

Top tips for a contented life

Try this psychotherapist's three G's: Generosity, grace and God

LIFESTYLES

By Jan Tuckwood - Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

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Connie Ingram, a psychotherapist in Royal Palm Beach and avid distance bike rider, stands with her bicycle inside Okeeheelee Park. (Richard Graulich / The Palm Beach Post)

Connie Ingram makes her living helping people improve their lives, so you'd think her life just falls into place, right?

Actually, the Royal Palm Beach psychotherapist applies as much thought to her own contentment as she does to that of her clients.

She lives with intention, setting personal goals each year in five areas: emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual and physical.

What's that mean? Ingram, who's been in private practice for 25 years, gave us a couple of examples:

"My social goal for this year is to be the initiator of social activities with people who are not the best at initiating. I want the relationships to be more connected, so I decided to do the inviting and the planning. It has been wonderful," she says.



RICHARD GRAULICH

Connie Ingram. (Richard Graulich / The Palm Beach Post)

"Emotionally, I chose this year to be more like Teflon. I don't get my feelings hurt easily anyway, but the middle child in me does raise its ugly head from time to time. So, I have chosen to more emphatically look at situations from the other side before creating drama for myself by getting all

spooled up over something that is innocuous.”

These are decisions we all can make for prime health, and Ingram says “these two goals are kissin’ cousins.”

“For example, If I wait for someone to initiate an outing and they don’t, it could create negative feelings (because of my expectations). That’s not healthy or fun, and it creates drama if there is anger or unforgiveness... so, it’s best not to engage in any of that nonsense. If I want the relationship to include a certain amount of connection, I plan it. If the other party can come, great, if not, I do not attach any negative meaning to it. Likewise, if I invite and they don’t reciprocate, I don’t attach any negative meaning to that either.

“I take charge of my side of the relationship and leave them to handle theirs.”

Taking responsibility for your mental and physical health is key to prime health.

Ingram has three “amazing” children who live locally. “They are adults, and this is the best time of life with them,” she says. “It is the time when we can be friends and enjoy spending time with each other without me having to ask about homework or clean rooms.”

In addition to her practice, she is a family mediator, university professor, parenting coordinator for Palm Beach County’s 15th Judicial Circuit, corporate trainer, consultant and coach.

What’s your routine for prime health?

“I was not always an early riser, but I have found that it is the best way to get everything done in a day that I want to. I awaken at 5 a.m. (even on the weekends) and start my day with coffee and Bible study. After that it’s into workout clothes and either head for my private home gym, the park or a local gym club.”

“Afterward, I go straight to the kitchen to prepare the most important meal of the day. My eating habits are simple and close to the earth. I eat quantities large enough to hold me through to the next meal without a huge blood sugar dip. I build in snack times of fruit, raw veggies, or protein bars. I think the best nutrition plan going is akin to Weight Watchers. Balanced, real food in satisfying quantities that are available anywhere.”

An avid bicyclist, Connie often cycles with friends down South Ocean Boulevard to Delray Beach. In the cooler months, she participates in cycling events around the state. And she and her friends

plan bike trips around the globe.

"We love to travel and decided the best way to see the world was on our bikes," she says. "We have ridden in Germany, Austria, Italy, and this year, we will go to Hawaii. We have met people from other countries with whom we have stayed friends."

Three tips for staying vibrant and in your prime at every age:

1. Keep your mind and body active and strong.
2. Look for ways to be generous to the needs of others.
3. Stay connected with God and good friends.

Has your energy level changed over the years? If so, what do you do about it?

"I am blessed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder! It allows me to have more energy than most. Even in this stage of my life, I can still work circles around most of the people I know. Albeit, lately, I have found the need to be sure to get eight hours of sleep in order to keep up the level of work, physical activity and social involvement I enjoy."

What are some quotes/words of wisdom you like?

"One of my favorites is 'This too shall pass.' When working with people in counseling, they often are blinded by the current crisis in their lives. This is a great reminder that tomorrow will be different ... better.

"Another word of wisdom I use often is Psalm 46:10: 'Cease striving and know that I am God.' There is nothing in my life that God cannot handle. When I find myself 'striving,' then I know I'm trying to take over God's position. It's a good reminder to let go and let God."

What are three keys to a contented life?

"Probably the most contentment one can embrace comes from a strong faith.

"Secondly, contentment comes from accepting others as they are, not as we want them to be. After

all, isn't that what we want, for others to accept us as we are? This is not to say we should not work to improve and grow, but realize that others are on that path as well. And, if they're not, that's not our concern. Unconditional love and respect involves acceptance. If we try to change other people, we are setting ourselves up for disappointment, which dashes our contentment.

"Finally, contentment comes from being gracious to others. Not trying to compare yourself, which breeds jealousy and discontent, but truly embracing the good fortune of others and being the good fortune for those who are not as blessed."