

EXCERPTS

from

What I Wish I Knew at 18: Life Lessons for the Road Ahead

by Dennis Trittin

From Chapter One, "Life Perspective"

Live Life without Regrets (page 30-31)

Looking back on your life, do you have regrets? Are there things you did and wish you hadn't? Any relationships that are strained? Although these are some of life's most important questions, too many wait until the end to ask them—and by then, it's too late. It's convenient for us to bury our disappointments and regrets, but eventually they will come home to roost. It's just a matter of time.

Even if your life becomes a masterpiece, you'll inevitably have some regrets. We all do. However, if you periodically ask yourself the regret question (and then actually do something about it!), you'll become that much more content with your life.

Most of life's regrets fall into one of the following categories:

1. I didn't spend enough time with my loved ones.
2. I didn't tell my family and friends that I loved them often enough.
3. I was too stubborn or proud to admit my mistakes and apologize.
4. I chose bitterness over reconciliation.
5. I allowed my life to be consumed by work.
6. I was too hesitant to take risks and try new things.
7. I wasted too much time.
8. I didn't appreciate the little things in life.
9. I valued things over relationships.
10. I worried too much.

Do any of these apply to you? Be honest! Although regrets run the gamut, most involve relationships and priorities. This is why it's so important that your life is balanced and your priorities are right.

So, how does one succeed at living a life with few regrets? The answer is to periodically take a "regret check" in your life and then commit to doing something about it, as difficult as it may be. This discipline will help you make those needed midcourse corrections and "relationship

repairs” along the way. Be forewarned, though: it’s not easy, and it takes a lot of courage, humility, and determination.

From Chapter Three, “Relationships and Communication”

How you say it can matter more than what you say (pages 91-93)

I wish I had a nickel for every time I’ve said, “I didn’t mean it like that!” I’d be a very wealthy man! The sad fact is, the messages we send can be received differently than we intend. And, when it happens, it can be a disaster.

Four things affect how our messages are received by others...and any one of them can be the cause of *major* misunderstandings if we’re not careful. First, are the *words* themselves, and how accurately they convey our intended message. Second, is how our words are “packaged” through our *tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language*. Third, is the *form* of the communication—verbal or written. The fourth factor, which unfortunately can’t be controlled, is the *filter* that is applied by our audience when receiving our communications. Allow me to elaborate on each.

Word choice is huge, especially when we discuss sensitive topics or relationships. In these situations, our emotions can interfere with our thinking, and we often use more provocative language that we later regret. In the “heat of battle,” we can be so focused on proving our point that we forget to show tact, empathy and understanding to the other party. The end result is that things spiral out of control, and frustration and anger take over.

In other cases, our word choice is fine but our manner of *delivery* gets in the way. Examples include speaking with a harsh or condescending tone of voice or displaying arrogant facial expressions or body language. No matter what words we use, if the “packaging” is incongruent, our message will lack credibility and rub people the wrong way.

The *form* of our message is also critical. The advantage of verbal communication is that the audience hears you speak, allowing your tone to help convey your ideas. In contrast, written communications (e.g., letters, email, memos, social websites) have a major **dis**advantage in that the recipient imposes your tone of voice while they read. Their tone may be light years away from what you intended. If so, you have a big problem on your hands.

The last aspect is the *filter* that the receiving party applies to your words. Depending on whether they like or distrust you, whether they’re in a good or bad mood, or are engaged or distracted by other thoughts, your message may not get through in the way you intended.

Unfortunately, this happens all the time (especially with written communications), and you can't control it.

Miscommunication is so common. There are, however, some simple things you can do to minimize it:

- Carefully choose your words (think before you speak!).
- Be sure your expression and words are congruent.
- Strive to be empathetic by putting yourself in the audience's position.
- Closely monitor the receiver's body language to see whether they may be interpreting your words differently than you intend. If they frown, for example, clarify your comments to ensure you are on the same page.
- Be a discerning listener when they respond.
- Be quick to apologize for any misunderstandings.
- **Never** say **anything** in written form that is provocative or highly critical.

From Chapter Eight, "Career Selection and Advancement"

Choose your major/career after conducting a comprehensive assessment of yourself and potential career matches (pages 162-164)

Can you imagine working on a job you hate? Spending most of your waking hours bored, frustrated, or totally stressed out? Working with people or for an employer that you don't care for? I certainly can't, but sadly, it happens more often than you think. Unfortunately, I watched it happen to one of my best friends, and it sucked the energy right out of him. It was sad to see because he deserved better.

On the other hand, can you imagine working for a company you admire where your skills are used to a great extent and you can build lifelong friends with your associates? Where you are given opportunities to grow personally and professionally and have a positive impact on your employer? Where you're rewarded and recognized for a job well done?

When people don't realize their dream career, it's normally because: 1) they didn't properly assess their interests and aptitudes (i.e. will I like it and be good at it?) and 2) an they had an incomplete understanding of potential career matches (i.e., what are my options and which fit me best?). If either of these apply, odds are that people will make a sub optimal career choice. It needn't happen to you.

Thankfully, you can significantly increase your chances of finding a career that's right for you. However, it's going to involve much more than listening to the impressions of your high

school and college counselors! *You* need to take charge of this decision. That's because nobody knows you like you do!

The **first step** is to *conduct a comprehensive self assessment*. This involves taking an *honest and objective* inventory of your:

- *Interests and passions*. You need to examine which fields (e.g., medicine, business, education, performing arts) interest and excite you. Your answer to this question may determine the career (nursing) or the industry (health care) that might be right for you. One of the most helpful clues will be how much you enjoy the advanced courses in your major. Often, we have a preconceived notion of a good career choice until we find ourselves bored to death in those upper level classes. If that's the case, it's time for a change. *Never* choose a major or career that may bore you!
- *Skills and aptitudes*. Just because you're interested in an area doesn't mean you have the needed skills. You need to thoroughly understand your strengths and weaknesses and find an area that plays to your skills. Your ability to succeed in advanced classes in your major will be telling. I was a math major until I received a five-credit C in Calculus! Time for Plan B! *Never* choose a major or career that doesn't match your skills. When it comes to your career, you must be confident that you can excel at it!

When our son Michael was a junior in high school, we took him through extensive aptitude testing at the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation (www.jocrf.org). The results confirmed his skills and identified several good career matches (and which ones would not). If you're uncertain of your dominant skills, consider visiting an aptitude testing center. In Michael's case, it opened his eyes to several potential matches that he otherwise wouldn't have considered. In fact, at this writing, he is changing his major to a different area that surfaced during his aptitude testing.

- *Lifestyle and workplace preferences*. In order to enjoy your job, it will need to match your personal preferences regarding location, work hours, travel requirements, recreational interests, required income, work style (individual versus team), and stress level. Remember, your career has to fit who you are.
- *Willingness to obtain the necessary qualifications*. Some careers require only an undergraduate degree, while others (e.g., physicians) require extensive additional

education and training. Even if you have the interest and skill, if you aren't willing to do what it takes to become qualified, it's not worth pursuing.

As you work through the above considerations, write down the qualities of your "ideal job." This way you have a set of preferences against which you can evaluate your choices.