



## Claiming the Empty Spaces The Importance of Idle Time in a Fast-Forward World

You're about to leave for your dentist appointment when you receive a phone call saying the dentist has been called out on emergency and will have to reschedule your appointment.

Congratulations! You are the winner of one unexpected free hour!

What will you do with your winnings?

Pay bills? Answer your email? Return to the project you were working on before you had to leave? Start a load of laundry?

Ever consider doing nothing?

If you're like many of us today, the thought of doing absolutely nothing for *an entire hour* seems as wasteful as throwing a week's worth of groceries out with the garbage. Indeed, free time with nothing to do can generate near panic among some of us who are overloaded and time-starved.

"We seem to have a complex about busyness in our culture," says Thomas Moore, author of *Care of the Soul*. "Most of us *do* have time in our days that we could devote to simple relaxation, but we convince ourselves that we don't."

And yet, the harder we push, the more we need to replenish ourselves. As Stephan Rechtschaffen, author of *Timeshifting*, says, "Each of us needs some time that is strictly and entirely our own, and we should experience it daily."

The importance of this downtime cannot be overstated. We see more clearly, we hear more keenly, we're more inspired, we discover what makes us feel alive.

On some level, we know this already. But claiming time to ourselves—time that is often labeled "unproductive"—and sticking to it can be difficult. We need to establish formal boundaries around our idle

time to ensure that others—and we, ourselves—honor this time. Some ways to do this are:

- **Make a date with yourself.** Get to know someone who deserves your attention—you.
- **Stand firm.** Learn how to say "no" to co-workers, children, a spouse or a friend. In just a short while, you can say "yes"; now is *your* time.
- **Be clear about your needs.** It's not, "I need more time to myself." It's more like, "I'd like to spend 20 minutes by myself in the morning before everyone gets up."
- **Be on the lookout for stolen moments.** Use the canceled dental appointment to sit on a park bench watching pigeons.
- **Practice doing nothing.** "Doing nothing" is an art, and like all art, you need to practice it to reach your highest potential.

How we define idle time varies by individual. For one person, gardening may be meditative downtime, whereas for another, it is one more item on the to-do list (to be done as quickly as possible). A walk through the woods is, for some, an opportunity to be in and with nature; for others, it's a great place for a power walk while dictating letters into a small tape recorder.

Our idle time should be like a beautiful flower: it has no purpose—it's just there—yet it refreshes us and reminds us of nature's glory.

Do something that has no purpose other than joy. Take a half-hour a day to surprise and delight yourself. Keep it simple, and keep it consistent. If your idle time becomes a "program," or becomes progress toward some productive goal, begin again.

It's stunning, how simple it really is. \*

## 10

### Ways to Get Through Tense Family Gatherings

Let's face it. Family gatherings are not always roses and cotton candy. For some families, they're masked balls, with everyone straining to maintain a façade of harmony. For others, they're Wild West shootouts. Try some of these tips, if your family get-togethers are tense.

**1. Make a pro-and-con list.** Clear your head, find a calm moment and decide whether it is best for you to go.

**2. Consider smaller portions.** Plan to visit only for appetizers or dessert.

**3. Educate yourself.** Seek information on the issues or dynamics that tend to come up in your family.

**4. Dig deeper.** How do you contribute to the tension? Can you adjust your understanding of other points of view?

**5. Seek to understand.** Get to the heart of things by asking questions in a relaxed, open, non-defensive way. Read Sharon Ellison's *Taking the War Out of Our Words* or *Non-Violent Communication* by Marshall Rosenberg.

**6. Be prepared.** Holiday-related emotions may arrive early. Recognizing the source can help you deal with them more effectively.

**7. Take care of yourself.** If the atmosphere isn't safe, leave. Gather with friends, do volunteer work or pamper yourself.

**8. Call a friend.** Debrief after the visit with someone you trust.

**9. Be patient.** Real change—in you and in your family—takes time.

**10. Be gracious.** Aim for maturity and compassion in dealing with family situations. \*

## 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 continue to marvel at the changes that occur for people when they increase their use of whole food and whole food supplements, and eat in accordance with their unique body chemistry. Support your mental health by insuring that your physical health is also well cared for.*

*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 supportive 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](http://www.michellebarone.net) for listings of groups, classes and speaking engagements.

*Treat yourself gently,*

Michelle Barone, MA, MFT

## Family Stress Test

Stress is a natural and normal “by-product” of every family’s life. In fact, family stress can bring out the best of us: as we stretch to meet the challenges we face, we become better parents, our children blossom and our families grow. But too much stress can spiral our families in the other direction. Take this Thriving test to see how your family fares.



### True False

#### Set 1

- 1. There is a lot of bickering in our house. Someone is always angry at someone else.
- 2. There’s never enough time to sit down together, either to talk or to eat. There’s always too much to do.
- 3. My spouse and I argue a lot about how to raise the children.
- 4. It’s like pulling teeth to get the kids to help around the house.
- 5. Our family has experienced a lot of significant change recently (divorce, death, blended family, job loss, illness, other trauma).
- 6. Money is very tight. My partner and I have constant conflicts about how to spend it.
- 7. My child has been having behavior problems at school.
- 8. The children get upset when they hear us arguing.
- 9. I work too much, and it’s really getting to me.
- 10. We don’t really talk about hard issues; we just hold our breath and wait, hoping they will go away.

#### Set 2

- 1. We acknowledge feelings, encourage their expression and allow time for dealing with the issues these feelings raise.
- 2. We plan time for family activities. And we eat together at least once every day.
- 3. If a blended family, we maintain and nurture original parent-child relationships and let new relationships develop in their own time.
- 4. I feel confident in my role as parent.
- 5. Our family easily maintains a sense of humor and playfulness.
- 6. Family priorities take precedence over work.
- 7. I know what’s important to my kids.
- 8. When issues arise that we get stuck on, we ask for help from other family members, support groups, community-based programs, clergy and/or a therapist.
- 9. We have enough money for the important things.
- 10. Everyone in the family has responsibilities around the house and does them without being nagged.

*If you answered true more often in the first set than in the second set, you may want to seek help to lower the stress level of your family. Families that communicate about problems, who face issues as they arise, who support one another and seek help when it is needed, can build strong bonds among themselves, nurture a healthy and loving family and have a lot more fun doing it!*

## Tapping the Power of Your Dreams

Most of us know that a good night's sleep decreases stress, increases memory recall, and improves overall functioning. Less well-known is that our nightly dreams also work to keep our psyches healthy and help us access our full potential. With just a little practice, we can learn to tap into this valuable source of information and use it to enhance every aspect of our personal and professional lives.

Every dream, no matter how small or strange, has a message for us. Dreams give us hints of what is to come, point out opportunities we are missing, and suggest creative solutions to problems we face. In the 1970s, producer Jerry Weintraub dreamt of a dazzling marquee that read: "Jerry Weintraub presents Elvis at Madison Square Garden." He followed his dream and brought Elvis back on the road, making millions.

To find out what your dreams are telling you, here are some things to listen for.



### The yes/no feeling after waking.

Jessica felt stifled by her job but was afraid to quit and strike out on her own. After a tumultuous day she went to sleep early and woke in the morning with a peaceful feeling of resolve, knowing that, in spite of her fear, leaving her job was the best decision.

**Questions answered through imagery.** David was considering leaving his wife when he dreamt of viewing his recently deceased father through a window. He interpreted the dream as saying that grieving was currently more important than making a big life change.

**Literal dream messages.** Samantha had a dream in which her heart fell out onto the sidewalk. She's an experienced dreamworker so she knew not to take the dream too literally, but since high blood pressure runs in her family, she went for a check-up. Her blood pressure was so high that her doctor said she could have had a heart attack at any time.

### More Ways Dreams Assist Us

Dreams help us manage change. Phyllis's workplace was undergoing restructuring but she thought her position was safe. She dreamt of walking into the office to find her desk bare and her coworkers gone. Several days later her whole team was laid off. Her

dream had prepared her for the change even though she hadn't wanted to admit it.

Dreams give us great ideas. Paul McCartney woke with a song in his head that he was sure belonged to someone else. He played it for friends and they all assured him it was new. Convinced, he turned his dream song into "Yesterday," one of his biggest hits ever.

If you're struggling with personal or career issues, check your dreams to see if a great solution is waiting in the wings. Often all it takes is listening to realize you had the answer all along.

### Tips for Working with Dreams

- *Before going to sleep, state your intention to remember your dreams.* Like priming the pump, this may take a while, but soon your dreams will flow.
- *Try to wake before your alarm goes off.* Nothing erases a dream faster than being startled awake.
- *When you wake from a dream, lie still.* Translate the images into words before opening your eyes.
- *Keep pen and paper beside your bed so you can start writing before the dream fades.*
- *Better yet, keep a dream journal to record your dreams and recurring symbols.* While some images may be universal, your dream language is your own.
- *Don't judge your dreams.* They speak in metaphor, image, and pun. As with any language, it takes time to learn.
- *If you want help, ask for a dream, and then seriously consider its answer.* Often dreams answer the question behind the question.



- *Have the courage to face what your dreams are telling you.* All dreams come for our benefit—even nightmares.

- *Share your dreams.* Working on dreams with others is a great way to learn about dreams. \*

# The Call to Create

The sound may be faint as the stirring of butterfly wings or loud as a brass band on the Fourth of July. Or you may not hear a sound at all, but feel an urging, an inner pull, a sense of excitement and longing that resonates from within. This is the call to create, and it is universal, bidding each of us to bring something new into being.

"Creativity is the Self searching for itself," says George Gamez, Ph.D., author of *How to Catch Lightning in a Bottle*. We create in order to express our unique visions and perceptions. Creative expression helps us feel connected to the world and builds bridges of understanding. It nourishes us and helps us grow, provides insights and deeper understandings. Creativity is fun, exciting and playful. It relieves stress and releases tension. It provides a way of communicating when normal channels may be blocked or are insufficient—when we must speak in colors and textures and shimmering visions and music.

Creativity is love expressing itself; it heals and renews. Our creations are mirrors in which others may see themselves and the signature of our lives that says, "This is how I saw it."

## Everyone Is Creative

No matter what you may have been told, every one of us is creative. It is as much a part of us as our voice and breath and fingerprints. Creativity isn't just about making "art." Cooking, gardening, handiwork and crafts, keeping a journal—all are creative acts. Arranging flowers or rearranging furniture, painting a picture or painting a room, singing on stage or singing in the shower—these are responses to the call.

Creativity is a way of living. It is being spontaneous and playful, exercising the imagination, finding solutions and embracing possibilities—and doing it all with passion.

Yet for all the joy and fulfillment it brings, some resist the call to be creative. In our culture, the ideas that "Time is money" and "Art is frivolous" hold certain sway. Old messages like, "Stay inside the lines" or "You can do better than that" have remarkable staying power. It takes courage to look beneath the surface of what we've been told to find our heart's desire.

Creativity requires risk-taking. It asks us to surrender, to lose control and to trust. Jan Phillips, in *Marry Your Muse*, writes, "Committing to our creativity is an act of faith, a promise to believe in ourselves."

Honoring the creative Self means finding time, making space, being patient and taking the chance of looking foolish. You cannot care too much what others think or say. You must be willing to start over and stay with it; creativity takes stamina. There are no magical secrets or absolute rules. Creativity can't be taught. You just do it. Creativity belongs to the artist in each of us.

Like the body's natural urge for motion and the human need for connection and community, the spirit longs to express itself. So when you hear the call to create, answer, "Yes." It is your self searching for your Self, a movement toward being whole. ✨



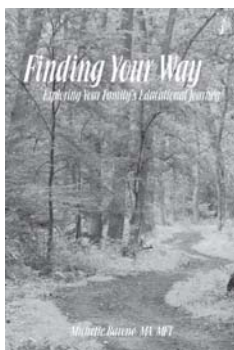
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Michelle's new book, *Finding Your Way*,

*Exploring Your Family's Educational*

*Journey*, is now available through [lulu.com](http://lulu.com).

You can go directly to [lulu.com](http://lulu.com) or access

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