercials and

pop-ups during your favorite program covering a big chunk of the screen. These pop-ups, at times, even have musical sounds and flashing graphics to distract you even further.

A federal law on December 15, 2010 was enacted, entitled the “Commercial Advertisement Loudness Mitigation (CALM) Act” directing the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) to establish rules preventing commercials from being broadcast at a louder volume than the program material they follow. Yet, commercials still seem to be louder than your favorite programs.

The FCC recommends we manually control volume levels with the remote control, which remains the simplest way to reduce excessive loudness levels. “The ‘mute’ button on your TV remote is also useful to control excessively loud audio. In addition, many televisions have circuits that stabilize volume differences between programs and commercials. These functions usually need to be ‘enabled’ or turned on through the television receiver’s ‘set up/audio’ menu. In ‘high-end’ equipment, such as home theater systems, some automatic devices may also help. They include:

- Automatic Gain Control (AGC) Circuits - raises the audio level if it is too low and decreases it if it is too high.
- Audio Compressors - tones down loud sounds. Compressors can be adjusted to eliminate many of the negative effects of loudness.

- Limiters and Peak Limiters - keeps the audio level from exceeding a pre-determined level. Peak limiters are the simplest, least intrusive of all the automatic level control devices, but can introduce considerable distortion.
- Audio Expanders - increases the range of sound. An expander can restore sound to its normal range and also reduces noticeable background noise.
- Audio Filters - “screens out” specific audio frequencies.”

Yes, we are thankful for the many remarkable inventions designed to counter the unending nuisance of commercial noise, such as remote control mute/volume buttons, DVRs to skip commercials altogether, and your own handy “fingers” that allow viewers to operate so much advanced technology! Yet, these loud and embedded commercials, pop-ups, you name it, interrupting your Sunday Night Football are still annoying. Commercials themselves are altogether annoying anyhow, aren't they?

But like most things in life, there is a “work-around” if we set our minds and hearts to a routine task that doesn't waste precious time in our lives, short of throwing the TV out the window! Just think what you could do with that extra 35 to 40 minutes or longer fast-forwarding thru those commercials of your favorite two-hour TV program?

I know I am very grateful for the ability to record programs for later viewing, making my leisure time controlled by yours truly, not the TV industry. In addition, I have more precious time to talk and text with my daughters, even write this article. So, if you haven't created some time-saving “work-arounds” for those never-ending commercials, maybe it's time to take control of the remote and

available gadgetries to give your eyes and mind a break. And without giving up your favorite TV program, reflect on redeeming precious time in your life.

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Reaching the 70 mark and beyond?

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As I approach the next decade of my life in 2014, I am beginning to wonder if the number 70 can continue to be a lucky number, like the number 7? I am not the superstitious type but it does give us “older” folks pause as the years continue to fly by. And as we watch our own children reach their 40’s and 50’s.

Our nation is also in the midst of major shifts, good and bad, that make us “older” folks even more uncomfortable about the future we reflect on. Is our generation going to still have a place of honor, respect, and input into our world’s destiny? And what about our own personal lives with our kids and grandkids? Do they take the time to pay attention to us and offer opportunities to still be an important part of their lives?

I know . . . these questions may not be on your mind if you are just in your twenties, thirties, or even your forties as you struggle to juggle your own sandwich generation. It is definitely not easy with your kids growing up before your eyes on one side and your own parents entering their senior years on the other side. Yet, take a moment here to reflect on ways you can give attention to those special “older” folks in your family in ways everyone will treasure.

Here are a few ideas I found on EHow.com by Gina Scott (paraphrased) that may help you touch the hearts of your senior parents and “older” folk in your lives. You will be amazed as to how much they contribute to the wellbeing of your own lives on a daily basis just being appreciated as an adoring part of your family. Those are the ones who just may be the glue of wisdom, love, and perspective that holds your family together through the good times and bad.

- **Birthday coming soon** – have a party but make sure it’s one that cherishes your 70-year-olds today as young at heart and older in wisdom. So plan accordingly to their personality and treasured interests. Birthdays are a momentous occasion, even more so as you grow older. and they have a lot of history to draw upon for the makings of a great party.
- **“This is Your Life” party** – What a theme this can be, whether it is as simple or elaborate as you want. Have your spouse and kids involved in putting together a time line of life events in your 70+ year-old. Contact people from key events of their life. Make this a surprise party if appropriate for everyone.
- **“Roast” party** – Now this one may need a little extra thought and consideration, depending on the feelings and attitudes of your 70+ year-old and their friends. If they are more fun-loving, with a sense of humor, then organizing a roast in their honor will be just right. Have some entertainment available and ask friends and family to share fun stories. You may want to prepare your 70+ year-old ahead of time on what to expect. This will depend on how well you know your 70+ year-old being

given a little bit of a hard time at the party and the comebacks they may have on hand of their own.

- **“Birth Year Theme” party** – Think back to the time and era of the one you are honoring. What was going on during and around the year they were born. How much did things cost back then. At the party place price tags on items around the house, reflecting what similar items cost the year they were born. Play era music at the party, and perhaps run a classic movie in the background of that era or year they were born.
- **Recreate a Memory** – Have a talk with your 70+ year-old about what events they fondly remember in their life, such as getting married, first dance, first job, growing up with siblings and playing a certain game. Play the game at the party. Play music from the time and decorate the place that reflects that moment in time. Maybe even locate someone from their past, but make sure they were on friendly terms when last they encountered them.

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Want to say a “Thank You?”

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Nov 15, 2013)

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.

As we reflect on important lessons and personal discoveries in each lifeskill covered during the year—from relationships/core values, the way we use our time, managing money, choosing a career, the not-so-fun recordkeeping and housekeeping, caring for our possessions, our health/wellness, treasuring mealtime, childcare, and recreation/the way we play—let’s see how we can say thank you to those who made all the difference in these life areas for us.

How would you like to say thank you during November and December? 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 transform a person’s life with 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 each space with the “Saying Thank You” chart provided in this article. Look at each lifeskill and consider each question. Then 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. But make sure it isn't in view of those you want to surprise with a thank you! Put SMART action dates on your calendar to remind you of your commitment (SMART means Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-phased).

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

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| Saying Thank You Lifeskill Gratitudes | Name of Person | SMART Action Date |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Relationships/Core Values: (Who has been exceptionally supportive of your core values and relationship? How would you like to say thank you?) | | |
| Time Management: (What person has made your days go more smoothly, saving you time and energy? How would you like to say thank you?) | | |
| 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?) | | |
| Recordkeeping: (Who has helped you maintain thorough and accurate records to preserve your integrity? How would you like to say thank you?) | | |
| Housekeeping: (Who has kept your home clean and clutter-free more than anyone? How would you like to say thank you?) | | |
| 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?) | | |
| 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?) | | |
| 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?) | | |
| 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? | | |
| 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?) | | |
| Reflection: (Who helps you keep things in perspective and your life in balance? How would you like to say thank you?) | | |
| Celebration: (Who always helps you celebrate a win in your life and just makes every day a celebration in some way? How would you like to say thank you?) | | |

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What do you see ahead for you and yours?

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Nov 22, 2013)

“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.

Consider each lifeskill area that has been covered so far this year. How do you want to continue pursuing your dreams and goals in the year ahead with each lifeskill?—from *relationships/core values to the use of your time, money, career, recordkeeping, housekeeping, possessions, health/wellness, meals, childcare, and recreation/how you play*. To encourage you to do this right now, grab a pen and start writing down on the chart provided specific commitments you want to make for this coming year. I have included the 12th lifeskill, *Celebration*, to be covered in December.

Share your ideas with your family or close friend and be open to their input. Then cut out this article with your notes written for each lifeskill 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 coming 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.

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**What's Ahead
Lifeskill Area Commitments**

**SMART
Action Date**

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| Relationships/Core Values: | |
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| Time Management: | |
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| Career/Money Management: | |
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| Recordkeeping: | |
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| Housekeeping: | |
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| Home/Vehicle/Possessions: | |
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| Family Healthcare/Wellness: | |
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| Meals: | |
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| Childcare: | |
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| Recreation/Entertainment: | |
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| Celebration: | |
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Tell Your Story

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Nov 29, 2013)

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 December 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 speaks to you.

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

and illustrious story. Those who are computer/internet savvy, have multiple creative ways to post it online...from creating your own webpage or YouTube video/slideshow for your story.

Remember, your life is a continuing 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.

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

The Writer's Digest, http://www.writersdigest.com/contests/your_story_display.asp

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

Books –

Writing Magic: Creating Stories that Fly by Gail Carson Levine

Writing the Memoir: From Truth to Art, Second Edit by Judith Barrington

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