On the Journey
Summer 2009

TOOLS FOR LIVING
from MICHELLE BARONE, MA, MFT
www.michellebarone.net
818-951-7744

Life's Choices Aren't All Easy... But They Are All Yours

Life is about making choices.

Imagine bellying up to the counter at your local Ben & Jerry's ice cream shop and asking the server for "whatever flavor you think I'd like."

Of course you wouldn't do that. With a veritable rainbow of ice cream flavors tempting you, making a choice might be difficult, but you'd do it. "Give me Cherry Garcia and New York Super Fudge Chunk, put the chocolate on the bottom and get a scoop with lots of cherries in it for the top."

Granted not many of life's choices are as lightweight as choosing between chocolate and vanilla, but what you choose and how you make choices, or don't make them, is as central to your self-esteem as taking responsibility for yourself.

Choices come in two flavors: Active—when you make something happen and live with the consequences, and passive—when you "choose not to choose," and continue to live with the status quo because the stakes appear too high for any changes choice might bring.

Active choices can be painful; feelings of fear and vulnerability often accompany these decisions. Just because we know what's best for us doesn't make it any easier. This kind of choice-making is risky, too. The most difficult choices don't have any absolute right or wrong; there is no perfect solution. It takes great courage to face these hard decisions.

On the other hand, the postponement of choice can have serious backlashes in the way of stress, depression, discouragement, apathy, even physical illness. Procrastination seldom has any favorable results.

Though in the end the choice is yours, getting to the place to be able to make a decision doesn't have to be a solo trip. Ask for help. Talking things out with another person can be helpful, especially someone who is on your side but has nothing at stake in your decision.

Just putting voice to your concerns may help you sort things out, and writing down the pros and cons will give you more clarity than keeping everything in your head. Getting some distance (emotional or physical) may make assessment easier, especially if that distance allows you to see the reality of the situation, rather than the way you wish it could be.

Even with thoughtful consideration, not every choice will be the right one. But wrong decisions don't make you wrong. And, trite as it may sound, one of the ways we learn is through the mistakes we make.

Not each of the choices you make will have a profound effect on the whole of your life. But the ongoing and continuous act of making choices will.

Making choices you believe in, choosing intentionally and with moral deliberation, taking responsibility for your choices, these are some of the markers on the road of self-esteem. The way William James put it was, "The first act of freedom is to choose it." ✻

10 "Top 10" Lists to Create

They're everywhere, these Top 10 lists, filling our desire for bite-sized, digestible morsels of learning or humor. They give us tips on housework or investment practices, satire on current events or political issues, and ideas for consideration on personal growth.

With this Top 10, however, you are the writer. Use these Top 10 lists (and any others you may create) to remind yourself of what's good and shining about you and your life. Use them to become more aware of what you know and what you can do to affect your world. Use them to reconnect with your dreams, to remember what you want deep inside. Enjoy!

1. Top 10 Things I Love About My Life.

2. Top 10 Ways I Positively Affect Those Around Me.

3. Top 10 Things That Are Uniquely "Me."

4. Top 10 Things I'd Like to Do Before I Die.

5. Top 10 Things I Know That I'd Like to Share.

6. Top 10 Ways in Which I am a Leader.

7. Top 10 Things I'm Grateful For.

8. Top 10 Dreams I Want to Fulfill.

9. Top 10 Things That Fill Me With Joy.

10. Top 10 Things I Could Fix or Change in the World. ✻

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 have a wonderful massage therapist/ energy healer available in my office or for home visits. Jeff Segal is a gifted body worker, and his work is a perfect adjunct to psychotherapy and NET. We often book sessions back-to-back to provide a powerful healing experience. Jeff can be reached at 1 773-575-1076.

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 sup- portive 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 for listings of groups, classes and speaking engagements.

Treat yourself gently,

Michelle Barone, MA, MFT

How Well Do You Handle Worry?

At its essence, worry is a useful response, helping us anticipate—and avoid—danger by taking constructive action. But too often, worry becomes an endless loop that makes it hard to sleep, focus and perform, and stresses our physical systems. Take this Thriving Quiz to find out how well you handle worry.

True	False	
◯	◯	1. I keep my worries to myself. I'm afraid I'll burden others if I share my concerns. The problem is, then it builds up and I get really stressed.
◯	◯	2. I write about my fears in a journal. This takes some of the power out of them. After writing, creative solutions seem to just show up.
◯	◯	3. I lie in bed for two or three hours at night worrying, just hoping to fall back asleep. I feel tired all the time.
◯	◯	4. Getting involved with my family, friends, church, neighborhood, organizations, etc., gives me a sense of being part of something bigger than myself. When I do that, my worries seem to dissipate.
◯	◯	5. I face and take responsibility for problems and commit to a plan of action, rather than worrying about what might happen.
◯	◯	6. What really works for me when I'm feeling tense and nervous is to take a long walk, run, bike ride or work out. When I exercise more, I worry less.
◯	◯	7. When my worries spin on in an endless loop, I know it's time for a gratitude list. Focusing on the things I am grateful for is like turning my worries inside out.
◯	◯	8. My worries seem to come from nowhere, and they feel uncontrollable. When I'm in the grip of them, I feel incapable of coming up with any solutions.
◯	◯	9. I worry mostly about things that, in fact, have a very low probability of actually occurring—dying in a plane crash, going bankrupt, etc.
◯	◯	10. Rather than let my nighttime thoughts keep me from getting to sleep, I focus on physical sensations, such as the feel of the sheets and the warmth of my own body.
◯	◯	11. I try to catch my worrying as close to the beginning as possible. Then I take some time to relax, breathe deeply and get centered.
◯	◯	12. When I'm immersed in my worried thoughts, I have, but rarely notice, physical sensations such as speedy heartbeat, sweatiness and shakiness.
◯	◯	13. The more repetitive my worrying becomes, the more persuasive it seems.
◯	◯	14. I worry about others because I don't really trust that they can take care of themselves. I've noticed, however, that most of the time, they can.
◯	◯	15. When I'm concerned about something, I take action. Then I let go, trusting that I've done all I can do.

Shifting your worry to wonder opens up possibilities for curiosity and action rather than dread and immobility. Ask yourself: How will it all turn out? What can I do to make the outcome the best it can be? If you would like to work on worry, trust or any other concerns, please don't hesitate to call.

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Summertime Drinking—When Is It a Problem?

What do you get more of in the summertime than any other time of the year? Besides mosquitoes and sunburn. If you guessed more drinking, you're right. Except for the winter holidays, no other time of the year sees an increase in drinking as much as summertime. There are more leisure-time activities—ballgames, outings to the beach or lake or river. More barbecues, picnics and other social gatherings where alcohol is as common as hot dogs on the grill. And for some, there's nothing like a cold beer after a wrestling match with a feisty weed whacker.

Just like the temperature, drinking taboos are lifted a few degrees in the summer. Drinking in the daytime seems to be more acceptable. You might lounge around the pool drinking tall, cool ones, or attend patio parties featuring exotic drinks and tiki torches. And since it stays lighter later, the cocktail hour is extended a few hours.

Vacations can also mean more drinking: no job to get to first thing in the morning; a relaxing time and place where you can loosen up, have some fun.

So, it's often during the summer that drinking problems may arise.

It's not true that increased drinking causes alcoholism—alcoholism is a disease with many "causes." Just because someone drinks more frequently, or consumes more alcohol than they used do, doesn't mean he or she has become an alcoholic. But, there are warning signs that drinking may be a problem, for example:

- Starting to drink earlier in the day.
- Increased drinking (drinking every day or every few days, and drinking increased quantities).
- Continuing to drink when you've "had enough."
- Denying you've "had enough."
- Urging others to "have one more," when they've said no thanks.
- Including alcohol in every activity.
- Always making sure there's "enough" alcohol (buying excess liquor for gatherings).
- Refusing to talk to others who voice concerns.

Alcoholism is a family disease—it affects not just the person who drinks, but everyone else in the family. They may need help as much as the alcoholic to recover.

The most common symptom of alcoholism is denial that there's a problem; the first step in recovery, is to admit there might be a problem. If you're concerned about your drinking, or the drinking of someone you love, let's talk. ❊

Doing the Right Thing—Issues in Integrity

Integrity is at the very basis of self-esteem. It comes from the word *integer*, and carries the same sense of wholeness: a person of integrity is a whole person. To have integrity implies a person has given thoughtful consideration to what is right and wrong, then lives by those principles. When a behavior contradicts deeply held beliefs, it eats away at self-esteem.

Daniel, age 43, found a UPS package on his porch when he returned from work. Though the package wasn't addressed to him, he opened it and found in it a cool four-in-one tool he'd been wanting. The package had been shipped pre-paid, which meant the person who ordered it had already paid for it. Instead of returning the package to UPS, Daniel added the tool to his collection in the garage and used it for a while. But it seemed every job for which he used that particular tool either took an extraordinary amount of time or didn't work out right. Daniel finally gave the tool away to a friend.

Those who act in ways that contradict what they believe is "the right thing," may be able to justify their actions for a while, but this self-betrayal ultimately catches up with them. In their own eyes, they begin to see themselves as hypocritical and dishonest. This self-judgment is far more powerful than any outside criticism or rebuke.

Sarah, age 37, was invited to a formal dinner by an important client. She went shopping for a new evening gown and put it on her credit card. She looked gorgeous that night and she and her client had a terrific time. As soon as the store opened the next morning, there was Sarah, dress folded neatly back in the box. She told the sales clerk that the dress "just wasn't right" and got the charge credited back to her account. Over the next few months, Sarah's relationship with her client deteriorated until, ultimately, she lost the account.

Having integrity means knowing your principles and living by them, even when it isn't the easiest thing to do. *Especially* when it isn't the easiest thing to do. Keeping your word, telling the truth, speaking out, taking a stand, having the courage of your convictions: this is the stuff of integrity. It's a primary ingredient of self-esteem, and at the foundation of good mental health. ❊

Setting Limits is More Than a Parenting Issue

How to Say Yes to Yourself and No to Others

Read any magazine article or book about parenting and the author will advise the necessity of setting limits for children. "Set limits and stick to them," parents are counseled. Limits create the structure and discipline that every child needs for healthy upbringing.

But for adults—especially those who tend to view other people's needs and wants as more important than their own—setting limits is more than an exercise in discipline; it's a vital component in good self-care.

Consider Georgia. Her calendar is filled with one family event after another. A niece's graduation followed by a great-uncle's 75th birthday party followed by a tea her mother planned for an old family friend. Much as she loves her family, enough is enough. After a day at work and meeting her immediate family's needs, she has hardly any time left for herself.

Or Burke, whose boss scarcely gives him time to complete one project before he lays on another. Then another. Work is so backlogged, Burke stays at the office every night till past nine and goes in on weekends as well.

Stephanie's husband helped her build a studio for her photography in the garage, then stored his fishing gear willy-nilly around her studio.

By not setting limits, Georgia, Burke and Stephanie are letting the needs and wants of others come before their own well being.

Sometimes it's difficult to learn to care for ourselves as much as we care for others especially if we feel uncomfortable or guilty saying "no." We may fear losing someone or something if we set limits on how much time we can give or work we can handle or if we claim space for ourselves. But always giving in to the requests or demands of others is to plow a field where resentments take seed. And failing to assert our needs and wants or to stand up for ourselves is to disregard our physical, emotional and spiritual well being.

Far from being selfish, setting limits is a healthy act of self-respect.

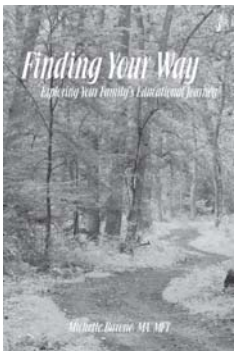
Taking a firm stand might be difficult at first. But by being calm, clear and direct—and without intentionally stepping on anybody's toes—you can learn how to set limits and create the kind of balance in your life that honors your own needs and wants.

For Georgia, it meant coming up with compromises—she'd attend the great-uncle's birthday party but drew the line at the niece's graduation and her mother's tea. Burke had to explain to his boss that it was impossible for him to do the kind of job he expected if he wasn't allowed ample time to complete a project. Stephanie offered to help build additional storage space in the garage for her husband's fishing equipment.

In each of these scenarios, far from losing something or someone they valued, by setting limits Georgia, Burke and Stephanie got what they wanted or needed, took good care of themselves, and, in the process, gained a healthy amount of self-respect. ✻

Michelle Barone, MA MFT
Sunland, CA

Phone: 818-951-7744
Website: www.michellebarone.net
E-mail: Michelle@michellebarone.net



Michelle's new book, *Finding Your Way: Exploring Your Family's Educational Journey*, is now available through lulu.com. You can go directly to lulu.com or access the ordering page on my website: www.michellebarone.net.