

What's Your Quality of Life?

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'A standard of living cannot be measured simply in terms of the goods and services we can purchase. It is also measured in how much time people have available to do the things they love, with the people they love. **U.S. Secretary of Labor, Elaine L. Chao**

"You don't get to choose how you're going to die, or when. You can decide how you're going to live now." - **Joan Baez**

I applaud Elaine Chao for her reminder that a standard of living includes the **time** folks have to do what they love, with the people they love. In doing so she speaks beyond the definition of a quality *standard of living* (access to goods and services) and right into the heart of one's *quality of life*.

In this America, with its bounty and beam, what exactly is *quality of life*? How do *you* measure quality of life for yourself and those in the larger community?

While many would examine a variety of economic and environmental factors, I've found that quality of life, at the core, is subjective, much more personal, intimate even as it reflects who we are to the world.

When I muse about *quality of life* I find my mind wandering across the domains of my life: community, work, family and friends.

I think of the diversity of my local community, the local farmer's market—complete with a terrific donut stand, the beautiful parks with Shakespeare and art festivals, the new library with quotes on learning etched up the glass walls, the convenience of my doctor available not far away, the public transportation to take me to art classes offered through the local college.

I think of the work that I love. Work that stimulates me to learn stretches me to move beyond what I once thought possible, work that sustains me in its meaning and purpose, giving me the opportunity to give back in appreciation of a life so blessed.

Then my mind shifts to the smaller qualities, those easiest for me to take for granted: hot water running for my shower in the a.m., the play of light through the window, the new insulation that warms my house for family and friends, the healthy meals we'll share later in the evening along with stimulating conversation.

We create *quality of life* with our choices, with the actions we take, individually, at the community level, even globally. Choices that reflect our values each and every day; choices we may 'forget' we're making as life whizzes past.

Quality of life, one that matters anyway, requires us to **take the time** to stop, ask, reflect and answer the question, 'what's important?' in our lives at home and at work.

Of course, it's easy to get caught up in *not taking the time* to reflect—we all think we're so busy. And, we are—with activities too numerous to count filling up our days. Question is, are those activities keeping us spinning or taking us into the heart of our values?

Here are a few questions I've been asking myself as 2007 came to a close:

- What creative outlet will I not put off in 2008?
- What relationships do I long to deepen this next year?
- What do I want to contribute to the larger community?
- What activity at work will make the greatest impact to others if I step into it?
- At the end of this year, what will I look back and wish I had done in '08?

Just asking these questions required me to cease activity, to be still, to listen to my heart.

My call to you--this very moment in 2008--is to stop a minute, breathe, and relax your shoulders. Take another breath. Ask yourself, "What's important? in my life and work this year? What matters most?"

Observe what happens inside of you when you stop to ask—and listen. Notice your thoughts, your feelings, your body sensations. What comes up? Stay with them, even if uncomfortable. This simple process of asking the question, reflecting on it, is a powerful eye-opener.

As you spend time clarifying 'what's important?' you might find yourself itching to create a few focused, creative goals to move into your *quality of life*. Or, perhaps a word will leap up that captures the 'what's important' answer just right. Or, maybe you'll be emboldened, naming '2008 The Year of XXX.'

Then again, you don't have to change anything; just ask, then listen. And really, that's what mindfulness is all about—seeing what's here and now, gaining perspective, being open. Once we recognize what matters most, we can spend less time stressing about keeping up or about how fast time is speeding by, and more time *deciding how you're going to live now*, cultivating *your quality of life*.