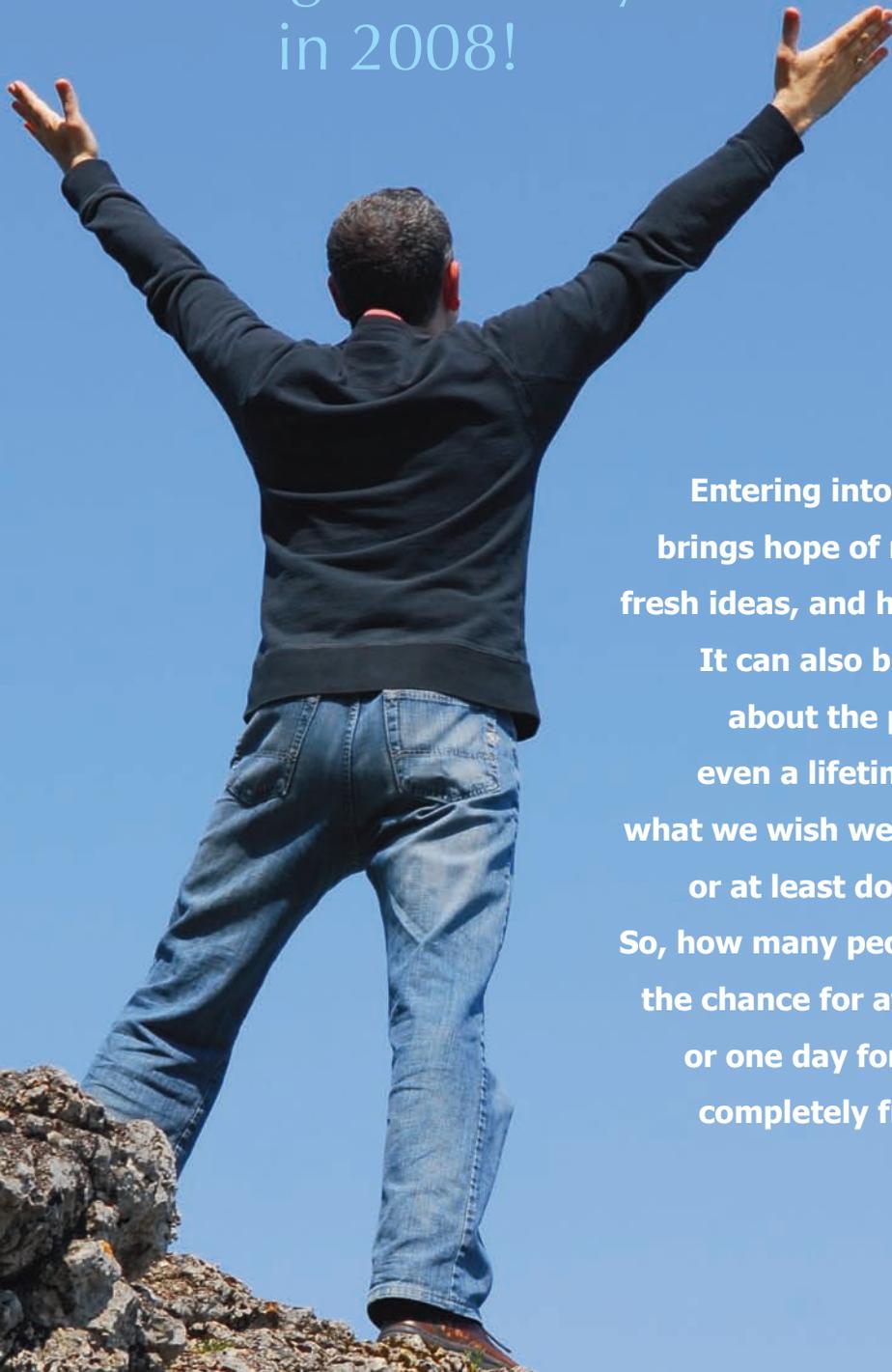


A Year Without Regret

Living Differently
in 2008!



Entering into the New Year brings hope of new beginnings, fresh ideas, and hope for the future. It can also bring thoughts about the past year or even a lifetime in terms of what we wish we would have done, or at least done differently. So, how many people would pass up the chance for at least one year—or one day for that matter—completely free of regret?

WHAT IS REGRET?

According to Webster, regret is defined as 1) to mourn the loss or death of something, or 2) grief or pain tinged with emotion. Roget likens regret to “remorse”, “lamentation”, “discontent”, and “repining”. No matter how it is defined, regret is clearly an ‘experience’ rather than simply a thought or emotion. Regret is an inseparable mix between thoughts and emotion often accompanied with a ‘gut-wrenching’ sensation. Regret can create an emotional abyss into which we continually and painstakingly grapple with our guilt and sadness from the knowledge that we might have an alternative outcome if we had acted differently in the past.

With each regret we hold, we leave a part of ourselves stuck somewhere in our past, whether it is a result of something we have done or something we have failed to do despite the possibly worse consequences of not having done it. Feldman states that most regrets result from thoughts we neglected to act on much more often than those that we did. How often have you said “I wish I would have said _____”, or “I wish I would have done _____”, then wondered for days, months and even years how life would have been differently had you actually taken those steps?

Erickson’s theory of development states that between the ages of 35 and 60, individuals are likely to have at least one “psychosocial crisis” based on whether any significant achievement has taken place in life. This stage, called “generativity vs. stagnation”, signifies the time at which a generation wonders whether they have passed on any purpose or “use” to future generations—a time when people start to consider where their lives would have been if they had taken a different path. According to Erickson, this is the primary stage in which regret impacts a person’s life. For some it may create stagnation—or immobilize the individual, whereas for others, it may motivate them to make change. This stage may be related to the “midlife crisis” many experience, making dramatic changes in their lives to ‘correct’ or compensate for past regret-

based decisions—or actions made to prevent further regret in the future.

So, why don’t people act on their thoughts or emotions despite potential regret? The decision-making literature consistently reports that decisions to maintain the status quo tend to be regretted less than decisions that initiate change (Inman & Zeelenberg). Best stated, change does not happen without inconvenience and few people like to go out of their way to change. Fear seems to cause most people to second (or third... or fourth...) guess themselves and prevent decisions that, in fact, could lead to a better life. In fact, you could be one decision away from changing the rest of your life—for the better!!! Instead, most people perceive change as risk. And many avoid risk at all cost—then wonder why their lives are less than fulfilled.

Living Differently in 2008

Some research indicates that we spend 60% of our time thinking about the past, whereas only 10% of our time is spent in the present moment. However, if we adopted more “conscious living”, the amount of regret would be minimized. Conscious living means living intentionally from moment to moment to minimize regret and maximize potential. To live intentionally means to live with purpose. Therefore, becoming more aware of moment to moment choices and being aware of consequences, one can decrease the amount of regret one

experiences and lead a more fulfilled, yet enhanced life. In my experience as a therapist, most people make decisions with little forethought about long-term consequences. This includes career decisions, commitments to relationships or marriages, and other life-impacting choices. Yet, it is the decisions NOT to change that generally haunt individuals for life.

There are several ways to live a regret-free life in 2008:

1. Think before you speak! One of Don Miguel Ruiz’s Four Agreements is to “Be Impeccable With your Words”. This means to slow down long enough to think through what you want and need to say, then state it simply and clearly. This creates regret-free communication. Whether you’ve been meaning to say something to someone but haven’t had the courage, or just need to clarify something you’ve already said, you will leave the situation feeling better than had you not made your statement. However, in the heat of difficult situations, many people regret having said harsh things to another. By being impeccable with your words, you can prevent this. In other words—would you regret not saying something more than saying it?

2. Hush Up! On the flip side—there are times to “zip it” and not say a word. Just as mom’s emphasize to their children—if you don’t have something nice to say, don’t say anything at all. In some

DEEP ROOTS MARKET

CUSTOMER APPRECIATION DAY!

Come shop on
Fri. January 11
and receive **5% OFF**
your store purchase!

(Owners - 10% OFF)



3728 Spring Garden Street, Greensboro • 292 - 9216
Hours: M - Sat 9 am - 8 pm • Sun 12 - 7 pm
Greensboro's Only Natural Foods Cooperative www.deeprootsmarket.com



cases, saying nothing is more powerful than spouting off at the mouth. Also, in some cases, by engaging in communication with another, you can actually stir up unwanted conversations or re-initiate unnecessary hurt or other feelings. Again, best to ask yourself if you would regret having said something.

3. Make your "To Do" list. Many people start a year with no plan for how they would like to live during the next 12 months. A question I often ask clients is "who do you want to be in a year?" or "what do you want your life to look like in a year?" By identifying a realistic picture of who you want to be and what you want to be able to say about your year, you can more easily set mini goals to reach these destinations. Without identifying the end result, you don't know the smaller steps to take to get there, and you don't generally plan ahead realistically.

4. Assess your Readiness. Many people say they are ready to have certain things in their lives (relationships, new careers, children, new self-image, lose weight, etc.), but few are ready to do what it takes to have these things. By first assessing the "end result" of your year, you can then assess your readiness to actually accomplish each step of the way toward your goal. If you would regret not taking the steps to "ready" yourself for your goals, then it is time to act now! Lay out

each step, then choose which one you are most ready to approach. Move on to the next once you've accomplished each step.

5. Make your "Karma" list. The "My Name is Earl" show is based on a man who has decided to wipe clean his slate of bad karma. Some regrets have to do with going back and "righting" wrongs. If at the end of the year you would regret not having addressed unfinished business in your life, it may be time to make your own karma list. We all hold onto things we have done or said in the past, even though those involved may not even remember the incidences. However, by clearing your slate, you can clear up any further accumulation of regret. Regret is like a dust bunny—it only takes one speck of dust (in this case regret) to start the pile. So, cleaning up the small regrets will only free us from further remorse later.

6. Identify Obstacles. By living the life you really want in 2008, it may be necessary to predetermine any obstacles which might prevent you from reaching your goals. This will eliminate unnecessary detours from your path toward goals and assure a more regret-free ending to your year. Planning ahead to anticipate these detours will save precious time and energy that you can utilize to actually meet your goals.

7. Live Moment to Moment. Probably the most important way to reach your Optimal 2008 is to make your decisions on a moment to moment basis. It is estimated that we have approximately 60,000 thoughts a day. If each of these thoughts was considered in terms of what we might regret by the end of the day, our outcomes would be much more fulfilling and less regret-filled. When faced with a decision, ask yourself what you would regret more? This will lead you down the path of least resistance (or regret) every time. Unfortunately, our overdeveloped brains tend to get in the way and we mull over even the simplest decisions for far too long. But when considering what we would regret, it is usually a "no brainer" decision. So practice using this question with simple decisions first, then move on to the tougher ones.

These are only a few of the ways to live differently in 2008. We tend to make life harder than it has to be, but by adopting a "regret-free" attitude, you will get to the end of your year feeling much more satisfied with the outcome.

This article was submitted by Katherine T. Kelly, Ph.D., M.S.P.H., Director of Branches Holistic Health and Wellness Center in Winston-Salem, NC. 336-723-101. www.brancheshealth.com. For more information concerning workshops or personal work related to Living a Regret-Free Life, contact Dr. Kelly directly at kkelly@brancheshealth.com. See ad on page 41.

**Intuitive Massage
& Bodywork LMBT #2355**

Energy Healing

Reiki Master/Teacher

Huna Master/Teacher

**Certified Heal Your
Life Instructor**

Angela Wilson Sherrill

336.986.0172

angelawsherrill@yahoo.com

Winston-Salem / Greensboro

**Call for upcoming
Heal Your Life Workshop
dates & information**

**Ongoing Reiki & Huna
Self Healing Classes**

**Evening Creation
Circles**

**Individual Healing
Sessions**