

Five Ways to Experience the Zest for Life

By Dr. Erica Miller

ZEST! The word sounds fun...like you're doing something really entertaining and engaging or are on some kind of mind-altering drug. And yet, this drug is totally legal, free, and addicting—in a healthy way.

What is “zest,” exactly? Zest is the glow that makes everything sparkle. Zest for a living gives us the shove we need when we'd rather stay in bed, thank you very much. Zest shifts the mindset, “Life is a drag to be endured,” to this phrase: “Life is an adventure to be cherished and enjoyed.”

I am a Holocaust survivor. Having spent four years of my childhood in the Nazi camps, I was left with the feeling, “I am so lucky to be alive!” Not to be dramatic, but when you're faced with suffering and death all around you every day, you find the prospect of living all that more exciting.

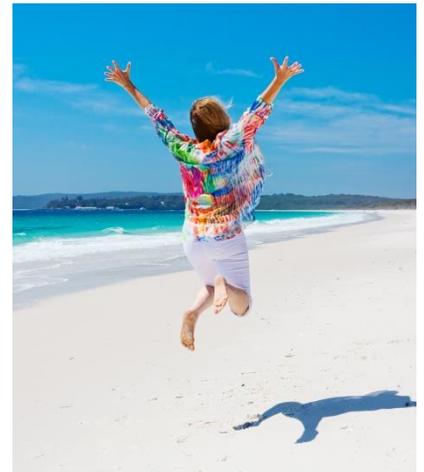
When bad things happen to good people

How did I maintain a good attitude while imprisoned during the Holocaust? It was a ghastly experience for anyone, but, I can still look back on that time remembering my will to live. It was a means for growth and an appreciation for life that I may not have learned otherwise. Because of those years, I came to realize that I wanted to be a healer. Undoubtedly, that's what led me to earn a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology and establish a chain of mental health clinics. Having lived through the worst, I wanted to understand the science of it—not only how I survived, but also how I could help others to handle their life challenges in a more positive and healthy way.

Nowadays, I experience a zest for life every day, and I am fortunate enough to address audiences of all ages and types to provide them with the motivation, inspiration, and hope along their journeys to overcome obstacles and challenges and lead a zest-filled life.

Five tips for experiencing a zest for life

1. *Be engaged.* That means actively paying attention to what is happening around you, and jumping in and doing something with your 24-hour day (you have the same number as everyone else.) Living on the sidelines of life pulls you down and inside yourself where the unpleasant memories and disturbing news of



world events can claw at your happiness. Stay challenged and show an interest in others. Ask questions and listen to the responses. Half listening won't cut it. "Uh-huh," usually means you're not listening.

2. *Participate in community activities.* Whether you volunteer at a food bank or run a fundraiser for a good cause, there are many opportunities to join with others. Having your family over for a barbecue and inviting the neighbors is participating in the community. What about your church or synagogue? Start a book club? Go mountain climbing or scuba diving with friends? Being in nature is always an excellent way to achieve zest. There are lots of activities that are viable and satisfying to increase your participation in life. Go for it!
3. *Take care of yourself.* Looking after yourself first is hard for some folks to accept as a means to living with zest. Many people might think it's selfish. But taking care of yourself means eating healthy foods, exercising, and drinking lots of water. Be mindful of your needs. This attitude is what provides fuel to help take care of others. While these guidelines might sound trite and like a broken record, they work.
4. *Live in the moment.* This precept is becoming more difficult every day with all our distractions. But if we don't stop thinking about the past and the future, we miss life altogether. Try turning off your cellphones for a significant part of the day. It's amazing how much that helps. Then, you can hear a bird sing, smell chocolate chip cookies baking at your neighbor's, or hear your own heartbeat if you're really good. One way of quieting the mind is through meditation, which has been around for thousands of years but has claimed a recent resurgence. You can learn about it in how-to books, through phone apps, or by attending a meditation retreat, for instance.
5. *Laugh a lot.* While life is a serious business, sometimes the only way to stay sane is to laugh at the absurdity of what happens. Many times laughing is a way of staying positive when everyone and everything around you is doing just the opposite.

Staying positive isn't just avoiding negativity. In my book, "Chronologically Gifted, Aging with Gusto," I have a whole chapter on 'Looking on the Bright Side.' In many ways, optimism is the most important subject in the book. Learning how to take adverse life events and turning them into something one can learn from—at any age—allows you to live a life of gusto and zest.

Zest is a choice

Everyone has the same 24 hours in a day. Do you know the song from the musical *Rent*: "525,600 Minutes"? That's it. We need to use our hours and our minutes consciously. If we are engaged and are living in the present with family and friends around us, we can more easily laugh at life. Even when the world closes in, maintaining a positive outlook helps us live with zest. The five tips are designed to complement, interplay, and overlap with one another. As a clinician, I know very well that our habits can be either harmful or useful. We may need to break our old habits, and it may take a while to form new ones. However, choosing the zest habit can be a good addiction that once you have it, you will never want to break it.

About the Author



Dr. Erica Miller is a multi-faceted, dynamic speaker and international best-selling author with a long history of "telling it like it is." A Holocaust survivor, entrepreneur, mental health professional, and world traveler, she captivates audiences with her colorful stories and authentic conversations of guts, grit, and gusto. Her three books are: [Chronologically Gifted: Aging with Gusto](#), [Don't Tell Me I Can't Do It: Living Audaciously in the Here and Now](#), and [The Dr. Erica Miller Story: From Trauma to Triumph](#).