

## **RATING OUR DAYS**

*A way to learn and grow; a way to become better managers of our lives!*

Have you ever thought of rating your day? Keeping score? Making yourself aware of what's going on so you can take responsibility for putting fun, satisfaction and winning into your life? A way of making life happen *for you*. A way to take charge of your life!

Watching and measuring our performance and responses, automatically creates new paths for our own personal growth. It's like making life a game that we get better and better at instilling satisfaction with the present and enthusiasm for the future!

### **What scoring is all about?**

We keep score on so many things in our life...so that we will know what is going on! Scoring measures progress...highlights weaknesses and strengths...tells us where we are going and how we are doing. Scoring is as essential to improvement as a heartbeat is to life. When we know where we are, we can begin planning where we want to be. For example:

- Sales for the quarter are up 15%
- Profits dropped 5%
- My batting average has moved to .286
- My cholesterol is down from 200 to 189
- And so on and on.

If the above statistics were ours, we would know that sales were up because we increased our advertising budget; profits dropped because we hired a new employee; the batting average improved because of our new coach's suggestion; cholesterol lowered because we made changes in our diet; etc.

Summing all that up: Because we knew what was happening and had the statistics to prove it *we made changes to improve our performance!* But when it comes to our lives—the basis for all those statistics—we don't have any score at all! No way to plan for changes that will improve our performance. It's a little like playing football, golf or running a business without keeping score. We don't know when to cheer or cry. We don't know what changes should be made to improve our performance and enhance the quality of our lives.

It is well said "That a trend will become a trend only when someone is watching!"

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Some days, we just go out the door in the morning and events and people take over and tell us how to be. We are in the dark and life is happening to us instead of for us!

Jane, age 67, was a good example of life happening to us. She was one of my clients when I was a volunteer counselor and arrived in what I would call a “frizzled” state. Her hair was flying all over the place and she was obviously distraught. Her story was that she was supporting her daughter, who wanted to be an artist, and paying the rent for her apartment, but the daughter did not like the lighting in her apartment and kept coming to Jane’s house to practice. This caused a problem because Jane’s boyfriend did not like the daughter being there and, of course, the daughter did not like him being there. They both took it out on Jane, whom, I observed, “was in a crossfire of criticism.”

We talked for a while and finally the key question came up: “What kind of work did you do before you retired?” Her answer surprised me! She had been the head administrator in a large hospital ... and then I understood her problem.

“Jane, I think I think I see what is going on. When you were working, you had a demanding job with all kinds of problems to be solved. Now, in retirement—you’re not solving them. Picture it this way, in the work-world you were on your toes making life happen *for* you and now in retirement, you’re back on your heels letting life happen *to* you.”

She sat quietly for a moment, then stood up breathing, “Huh, so I am back on my heels” ...and then walked out the door with, “I’ll see you next week.”

The following Wednesday, a different Jane walked into my office, She was well dressed with every hair in place. “Well,” she enthused, “I have had a wonderful week! I told my daughter to get a job and begin paying for her apartment and my boyfriend now understands that if he doesn’t like me spending time with my daughter, he can move back to Kansas City. And, oh yes, I’ve hired a contractor to remodel the bathroom.” She paused for a moment and then exclaimed, “So, I am back on my toes. It feels great, and I am going to stay right on them for the rest of my life!”

I wish I had told Jane about “keeping score” and taught Jane how to use the system because when the next life-challenge came along, her lower daily score would remind her that it was time to “get back on her toes!”

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When you decide to keep score every day, you open the door to many factors that will be helpful along the way. Factors that have been there but are rarely used. Factors that will help you change and grow, as you become better at managing your life.

As I said earlier, it’s like making “life” a game. When we begin winning on a daily basis, it creates an inner sense of satisfaction and joy that comes right along with us.

### **So let’s get started!**

The best way to get started is “just to begin”! Promise yourself that you will give each day a rating for at least a month. I’ve always used the 1 to 10 scale with 1 being the

lowest and 10 the highest. Try to be mindful as your day goes along, watching events and your reaction and response. The good and the bad will be a little more highlighted now that you are keeping score.

At the beginning, you may come home, think about the day and jot your score down on the calendar, but it won't take long before a new friend and ally, your scorer, will appear. He or she will not be content to sit at home waiting for you but will come right along with you. It's like having another pair of eyes watching and evaluating what is going on, praising you for the good things that you made happen or making comments like "If you keep losing your temper and getting angry, you are going to get a very low score for today!"

It may sound a little strange but talking with your scorer brings events and behaviors to the surface where they can be reviewed again to see what "learning lessons" they may have produced. Remember that the object of the game is to learn and grow but first... you have to be aware.

### **Improving Our Scores**

The good news is that we are far more inclined to get better than get worse. Throughout our lives in school, sports, business, etc., we are "improvement oriented," and now we can turn that focus on life itself. When we give the day a score, a large part of that will be our performance. How did we react—make things happen—deal with others—overcome obstacles, etc.

Visualize our lives as a balloon that wants to fly higher and higher but bad habits are weighing it down just like sandbags do in the real world. And when we make the necessary changes, the sandbag-habit drops away, letting our score rise.

Og Mandino wisely said, "That only a habit can replace a habit and this we must do if we want to become a slave to good habits." I used the scoring system to quit smoking! I promised myself a one-point increase for every day I was smoke-free, which made not smoking an exciting way of winning.

### **Factor Anger and Negativity into Your Rating**

When you are feeling angry or seeing the negative side of all that happens, you cannot have a good day. We must understand that those feelings and the resultant stress are harmful to our bodies so we simply have to take a deep breath and find a way to change or handle the situation.

It may surprise you to learn that we get angry for only two reasons. One being, "That we want approval and aren't getting it." And the other, "We want control and don't have it."

Now that you are aware of that, picture yourself driving down a beautiful scenic highway. You're just soaking up the whole countryside when along comes a speeding car driving

too close behind. So, what do you do? Jam on your brakes and shake your fist! Or, just pull off to the side of the road as you wave them to go on by? ... I like the second one because there is no anger and often a friendly thank-you wave comes back. And most important, you are once more enjoying the scenic highway and doing it your way. You won!

All of us have experienced the stomach churning, sleepless effects of anger and the longer it persists the more damage it will do to ourselves. Consider forgiveness!

Forgiveness is a way to shed anger and blame. We no longer have to prove that we are right, or plan how to win, or tell our side of the story to get others to agree with us. Rather, we say *it's over, it's done*, and it feels like winning. Many times our apology will build a new bridge to the other person and we will get an apology in return. It's good to keep in mind psychologist Skinner's statement that, "Everyone's behavior makes sense to them."

To be more aware of our outlook on life, every once in a while, make "negativity" a game and count the number of negative comments you make during the day and then look for ways to reduce the number and change your outlook.

### **Factor Self-Esteem Levels Into Your Rating**

In the whole measuring experience, one of the key ingredients is our level of self-esteem. You won't give yourself an 8 if your self-esteem is running at the three level because you will not believe that you deserve it! And the reverse is also true. You could have a bad day with everything going wrong but still get a good mark because you liked the way you responded to the problems.

It's important for us to understand that self-esteem fuels our mind just as food fuels our body. Imagine that each of us has a self-esteem tank inside of us. If it is full, we can do anything, but if it is empty, we can't even get out of bed. When our tank is more than half-full, we continue to act and think in the ways that keep self-esteem flowing in. But with less than half a tank, we are in danger of having our supply dwindle away.

Our scoring process will pretty accurately reflect how much fuel we have in the tank. Because the more we have, the higher our scores will be.

We increase self-esteem by doing... by being active...by reaching out to others with the understanding that you cannot add to another person's level without automatically increasing your own.

Factor into your daily scores the number of compliments you made, the attention you paid to others and the acts of kindness you performed. Quite often when we think we are *giving*, we end up *getting*.

And don't forget to include in your scores "taking chances"...moving out of your comfort zone and walking new roads...saying "yes" instead of "no." It's a way of growing...a way of being!

My own experiences produced this poem:

*Yes and No...so easy to say  
But what a difference they make as we go our way!  
Yes opens doors...a new road lays ahead.  
But a No swings the door shut...it's over...its dead.  
Yes creates roads...No hides them from view.  
Shrinking our world... strangling the new.*

*Yes asks, "How far will we walk? What skills will we learn?  
Who will we meet? What old bridges will burn?  
With Yes we are open...with Yes we are aware  
It's our life, our decision...it's all in our care.*

*Yes and No...so easy to say.  
But what a difference they make as we go our way!*

So, when you deliberately choose a different road, be sure that your inner-self is aware and watching for all "the new" that will come along ... the changes, events and people that never would have happened, if you hadn't said "yes." Should you feel at the beginning that you chose the wrong road, take some comfort in one of my favorite expressions: "Things have a way of working out!"... All because we make it so.

### **Scoring Can Tell Our Day How To Be**

When we go out into the day without any plan or mindset, people and events will tell us how to be. We will be responding and reacting and can only hope that good things and nice people will be there for us. But scoring puts us in charge. It then becomes our day to manage! Our day to make happen! It's like placing the day right in our hands!

I encourage you to add this belief to your scoring system, ***There is nothing that I can't solve and/or manage!*** Problems then become opportunities! A chance to show ourselves how good we can be. So a day that begins with two flat tires could be an 8 if we liked the way we dealt with people and circumstances.

And I have never forgotten my rodeo lesson! After watching the cowboys on those wild bucking broncos, I said to the rancher next to me, "If I were doing that, I sure hope I would get a more gentle horse." The rancher turned to me and replied, "Son; you just

don't get it. They want the toughest horse 'cuz that gives them a chance to show how good they are!"

How true. How very true!

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### *The Retirement Experience*

The retirement phase of our lives is a challenge for which most of us are unprepared! It is uncharted territory where we will spend forty to fifty hours a week. The world of work has said "goodbye" and we are all on your own. Self-esteem can take a real hit as we struggle to find our new lives.

Looking back, I was very fortunate to have the rating process in my mind. Low scores made me aware that changes were necessary to help me to continue to learn and grow and enjoy the life they created.

Most of you will find that Retirement is unlike any other stage of life. The same society that propelled us through school, marriage and all the other "things which we should do" is strangely silent—there are no rules, road signs or benchmarks; no rewards for excellence; no sympathy for failure. The world of work has said "goodbye." You have the feeling you are quite alone.

It is sudden and abrupt! Only one day separates work from supposed "play." Routines, habits and all the automatics that sped time along have been abolished. Self-esteem ebbs as we tell others what we used to do and who we were. There is no one to report to. We only have ourselves to manage on a full time basis.

The good news is that we are taking years of experience with us as we enter what can be the finest stage of life. Positioned between the world of work and the true last stage, poor health and death, it is the longest. And we have been given the time, freedom and maturity to make it the most fulfilling.

The additional hours we have been given are not so much a reward for what is past but a challenge for what is to come. An opportunity to redirect perspective and purpose. There is room again in our lives to adventure, learn, and grow; to share and help others; to become that curious, fun loving, wacky kid again!

We can help carve out this new stage, give it character and meaning. Mark the trail for generations to come. Hone and polish this new era. See it as a time to understand and appreciate ourselves. A time to put our lives together so we can accept the final stage with the serenity and satisfaction that flow from knowing that we climbed as high as we could go. We were the best that we could be!

Retirement is not an ending! It is a graduation! A new beginning!

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*And summing all of this up: Keeping score and rating our days immediately introduces introspection and the awareness of time into our lives and when we give ourselves 365 days to practice, we can manage and make our lives better every year.*

*Give it a try. You'll enjoy it. It's a fun way to live!*

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