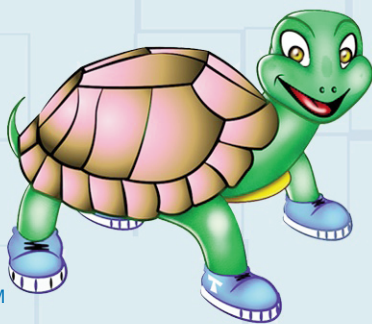


Tips for Tortoises

Getting Ahead
at Your Own Pace



Sharon Good

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Sharon Good

Good Life Coaching

sharon@goodlifecoaching.com

<http://www.goodlifecoaching.com>

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“Little by little, one travels far.”

~ J.R.R. Tolkien

First of All, What's a “Tortoise”?

I define a Tortoise as someone who may be challenged energetically or timewise, but has lofty goals and ambitions. You may be facing a physical or personal challenge that limits you. You may be in the midst of raising a family or going to school while holding down a job. Or you may simply be a slow-moving, “energy-challenged” person. But you still dream and have ambitious visions of what you want to accomplish with your life.

Remember the tale of the tortoise and the hare? We live in a world full of “hares” — people who are constantly busy working, playing, accomplishing. At least, they’re the ones we mostly hear about. The “tortoise,” on the other hand, plods along slowly and steadily and doesn’t seem to be going anywhere fast. But remember — it was the tortoise who won the race! By putting one foot in front of the other, continually and consistently, you can accomplish more than you might imagine.

Our world encourages ambition and accomplishment. As Tortoises, we may have all the ambition in the world, but our circumstances or physical makeup just don’t let us push ourselves the way some of our comrades do. When we try to put in an eighteen-hour day, we end up sick or depleted. We may accomplish a lot in one day and then lose several days recovering. Not very efficient.

Certainly, there are high-energy people who love to keep busy and enjoy the fruits of their labors, but just as many drive themselves, but hate what they're doing or don't enjoy the rewards, maybe even feel burdened by all their possessions and obligations. But, as they say, the grass is always greener. So, let's brighten up the grass on our side of the lawn!

As Tortoises, we need to frame our lives and make choices that take into account what we are capable of doing within our limitations, but also feed our need to accomplish. This book offers a few tips to help you do that.

1. Lower your sights.

While I would never tell anyone to give up their dreams, I do recommend reevaluating what you really want. Are you trying to do too much? Are you trying to live up to unreasonable expectations, yours or someone else's?

You may have been brainwashed since birth that you should take the best-paying job you can find (whether you like it or not) with the sole aim of being a millionaire and retiring by 35. But what then? What do you *really* want? Why not, instead, find work you love and wouldn't mind doing until you were 80, rather than suffering until you can retire? Or give up the overtime and find ways to simplify your life and cut back on expenses, so you have time to do the things that feed your soul now.

If you love your goals and dreams, but simply don't feel you have the energy or inclination to achieve them, find ways to bring them down to a level you feel comfortable with, that's doable for you. What is it about your dreams that's important to you? Is there a way you can modify your dream so that you can get the satisfaction without pushing yourself harder or faster than you want to go?

Change your time frame. You may be able to accomplish your goal easily if you double the amount of time you give yourself.

Doing less of what you want may work better and satisfy you more than trying to do it full-force, failing at it and giving it up entirely. Say your ideal is getting to the gym 5 times a week, but you end up running yourself ragged trying to fit it in. Instead, go 3 times a week and find other ways to do more exercise that work better with your schedule. Go rollerblading or play tennis with the kids. Take the dog for a nice, long walk. Peddle the exercise bike while catching up on your reading.

How about teaming up with someone who has similar goals? Having a partner not only cuts the workload in half, it gives you a companion to share the joys and challenges along the way.

2. Let some things go.

The sad fact is that we have just so many hours in the week. You may work, spend time with your spouse, kids, friends, take classes, volunteer, go to meetings, clean the house, do the laundry . . . whew! Something's gotta give. And since it's unlikely the days will get longer, you need to give up some of those activities or do them less frequently.

Try taking an activity hiatus. For a period of, say, two weeks, don't schedule any activities outside of work. Use the time to think about what's really important to you. See which activities you miss and which you don't. Make some choices, and work them back in gradually.

Learn to say "no." Your friends and family may be annoyed with you, but there are times when you just have to be selfish. Prepare yourself to take the flak (or resist their pressure), then do what you need to do to take care of yourself.

Find creative ways to multitask, such as doing the laundry together with your spouse while you discuss your day, or taking a class you enjoy with a friend you want to spend time with.

One warning: Don't give up sleep to fit everything in. That may work for awhile, but it will backfire on you in the long run if you get sick or have an accident because you weren't alert.

3. Prioritize.

In order to let some things go, you need to know what's important to you.

First, look at why you're doing each activity. Is it something you have to do or choose to do? Are you doing it because you want to or because someone thinks you should? Do you think you need to do it to get ahead? Is that really true? Which activities would you happily let go?

Determine what's really important to you, what your values are, and make choices based on those.

Look at timing: You don't have to do everything at once. See what needs to be done currently, and put the other activities or goals on the back burner. Plan which ones you'll do next season, next year, in 2 years, etc.

Try this exercise: List all the activities you're doing. Take the first 2. If you could only do one of them to the complete exclusion of the other, which one would you choose? If necessary, flip their order in the list. Now, move down the list and compare the second and third items, the third and fourth, etc. If any item moves up on the list, compare it with the one above it, and so forth, until the activities are listed in the order of your preference. Use this list to make some choices about what to eliminate or put on the back burner.

4. Define success for yourself.

In this age of media, we're constantly bombarded with definitions of what it means to be successful, popular and sexy. It becomes really easy to buy into them. Don't.

When you take your activity hiatus (see #2), take time to think about what's really important to you. What do you want your life to be about? What are your values? What do you need to change to live in line with them?

Whose idea of success have you been living? Is it yours or that of your parents or teachers, your society or profession? What are you sacrificing to live their vision? What would you change?

Go through each area of your life—friends, relationships, work, home, community, etc.—and see how you would want it to be if you could have it any way you want and didn't have anyone else to consider. If you have a spouse or significant other, do the exercise separately and then together.

When you do find yourself buying into media (commercials, ads, articles, shows) that tell you what it means to be successful, question them. Is that really true? Is it true for you? Will it make you happy?

5. Break your goals into baby steps.

A lot of projects seem daunting when you're busy or don't have a lot of energy. By breaking them down into small, doable steps, you make them more achievable.

Either start where you are and take the next step and the next, or start from your end goal and work backwards to define the steps you'll need to take to get there. Break each step into tasks. Put your steps and tasks into a checklist.

Taking small steps will give you a sense of accomplishment, as you check off each item on your list. Even if you're persistent and have a lot of patience, every once in awhile, you need to feel you've completed something to motivate you to continue.

6. Start your day from a calm place.

For a Tortoise, a long to-do list can be daunting. Just looking at it can put us into a state of frenzy. But worry, tension and a racing mind can eat up our time and energy, and we Tortoises can't afford that.

Begin the day in a peaceful way. If you're so inclined, meditate, pray or read inspirational material before you go to work. Save the newspaper or to-do list till after.

Scan your body to see what you're feeling, both physically and emotionally. Notice where your body feels constricted or painful. Breathe into it and release. Enjoy the positive feelings and release the debilitating ones with the breath.

A note on feelings: Take the time to tune in *specifically* to what you're feeling. Sometimes, a positive and negative feeling will have a similar "vibration." Fear and excitement, for example, feel very much the same, and you may find yourself caught up in fear when you're actually excited.

Plan your schedule for the day first thing in the morning, or better yet, the previous evening, so you can move through the day in a calm, focused way (see #8).

7. Pace yourself.

There's just so much you can do in a day. For some people, that's a lot; for others, not so much. You gotta do what *you* can do. Once you've cut out the extraneous activities (see #2), work at a pace that's comfortable for you.

Have reasonable expectations for what you can accomplish in a day. Tasks have a way of expanding when you least want them to. Plan more time than you think you'll need. And plan for those days when the phone never stops ringing and nothing seems to get done.

Don't push yourself to keep up with others (see #10). Do as much as you can do to the best of your ability. They don't call us "Tortoises" for nothing — when we keep moving forward at a steady pace, we can accomplish a lot!

And remember, quality counts, not just quantity. Take the time to do the job well and in a way that's satisfying to you.

8. Plan your day.

Planning is important for everyone, but especially for Tortoises. Because of our limitations, our time is precious. Having a schedule to follow will help you stay calm and focused and get more done.

When you plan ahead, you don't have to waste time being anxious and overwhelmed about what you should be doing. Worry, anxiety and overwhelm are huge energy drains, and that energy can be better spent moving your goals forward.

Get a day planner, either paper or electronic, whichever suits you best. Use it consistently. Put all your work and personal appointments in your planner, and also block out time for the activities that nourish you.

Set aside time daily or weekly — each evening or on Sunday — to plan what you'll do over the next day or week. You can be flexible with it if appointments change or emergencies occur, but if you plan, you'll accomplish more with less stress.

9. Plan long-term.

Many of us fall into the trap of thinking that if we can't accomplish something right away, we can't accomplish it at all. Many great ideas take time to bring to fruition. As a Tortoise, you need to consider your own capabilities and time frame and plan accordingly.

Take the steps you defined in [tip #5](#) and put them on a timeline. You can do this on a large sheet of paper or using an Excel spreadsheet. Have a separate line for each goal or area of your life. That way, you can see how they all mesh. For example, if you're planning a family, you can see how that fits with your career goals, financial goals, buying a home and other personal goals.

Remember, too, that you'll learn along the way and develop strengths, skills and insights that you don't have when you start. So, set goals bigger than what you think you can do now, and then pace yourself according to your own time and energy parameters.

10. Don't compare.

Comparing yourself to others is a trap that can imprison you in a web of self-doubt and self-denigration. Don't go there! Each person is unique, with their own path and timing.

Instead, go for your “personal best.” Set a standard of excellence, striving to surpass your own previous accomplishments.

Accept and embrace who you are. Evaluate your successes according to your own values (see #4). Acknowledge and celebrate even your smallest successes (see #13).

When you hear other people speaking of accomplishments that seem far beyond your own, take a deep breath and let it go. Look instead at your own progress and acknowledge how far you've come.

Have a bulletin board (or use the front of your refrigerator) to post items that remind you of your wins. Include appreciative notes from clients and friends, awards or acknowledgments you've received, inspirational quotes and affirmations. My bulletin board includes a picture of myself with the caption, “Most Likely to Succeed.”

11. Be patient and persistent.

As a Tortoise, you may not be able to accomplish things as quickly as your friends. Patience helps you stick to your goals, taking a step at a time, until you complete them—whenever that may be. And persistence will get you there.

Be careful, also, not to berate or belittle yourself for being slow. Each person has his or her own pace, and one is not better than another. Some writers, for example, easily crank out a dozen books a year. Ayn Rand, on the other hand, took 12 years to write *Atlas Shrugged*, which became a classic. What if she gave up after the first year, thinking she'd never get it done?

By setting small goals for yourself (see #5), you can feel a sense of accomplishment along the way to your bigger goals. By setting long-term goals (see #9) and taking it at a comfortable pace (see #7), you can enjoy the steps that get you there as much as the final result.

12. Take care of yourself.

As a Tortoise, it's easy to push yourself beyond your capacity. Driving yourself mercilessly may get you where you want to go, but at what price?

You need to take care of yourself, perhaps more than other people might. That's okay.

Make sure you get enough sleep and leisure time. Plan a life that makes you want to get up in the morning, not dread it.

Plan breaks during the day, maybe even take a short nap.

If you do a lot of mental work, plan activities that feed your mind and allow it to rest.

Get the right kind and amount of exercise *for you*.

Choose foods that enhance your energy, rather than making you sluggish. Plan the number and times of meals to suit your body's needs.

Don't feel guilty if you need more down time than others. By honoring your own needs, you'll accomplish more, more pleurably and without sacrificing your health and well-being.

13. Enjoy the process, and acknowledge your successes.

Once you've defined what success means to you (see #4), notice when you've achieved it. It doesn't have to be just the big, notable successes. Acknowledge your small successes and baby steps, too (see #5).

Because we may not accomplish as much as our faster, more energetic friends, we need to appreciate every small success and enjoy the journey, not just the destination. We Tortoises can appreciate the scenery along the way, and not just race for the finish line.

Define your successes on your own terms (see #4). For you, there may be days when just getting out of bed is a success. Acknowledge it!

Plan a reward or celebration as you accomplish each step toward a major goal. That will inspire you to keep going to the end, no matter how long it takes.

14. Be okay with who you are.

Life is not a competition. Each of us comes into the world with a unique set of gifts and talents and how we will use them. By getting in touch with your values and your strengths, you can find ways to express your gifts and talents that work for you.

Find ways to affirm and accept yourself (see #10). Ask your friends what they admire and appreciate about you.

At the end of each day, make note of at least one thing you accomplished. It can be a big win, like how productive you were, getting acknowledged for your work or achieving a major milestone, to simply starting the first step of a project or making someone smile.


By implementing some of the tips in this booklet, you'll increase your personal success rate, and thereby your self-esteem and self-confidence.


While you may not be able to keep up with some of the people in your life, you can be the best you can be, and that's good enough!





Resources


Click on the  to access this resource online.


-  *Balancing Act: Create an Incredibly Healthy Life That Fulfills Your Dreams (audiocassette)*
... David Essel, Randy Kepple, Kristen Schuerlein

-  *Doing Less and Having More: Five Easy Steps for Discovering What You Really Want—And Getting It*
... Marcia Wieder

-  *The Highly Sensitive Person: How to Thrive When the World Overwhelms You*
... Elaine N. Aron, PhD

-  The Highly Sensitive Person website

-  *Life Was Never Meant to Be a Struggle*
... Stuart Wilde

-  *Simplify Your Life: 100 Ways to Slow Down and Enjoy the Things That Really Matter*
... Elaine St. James

- 👉 Simplify Your Life booklet, workbook and audiotape
... Linda Manassee Buell

- 👉 *Slowing Down to the Speed of Life: How to Create a
More Peaceful, Simpler Life from the Inside Out*
... Richard Carlson

- 👉 *Take Time for Your Life*
... Cheryl Richardson

- 👉 Cheryl Richardson's website

About the Author

Sharon Good is a Life, Career and Creativity Coach, a writer/editor and a self-proclaimed Tortoise. Through her company, Good Life Coaching, she coaches individuals and groups. She has led workshops and teleclasses for the Learning Annex, Friends of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, the International Coach Federation/New York City chapter, the Network of Enterprising Women (a chapter of NAFE), Axxess Business Centers, the International Facility Management Association, Manhattan Plaza Social Services, the Virtual Reality Self-Help Center, WriteDirections.com and Teleclass.com; and she trains and mentors coaches for the Life Purpose Institute and New York University School of Continuing and Professional Studies.



As a Career Coach, Sharon holds a certificate in Adult Career Planning and Development from New York University and is certified by the Life Purpose Institute to administer the Life Purpose Process©. She also draws on her experience in theatre, publishing, business and personal development to coach her clients toward creative and fulfilling lives and careers.

Sharon is the author of *Tips for Tortoises: Getting Ahead at Your Own Pace*, *Managing With a Heart: 222 Ways to Make Your Employees Feel Appreciated* and *Alpha, Beta & Gamma: A Small Story*, and a contributing author to *By Actors, For Actors* and *My First Book Sale*. Her e-newsletter, *Living the Creative Life*, helps readers live their lives more creatively.

To learn more about Being a Tortoise, visit www.beingatortoise.com.

To learn more about Sharon and her coaching services, visit her website at www.goodlifecoaching.com.

