

Caregiver's Corner Column (July 2014)

Fulfilling Your "Bucket List"

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What is a "Bucket List"?

A bucket list is the list of the things you want to do or accomplish before you "kick the bucket". The phrase is based on a 2007 film by the same name that featured two terminally ill men who fulfill a list of things they wanted to do before they died. The idea is quite similar to goal setting, but includes examining your personal sense of purpose in life. It encompasses more of a sense of urgency to make sure you don't miss doing the things that matter to you most.

As caregivers it is ingrained in us to be ever cognizant of the needs of others. We consistently put aside our own needs to do the things required of us. Many caregivers never even allow themselves to think about what they would like to do, let alone dream of what they would love to do the most. For some who have already identified their wishes, their "bucket list" has become a source of guilt or sadness for the things they have left undone or feel they will never be able to do.

Why should we have a "Bucket List"?

Living our life based on knowing, prioritizing, and doing what is most important to us helps maximize our existence. It can cause us to feel like we are really living our life to its fullest. We do not, maybe should not, have to wait until we are in the process of actually dying to begin to really live. The time to make and live our goals -- to fulfill our bucket list -- is now.

How do I make a "Bucket List"?

Keep a little notebook to carry with you to write down the things you think of that you would like to do. Take time to dream. Think big or small. It may help to think by categories or topics, such as: Travel, Entertainment, Love, Family, Religious, Self-Improvement, Friends, etc. The thing to keep in mind is that doing them should help you feel good and bring joy. They need to be things you want to do. If you have difficulty with coming up with ideas you can ask others who know you well to offer some suggestions.

What do I do once I have my "Bucket List"?

Some people find it helpful to just get started. They pick some of the more simple items to get them going on a successful track. It is important to insert time to do them in your schedule during the week or month, just like an appointment. Then when the time comes, stay true to your goal and do not miss your "appointment". Some suggest that they like to take their list and prioritize by thinking about how it might feel to be at the end of their life without having done that particular thing. If it feels heart wrenching, it becomes a top priority. They like to start out

with accomplishing their top priorities. Some of these goals might take several smaller steps to achieve them so we need to schedule in the necessary steps it takes to move forward toward them. No matter how you decide to proceed, just get started and make sure it does not feel like a burden. As a busy caregiver you do not need another list of “things you should or must do.” When you are successful in accomplishing your bucket list items it will feel good and may inspire you to help those you care for to make and fulfill their own “bucket list”.

Caregiver’s Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American’s Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.CaregiverResource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.

Suggestions for further reading: First Things First by Stephen Covey, A Short Guide to a Happy Life by Anna Quindlen, Chasing Daylight by Eugene O’Kelly, The Five Wishes by Gay Hendricks and God’s Bucket List by Teresa Tomeo