

# Ten Year Plans

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I was born in 1947. Harry Truman was President, houses cost about \$6000, gasoline was \$.15 a gallon, Olivia de Havilland and Frederic March were big at the box office, and the Billboard #1 song was Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land."

I was in high school when I first heard "Never trust anyone over thirty," but it has followed me around since, reminding me that for the last thirty years, I can't even trust myself.

In 1987, forty came around, Ronald Reagan was President, houses cost \$92,000, gasoline was \$.89 a gallon, and top movie stars were Paul Newman and Meryl Streep and the #1 Hit Song was "Open Your Heart," by Madonna.

40 seemed fundamentally different. I worked at Intel. I don't know if it is any more youth obsessed than anywhere else, but birthday parties for those 40 and over, took on a macabre significance. Cubicles were decorated with black balloons imprinted with "Over the Hill." Instead of singing Happy Birthday, people sang the "rest in peace" song.

Nuh nuh            nuh nuh.

Celebrators snarled and growled when their friends would wish them happy birthday.

Even though it was portrayed as playful, and tongue in cheek, aging took on a significance that revealed that there were some serious underlying issues. The jokes of the day, both said aloud and written on greeting cards, were ones we are probably all familiar with and I have no intention to use this forum to perpetuate.

I didn't want to become that person who felt sorry for themselves for what seemed to me, like just being alive. Several months before my 40<sup>th</sup> Birthday, I took an idea that is very similar to the Atkinson Church process of appreciative inquiry, and began writing a ten year plan. Barbara Stoker an expert in appreciative inquiry puts it this way "By asking positive questions, we generate new images of the future. These powerful images of ourselves, our organizations, and the world allow us to create the future we desire."

I looked at where I was with my life: Great wife, new baby, good job, an nine-year-old and teen-age family members struggling with their own sense of who they are. I began figuring out what my questions were. We did a major process of values clarification, so I didn't buy into Madonna's values, what did I buy into.

The director of religious education, my wife Annie Scott has a values clarification exercise that is either the one I used or is very similar.

What comes across looking at my ten year plan at age 40 is this: My values were clearly education, family was vital, health and clearly my job were important to me and all of those were captured in my ten year plan.

But here's the deal, according to Steven Covey's **7 Habits of Highly Effective People** people who do this kind of planning are more effective than those who don't.

I tell you this because with the power of hindsight, I confess that I did not fully achieve a single one of my goals.

So Annie and our kids Sean, Laura, Sarah and Leigh threw a family birthday party.

For you fashionistas:

I wore cargo shorts—those kinds with the multiple pockets.

Tennis shoes with no socks.

A blue and grey muscle shirt.

A clip-on earring.

And I actually had hair then which I had sprayed bright blue just for the occasion.

For you foodies, the salivating followers of the Food Network.

My birthday cake that year was Carrot Cake with Sour Cream Frosting.

While the family imbibed I read the few simple bullets that were my ten year plan.

I said:

- I would have my PhD by age 50. Nope still don't have it.
- I'd be down to 155 pounds the following year and 150 pounds by the time I hit 50 —not even close
- Our family would have dinner together, every night.
- I would have new hobbies,
- Be on a low cholesterol diet,
- And do frequent aerobic exercise.

But I set the bar for myself and I believe that in the next ten years I pushed farther toward that goal than I would have otherwise.

Even better, I didn't go through the morose period of depression that my friends did upon reaching the milestone.

I learned during this that I couldn't totally master my future, but that by setting a standard I could begin to move in the directions that I wanted to go.

I made one prediction that was more of a promise. By the time, I reach 50, I told my children, there was one significant cosmetic change I would make, and it didn't have anything to do with my hair.

Let's fast forward to 1997, Bill Clinton was President, houses cost \$124,000, a gallon of gas was \$1.22, The big stars on the red carpet that year were Geoffrey Rush and Meryl Streep and the number 1 hit song the year I hit 50 was the Spice Girls with their song Wannabe.

**Yo, I'll tell you what I want, what I really really want**

My 40 year plan had been such a success that I had decided I would do it again when I hit 50. My family's world at 50 was very different. It had been a decade of changes. At 40 I worked in Hillsboro, but a few years later Intel moved us to Phoenix, Arizona.

We made some great friends in Phoenix, both of our kids that still lived with us, thrived at school. Annie became the Director of Religious Education at the First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Phoenix, and I continued to grow my career at Intel.

In 1995, I completed my second sabbatical at Intel, I had 12 weeks off and during that time I had realized that I had grown weary of fixing the same problems over and over again and Annie missed her extended family. So I left Intel after 16 years and we moved back to Oregon.

I felt like I had been at Intel my entire adult life and we weren't sure what all of this would mean—me leaving the mother ship, Annie exchanging a job that she loved for a fair amount of the anxiety of potential unemployment.

Much to our relief, I landed a job within a week. Unfortunately that job was in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We took that position because they told us that I could commute every week and I was crazy and naïve enough to not realize what that meant.

After a year of radical commuting, the company offered to move the family from Oregon to Pennsylvania and we set about moving during the summer of my 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday.

So we let the movers do the heavy lifting and Leigh, Sarah, Annie and myself mapped out a family cross country adventure. We packed up our dog Franklin, one cat Hunni and a five week kitten, Shadow into a mini-van that seemed huge when we rented it.

Our first stop: Baker City, Oregon where we stayed with my sister and saw a performance of The Trail Band.

I won't do a travelogue, but we saw relatives, Yellowstone National Park, an auto repair shop in Cody, Wyoming, the Black Hills, Mount Rushmore, Niagara Falls and we had the thrill of seeing our first Fireflies. All across the country we listened to "To Kill a Mockingbird," while we juggled our needs and the needs of this menagerie of pets.

Just a few days before my 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday, we arrived in Philadelphia where we had a corporate suite. That year, there were only four of us there for the reading of my 10 year plan.

For those of you who are writing fashion pieces for People Magazine or TMZ, I wore a Burger King Crown during this reading.

My ten year plan at 50, had some goals that carried over from my 40<sup>th</sup>, I still wanted to finish my PhD, and I wanted to get some writing published. I wanted to deepen my relationship with my family and be more actively involved in Unitarian Universalist

church life—but there was one failure that bothered me more than any. I had promised on my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday that by my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, I would have an ear pierced.

As the time approached, I became more and more cowardly. Not about the pain, but about its potential impact on my ability to sell myself in my profession. I was worried that it may prevent me from making a living. So I announced on my 50<sup>th</sup> that I was not going to get my ear pierced.

I learned on that day that I really could not read my family's minds. Although they teased me mercilessly, it seemed like much more of an issue to me than it did to Leigh, Sarah or even Annie.

In 2007, when I reached sixty, George W Bush was President, houses cost \$232,000, gas was \$2.51 a gallon. Forrest Whitaker and Meryl Streep were big stars and the #1 song was Bartender by T-Pain featuring an auto-tuned Akon.

Church member Jerry Spriggs and I invited everyone to a party for anyone who had a decade of anything to celebrate. I know that some of you were here. Elvis was also in the building but that's another story.

By this time, I had a blueprint for creating a successful ten year plan.

You don't have to take notes, I've put this sermon up on my website [ImaginationGardener.com](http://ImaginationGardener.com)

First, you can do it as a family, you don't have to do it by yourself. You can even figure out all sorts of ways to make it a fun family process.

Second, understand your values. Start with some sort of process to clarify your values.

Third, there is nothing magical about ten years, five year plans will work just as well. I picked ten years for myself because I, like many Americans, am a sucker for instant gratification. For me ten years provided a nice balance between tomorrow and the future. Something to shoot for even as I learn to live in the moment.

4) Put something in your plan that is about providing growth and sustenance to a charity or others. Monthly, I will work in a food kitchen, or I will volunteer at church once a week. Even if you are already doing this, it helps to put it in your plan. You will feel good when you do.

5) Have one or two concrete goals that can help motivate you throughout the period. For example, "I will take my partner to see the Taj Mahal," or "When I see my father, I will hug him whether he resists me or not."

6) Have a party. Doing a plan is a major investment of time and energy. Celebrate it. I had two parties, the one at the church for all of us and another where I invited my

extended family and a few friends to come to a reading of my 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary ten year plan.

I used these six points to create my 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary ten year plan. Here is the Cliff Notes or Sparks version of what I said at that party.

Write a couple of books and take some speaking offers.

Live a healthy life with lots of exercise, good diet.

By the time I am 70, I want to have recruited a three person end-of-life-committee to help me figure out the criteria for when to die. I mentioned this to a reporter and she said, “Ooh, can I be on that committee.”

When to give up driving. Phil has already said to his kids, take the car-keys whenever it looks like I’m no longer a safe driver. Resolving this issue was also on my ten year plan.

I tend to live in my head, which makes it hard for my family members. So I put a couple things in my ten year plan to help with that: I said I would accept all offers. When any family member asked me to do anything with them I would say yes. I also resolved to keep working on being present, aware.

I end today with these words from non-Unitarian Universalist Leonie Sandercock:

“Spirituality in planning is not about ideology or theology. These are aspects of religion that lie outside of planning practice. Spirituality as it applies to planning is a way of being in the world rather than a particular ideology. It shapes how we interact with others in a process of building relationships, building connections. It is, if you will, choosing to dance, choosing to be engaged fully in the world.” Well that sounds pretty spiritual to me. Amen and Blessed Be.