



Stepping Stones for the Good Life

#9 May 2012

30 Lessons for Living: Tried and True Advice from the Wisest Americans
From the Desk of Glenda Haskell, *Life Coach*

Recently I heard an interview with Karl Pillemer, professor of human development in the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University and the primary force behind The Legacy Project, which has interviewed more than 1,500 elderly Americans, whom the project calls “experts in living,” about making the most of life. The interview with Dr. Pillemer was part of a series of interviews with today’s thought leaders by Ben Dean, the founder and president of MentorCoach, where I received my coach training.

Late in 2011, *30 Lessons for Living: Tried and True Advice from the Wisest Americans*, which is drawn from the findings of the Legacy Project, was published. In the book, Professor Pillemer offers us a thoughtful, engrossing compilation of the wisdom offered by these life experts. Although the summary below of lessons for living extrapolated from the Legacy interviews doesn’t begin to capture the richness of this gem of a book, which is chock full of anecdotes and stories, I hope it piques your interest enough to make the effort to buy it or get it from your local library. This is a book that belongs on the shelves of our personal libraries— better yet on the night tables next to our beds. Just in case you would like to interview the elderly “experts” in your life, at the end of this issue of *Stepping Stones* you’ll also find the set of ten interview questions used by The Legacy Project.

Lessons for a happy marriage

1. Marry someone a lot like you [particularly when it comes to core values].
2. Friendship is as important as romantic love.
3. Don’t keep score.
4. Talk to each other.
Tip 1: If you are having trouble discussing something, get out of the house.
Tip 2: Find a way to blow off steam, and then engage with your partner.
Tip 3: Watch out for teasing.
Tip 4: Let your partner have his or her say.

5. Don’t just commit to your partner—commit to marriage itself.

Postscript: Don’t go to bed angry.

Lessons for a successful and fulfilling career

1. Choose a career for the intrinsic rewards, not the financial ones.
2. Don’t give up on looking for a job that makes you happy.
3. Make the most of a bad job.

4. Emotional intelligence trumps every other kind.
5. Everyone needs autonomy.

Lessons for a lifetime of parenting

1. It's all about time. [Life really is short.]
2. It's normal to have favorites, but never show it.
3. Don't hit your kids.
4. Avoid a rift at all costs.
 - Tip 1:* See the potential rift early and defuse it.
 - Tip 2:* Act immediately after the rift occurs.
 - Tip 3:* When all else fails, it's the parent who usually needs to compromise
5. Take a lifelong view of relationships with children.

Postscript: Abandon looking for perfection—in your children and in your parenting.

Lessons for aging fearlessly and well

1. Being old is much better than you think.
2. Act now like you will need your body for a hundred years.
3. Don't worry about dying—the “experts” don't.
4. Stay connected [to people].
 - Tip 1:* Take advantage of learning opportunities.
 - Tip 2:* Make a conscious goal of staying connected.
5. Plan ahead about where you will live (and your parents, too).

Postscript: Abandon the fight against aging. [Denial is our own worst enemy.]

Lessons for living a life without regrets

1. Always be honest.
2. Say yes to opportunities.
3. Travel more.
4. Choose a mate with extreme care.
5. Say it now. [If you have something to say to someone, do it before it's too late.]

Lessons for living like an expert [Choose happiness]

1. Time is of the essence.
2. Happiness is a choice, not a condition.

3. Time spent worrying is time wasted.

Tip 1: Focus on the short term rather than the long term.

Tip 2: Instead of worrying, prepare.

Tip 3: Acceptance is an antidote to worry.

4. Think small. [Focus on the joys of everyday life.]

5. Have faith. [If only because it's good for you.]

Postscript: Follow the Golden Rule—treat people the way you want to be treated.

Ten questions to ask the experts in your life

1. What are some of the most important lessons you feel you have learned over the course of your life?
2. What kind of advice would you have about getting and staying married?
3. What kinds of advice do you have about raising children?
4. Do you have any advice you can share about finding fulfilling work and how to succeed in a career?
5. Some people say that they have had difficult or stressful experiences but they have learned important lessons from them. Is that true for you? Can you give examples of what you learned?
6. As you look back over your life, do you see any “turning points”; that is, a key event or experience that changed the course of your life or set you on a different track?
7. What would you say you know now about living a happy and successful life that you didn't know when you were twenty?
8. What would you say are the major values or principles that you live by?
9. Have you learned any lessons regarding staying in good health?
10. What advice would you give to people about growing older?

For more information:

The Legacy Project at Cornell University (<http://legacyproject.human.cornell.edu/>)