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How to Make the Most of Life

By Dr. Kathleen Begley
Professional Speaker and Author

Note to Readers: *This free e-newsletter, sent only upon request, comes from Dr. Kathleen Begley, owner of Write Company Plus communications training. She writes weekly on topics connected to business and personal success. Dr. Begley recently launched a new blog called "Meandering to a Different Drummer." Click onto the website address at the end of this article to read her one-paragraph musings on life, death, and how to fit into your bed with three dogs.*

My friend Marie's mother died a few weeks ago. On the day of the funeral, I cleared my calendar to attend the viewing, service, burial, and luncheon, all in different locations. It was an all-day affair; I left my home at 7 a.m. and got back about 3 p.m. Yes, Marie is that important to me. You'll soon understand why.

During first and second grade, I was the only kid in my neighborhood outside Philadelphia attending parochial school. During the summer before third grade, I felt especially lonely. One August morning, shortly after complaining to my mom that I had no one to play with, Marie appeared miraculously on the street where I lived. My heart thumped with joy when I found out this lovely girl with ringlets would be in the same grade at my school. Within five seconds, Marie became my best friend.

Throughout childhood, Marie and I played dolls, walked to school, ate chocolate bars, sewed costumes, went to sleepovers, practiced the jitterbug, bought clothes on layaway, saw dozens of movies, experimented with makeup, and agonized over boys, boys, boys. We later graduated, got married, and started careers. Marie became a flight attendant, a position back then requiring extraordinary good looks. Did I mention that she resembles supermodel Cindy Crawford, only shorter?

Fast forward 50 years, and Marie's mother is dead. As dozens of mourners gathered at the church, all I could think about was the unstoppable passage of time. In the blink of an eye, Marie and I had gone from standing in line to re-enter school at the end of recess to standing in line behind a coffin at the end of her mother's life. Something Marie said to me several years ago kept whirling around in my brain: "Time is passing fast. We need to get together more often."

And that brings me to the subject of this column: making the most of your time by focusing on your most important goals and connecting with your most significant loved ones. To be honest, this topic is my biggest bugaboo. Because my business requires weekly travel, often to the West Coast, I frequently spend weekends connecting not with human beings but with my bed pillow. Marie's mother's funeral shook me up so much that from then to now I have looked at innumerable websites about using time to support your values.

One of my favorites is www.zeromillion.com, which contains an article called "Getting Clear on Your Priorities and Life Purpose" by a life coach named Jan Marie Dore. "Clarifying what really matters to you will set you free to live life to its fullest potential," Dore writes. "Knowing what you stand for allows you to proactively seek the people, situations, and things that support your core values. If you know your priorities, you can assess every demand on your time against them." Some other words of wisdom I've gleaned recently from Dore and others:



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Decide what's important. Have you ever heard a person say he or she values work more than family? Me, neither. Yet that's how many people act – including me. If you want to go back to school, remodel your house, or have another baby, do it now – maybe not this instant, but at least start planning. Order your high school transcripts, buy a book on house additions, jump into bed and have. . . well, you know.

Create realistic expectations. If you're anything like me, you probably would love to spend 100 percent of your time in altruistic pursuits such as raising money for cancer victims, providing blankets to the homeless, and giving hospice care to the dying. Alas, unless you're independently wealthy, you need to devote some time to earning a living. So do the best you can dividing up hours for various pursuits. Perfection is not required.

Stay in the moment. On the road, I have encountered hundreds of men and women who share their most intimate problems. Over the years, I have come to realize how desperately individuals need a sounding board. So, instead of thinking about issues at home when such occasions arise, I try to clear my chaotic mind to watch and listen attentively to the human being standing right in front of me. In my mind, the universe has thrown us together specifically to have this interaction.

Acknowledge aging. All my life, I have heard older folks voice aloud shock about their sun-spotted arms and ever-whitening hair. My turn to bemoan the loss of youth is coming soon – perhaps yours, too. You may want to take an oil painting or home repair class now before your hands become too shaky to hold a paintbrush or wrench.

Talk about time issues. If you often have to pass up activities with your loved ones because of business pressures, share your frustration with them. Tapping into their fresh perspective, family and friends may be able to figure out better time management techniques for you.

Write in pen, not pencil. Make unchangeable appointments with people closest to you. And, to the best of your ability, keep them. Break dates only if President Barack Obama invites you to a White House dinner or George Clooney asks you to spend a week at his villa in Italy. Oops, delete the Clooney reference; that's my fantasy.

Act now, not later. Life goes by in a poof. Freak accidents, fatal diseases, violent crimes happen – even to the blissfully unaware young. Your friends and family won't be around forever. So stay in touch. That reminds me. I need to stop writing and call Marie.

Dr. Kathleen Begley has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at KBegley@writecompanyplus.com. She responds to everybody!