

15 STEPS TO GETTING THE LIFE YOU DESERVE

By Tara Marie Segundo, M.A.

When I was in my 20s, I thought that I really had the world figured out. I also thought that people in their 40s were not only out of it, but were more-or-less ready to be “put out to pasture.” I had no idea that the most wonderful thing happens as we age: After life knocks us around a bit, we gain a sense of self that is much better than having wrinkle-free skin or a faster metabolism. The wisdom that I have gained has made this the best time of my life. I wish that everyone could feel such a tremendous sense of satisfaction.

One of my favorite quotes is by the writer George Eliot: “It’s never too late to be what you might have been.” It should remind us that our life is ours. At any moment we can decide to live the life we desire. Here are 15 ways to get exactly what you want out of life and get the kind of treatment you deserve.

1.) Don’t worry about what other people think of you. You wouldn’t stress over what others think of you if you realized how seldom they did so. Live the life that you want, and don’t make apologies. Looking back I see how much energy I’ve wasted worrying what everyone else thought about me. I have found such freedom in not putting an emphasis on other’s opinions of me, but rather what I think of me. You are the one who has to live with yourself and the decisions you make, so make them in accordance with your beliefs.

2.) Learn to say “no” when you really mean no. If I could take back all the time I’ve lost doing things I didn’t really want to do, I would add years to my life. Time isn’t limitless; be sure to use it wisely and honor your feelings. It is okay to say “no” when you mean it. “It’s important to know the difference between saying ‘yes’ out of obligation and saying ‘yes’ when you really want to,” says Karol Ward, LCSW, a licensed psychotherapist and creator of Find Your Inner Voice, a program for combining body-mind awareness, intuition and practical goal-setting. “The word no is a powerful way to set good personal boundaries and break the habit of saying ‘yes’ automatically. The more you can say ‘no’ when you mean it, the more you will be able to say ‘yes’ from a truthful place.”

3.) Learn the importance of balancing work and rest. Your body will eventually give out – guaranteed. I used to burn the candle at both ends thinking that I would reach my goals more quickly. All I got was a bad case of chronic fatigue syndrome and years spent bring-



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ing my body back to good health. As a “workaholic in recovery,” I have learned the hard way that I must recharge my batteries socially, physically, emotionally and spiritually, or the lack of balance in my life and its negative effects will ultimately lead to disease. I am not the Energizer Bunny, and neither are you.

4.) You can't be all things to all people, so don't even try.

No matter what you do, some people will love you and some people won't. This is a lose-lose situation. Set your priorities and be true to yourself. Decide who you are and be the best person that you can. The people who don't want to be your friends are not worth having as friends, anyway.

On the above point, “The funny thing about humans is that there will be some people who like us automatically for all sorts of unconscious reasons and some who dislike us automatically for the very same reasons,” says Ward. “I encourage people to ask themselves who they feel is on their team 100 percent and to cultivate those relationships.”

5.) You may never get your parents' approval, so stop looking for it.

My dear mom would be the first to tell you that the way my life has turned out is not what she would have chosen for me. I spent most of my 20s trying to be what I was told that I should. I have been the happiest, however, since I decided that I am going to live the life that I want and hope that everyone else gets on board with the plan. If they don't, that's okay, too. I don't say this with an attitude of indignation; I simply have decided that I am going to live the life of my dreams, not someone else's.

6.) Value your girlfriends. As a younger woman, I didn't understand how important my girlfriends were. Now in my 40s, I look back and see that while men tend to come and go, your girlfriends are forever. That statement is not meant to be “anti-man” in any way. I believe, though, that as women we need to spend more time valuing each other and less time tearing each other down. We should treat each other like sisters, not enemies.

7.) Your happiness is your choice. Life is what it is. Parts of it are great, and parts of it are tragic. Every opportunity to laugh should be enjoyed; it will not only help you mentally, but it will generate better health and a stronger immune system. Happiness is not just about how you are feeling . . . your physical health and quality of life are at stake.

In a study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Lee Anne Harker, Ph.D., and Dacher Keltner, Ph.D., of the University of California-Berkeley, looked at women's college yearbook pictures taken between 1958-1960. They rated the pictures for facial expressions and found that the women featuring the greatest positive emotional expressions (like a broad smile) rated themselves as high on personality traits associated with good interpersonal and cognitive skills; they were also viewed more favorably by others. In addition, these women were also more organized, mental-

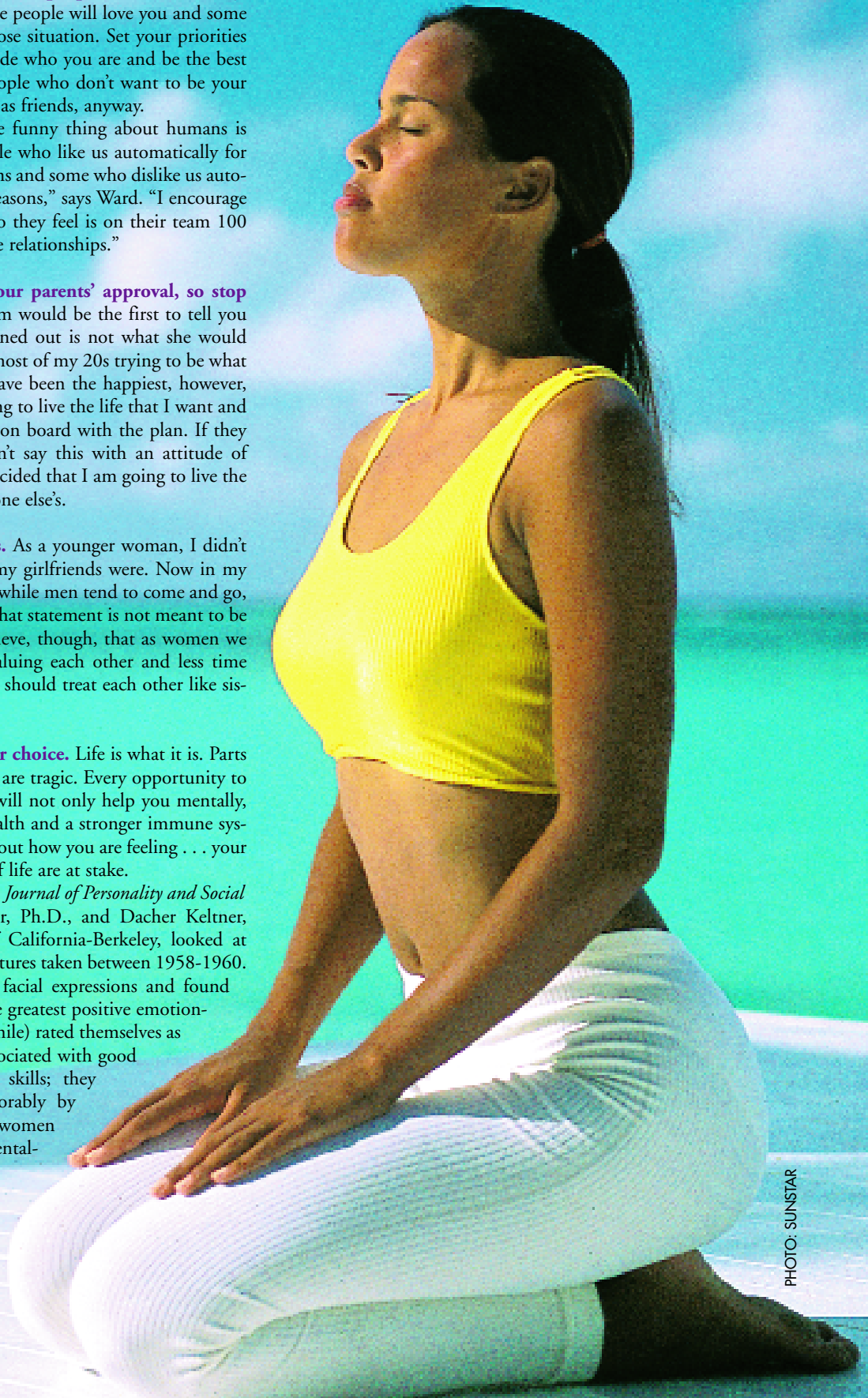


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ly focused and achievement-oriented, and were shown to have better attitudes about marriage and personal well-being, even up to 30 years later.

8.) Set goals, work hard and let go of the outcome. If you squeeze a bar of soap too tightly, it will slip out of your hand. Goal-setting is important and hard work is essential, but understand that life will work out the way it is meant to, despite your efforts. Do not give yourself an ulcer worrying whether or not your hard work will lead you to your desired end result.



PHOTO: CHARLES WORTHINGTON

You *will* be rewarded, although the reward may be something very different from what you had planned. I believe that we do not always get what we want, but we do always get what we need.

9.) Get rid of an inflated ego. No one is better or more valuable than you. You, however, are no better or more valuable than anyone else. In a company, it doesn't matter whether you are the CEO or you scrub the CEO's toilet; we are all people and we all deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. The day that you start to believe that you are better than another is the day that your life will start to unravel. We all have value and we all need each other. If you have a superiority complex, get over yourself.

10.) Don't be a prisoner to the number on the scale. I wasted years worrying about the number on the weight scale and didn't stop to think about my health. Now my focus is my health and level of fitness, and attaining a healthy bodyweight just happens naturally. If you are healthy and physically fit, your body will settle into a weight that will fluctuate during the month due to hormonal changes, an increase in salt intake or other factors. Who cares if the needle on the scale moves a little to the right or the left? Life is too short to stress about it.

In her private practice, Ward works with many women who struggle with body and food issues. "I have seen how the scale can become a battleground for self-esteem," she says. "If the scale rules your life, it's important to discover why something outside of yourself has so much power to decide how you will feel that day." My personal advice: Throw out your scale and buy a full-length mirror; you will enjoy life much more.

11.) Appreciate the simple things in life. As I have gotten older, I see the world differently. If you get joy from the simple things – a bright, sunny day, hearing a baby laugh, seeing an older couple holding hands in the park – you will always have happiness in your life . . . and it is the kind of happiness that no one can take away from you. It is okay to want material possessions, but don't ever stop appreciating the simple things that are available to us all. Hey, I love a great handbag or a new pair of shoes, but I know that the things that really make my life worth living aren't charged on my credit card – they are felt in my heart.

12.) Stop comparing yourself to others. I figured out a long time ago that there is always somebody who is smarter, prettier, taller, more popular or more talented than me. Comparing myself to someone else not only takes away from precious time that I could be working toward my own goals, but it is a never-ending battle. When you run your race, don't turn around to see who's gaining on you. Ultimately, we are all on our own journey.

13.) Be a good daughter. At this stage of my life, I have decided that it is more

important that I am a good daughter than that my parents are good parents. We have to remember that our parents do the best they can with the skills they have, and it's a hard job. Stop thinking about what they did or didn't do for you when you were growing up, and start thinking about what you can do for them now. One day when they're gone, you will be sorry if you focused on petty things that don't really matter in the long run.

14.) Take responsibility for your life. Nothing in your life will ever improve until you acknowledge that you are not a victim. You are living the life that you created. Life throws us all curveballs, but you have to stand up and do whatever it takes to get where you want to go. If your life is not the way you want it to be, take steps to change it and don't give up until you do so. Things may happen to you that will knock you down, but don't let anything take you down . . . there is a big difference.

In his book *Life Strategies*, Dr. Phil states as Life Law #4, You Can't Change What You Don't Acknowledge: "If you're unwilling to acknowledge a thought, circumstance, problem, condition, behavior or emotion – if you won't take ownership of your role in a situation – then you cannot and will not change it." The way to living a satisfying life is through taking responsibility for myself and my actions, then fixing what it is I don't like.

15.) Life isn't fair. You will be a happier person the day you get this. If life were fair, we would all be good-looking, have great jobs and lots of money. We each have a different set of problems and blessings, but we all have problems and blessings. If you really look at the lives of the people that you think have it easy, you will see that they, too, have their share of tragedies. Be grateful for what you do have and don't fret about what you don't. I have observed that often the people that have the least appreciate what they have the most, and vice-versa. Make your life the best you can and be thankful for everything and everyone in it. Change the things that you can control and gracefully accept the things that you cannot. ★

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