

[ PEP TALK ]  
**LISTEN UP!**

Your life is trying to tell you something

Have you ever heard that little voice trying to tell you, "Uh oh, don't do that!" or "Good job. Keep up the great work!" No, it's not your imagination. According to Valorie Burton, in her book *Listen to Your Life* (Waterbrook Press; \$13.99), it's your inner spirit trying to guide you on the path to success. For better or worse, your sixth sense (or whatever you call it) is there to help you fulfill your purpose, decrease your stress, and expand your life, says Burton. All you have to do is listen.

That might be easier said than done. We live in a world bogged down by to-do lists, with every interruption imaginable from the television and radio to the Internet. Who has time to sit still and listen? We do, says Burton, and if you don't, you'll be forever out of sync with five key areas in your life: your spirituality, your physical health, your relationships, your work, and your finances and resources. If you choose to live your life more fully and with purpose, she offers some sage advice on how to start out: Get connected.

In our business and personal lives, we simply don't talk to people unless we really want to, and even then it can be awkward. Have you ever gone to a networking event and felt like a fish out of water? The next time you see a person, flash a smile, say hello, and make eye contact. It will make those around you more open and accessible to sharing themselves with you. Here are some other tips on connecting with yourself, your spirit, and those around you:



**Meditate.** Quiet your mind to hear your thoughts. "Often during these moments, God communicates to you, giving you wisdom, guidance, and inspiration," says Burton. Even if you hear nothing, don't be discouraged; sometimes the point is to simply be still.

**Count your blessings.** This is a simple way to put life into perspective. While driving to work, cooking a meal, or taking a walk, count at least 10 blessings daily. This will help you practice staying in a continual mode of gratitude.

**Keep a spiritual journal.** Writing down your thoughts is an excellent way to track your journey. It's also a way to connect with your spirit in an honest, open dialogue. "Over time, you will be amazed to look back and see the answered prayers and the spiritual growth you have experienced," says Burton.

**Be still.** Often, we create noisy conditions with the television, radio, or dishwasher to drown out the silence. "You must be willing to clear the clutter that clogs your mind and keeps you from recognizing that still, small voice that can lead you to the path to success," says Burton. Try spending a day without these distractions and notice how much more connected you feel.

—Tanisha A. Sykes

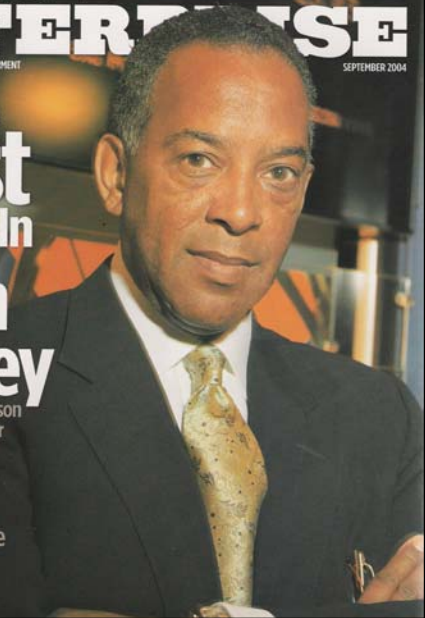
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Recently I've started to write gospel songs. My problem is I don't write music; I only know how to write the lyrics and how I want the melody to go. I have over 50 songs on paper. Can you help me in some way?  
—J. Reed  
Lithonia, Georgia

You need to find collaborators who can write music and partner with you to move your lyrics from paper to recorded demo tape or compact disc. To do this, you'll need to gain contacts in the music industry and educate yourself about the art and business of songwriting.

Start by reading *The Craft and Business of Songwriting* (2nd Edition) by John Braheny (Writer's Digest Books; \$22.99) and *The Art of Writing Great Lyrics* by Pamela Phillips Oland (Allworth Press; \$18.95). Braheny's Website ([www.JohnBraheny.com](http://www.JohnBraheny.com)) offers great information, including career strategies for lyricists and tips on how to get your songs recorded. Another Website with good information and links to resources is [www.songwriteruniverse.com](http://www.songwriteruniverse.com). To find outlets to get your songs published and recorded, also read the *2004 Songwriter's Market* by Ian Bessler (Writer's Digest Books; \$24.99).

Finally, you should meet and network with songwriters, musicians, and others in the industry. Start by contacting the Georgia Music Industry Association Inc. ([www.gmia.org](http://www.gmia.org); 404-266-2666). Also, consider joining the Gospel Music Association ([www.gospelmusic.org](http://www.gospelmusic.org); 615-242-0303), which publishes the *2004 GMA Music Industry Networking Guide* (Gospel Music Association; \$19.95).

—Alfred A. Edmond Jr.

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