

30 True Things You Need to Know Now

It is never too late to bring about lasting change for your life. No matter your present circumstances, no matter what has happened in your past; no matter your age, gender, or socioeconomic status, you are the creator of the life you want to live.

Dr. Gordon Livingston, author of **Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart**, a Vietnam War veteran and practicing psychiatrist has experienced, first hand, the tragedies life can bring upon us. He has also found the necessity to keep joy and comfort alive regardless of the pain endured.

After learning more about Dr. Livingston's life and the circumstances regarding how he lost his two sons within a thirteen month

period, I have been moved by his commitment to preserve hope in a world capable of inflicting such great tragedy. His ability and strength to move forward in spite of the obstacles is inspirational.

Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart provides 30 essential truths to remind us that while we can't escape who we are or what has happened to us; we are responsible for who we would like to be and where we want to go. I see incredible value in learning and living these truths. Here is how each truth touches my heart; I hope you find hope and value in these, too:

1. If the map doesn't agree with the ground, the map is wrong.

We are given mental maps as children. Our parents and other adults tell us what is right and what is wrong – sometimes they don't always get it, well, right. Now as adults, when we find the maps we have relied on for so long can get us lost, we need to recalibrate and create more reliable guides based on what we now know to be true and where we want to go.

2. We are what we do.

We are not what we think, or what we feel, or what we say, we are what we do. Actions do indeed speak louder than words. If you are unhappy with a particular part of your life, take a strong look at what you are doing to be happier.



3. It is difficult to remove by logic an idea not placed there by logic in the first place.

By nature, we are emotional creatures. Often we live and react based on feelings, not logic. Feelings are wonderful, but when we become tied to a particular thought or belief we tend to ignore the fact that change might be necessary. If a negative behavior is driven by an emotion, then we must find a way to still satisfy the emotional need while putting an end to the destructive behavior.

4. The statute of limitations has expired on most of our childhood traumas.

For some, childhood was pleasant, almost idyllic. But for others, when there has been serious physical, sexual or emotional abuse it is important to recognize this and process this with a trained professional. No matter your past, change is the essence of life. In order to move forward in life we need to learn to live in the present.

5. Any relationship is under the control of the person who cares the least.

When relationships end it is typically because of unmet expectations or one person is not feeling love or cherished by the other. For relationships to grow and last both members have to be equal with the love they give; and both should do it, not because they think they have to do it, but because they want to do it.

6. Feelings follow behavior.

No matter how hard we try, we don't control what we think or what we feel. But, we do know which actions bring us happiness, pleasure and confidence. So, we do the actions that make us feel good. It is the action, the behavior that comes first. Take the next few days to notice how you feel after doing a particular behavior. If you like the feeling, do more of it. If not, change the behavior.

7. Be bold, and mighty forces will come to your aid.

When we step out and claim what we want from the world a wonderful thing happens – the Universe responds.

8. The perfect is the enemy of the good.

While it's important to have control over our lives, it can be counterproductive to attempt to control our lives. The energy spent trying to be perfect can keep us from enjoying and appreciating all the good things that exist right before us.

9. Life's two most important questions are "Why?" and "Why not?"

The trick is knowing which one to ask. Understanding why we do certain things is the first step to change. Until we understand what motivates us, what we get from doing a particular behavior, there

is no momentum to begin the change process. Likewise, by asking “Why not?” we begin assessing the risk versus reward aspect which can lead to bringing about productive change in our lives.

10. Our greatest strengths are our greatest weaknesses.

One of my biggest strengths as a person is I'm caring, sensitive and emotional – it is also my greatest weakness. While this strength helps me to build and maintain healthy relationships, it can also make me too reactive and less effective when dealing with conflict. This can create a confusing paradox for me from time-to-time, but having the awareness of the thin line between the two better prepares me to either use my strength or be mindful of my weakness.

11. The most secure prisons are those we construct for ourselves.

What is your fear of change costing you? Too often what keeps us stuck is the belief we can't move forward. Our head-trash tells us we are not worthy to have our heart's desire. This fear; this incarceration, prevents us from breaking free and having the life we desire. Remember this: Before you can do anything, you must be able to imagine it. Imagining who and what you want to be, and then taking action, is the key to begin freeing yourself of what is holding you back.

12. The problems of the elderly are frequently serious but seldom interesting.

The thought of our own mortality and demise can be a frightening one. Therefore, our attitude towards the aging can be callous because they are unwanted reminders of what's ahead for us. However, the elderly can hold great value and wisdom for us. We must remember to show respect and gratitude for those near the end so the cycle can be repeated when it is our turn.

13. Happiness is the ultimate risk.

No matter how painful, sometimes what we know is more comfortable than what we don't know, even if we are depressed and miserable. Our misery can feel safe because it has been a part of us for so long. To seek happiness, to do things to break free of the depression, is a risk because we don't know what it looks like or feels like to be happy. The antidote for this is hope and faith.

14. True love is the apple of Eden.

“When I look back, the Garden is a dream to me. It was beautiful, surpassingly beautiful, enchantingly beautiful; and now it is lost, and I shall never see it any more. The Garden is lost, but I have found him and am content. - from Mark Twain in Eve's Diary. True love is fair compensation for the obstacles and burdens of being human.

15. Only bad things happen quickly.

When we think about the things that can change our lives in an instant we usually think of the negative ones first: accidents, our employer going out of business, or the news of a loved one becoming seriously ill. There is plenty of room; however, for good things to happen too, we just have

to be more patient. Losing weight, improving a relationship, or creating a rewarding career all take effort, but the life-long satisfaction these bring can help to fill our souls when they are emptied-out by the bad.

16. Not all who wander are lost.

When we were children we were told what to do. In our jobs, we are assigned tasks and projects. Our culture even has expectations of what we should do. It's OK to step outside of the lines in order to follow what your inner wisdom is suggesting you do with your life. It's not that you are lost when you wander, it's just the opposite: You know what you want and you are only attempting to find the best path to your destination.

17. Unrequited love is painful but not romantic.

Love is meant to be shared. When you give your heart to someone who is uninterested, it will only result in loneliness and disappointment. Instead find someone who will share love with you. When you do, you will feel the real power of love.

18. There is nothing more pointless, or common, than doing the same things and expecting different results.

This truth also provides a very good definition for insanity. When things are not working in your life, try different things. The rub comes when we become so comfortable with the familiar we refuse to try something new. To grow we must also embrace change. The question then becomes what level of fear you are willing to walk through in order to change, grow and create the life you want.

19. We flee from the truth in vain.

Somewhere along the way there are truths about ourselves we never allow to see the light of day. Shame, guilt or embarrassment keeps these truths hidden and locked away. But remember, we cannot change or heal what we do not acknowledge.

20. It's a poor idea to lie to oneself.

We may say the words, the words of a lie, but inside we know better; we know the truth. The most damaging lie we can tell ourselves involves making a promise. While good intentions are important, living the truth has far greater value in our life. Do what you say you are going to do, not just to improve the quality of your life, but to be able to live your life with confidence and self-respect.

21. We are all prone to the myth of the perfect stranger.

Unless you are being victimized by your partner, chances are very good there are plenty of reasons to love your partner or spouse. It takes maturity, patience and trust to look across the fence and know your grass is greener.

22. Love is never lost, not even in death.

To lose what means the most to us is the ultimate test of helplessness and survival. I have been very fortunate to not yet experience the death of a close relative. That day, however, will come. When it does, my hope is I can transfer all of the love I have for that person to others still with me. In that way, the love for the person lost will always be alive.

23. Nobody likes to be told what to do.

As a parent it's easy for me to sometimes tell one of my children what to do instead of just listen and offer advice, if requested. My need to control can trump their need to be heard and grow on their own. When this happens, communication is strained and trust can be eroded. Rather than telling my children what to do, my job as a parent is to give them hope that they can be successful in a very uncertain world. This can be achieved by limiting my lectures and by giving them the time and space to "figure it out," while I'm standing by with a safety net.

24. The major advantage of illness is that it provides relief from responsibility.

In an ironic twist, the days we feel under the weather can be some of the healthiest for us. We push, we rush and we often don't take time to take care of ourselves. But when we are feeling ill, we are forced to slow down, perhaps call in sick at work, and take it easy.

25. We are afraid of the wrong things.

For the first 18 years of my marriage I feared the wrong things. I feared not earning enough money or not advancing quickly enough in my career. I should have feared losing my wife and family instead, because I almost did. Now, I try to live in the present moment and appreciate all I have. When I do this, I stay centered with hope and not distracted by fear.

26. Parents have a limited ability to shape children's behavior, except for the worse.

My wife and I often hope our greatest legacy to our children is to be able to break the cycle of pain and doubt we experienced as children. Our hope is our children will have the self-love and confidence needed to live a rich and full life. With that said, we are far from being perfect parents. But our focus is to help them be as happy as possible in a world that takes and demands so much of them.

27. The only real paradises are those we have lost.

Too often we may view the past with a special fondness, perhaps reverence, too. But the past for most of us may be no different than the present, it just feels that way. To be honest, we may not always see the past for what it actually was. This view can be dangerous and it can keep us from living fully in the present, in the here and now.

28. Of all the forms of courage, the ability to laugh is the most profoundly therapeutic.

Yes, things can go wrong in life. Yes, there are issues and problems to solve. But we have a choice. We can choose to become pessimistic and not see the value in what we experience, or we can choose to laugh as an admission to the fact we are not perfect and life can get the best of us at times. What a relief to know that no matter how bad things may look, a smile or a rift of laughter can begin to make the circumstances feel better.

29. Mental health requires freedom of choice.

No matter how bleak or desperate a situation may appear to look, we always have choices. Even with the absence of answers or direction, we do have the power to choose what our next action is. We can choose to ask for help; we can choose to pray; we can choose to get up in the morning, get dressed and forge ahead. The ability to choose gives us power. We can use that power to begin removing the obstacles that confront us.

30. Forgiveness is a form of letting go, but they are not the same thing.

To be clear, the purpose of forgiveness is not to let the person who harmed you off the hook, the purpose of forgiveness is to end the grief it has cost you. Don't just let go, forgive and truly surrender the feelings of anger and pain. This may seem difficult, almost impossible, until you attempt to do it.

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