

USE IT OR LOSE IT

By Dr. Lin Stepp

A popular motto associated with adulthood – and especially with the middle years of life and beyond – is USE IT OR LOSE IT. In our early years of life - the childhood and teenage years – there are usually parents, teachers, and others in authority positions above us that see to it that we do the things we’re supposed to do. “Clean up your room” ... “Pick up that trash; don’t litter” ... “Do your homework” ... Be nice” ... “Don’t eat those sweets before dinner.” Nag, nag, nag – we often parroted, out of earshot, when we were younger. Someone was always telling us what to do or how to do it. We looked forward to the future day when we could do what we wanted to do, run our own lives, plan our own days, and make our own decisions.

So, what happened? Well, we basically got our wish. We grew up - and our days, our hours, and our time became our own at last. As adults we have more control over our individual lives than at any other stage of the lifespan. Because of that fact a famous psychologist who studied life span development, named Erik Erikson, determined that the biggest challenge for the mid years of life is what he termed: Generativity versus Stagnation. A person who is generative is involved in active growth; one who is stagnant is not. Think about this in terms of a pond. A generative pond has an active water source moving through it and stirring it. The water is clear, fresh, oxygenated. It’s teeming with life and vitality – dynamic, interesting, and beautiful. A pond that has grown stagnant is the opposite. No movement stirs it. It has become clogged, inactive, and the life within it has started to become threatened. It’s no longer admirable or lovely.

In the mid years – we become solely responsible for how Generative or Stagnant our lives are. We actually got our earlier childhood wish. But it is a wish fraught with responsibility. For if we don’t remain vibrant and active in any critical area of our lives – those areas quickly decline and slip into atrophy. Countless articles caution us about “Using It or Losing It” in terms of caring for our health, mentality, cognitive skills, emotional growth, gifts and talents. Even this morning’s sermon in our church addressed the parable of the talents in Matthew – and the admonition to use and multiply them.

Having the ability to write well is a gift and a talent. It is your responsibility now as an adult to use that writing gift wisely and well. Every month that passes is either one in which you use your inherent gift or one in which you don’t. Despite the hectic pace of life – that gift to write is your personal responsibility. Frankly, we all really did get our wish to be in charge of our own lives and gifts. So ... we can either make time in our lives to nourish our writing gift, to be generative and to help that gift to grow and flourish, or we can neglect that gift, allowing it to grow stale and stagnant from disuse.

Here are some facts to think about:

1. We all have the same 24 hours in a day.

“Time is precious. It is given each day in equal measure to us all. What we do with that time determines what we achieve in our lives.” – John-Roger McWilliams

2. Most successful writers once carried – or still carry – other jobs and responsibilities around their writing schedule.

“Everything comes to him who hustles while he waits.” – Thomas Edison

3. A gift or muscle that is exercised regularly gets stronger and better.

“Success seems to be connected to action. Successful people keep moving. They make mistakes but they don’t quit.” – Conrad Hilton

4. Regular writing (and reading) creates continually better writing.

“If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot.” – Stephen King

5. An average double-space manuscript page contains approximately 250 words; if you wrote one page a day (that’s only seven pages a week), you would have a 91,250 word novel completed by next year.

“Block out time to write every day no matter how discouraged you get.” – Nora Roberts

6. If you don’t begin to use your gift of writing regularly, your gift will stagnate and atrophy.

“The talent you have been given by God cannot be set aside ... if you do not nurture your ability, it will steadily decay until it is useless.” – John Maxwell

7. As you discipline yourself and your time to see that your productivity increases, you will find that your excuses and justifications for neglecting your writing proportionately decrease.

“If you wait for all the lights to turn green, you will never leave your driveway.” – Anon

8. You may be buying your own excuses for why you call yourself a writer and don’t produce, but no one else does.

“Argue for your limitations and, sure enough, they’re yours.” - R. Bach

9. Challenge yourself to quit hypocritically calling yourself a writer – and attending groups and conferences intended for writers – unless you seriously and conscientiously write and produce.

“To do the work you are capable of doing is the mark of maturity.” – Betty Friedan

10. No one admires a stagnant pond. If you want admiration and respect for your writing, stir up your pond and your life. Get active and generative. Start using your talents. You have much to gain if you do. And much to share with others.

“We are more likely to rust from disuse than to wear our from overuse. Use It or Lose It is sound advice.” – David Myers

Remember ... you always wished when you were a child that you could run your own life. Do your own thing. So, now you can! A quote by the great philosopher Henri Amiel says: “Work while you have the light. You are responsible for the talent that has been entrusted to you.” Use your gift of writing while you can. Purpose to stir up the creative waters of your life this year. Become generative instead of stagnant. Use your writing gifts wisely and well. “Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did.” – Mark Twain