



THE PERFECT LIFE

“I can’t wait until everything about my life is perfect so that everyone will be jealous” said 16 year old Tania. Tania was having a good deal of difficulty with her self concept and felt that her identity and ability to make friends could only come from her body image.

“Then I won’t have to worry about people criticizing me or having a lot of friends and I’ll be able to do whatever I want to do. I’ll be so popular that everyone will want me to spend time with me. I’ll be able to pick and choose who I want to be with on any given day and there won’t be any end to my choices. And if there’s anything that I don’t like about the way I look, I’ll have a surgeon fix it. I’ll be ‘flawless’. I’ll be able to get even with those girls who don’t like me and the boys will “fall all over me” trying to get a date. Someday! I just can’t wait for that day to come.”

It’s very hard not to be somewhat paranoid these days. Many people are looking over their shoulder on a regular basis to make sure they look perfect or are politically correct. When I conduct workshops I ask people to go home and find just one positive article on the front page of their newspaper. We are more apt to be criticized than praised and supported by others. The feeling for many is one of “standing out there all alone” with no one to appreciate who we are. Instead, people tend to believe that they need to be what/who others want them to be so that they’ll be accepted...even loved. When I ask people to tell me about who they feel they are, they tend to start with describing their job, accomplishments, etc. instead of being able to tell me about who they are. It’s as if “who” they are is really about “what” they do which is often about doing what pleases others.

For many adults, the feeling might be similar to a child’s learning that his parents are divorcing and are experiencing a sense of abandonment. It is not uncommon for children to question whether they may have caused the breakup or even an argument that parents may experience despite the fact they had nothing to do with it. A basic premise upon which children operate is whether they are “good enough” to love and be loved by their parents because of their total dependence on them. The dilemma is that they are torn between wanting to please them while at the same time resenting the control parents have

over them. That very dilemma is why I give parents of teenagers the advice “save thyself first” because for a period of time during the stormy period labeled “adolescence”, neither parent nor child can win.

Although this period is one which parents wish their child would skip over, it is a necessary part of the developmental process. If a child has been exposed to loving, accepting and uncritical parents in their younger years, neither parent nor child need to undergo such a difficult period during adolescence. Unfortunately, parents who are negatively critical and demanding of their children have themselves been exposed to those same parenting techniques as children. In those instances, the parents may need help in understanding and changing those personal patterns which in turn will help change their relationships to their children.

Children need guidance and structure, not criticism. They need to know when they have done well but also need to know when they have transgressed. This can be accomplished through positive teaching and involvement, not criticism. Children need to be secure in their environment and that means knowing where they stand with parents and parental figures. Adolescence can then take on a sense of an adventure where children and parents can begin to separate in a healthy and meaningful manner. That process will open the door to a healthy adulthood.

Children don't have the kinds of choices that adults have and their need to please parental figures is key to their sense of identity and well-being. As a psychotherapist treating many children, I found that many of them went to an extreme and concluded two premises. The first is that they believe that they needed to become perfect in order to be loved and the second is that they will never be satisfied with whatever they accomplish because perfection can never be achieved.

The more we can come to accept ourselves **for who we really are** and clearly manifest that person to others, the more we tend to find out who our true friends are and, surprisingly, the result will probably be much greater than we might anticipate. Apart from developing long lasting relationships, we can begin to feel a sense of freedom and relaxation that can only come from the natural manner in which we live our lives. We don't need to be perfect in order to be loved. True love and friendship doesn't depend on pleasing the other person to the extent of denying our basic human nature. That's a game... a very dangerous game that usually ends up with the participants getting hurt. Practicing being genuinely supportive of others instead of being critical when they make a mistake enables much closer and more meaningful relationships. The stressful thoughts and feelings of whether we're liked or loved enough will dissipate and our lives and relationships will take on a more healthy and happy tone. Whether with our own families or with our friends and acquaintances, you can still attract “more bees with honey than with vinegar”.

A Brief Biographical Sketch

After an over 40 year career as a professional psychotherapist and Director of The Sports Stress Clinic in Amherst, NY, Charles Bonasera came to Florida and decided to use the benefits of his previous professional experiences in his new roles of Consultant in Life Management and Business Coaching as well as his expertise as a Motivational Speaker. He once again became involved with athletes in different sports training them with his techniques to help them develop and maintain focus as well as staying in their zone. Much of his training methods are derived from the CD collection he developed under the heading of WIN-WIN SECRETS as the President of Personal Identity Controls. This collection consists of thirty-six programs dealing with vital issues in the management of stress.

Another role that he adopted to add to his professional career was that of Author. Early in the 1980's he wrote Guide to a Life Management Process which he has re-written as a workbook to successfully help people manage their stress which includes his own Working Model. As a result in his interest in golf and realizing that it was essentially a "mind game", he wrote The Mental Side of Golf which can benefit the beginner as well as professionals playing the game of golf.

He then compiled over five-hundred sayings that he had developed in the course of his professional career as stimuli to help people change patterns in their lives entitled How to Stay Well and Live Life to the Fullest. This was followed by a book documenting case studies around disruptive life patterns including ways to change them under the name of How in the Hell Did This Happen to Me? Both his personal involvement in sports as a participant, coach, manager and in his role in officiating, inspired him to write a primer for parents and coaches entitled The Legend of Little League.

Charles invites you to view his website at www.charlesmbonasera.com as well as to write with your comments and questions to his e-mail address (charles@charlesmbonasera.com). He would also be very happy to communicate with his readers by telephone should they desire. His professional motto is "seeking alternative methods to happiness" and wishes those touched by his words to practice the three secrets to a happy life: "enjoy life and enjoy it thoroughly ... develop and maintain a sense of humor ... bring as much love into your life as possible.