



Quality of Life Choices --- in Challenging Times by award-winning author / stress-relief expert Susie Mantell

Market Volatility... Unemployment... Global & Environmental Concerns...

I know...< sigh >...I know.

This is not the article I had planned to write today.

But this *is* the article that needs to get written today. In my effort to help you to reduce your own stress in a world spinning very fast, periodically I too need to reassess goals, needs, and adapt. *That...* is the article that needs to get written today. In fact, that's what coping with 21st Century Stress will be about: Reassessing goals, needs... then adapting.

"In the dew of little things, the heart finds its morning and is refreshed." --Kahlil Gibran

It is safe to say that wherever you are reading this today, these are challenging times emotionally, physically, financially and globally. Each night, all over the world, parents reassure their children about events that they themselves grapple with. Some make no sense at all, others make perfect sense -- heart-breaking mind-boggling sense--to someone with a belief system of which we understand little. We wonder and we hope and we worry sometimes. Still, each morning, the sunrise brings new possibilities, sales presentations and term papers are still due, and birthday cupcakes need to get baked. (Ok--bought.) And while shaky markets rumble beneath savings, grocers and plumbers still must be paid, I Love Lucy is still funny, and kindergarten ballet recitals are still laugh-until-you-cry adorable. So it cannot all make sense and we need to know that.

Tough times have always found people reassessing what they value most, creating new ways to help themselves and one another to enjoy the highest possible Quality of Life in this moment. We seek comfort and embrace faith in whatever we believe to be good and decent. In difficult times, we need to maintain balance and routine wherever possible, to live mindfully, focusing in-the-moment.

"We need to be careful not to confuse Standard of Living with Quality of Life."

--Mark Sanford, Software Designer/Engineer

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We each have choices to make about how we respond to circumstances. We can choose whether we watch the News for the seventh time today at bedtime or instead, unwind with a warm bath, some cereal and a magazine. Yes, we have choices. Stress leads some to abuse alcohol and others to embrace wellness. We may take a second job to make ends meet, ask for a raise, move to a smaller place, or spiral into credit card debt. We have many, many Quality of Life choices and options.

Last winter I learned a valuable lesson from a random stranger. I was, admittedly, in a hurry and waiting on a long line at the deli for one cranky, stressed-out, overworked (therefore inefficient) woman to process orders. *[Eyes rolling. Audible grumbles down the line.]* Quietly, the man ahead of me leaned toward this rude, miserable worker and smiled, "Hey there! How are you today?" That small human contact instantly transformed her. A smile lit her lined and tired face and her whole mood shifted. One smile, a kind word. So simple! By the time she got to me, she was a cordial, reconnected person again! That was a man In-the-Moment. And he was willing to make a slight effort to let some light shine in on a woman who, until that moment, could see only lines of impatient, unhappy, faceless demands.

More and more, I'm noticing such moments, even in business. Because these are such incredibly stressful times, occasionally my company is approached by another, with a creative co-op venture to benefit both parties. I prefer to support companies that exemplify high standards and fair play, so we have built wonderful strategic partnerships with innovative companies who want to help our business grow and stay healthy, as we do theirs.

Create a Win-Win-Win To spark your imagination, here are a few more examples of how we do it:

- Support people and businesses whose values you respect.
- Barter. Trade babysitting for car-repair. A computer tech once installed my system for a beautiful desk chair I'd bought, but that hurt my back.
- Periodically, I send out "dot.calm" stress-relief e-newsletters. Many companies charge subscription fees for newsletters. I like making mine a gift to support the wellness of anyone who wants some help with stress. (Besides, the more people out there managing stress healthily, the likelier we all are to run into one!)

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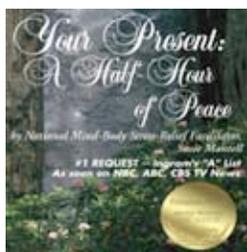


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Sometimes we do things simply because they feels Right. Our company once bartered advertising space with a magazine that wanted a large number of my stress-relief CDs, "Your Present: A Half-Hour of Peace" as morale-boosters for their employees. See? That was a Win-Win-Win. A physician gives copies to each patient and to his staff. A psychiatric unit gives copies to patients as discharge gifts. More and more, smart people are doing creative business. My wish is to help as many people as possible to experience the soothing relaxation listeners find in, "Your Present: A Half-Hour of Peace," but as a small company we cannot donate or advertise everywhere we wish we could. One day, a lovely woman named Jamie Bright, from The Skin Care Institute in Columbia, MD, called me, out of the blue. She was creating and donating "Comfort Boxes" as gifts for newly diagnosed cancer patients at Johns Hopkins, and included a copy of my CD for every newly-diagnosed recipient. I *loved* the idea! By helping Jamie's business help others, our company benefits as well: Win-Win-Win. A hospital in Missouri gives our CD to every patient upon discharge. It was such a great idea, we created special pricing to make that more affordable for them. These are Quality-of-Life Choices impacting the quality of their lives... and ours.

More and more people are finding creative ways to work together. Everybody wins. I bet you could think up three of your own today!

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