

# Solutions to Everything by Michael Ventura

Reprinted without permission from the L.A. Weekly.

1. Make mistakes. As Coleman Hawkins said, "If you don't make mistakes, you aren't really trying."
2. Stop lying about yourself. To yourself. To your family. To your business associates. Maybe even to your enemies. (Your enemies oppress you as much by your fidelity to your own lies as by anything else.)
3. Stop tolerating in your leaders what you would not tolerate in your friends. But...
4. Tolerate impurity. Trying to be pure about anything is a way of setting yourself up to fail. Asking other people to be pure is a way of setting them up.
5. Read one book a month -- a book that you didn't find out about in a magazine or a newspaper. Browse an independent bookstore and wait till some book says, "Read me," and read it.
6. Listen to the voices. The wee inner voices. Even if they don't speak, only breathe a little, like dirty phone calls. Do anything they tell you to do except rape, kill or pillage. (The voices make mistakes sometimes, but they don't make boring mistakes.)
7. Leave people alone when they tell you to leave them alone. If they mean it, they need it. If they don't mean it, they're trying to manipulate you, so fuck them. (Note: this rule applies to grown-ups only.)
8. Don't make the sophisticated error of thinking that a negative voice is automatically smarter than a positive voice.
9. Eat real food but don't be a fanatic about it.
10. Don't be a fanatic about anything.
11. Do only exercises that take you somewhere. Walk, ride a bike, roller-skate, swim. All other exercise is ego-and/or fear-driven, and if you listen to ego and fear you will drown out the voices you most need.
12. Don't run. Really, don't. America likes to run because running from (fill in the blank) is what we do best. Everybody who runs in running down an alley away from something terrible. Stop running and find out what's behind you.
13. Don't dye your hair unless you're a woman over 40 and you dye it the color of my obsessions. Even then, don't cover up all your gray. Gray is gorgeous. And if you're a man, then really don't dye to cover gray. Dig it: EVERYBODY KNOWS. And they talk about it in a snide way behind your back. I'm not kidding.
14. Eat Italian food. Italians went from being oppressive Romans to being the inefficient wonderful Italians they are today. It's probably the food.
15. Order my novel "Night Time Losing Time" at your local independent bookstore. (This won't solve the world's problems or yours, but it'll do wonders for some of mine.)
16. Learn to drive. You may think you know how, but my experience of the way you drive is that you probably don't. So here's how: Drive for space. Space in front of you is the safest thing you can have with a car. Dart-

ing in and out of traffic doesn't change anything, it just makes you older. You can't beat the average traffic flow on any given street or freeway by more than five minutes, which only makes a difference if you're having a baby. And don't you feel like an idiot when you've passed six cars and they pull up beside you at the next light? They're laughing at you. And they hate you. That isn't good for you. Drive for space. If the move ain't smooth, it ain't right. There's no excuse for a jerky turn, stop or acceleration. It's hard on the car, it's hard on the other passengers, it confuses other drivers, it's not aesthetic. Such moves are for emergencies only. Ninety percent of the time you drive with your habits, not your head, so figure out what your bad habits are -- gunning it through the yellows? not signaling? tailgating? Your worst habit will turn into your worst accident. So stop it. Drive for space. End of lesson.

17. Dance. Jesus said, in one of the Gnostic gospels, "He who does not dance does not know what happens."

18. Don't worry so much about being fat. Fat feels great in bed.

19. Have at least one other living thing in your abode. Rhododendrons, for instance, are fantastic creatures. They give much, ask little, have marvelous names, and they don't shit where I walk.

20. Look into people's eyes when you talk to them.

21. Call your parents by their real first names the very next time you see them. Try it. Watch their faces. Then do it at least half the time you talk to or about them from now on. (If people all over the world did this, nations would cease to war.)

22. Have candlelight in your life. (If you should get into rituals, it'll come in handy.)

23. No matter how rushed your schedule is, spend at least five minutes in the morning quietly in bed with your loved one just being gentle together. Perhaps drinking tea.

24. Tell your mother and father, individually -- and your children, if you have children -- what you really think. Once a year, minimum. If more people did this, it would save more lives than arresting drunk drivers.

25. Do not avoid the eyes of the homeless.

26. If you think something is wrong -- at work, in your family, in your self, in your country -- agitate for change. If you won't do that, it doesn't matter how tan you are.

27. As regards No. 23: Assuming that you want a loved one but don't have one, my bet is it's not because you're fat, ugly, crazy, old, a failure, a drunk, a ninny or a clod. Lot's of fat ugly crazy older failing drunk ninnying clods have loved ones. Lots who don't want one, and would probably even put up with you. So there's some lie at the heart of your loneliness; being with someone would reveal the lie, and you don't want that.

28. Tape this to your bathroom mirror: "One can only accept in others what one can accept in oneself."-- James Baldwin

29. Work is a sacrament. Don't despise anyone's.

30. Don't talk down to kids.

31. Don't chicken out about sex. Given that you're with a consenting adult, do whatever you fantasize. This is much more important than quitting smoking.

32. Watch at least one black-and-white film per month.

33. Regarding No. 6: Entertain the notice that there are... voices. Some come from within, some from the plants and objects and such around you, and some come from what I call, for shorthand purposes, the Infinite. If you don't listen to them, your life will be more difficult than it has to be.

34. Pay more taxes -- and insist that those taxes, and the taxes you already pay, go for education. Giving the young a lively, thorough, truthful education is the most important environmental issue today, even more important than acid rain, tropical rain forests and ozone holes.

35. Let me make that a lot clearer. Recycling and shopping ecologically are almost pointless when so many high-school students drop out, and most who graduate can't read much and have no skills to speak of. How can these people inherit a world? Even if we give them a greener world, are they equipped to keep it that way? You want a solution, so here's a solution: Take to the Streets for the Education of the Children.

36. Pray.

37. Stop looking for other people to supply the solution. You're the solution. If you're not, there is no solution.

38. Be aware of the Network. We live by a network of connections and links. Your connection to yourself, to your intimates, to your place, to the collective, to the planes, to the Infinite. (Each is a distinct connection.) Equally powerful are the collective's connections to you (not at all the same as yours to it), to groups of intimates, to itself, to the planet, to the Infinite. All these levels and connections interweave. All are equally important. All the links or connective points of this network (call them the acupuncture points of our universe) both take and generate energy. Any link out of sync weakens the others. (The West, for instance, has concentrated too much on the individual, the East, too much on the collective; both approaches have been catastrophic on every level of the network.) This network, from you all the way to the Infinite, is a living whole, ceaselessly changing. Some of these changes take millions of years. Some happen instantaneously. May the links of the network shine.