

# THE 10 PILLARS OF EMPOWERMENT

THERE ARE NO SECRETS TO EMPOWERMENT—  
only awareness and knowledge coupled with focus and concerted action.  
Those who empower themselves do so with the proven methods that anyone  
can incorporate into the lives; the very methods presented in this special section.

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# PERSONAL GROWTH

How many times have we told ourselves in complete earnestness, that we are going to make the concerted effort, starting now, to be a better person? How many times have we told ourselves that we were going to be more organized and productive, or that we were going to start working out, or that the new healthy diet starts now? How often do we find that our most fervent desires for self-improvement are followed by inaction, guilt, and giving up? Now is the time to break that cycle with a few easy-to-follow tips for turning your desire for personal growth and self-improvement into reality.

**UNDERSTAND HABITS**

Habits are choices that each of us deliberately make at some point and then stop thinking about yet continue doing with regularity. When conscious choices become habits they become automatic behaviors and are ingrained in our neurology. Habits emerge because the brain is constantly looking for ways to save effort. Our brains, in the name of efficiency, use any excuse to create habits out of things that we regularly do. The primary components of any habit are the cue or trigger that our brains use to go into automatic mode, the routine or behavioral loop, and the reward. The key to understanding the habits that you already have are to understand the automatic nature of habits, identify the cues and rewards; and hold firm to the degree possible until consciously chosen better routines become new and empowering habits of choice.

**LOVE YOURSELF AND BELIEVE THAT YOU CAN**

Habits cannot simply be eradicated, they must be replaced. In order to change our habits, we must believe that change is possible. You must first love yourself enough to believe that you deserve and can do better. When you love yourself, you start to see the habits and behaviors that are a detriment to your growth as a person and begin to act in your own best interests. Leave behind those negative

thoughts that say that you don't deserve more, that you cannot do any better. Embrace yourself with love and believe that you can affect positive change in your life...for you most certainly can.

**WILLPOWER + GRIT = A GREAT PREDICTOR OF SUCCESS**

Keystone habits, if modified, have the greatest overall positive impact on our lives. These habits, when changed, have the power to remake other negative patterns that we may follow. Research has shown that willpower is the single most important keystone habit for individual success. By strengthening your willpower into a habit, you will become more self-disciplined and increase your grit for weathering tough situations.

Grit is defined as the tendency to work strenuously toward challenges despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. It is a combination of persistence and passion for an objective.

The more willpower and grit that you have the more likely you are to succeed. Focus, meditation, and mantras, an accountability partner, or support group are often utilized to increase willpower and grit.



### HUMAN ENCOURAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Remember inertia is a powerful force. Studies show that new habits take at least 21 days of consistent repetitive effort to set, and even longer if that bad habit that you are trying to change happens to be an addiction. You are used to the way things are and even if you want to change, change is hard. Human support and group involvement is the best way to beat inertia and temptation. Tell someone, who will be invested in your successes, your plans for personal

improvement so that person can hold you responsible for meeting your goals, celebrate your successes, and help you learn from your failures. Report your progress to them regularly, daily if possible. The more people you share your goals with the more committed you will be to seeing them through.



### JOYOUSLY EMBRACE HARD WORK

You must consciously accept and mentally prepare for the hard work that comes with identifying the cues and rewards that drive your bad habits. You must also commit yourself to finding alternative patterns and behaviors that best model the change you wish to see. Old habits are hard to break and new habits are hard to form so when you do finally begin the process of forming new more productive habits remember that at first they are very fragile. Do all that you can to avoid backsliding into those old bad habits by identifying, and then eliminating or consciously controlling, the moments when you are most likely to give up on new habits and fall back into old ones. Take strides to eliminate temptations or enticements that might lead you astray.

### IT'S NOT FAILURE IT'S GROWTH

Giving into temptations is inevitable. Plan for it, accept it, and move on. Treat each failed attempt as a learning experience: what can I do differently the next time?

How can I change this outcome to something positive? Life is full of valuable learning experiences masquerading as failures and the only thing to do is to get back up, dust yourself off, learn what you can from the experience, and try again.

### LEARN, MODIFY, AND PURSUE

You will encounter obstacles, and falter and fall. Just get up and keep going. You'll face temptations and give in. That's OK. Just keep going. You'll make mistakes, get discouraged, and backslide... just keep going while making needed modifications (or new goals and objectives) based on your experience-to-date, and you'll eventually get to just where you should be.



*When I think about growing a soul, I think about planting a seed in hard hard earth. That seed wants to live and grow into what it should be, but it struggles. For that seed to grow into its fruitful and prosperous destiny, there has to be work: you have to do the tilling. You have to turn the soil, and you have to water it constantly. Change requires persistent and vigorous effort. You have got to love yourself, and your actions must demonstrate that love. Claim your greatness, for your ancestors paid dearly so that you could know today.*

*-Mama Moon*



# RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are an integral part of our lives and essential to the human experience. Although sometimes it can be very hard to live with them, we cannot live without them. With consistent attention and genuine effort, relationships with family and friends can grow to be one of the most rewarding aspects of our lives. Here are some effective ways to nurture and maintain relationships with your friends and family.

## STAY IN TOUCH; BE TRUSTWORTHY AND SINCERE

To maintain relationships, it is essential to keep in touch. One cannot neglect a friendship for long periods of time and expect to maintain the same level of trust, caring, and interest. Call, text, email, write, or meet for lunch more often; stay in touch with your loved ones no matter how brief the moments may be.

Trust and sincerity are the foundations upon which all relationships are built. Without implicit trust, relationships just do not last. Friends and family should come to count on you as someone trustworthy, honest, and dependable with good intentions. In any good relationship, there is no room for superficiality, pretense, or shallowness.



## TAKE AN INTEREST, AND LEARN TO LISTEN

Always take a genuine interest in what others have to say. Cultivate healthy relationships by giving your undivided attention to someone else. Be fully present in the moments that you spend with others. Learning to listen is essential to understanding and communicating with your loved ones. Often times we hear someone but don't actively listen to what the other person is saying. To actively listen means that we are engaged with the information that is being shared with us and that we are trying to understand the emotions and feelings that are being communicated.

## OPEN UP, SHARE, AND CARE

It is easy to get too comfortable in a relationship and forget to do the work of maintaining it. If we take family and friends for granted, we will find ourselves losing close ties and fighting to maintain weakening bonds. Without consistent care and attention, close relationships cannot last.

There is so much that you can share with your friends and family. Share sympathy, encouragement, and praise. Openly give your time, companionship, wisdom, and kindness. Tell your loved ones how much you value them and why they are special to you. These actions are seldom forgotten and often reciprocated.

## AVOID UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

For many of us it can be difficult, even painful, to realize that a friend, family member, colleague, or partner is not treating us with the respect or courtesy that we deserve. Do not be afraid to step away from potentially harmful situations and to remove negative influences in your life. Never submit to any kind of verbal or physical abuse, and always "to thyself be true."



*Relationships help us know God and help us know ourselves. They have the power to transform us into benevolent or malevolent creatures depending with whom we choose to spend our time. Birds of a feather fly together, so be careful with whom you flock. When you give someone your time, you are simultaneously gifting him or her with a portion of your life. Gift wisely.*

*-Mama Moon*





# LIFE PARTNERSHIPS

A good life partnership improves all aspects of our wellbeing, strengthening our health, our mind, and our connections with others. A strong healthy relationship can be incredibly supportive. Since a life partnership is a major relationship investment, the more you put in the more you can get back. These tips can help keep a healthy relationship strong or can repair trust in a relationship that is on the rocks.



*It is a blessing, blessing, blessing from the Most High to meet somebody who you can lean on as you go through on this earthly journey! That is what a life partner is, and that is what a life partner does. Intimacy brings into existence bliss—the enraptured pleasure of heaven on earth. Life partnerships offer us strength, support, and the knowledge that we are truly adored for who we are, allowing us to become all that we were meant to be. Be certain that you choose wisely.*

*-Mama Moon*

**NEVER STOP COMMUNICATING**

Fundamental to a healthy relationship is good communication. Both verbal and nonverbal communication, loving positive energy, and nurture play essential roles in keeping couples connected and relating well to each other. Even though you may have a pretty good idea of what your partner needs or is thinking, remember that your partner is not a mind reader. Direct communication is always best. Get in the habit of openly expressing your personal needs.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL INTIMACY**

Regular loving touch is a fundamental part of human existence. Studies have shown that affectionate touch actually boosts the body's level of oxytocin, a hormone that influences bonding and attachment. Regular affectionate touch such as holding hands, hugging, or kissing can be an important part of building a lasting and stable romantic relationship. Also know that stress will characterize your relationship if your partner is feeling unfulfilled sexually.

**SPEND QUALITY TIME TOGETHER**

It is critical in a life partnership to ensure adequate quality time together. You simply cannot allow the stress of children, demanding jobs, and other obligations to push quality time to the curb. Without meaningful quality time, communication and understanding will start to erode. Commit to spending time together on a regular basis, doing things that you both enjoy, or trying something new. Quality time and private communication are needed to stay in sync.

**CREATE A RELATIONSHIP AGREEMENT**

In any relationship, it is important to have mutual trust and understanding. Establish a solid foundation for your relationship with a detailed and explicitly negotiated written agreement that clearly establishes how parties are to be treated. Use this agreement to detail expectations, to set ground rules and limits, to decide when and whether to have children, and to determine how you will interact with your partner. We use written agreements when expectations are important. What agreement is more important than a life partnership?

**RESPECTFULLY RESOLVE CONFLICT**

The key to a strong relationship is to confront conflict and to work towards compromise. If you expect things to go smoothly and to get what you want 100% of the time, you are in for

a big disappointment. Recognize that every relationship has its ups and downs. A little bit of frustration and anger in a relationship at times is completely normal and to be expected. In a strong relationship, partners are safe to express things that bother them without fear of retaliation or

punishment. To keep a relationship strong, both people need to feel they've been heard. The goal is not to win the argument or conflict but to resolve it with respect and love.

**BE FIRMLY COMMITTED**

Love is being firmly committed to aiding another to realize their potential as an empowered adult; this empowerment is achieved through maintaining high character, virtue, values, and life skills.





# PARENTING

It is tough work raising a child, yet parents, guardians, and caregivers have an absolute obligation to do all they can to ensure that each child thrives. Children need and deserve adults in their lives that are committed to their support, positive development, and empowerment. You see, we all come into this world with a need to be consistently, competently, and reliably cared for. With this need met, we achieve success and flourish. We know children are horrible at raising themselves; when their physical and emotional needs are not met, pain is the result. There are many factors that establish the successful nurturing of future empowered adults; a few crucial elements for raising your child are presented here.

## GIFT A MLREA

Assure the empowerment of your child by gifting them with a meaningful longitudinal relationship with an empowered adult. Nothing is more important. Utilize grandparents, other relatives, and trusted friends as long-term mentors. The result will be a child of high character, virtue, values, and life skills.

Coaches, karate teachers, piano teachers, and tutors can also gift your child with an empowering long-term relationship. Ideally schools, as the professional partners and backstops for parents, would surround children with meaningful longitudinal relationships with empowered adults. In public schools, however, the same educator does not serve the same child long enough to know them, heal them, and launch them. It's also important to make sure that your child knows that you are flawed and that their obligation is not to replicate your faults but to exceed your achievements and expectations.



### ENTER INTO A PARENTING AGREEMENT

A parenting agreement is a written contract between two adults that constructs the ground rules for how a child will be raised. It details the specific responsibilities of each parent or guardian. Plan for the life of your child by being proactive in defining what each of you will provide your child. It will help you be the parents that your child deserves.

### LOVE MORE THAN LIFE ITSELF

Love your child more than life itself. Every child deserves to experience love and support. This is how they learn to value themselves and to establish a sense of self-worth.

### POSITION YOUR CHILD FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Parents must be willing to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to gain a top quality education for their children. They must be competent educational advocates for their children or successfully find someone else to fill that role. Public schools, charter public schools, the Volunteer Interdistrict Choice Corporation (the busing program), parochial schools, and private schools are educational offerings available in St. Louis. Whatever you want for your child's education can almost certainly be found among these choices. A parent or guardian must find schools where their child will thrive and excel.

### HIGH AND CONSISTENT EXPECTATIONS

Your children will most likely do as well as is required of them. If you do not lovingly and consistently communicate high expectations of achievement to your children, then you can't

expect it to happen on its own. Know that it is perfectly okay to set standards and to have expectations that exceed that of other parents.

### KEEP LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN

Establish strong and nurturing relationships with your children that include quality and effective communication (as opposed to giving orders) and that involves sharing and active listening. Get on your children's level and really talk to them; don't just talk at them. You will be surprised by how eager your children are to share their private world when they know that you are prepared to listen.

### CONTROL YOUR CHILD'S FRIENDSHIPS

Your child's friends are a direct reflection of the kind of person your child is becoming, so pay close attention. Do you want your child to spend unsupervised time with them? If not, limit your child's time with them.

### TOO BUSY TO GET INTO TROUBLE

Just because the school day ends at 3:00 pm doesn't mean that your children should be left to their own devices until you get home after 5:00 pm. Keep them out of trouble by enrolling them in after-school activities that are supervised by responsible and empowered adults. Sports teams, chess, dance, theater, and music are all fun and supervised activities in which your child can engage and stay busy, as is tutoring and church activities.



*Parents are responsible for bringing forth life, and that is an awesome responsibility. On my own parenting journey, I have made many mistakes, but I never stopped loving the children that I brought into this world. I had to be the best parent I could by giving my children all of the truth and decency that I had to offer. It ain't easy. It's hard, but love makes it happen. It is an honor and a glory to be a parent, so love each child more than life itself. They are your immortality.*

*-Mama Moon*



# PROFESSIONAL

The world has changed, and we are in the midst of a revolution that has radically changed the requirements for workplace success. Today, critical thinking is a requirement for employment. This intellectual revolution has been surging for decades. In America's future, a "strong back and a willingness to work" is no longer enough. Employers are looking for a new kind of employee to fill the positions that are being created by this "thinking work revolution."

## ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Today, a qualified candidate for a living wage position must be a quality human being with character, virtue, values, and life skills. They must be able to take initiative, possess self-management skills, have a reliable and productive work ethic, embrace change, be adaptable, and be versatile. They must have an analytical mind with the ability to think critically, ask the right questions, and make informed decisions. Employers are looking for workers who have specialized knowledge, specialized skills, and are a one of a kind benefit to the work environment. In today's economy, we are almost to the point that those who work for a living must meet all these characteristics. If not, they will only occupy low wage positions.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Consider this—today it is very rare for workers to hold the same job or even follow the same vocation their entire working career. In this new working world, many people will find that they will need to further their education and training as their employment options change and evolve. Because of this, education must become a lifelong pursuit. Education not only creates opportunities for higher earnings and material comfort, but it also helps us to understand the world and how we can create greater meaning and joy for our families, our community, and ourselves. By continuing to educate yourself throughout your life, you are putting yourself in a position to have lifelong success.

## THE NEW ECONOMIC REALITY

The effects of the workplace revolution are a direct result of wealth pursuing the highest return on its investment. Among those who have concentrated real wealth (not the 1%, but the 1/1000th of 1%), national alliances and commitment to the welfare of the citizens of their home country no longer directs financial investment decisions, so most new jobs aren't being created in America. Offshore tax havens have replaced the patriotism of paying taxes. This has had enormous impact on the changing economic structure of American society, as has the Supreme Courts' sanction of the use of unlimited private money to influence elections and public policy.

These combined forces have eliminated many manual labor and clerical jobs that have been the backbone of the American middle class. These forces have resulted in a polarization of earnings so extreme that the majority of Americans are sinking into poverty. Only a sliver of the population holds the vast majority of the wealth. For many, economic security is no longer a certainty, and the number of people subjected to economic insecurity is ever growing. We must do all that we can to ensure that our families and loved ones are provided for during this time of economic change. Clearly we cannot rely on governmental programs to provide economic security, and we need to make, save, and invest money while and when we can.



*Whatever you do, whatever your labor is, just make sure you are doing your very best. Work is the outward expression of how much you appreciate putting bread on your table. Remember, your time is your life. What you do with it and how you use it expresses your ethics, your integrity, and your dignity. Realize your potential so you can generate the income you deserve for yourself and your loved ones.*

*Mamma Moon*







# FINANCIAL LITERACY

Financial literacy starts with knowing the basics of how to earn, borrow, save, spend, and protect your money. Understanding these five principles is essential to achieving a working knowledge of your finances and will help you make informed and effective decisions.

## OPTIMALLY EARN

Position yourself to earn as much as you can, and know the details of both your paycheck and your benefits. Your net income includes your net pay and the cash or cash value of benefits and investment/retirement contributions your employer provides, less any deductions or withholdings that your employer subtracts from your paycheck. Deductions usually include federal, state, and city income taxes, Social Security and Medicare taxes, and often contributions that you make to insurance and retirement plans. In these uncertain times, you must be certain to earn what you can while you are able.

## MINIMALLY BORROW

Borrowing money is a way to purchase something now and pay for it over time while incurring interest. Sometimes it is necessary to borrow for major purchases such as a home, a truly necessary car, education, or an entrepreneurial pursuit. Borrowing for consumption and necessary living expenses most often indicates that difficult decisions are being delayed. It also decreases the funds available in the future.

Make sure you are being smart about from whom and how you borrow money, and be sure to plan and shop around for a loan with a low annual percentage



rate (APR). It is crucial to remember that credit and loans are not free money but almost always come with interest payments. The longer you take to pay back a loan, the more you will end up paying in interest.

Your ability to get a loan (and its interest rate) depends largely on your credit history and credit score—your track record of timely payments and perceived credit worthiness. Make sure that your credit history is strong.

### MAXIMALLY SAVE

Open a bank or credit union account to help you manage and save your money. People who save regularly, even in small amounts, have more success in planning for life events and unexpected expenses. With savings, you will be better prepared for unplanned emergency needs and life's inevitable rainy days.

### WISELY SPEND

To get a handle on where your money is going, it is important to make a budget or plan and to track your spending habits. Control your spending, and live within your means. Important actions that you can take include being a smart shopper, taking the time to plan for big purchases, setting weekly or monthly maximum spending amounts, and limiting spending to necessities and to desires

that are not related to ego or conspicuous consumption. Remember that “friends” who encourage needless spending are only “fair weather friends” who probably struggle with their own finances and will not be able to help you financially. Family members who want you to provide for them what they won't provide for themselves (especially while not contributing what they can non-monetarily) require your insistence that they become motivated and more self-sufficient.

### ASSUREDLY PROTECT

Protect your money, and take precautions about your financial situation. Keep your financial records in order, watch out for fraud and scams, and protect your identity. Be wary of requests to “update” or “confirm” personal information, and report any discrepancies on bank statements or bills as soon as they arrive.

Insurance, wisely bought, can help assure you and your family's financial security given sickness or disability. A medical directive (living will) and a health care power of attorney can help guarantee that your wishes are respected. A will and insurance that is tied to a trust can help ensure that you will be able to provide for your loved ones “from the grave.”



*We waste our financial power when we don't spend wisely. Savings and investments build economic security. No matter what, don't spend more than you earn. It just delays necessary decisions while pledging your future earnings to the payday or title loan company. Circulate your money within your family and community, for your money creates jobs and sends children to college.*

*-Mama Moon*



# WEALTH ACCUMULATION

There are no secrets to becoming wealthy—only knowledge. Applying this knowledge can make the difference between living paycheck-to-paycheck or enjoying comfort, security, and abundance. Those who create wealth do so with proven methods that anyone can incorporate into their life.

## SAVINGS AND INVESTMENTS

The wealth-building potential of regular savings is enormous. Even a small amount of regular savings, combined with the power of compound interest, is an effective means of creating wealth. Why only earn money by working for a wage or salary? Why not save and invest on a regular basis so that your money can work for you?

The first payment made out of your salary or wages should go directly to savings. Let your mantra be, “Part of all I earn is mine to keep.” If you save 10% of all your earnings and invest in safe and secure investments, then you can accumulate real wealth and experience financial security. Saving for investment is essential. You can’t create wealth without putting some of your money to work for you.

Investing requires both knowledge and discipline. Many types of investments exist, and we should choose our investment vehicles based on our risk tolerance and our financial goals. Financial vehicles such as savings accounts, certificates of deposit, stocks and bonds, indexed funds, employer provided retirement accounts, and Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs) should all be considered. Only invest in things that you understand, and never hesitate to seek competent financial planning and investment advising assistance. It is wise to hire competent financial professionals to aid you in wealth accumulation, and remember that wealth accumulation takes time.

**BUDGETING**

Spending more than you have earned (after taxes are withheld and your savings have been set aside) will result in stress and a difficult financial situation; you cannot know peace when you are worried about debt. Bad spending habits lead to a vicious cycle of credit card debt, high interest payments, and pay-day-lending, which is then hard to escape. Make the promise to yourself and your family that you will not live beyond your means. Make a budget and spend within it.

**MANAGING DEBT**

As with savings, most Americans don't handle credit cards very well; the average American family owes many thousands of dollars in credit card debt. Credit cards are convenient, but that convenience may lead us to use them as though they were "free money." Nothing could be further from the truth. Every time we pull out a credit card, we should remember that we are borrowing money; the high interest rates of credit cards or payday loans creates wealth for others, not for us. Paying for unnecessary items and the often-associated debt, robs us of savings and wealth.

**HOME OWNERSHIP**

Buying a home, instead of renting, has been the easiest and often most accessible means of building wealth. With each mortgage payment, we purchase a portion of our home's value. This value, or equity, becomes part of our assets (wealth) and can be used to finance other goals such as paying for education or investing in other kinds of financial vehicles. Equally important, our home typically increases in value over time. With today's low home prices and low interest rates, buying a home should be a wise long term investment.



*You must fuel the wealth creation process by continually investing some of every dollar you earn so that your investments can earn money. Keep it up, and in a few decades, your invested money will have likely begun to generate real wealth. Wealth helps us to aid others, and wealth provides security and freedom. I think everybody should have some wealth!*

*-Mama Moon*



# PHYSICAL + MENTAL HEALTH

Our failure to critically examine the tragic diet, lifestyle, and physical and mental abuse of our enslaved ancestors has unconsciously resulted in horrible health in our community and a reluctance to seek competent medical care. These behaviors and beliefs are inconsistent with good physical and mental health. We can trace the cause of each of these destructive behaviors to the culture of slavery in America. Our unwillingness to carefully examine “America’s peculiar institution” hinders us from connecting the dots to current behaviors and thus being able to correct them. In fact, experts estimate that simply by changing our behaviors, we could eliminate a full 80% of today’s (black versus white) health disparities, resulting in significantly decreased levels of disease and a vastly improved quality of life.

Once aware, we must love ourselves enough to change our behavior. We have the power to dramatically improve our health by living in ways that promote good health. Our amazingly strong ancestors endured hardship beyond belief, simply so we could know today. Surely they want us to value and care for ourselves. After all, we have been paid for. Here is what we can do for our families and ourselves to improve our quality of life while lowering our risk of disease.

## EAT A HEALTHY DIET

Develop a diet that is low in animal fats, especially saturated fats and cholesterol. Replace these items with more servings of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Prepare meals in which half of your plate consists of fruits and vegetables and the other half consists of grains and lean proteins. Your dairy can come from simple sources like yogurt or a cup of whole milk. A healthy diet will result in your feeling vastly better and having greater vitality and mental alertness. It also will

prevent disease and extend your life. A healthy weight dramatically reduces the risk of hypertension, diabetes, and coronary heart disease; all of which are major diseases and cause premature death in the African American community.

A “soul food” diet was once all that was available to us, but it is time to learn to love fruits, vegetables, and grains. It is wise and healthy to reconstruct our eating habits and our culture.



## EXERCISE RE

Another essential part of good health is being physically active; exercising for at least 30 minutes three or more times a week can significantly improve our health, vitality, and mental wellbeing. The medical community is in total agreement that regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do for your health.

Fitting regular exercise into your daily schedule may seem difficult at first, but as little as ten minutes at a time is fine. Even Wii and Playstation applications can involve exercise, such as aerobic activity or yoga. The key is to find the right exercise for you; the best exercise is the activity that you enjoy, that fits within your schedule, and that matches your abilities.

## HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CHOICES

Striving for good health requires you to make positive and empowering lifestyle choices.

Smoking is a significant and preventable cause of premature death in the U.S. It is a leading cause of lung and throat cancers and has been linked to bladder cancer, high blood pressure, emphysema and heart disease.

Never use illegal drugs, for a healthy body comes from a healthy lifestyle. Addiction for many is instantaneous with the very first use, so you won't know if it is an instantly addictive drug for you until to try it. Given the horrors of addiction, a brilliant decision is to never try illegal drugs or abuse prescription drugs. Half of the 1,000,000 African Americans currently in prison were convicted of drug charges, and their incarceration negatively impacts all of their relatives and loved ones.

Alcohol use should be minimized as it does all kinds of things in our bodies. Heavy and even habitual drinking have links to anemia, increased risk for cancers, cirrhosis of the liver, cardiomyopathy, heart attack, and stroke.



Correctly using condoms is wise for a sexually active person (unless both partners are exclusive to one another and have tested disease free) because they help prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted infections and diseases such as HIV, syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia. Reliable birth control (ideally by both partners) is essential unless pregnancy is being consciously and actively pursued.

Today there is absolutely no reason for us to make poor lifestyle choices. It is time for our actions to reflect self-love rather than racial self-hatred.

## GET REGULAR CHECK-UPS

Although eating right, exercising, and making healthy lifestyle choices can greatly reduce your risk of developing many chronic illnesses, it does not stop them entirely. When illness does strike, you can ease its effect on your life by catching it early, which is when it is most treatable. The key to success is to see your doctor or health care professional at least once a year for a check-up, or more often if you have a family history of disease or sickness. Federal law now requires every health insurance policy to provide regular check-ups and normal vaccines, without requiring a separate fee or co-pay.

## TREATMENT

In addition to our physical wellbeing, we must also take into consideration our mental state. Untreated mental illness can be just as deadly as physical ailments. We cannot allow fear and/or stigma to prevent us from seeking help for emotional issues. The quality of life for far too many African Americans is seriously compromised by failure to seek mental health treatment. It was one thing to hold the treatment of mental health in contempt when we could not, or could not safely, access it, but this is no longer the case. To heal from rape, incest, physical and/or emotional abuse, severe guilt, depression, and racial self-hatred often requires the assistance of a mental health provider.

It is also important, when indicated, that children receive a prompt and full mental health assessment and appropriate treatment. We often fear that our child will be misdiagnosed or that an unnecessary diagnosis is designed to bring financial gain to a public school system. Parents, however, rarely regret having sought competent mental health assessment and treatment for their children; necessary treatment is beneficial and life enhancing. Today, all medical insurance policies must cover the treatment of mental illness.



*Health is what gives life its zest, its glow, and its energy. I will say it again like I said it before, what you put in your mind, what you put in your mouth, and how you use your muscles will determine the quality of your health. Take time to meditate, for it is the silence that speaks to your soul. Take care of yourself while you are young, for there is an eventual consequence for everything you do and don't do.*

*-Mama Moon*





# SPIRITUALITY

Spiritually healthy people come from a variety of belief systems (religions) and backgrounds, and there are many benefits to engaging in a spiritual practice. Those who choose to pursue spiritual empowerment often find their lives more meaningful and joyful; their days are filled with purpose and passion, and their relationships are more satisfactory and intimate. Most spiritual practices have the same ultimate goal—providing guiding values and morals for our daily lives and connecting with a higher power or purpose that focuses us in positive ways.

Pursuing spirituality offers moral and ethical guidelines for living as well as rules for behavior that can be used to structure your life. Whether you are committed to following an established religious practice or whether you meet your spiritual needs through non-traditional means, there are many benefits to pursuing spiritual empowerment.

What is more, the use of prayer and/or meditation has grown tremendously in popularity. It is healthy to withdraw from the hustle, bustle, and stress of life and to become still, quiet, and in touch with our spirituality. Taking time for your spiritual wellbeing is time well spent.



### PERSPECTIVE AND PEACE

Spirituality can help us see our lives on both the micro and macro levels. Spirituality can open the door to a much quieter and deeper relationship with ourselves, as well as help us to gain a new perspective on the broader picture.

Organized religion or other spiritual practices can provide a sense of peace in the midst of otherwise overwhelming and demanding lifestyles. Spiritual practice, whether it be going to church or temple, meditation, yoga, or communing with nature provides us with sacred time apart from the rush of our everyday lives. These practices can strengthen the connections between our mind, body, and spirit.

### RELIGION

Most African Americans are joyously Christian. We were both allowed to and encouraged to embrace Christianity as enslaved Africans in America. Living in America, a country now deeply committed to freedom of choice and practice of religion, allows us to live in peace regardless of our religious beliefs, even when some religions believe otherwise.

Fortunately, most find that the basic teachings of every religion are greatly similar. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” says Christianity. “What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary,” says Judaism. “No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself,” says Islam. “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful,” says Buddhism. “Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself,” says Baha’i.

Some separate religion from spirituality, although most religious persons are and consider themselves spiritual. Fortunately, even those who reject all religion generally believe in expressing love through actions and thoughts.



*When you let what is sacred within you be seen in your actions, you are being spiritual. To live a spiritual life is to make love real. Being spiritual is the divinity in our humanity.*

*-Mamma Moon*



# TIME TITHING

No one will heal our community for us, and healing is exactly what we need.

Some perform episodic (one-time) voluntary service, but at its core Time Tithing is about consistently volunteering a portion of the time that you control (hours spent not working or sleeping) to on-going community service. Only after we engage in on-going voluntary service, in essence ministering one to another, will we begin to see the much-needed change in our communities.

Did you know that Time Tithing positively impacts our communities and has significant benefits for the volunteer? While the motivation for volunteering often comes from a place of selflessness, the benefits of a volunteer experience are real and can positively affect your personal, professional, and communal life.

## PERSONAL FULFILLMENT

By serving others, you will feel better about yourself and will be more likely to have a positive view of your life and future goals. Researchers at the London School of Economics found that the more people volunteered, the happier they were. Among weekly volunteers, the increase in being “very happy” was comparable to those with an annual income of \$75,000–\$100,000 versus \$20,000.

## BETTER SOCIAL SKILLS

By meeting with a group of individuals with shared interest and similar goals, you are providing yourself an excellent opportunity to practice and develop social skills and to make new acquaintances and friends. In a recent study conducted by the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 79% of volunteers said that their volunteer activities helped them with interpersonal skills, such as understanding people better and motivating others.

## HEALTH IMPACT

Studies show that those who volunteer have a significantly reduced risk of suffering from depression and depressive symptoms. A key risk factor for depression is social isolation, and Time Tithing opportunities often keep you in regular contact with like-minded people. Studies also show that volunteering has a positive impact on your physical health. Those who volunteer regularly have been shown to literally live longer than those who do not.

## JOB SKILLS AND CAREER HELP

Just because volunteer work is unpaid does not mean the skills you learn are basic. Studies have shown that those who volunteer often report gaining skills such as communication, project planning, budgeting, and employee management. These skills can be used in your current workplace and/or can help you gain employment. Recent research found that 73% of employers say that they would hire a candidate with volunteer experience over one without, and 94% of employees who volunteered reported learning valuable skills that helped land a job, improve their salary, or gain a promotion.

## FINDING A FULFILLING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

There are countless opportunities to be of service to others—to Time Tithe. The sheer number and variety of opportunities overwhelm many of us; while others say they want to volunteer but wait for an opportunity to find them. Still others feel that they are not ready to help anyone, but remember that there is no need to perfect yourself before beginning to serve others.

First and foremost, it is important to understand your personal reasons for volunteering. About what are you passionate? What change do you wish to see in the world? Who do you desire to positively impact, and why? What are your reasons for volunteering? Once you have these questions answered, you will find it easier to narrow down the many volunteer possibilities to a few specific choices. Sites like the United Way's Volunteer Center [stl.unitedway.org/get-involved/volunteer/](http://stl.unitedway.org/get-involved/volunteer/), and

[STLvolunteer.org](http://STLvolunteer.org), can be a great place to start researching volunteer opportunities in the greater St. Louis area. Other good online resources include [501connect.com](http://501connect.com) and [volunteermatch.org](http://volunteermatch.org).

When we see an unaddressed need in our community, it is sometimes necessary to create our own Time Tithing opportunity. Do you see a need that is not being met? Do you have an idea for how you and a few others can meet this need? Some of the greatest rewards can come from being the change that you wish to see. Remember that nothing happens until someone does something, and you are someone who can do something.

The truth of Margaret Mead's famous quote is undeniable. She shared, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Believe in your power to impact positive change, and recognize that a small number of Time Tithers, who share the same passion, vision, conviction, and willingness to act, can and will change the world.

## BE A HERO

Werner Erhard is credited with this famous quote, "Heroes are ordinary men and women, who dare to see and meet the call of a possibility greater than themselves. Breakthroughs are created by such heroes, by men and women who will stand for the result while it is only a possibility—people who will act to make possibility real." Be a hero.



*I am too old to care anymore about what people say because truth is revealed by what people actually do. We do a lot of talking about the poor condition of our communities, but rarely do we get off of our behinds. Be the change that you wish to see in the world around you, and start giving of your time and talents.*

*-Mama Moon*





# THE FINALE'

Congratulations! Finale is the last chapter of 10 Pillars of Empowerment; the largest element of Empowerment is the Imperative: The Empowerment Conference Action Guide. It is a companion to The Empowerment Conference which is presented annually, the first Saturday in March, by St. Louis Black Pages, Inc. and The Transformational Agenda.

Interestingly, the Action Guide will benefit far more people than The Conference, as it has been printed 100,000 times and distributed as a free publication to homes and businesses. It reaches over 80% of all African American households in all of St. Louis City and County, or over 300,000 persons.

Please know that we each possess incredible power that can only be realized by our extending ourselves. Life is a process, not a destination, and having the courage to consistently act to improve ones self, even when things are not working out, is key to realizing a full and productive life. One just has to want to be better, to believe that they can positively impact their life, and to act knowing that sometimes it is not success but the learning experience that is most important.

Love and value yourself. Love and value everyone else. Act to bring more Heaven to Earth.

And so it will be.



*Our purpose is a grand purpose. It's to become our best selves and to be of service to others. We are the Creator's emissaries on planet Earth. We must turn our concern into love in action, for love will always overcome evil when love acts to, and thus love delivers more Heaven to Earth.*

*-Mamma Moon*

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