



## Life Lessons from the Garden

Consider the dandelion. Reviled by many as an insistent, bothersome weed, it nevertheless continues to proudly display its pert, bright yellow self in lawns and gardens everywhere, thriving in the face of adversity.

### *Thriving in the face of adversity.*

Where, in our own lives, do we face adversity? How do we carry ourselves through it: head down, beating ourselves up, or feeling defensive and resentful? Or head up and face open, like the dandelion, sure of our intrinsic worthiness, knowing our gifts to the world, even if the world doesn't necessarily recognize them?

For those who know how to look and wait, the garden teems with other such life lessons. As Spring awakens this year, turn your awareness to the wise teachings of your garden. If you don't have a conventional garden, a container garden on your porch or potted plants in your home still offer valuable lessons. Here are a few:

**It's OK to be imperfect.** Trying to grow the perfect rose, or the perfect cabbage, is an exhausting, never-ending quest for flawlessness. "Imperfect" roses are still beautiful and "imperfect" cabbages still burst with life, just like we humans. With our myriad imperfections, we still contribute our own beauty and zest to the world.

**Pruning improves growth.** Removing old habits that don't serve us opens new possibilities for growth in areas that *do* serve us.

**Pay more attention to your health than your appearance.** As author William Longgood wrote, "Over-fertilized plants may be beautiful but are otherwise useless, like people whose energies are devoted so completely to their appearance that there is no other development."

**Regular maintenance is important.** Isn't it soooo much harder to clear an overgrown jungle of a garden than to regularly pull encroaching weeds? Think of the clutter that can accumulate in our

houses, the extra pounds that are harder to lose than to keep off in the first place, the overwhelm or illness that can result from too little self-care.

**Have faith.** Plant a seed, water it, and trust that it will grow. Similarly, believe that the shifts you make in your life, the dreams you hold dear, will fully blossom if you nourish and protect them.

**Don't be afraid to try new approaches.** The garden is an incredible laboratory for experimentation. What new approaches do those old problems in your life need? Trial and error is one of life's best teachers. Not trying is the domain of hopelessness.

**Take care with predators.** It doesn't take long for predators to damage the result of your careful cultivation, in the garden and in life. What toxic relationships, substances and emotions are feeding on your energy and taking away from what you have to give to others? Eliminate them.

**Transform your trash.** The compost heap turns rotting plant waste into a treasure pile of rich, organic fertilizer. What negative patterns in your life can you work to transform? When we do this hard work of breaking these patterns down, the results are often rich and beneficial to our lives.

**Everyone is unique and needed.** Everything in nature has a function that is interdependent. As famous naturalist John Muir said, "When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world." Rock, plant, bird, bee—even bacteria in the soil—all occupy a vital place in life. What is your purpose, your gift to the world? Who do you depend on; who depends on you?

**Something important happens every day.** Take the time to notice the little everyday miracles in your gardens and in your life. \*

## 10 Ways to Get a Good Night's Sleep

*Seldom does time pass more slowly than when insomnia joins us in our beds. Sleeplessness can have both physical and emotional roots. Health problems, what we eat or drink, stress, or depression can get in the way of a peaceful night's rest.*

*Following are suggestions that might help you get to sleep and stay asleep.*

1. **Structure your sleep.** Try to go to bed and arise at the same times every day.
2. **Create a soothing bedtime routine.** Watching the news or reading the latest page-turner are not good sleep inducers.
3. **Keep your bedroom quiet, dark and cool and your feet warm.**
4. **Exercise during the day, but not within several hours of bedtime.**
5. **Avoid caffeine within at least 3-6 hours of bedtime** (longer if you're caffeine-sensitive). Nicotine, sugary snacks and alcohol can also cause wakefulness.
6. **If you do nap during the day, limit your sleep to 20 minutes.**
7. **If worries keep you awake, try writing your concerns down.** Also list possible solutions.
8. **Head potential anxieties off at the bedroom door;** organize what you need for the next day.
9. **Don't work, eat or watch TV in bed.** Keep your sleeping place for sleep.
10. **Cover your clock so you can't see the time if you wake up in the night.** Figuring how much sleep you're missing intensifies the wee-hours stress. \*

## A Letter From



Michelle Barone, MA, MFT

*I hope you find this newsletter helpful. I am always looking for ways to help my clients find joy and lead a fulfilling life. I have spent the last year studying a process that facilitates lasting change: NET, Neuro Emotional Technique.*

*I am now certified in NET, a mind-body technique that I find exceptional. I have personally experienced its benefits and clients report swift, long-lasting change. If you are ready to clear old patterns, reduce stress, and unlock hidden potential, it is time to experience NET.*

*In line with mind-body healing, I continue to marvel at the changes that occur for people when they increase their use of whole food and whole food supplements, and eat in accordance with their unique body chemistry. Support your mental health by insuring that your physical health is also well cared for.*

*Your mental and physical health is your most important asset. Take time and invest in yourself.*

*Currently, I work with individuals, couples, families, children and teens. I bring my knowledge of interpersonal neurobiology, mind/body therapy and alternative health/education to my work. I maintain a large referral base of supportive health care providers. I currently serve on the board of the Glendale Area Mental Health Professional Association as the e-list facilitator.*

### Services Offered

- Individual, couple, family counseling
- Healing grief and loss
- Stress management
- Alternative education/homeschooling support

• Parenting classes and support groups  
Office and phone sessions by appointment. Please visit my website [www.michellebarone.net](http://www.michellebarone.net) for listings of groups, classes and speaking engagements.

*Treat yourself gently,*

Michelle Barone, MA, MFT

## Are You "Too Busy"? How Can You Tell?

*Time is the great equalizer. Everybody gets the same amount: 24 hours in a day, 60 minutes in an hour. We can't save time or accumulate or rearrange it. We can't turn it off or on. It can't be replaced.*



*But these days, it seems as if the lament of not having enough time has become a national anthem. Though it may not always seem so, how we fill our time and how we spend it is our choice. Answer the following questions to discover if you're caught up in the "too-busy" cycle.*

True False

1. I constantly find myself doing "urgent" things and trying to catch up.
2. I allow myself to drift into obligations when I don't know how much time or energy they'll require.
3. I find myself running from when I get up in the morning until I go to bed at night. I'm always tired and never feel like I accomplished enough.
4. I seldom schedule a day off for myself and when I do, I tend to fill it with activities.
5. I don't make time for "self-care" activities: physical exercise, nurturing or "pampering" myself, cultural stimulation, spiritual well-being, learning something new, playing, or simply doing nothing.
6. I seldom have time to do the things I really love.
7. My work and project areas are cluttered with "I'll look at this later" stacks and "to-do" piles.
8. I often miscalculate how long certain activities will take.
9. I often miss deadlines or work long hours to meet a deadline.
10. I respond to interruptions such as phone calls, faxes, email, beepers and pagers, and allow them to take me off track.
11. I try to keep things in my head rather than making lists. If I do make a daily "to-do" list, it's impossible to complete in a day.
12. I tend to move from one urgent thing to the next, rather than working toward specific goals and objectives.
13. I find myself constantly wishing I had more time or projecting an imaginary future when I have more time, making comments such as "as soon as..." or "next year..."
14. I spend time running errands and rushing because I didn't plan well enough.
15. I spend time doing things I could pay someone else to do.
16. I often do things because I "should," or continue to do things that no longer fit who I am.
17. Other people complain that my schedule doesn't allow enough time for them.

*These fast-paced, high-energy days it's difficult to stay out of the "too-busy" lane. But if you answered "true" to most of these questions and would like some help slowing down your life, please don't hesitate to call. \**

## Working on Your Relationship—Alone

As the saying goes, it takes two to tango. It also takes two to make a couple. It takes two to make a relationship and, it follows, two to work on that relationship.

But what happens when one person in a relationship doesn't want to do the work—especially if that work means going to couples counseling?

First, it's important to make sure your mate really doesn't want to go. Lorna Hecker, Clinic Director of the Marriage and Family Therapy Center of Purdue University, lists these tips for asking your partner to join you in marital/relationship therapy:

- **Ask your partner to join you in therapy.** Most people are just afraid to ask. Express your concern about your relationship in a non-blaming way. Don't let the myth that "he/she will never go to counseling" dissuade you. As a therapist, I hear this all the time, and 90 percent of the time, it just isn't true that someone will never go to therapy.
- **Don't let your partner pull you into an argument.** Try a broken record technique such as: "We disagree; and we disagree a lot. That's why I would like for us to go to marital therapy." Say it over and over (like a broken record), rather than get pulled into an argument. Also, ask for what you do want from your partner, rather than what you don't want.
- **If you have previously asked your partner to go to therapy before and he/she refused, ask again, but ask differently.** Most people have great difficulty asking their partner to counseling in a non-defensive, caring way because they are hurting. Try, "I love you, I care about us and I need some help in learning how to communicate to you better. I would like to try counseling." Select a time when there are no distractions, and your partner is rested.

And if your partner absolutely refuses to try couples counseling? Go yourself. At the very least you can change how you are managing your relationship problems. Even if only one person in a relationship sees a counselor or therapist, change can happen.

"The overall relationship you have together may or may not improve, however your own attitude about it will," says Larry James, author of *How to Really Love the One You're With!* This alone is a positive step in the right direction."

Dr. Phil C. McGraw puts it more bluntly. In his book, *Relationship Rescue*, he urges all partners who are unhappy in a relationship to first tend to themselves before trying to change a spouse, lover, partner or boyfriend/girlfriend.

"It is not possible for you to have a seriously

defective long-term relationship unless you have generated and adopted a lifestyle to sustain it," he writes in *Relationship Rescue*. "The reality of your relationship along with your overall lifestyle and your relationship with yourself are one hundred percent inextricably intertwined."

In other words, how are you doing with your own relationship with the #1 person in your life—you? Although it's important to acknowledge your disappointment that your partner won't go to therapy or read about relationships with you, it's even more important to move on to the next step.

"The most important relationship is the relationship you have with yourself," James says.

If taking care of you means going to counseling, first make sure you are truly committed to changing. Counseling can be very emotionally challenging because you are forced to come face to face with some painful realities about the ways you interact with your mate. A "what can I do to be a happier person and maybe improve my relationship, too?" approach will probably be more effective than a "what do I do to get him/her to change so I can be happier?"

Alabama mediator and divorce lawyer Lee Borden urges his clients to seek counseling, even if it means going alone. He even urges couples who have decided to divorce to seek counseling to understand what went wrong and perhaps avoid certain behavior patterns in the future.

As he puts it, "As you work to know yourself, and particularly as you do it under the guidance of a caring professional, you may discover what makes you tick and find yourself on the road to healing and wholeness."

That step takes a lot of courage and commitment but it's a step few regret taking—even alone.

### The Three Cs of Change

Any change begins with courage, clarity and commitment.

**Courage.** It takes courage to be truthful about your own part in keeping the relationship "stuck." For some people, being "right" is more important than creating a new and better relationship. It takes courage to jump off that pedestal.

**Clarity.** Who are you and what do you want in your relationship? When you can clearly see how you helped create your relationship, it's a lot easier to change.

**Commitment.** Change requires taking the leap and sincerely dedicating yourself to creating a shift. Your partner may or may not cooperate with you, but in the end, you will have made the necessary changes to be ready and willing for a productive relationship. \*



# Summer Vacations & Families What to Do With All That Togetherness

Summer vacations with the family can be the best of times or the worst of times. Interminable plane trips, boring hotel rooms, exhausting hours together in the car, funky cabins on muddy lakes and six straight days of rain—family vacations can be difficult enough for adults, but for children they can be downright awful!

On the other hand, exploring new places together, sharing time and goofing off for days at a stretch, meeting new people or reuniting with loving relatives—family vacations can be the best thing since summer was invented.

### How to have more of the best of times and less of the worst

First of all, watch out for great expectations. Your own and the kids'. Enjoy the surprise of the vacation



as it unfolds. This doesn't mean don't make plans. By all means, do make plans. And include everyone in the planning. Maps, brochures, photographs, letters, share them all. Make checklists, too, with responsibilities for everyone.

Allow plenty of time, don't jam-pack days or crowd too much into the trip. If you're traveling with young children or toddlers, take short jumps instead of long leaps. If you're driving, stop often, get out and stretch, move around. Consider picnics instead of restaurant meals.

Keep it simple. Don't schedule so many activities that there's no time for just hanging out. Build in rest time, too. Tempers have a tendency

to flare when everyone's packed together day and night for long stretches of time.

Create alone time, for you and the children. Everyone needs recharging. Remember, both boredom and over-stimulation can result in acting out. Strive for balance.

Be sure to allow a day or two for re-entry before you go back to work and the children return to their summer routine. Coming home can be as stressful as leaving.

Make homecoming part of the vacation, too.

Vacationing together provides that one element for nurturing

family relations that is far too often missing in our day-in and day-out lives—time. May your family vacation be one of the best of times. \*



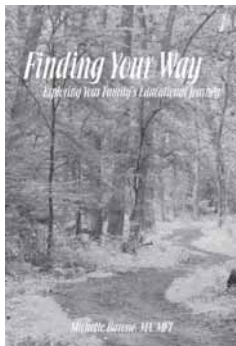
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Michelle's new book, *Finding Your Way:*

*Exploring Your Family's Educational*

*Journey*, is now available through [lulu.com](http://lulu.com).

You can go directly to [lulu.com](http://lulu.com) or access

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