



Help Seniors

SEVEN STRATEGIES FOR MEANINGFUL AGEING



By: Syd Eckley

Introduction

For the first time in the history of the World three to four generations share this earth together. More persons have the privilege to enjoy their grand children and great grand children than ever before. Over the past 100 years life expectancy almost doubled and at the same time older persons remain relatively healthy and fit deep into their eighties.

The question is frequently being asked: “Do older retired persons enjoy their bonus years or is it one long time of suffering”? The question can also be asked more bluntly: “Is it necessary to live so long”? Let us explore some facts and perceptions in this regard.

What do people say about older persons and what do older persons say about themselves?

Take note!

- At last **science** has dismissed the many myths about ageing as false. There is absolutely no truth that most older persons suffer from ill health, can no longer study or make any contribution to society. In actual fact the vast majority of older persons live active and fulfilling lives deep into their 90's. Ageing should be seen as a resource, not a liability, so say the scientists.
- **Older persons themselves** in general view growing older as a positive time of life. Most of them feel very good about their families and treasure their grand children, many are active in the church and community and many still work and earn an income. Age is seen as a blessing.
- Then there are a **growing number of persons** we say that too many older persons use their age as a bargaining chip. Age, ill health, loneliness, social and financial status are frequently used to manipulate others. In South Africa older persons are sometimes referred to as people who tend to live in the past, refuse to accept the present and who make a hobby of finding fault and criticize everyone and everything. Maybe this statement is a little too strong, but where there's smoke there is a fire.

The question whether older years are a time of joy or is it a “sad-sad world” was discussed by two separate groups of older persons.

Listen to what they found!

- **Work is the glue what keeps the body and soul together.** If you stop working, even if it is voluntary work, you will be like a train running up and down on a side line.
- **The devil finds work for idle hands.** Unstructured and empty days become days you do not deserve. Idle people mostly become irritating and negative. A full daily routine is a must!
- **Worry destroys** life and will eventually lead to depression and anger. If you expect the worse you will attract the worse. Surround yourself with positive things and positive people.

- **Your brain is your biggest asset – care for and protect it!** People, who read daily, continue to study, accept new challenges, eat correctly and exercise, will remain brain fit.
- **Contact with people, especially young persons.** Create opportunities to stay in touch with the world. Good relationships with grandchildren and family are important in developing a care and share attitude.
- **To mix with persons of other cultures,** will help to develop a broader perspective on your life.
- **Good life style habits are important as they become keys to successful ageing.**
What does it mean:
 - **Praise** rather than to seek applause.
 - **Give acknowledgement.**
 - **Be open to criticism.**
 - **Use “pleasant” words** rather than your “stupid”, “sick”, a “liar” etc.
 - **Listen first, and then talk.**
 - **Focus on others** rather than yourself.
 - **Eat correctly.**
 - **Exercise regularly.**
- **Make absolute certain of your destiny** When your earthly tent is torn apart, will you move to the “mansion in the sky” or the “hole with the lid”?

A final word from Paul Tourier a psychologist with a lifelong passion for older persons:

- **Say yes to life.** Despite the many bad chapters, it does not mean your book of life is a disaster.
- **Live beyond your age.** Your chronological age actually means nothing, it is all about quality years – it is about what you think about yourself, others, life and what you do every day that really counts.
- **Take control of your last chapter.** Use every opportunity to serve, to give, to learn, to give hope and to spoil yourself.
- **Live with hope.** Look up, look ahead!

“I am living in life’s last chapter, and it is best of all”. – Elton Trueblood.

SEVEN STRATEGIES FOR MEANINGFUL AGEING

Strategy ONE: Seek meaning in older years

- Acknowledge that ageing is not an illness, cannot be treated and that it forms part of a life long development process.
- A life of fulfillment has meaning. Focus on finding what life holds for you and cherish it.
- Decode your age. This means to develop an understanding of what it means to you and others to grow older.
- Focus on core issues, things that are truly important to you and let go of the irrelevant ones – be selective to what and who you allow within your living space.
- Continuously evaluate your life and make the necessary decisions to take you forward, for example to study, exercise, to reach out etc.
- Make it your business to stay functionally active, this can mean many things, like exercising, participating in intellectual social and spiritual activities.
- Be on the look out for opportunities to help you grow and develop, never allow stagnation to manifest.

Strategy TWO: You are never too old to learn.

- Life long learning is the best way to keep your brain functional.
- Stay informed about life, the world and the community you live in. This will sharpen your intellect and social being.
- Brain exercises and supplements will help to control intellectual and mental decline like dementia and Alzheimer – participate in Sudoku, chess, bridge, crossword puzzles, read newspapers and books.
- Acquire new skills – painting, sculpting, pruning trees etc.

Strategy THREE: Use the past to accumulate wisdom.

- Wisdom acquired through life experience is your biggest asset – believe it!
- Focus on positive things – learn from the past.
- Be willing to change, despite that it may be challenging. Make it your business to know what is happening around you and fit in, so that you remain on the main track of life. Fight negativity at all levels.
- Plough knowledge and experience back – become part of harvest time.

- For those people with titles, dig a hole in your garden and dump them there and become an ordinary person once again.

Strategy FOUR: Strengthen Relationships

- In your true being you are a social animal – accept it!
- Acknowledge that for you to survive in this life; you will need a social network. If the old ones collapse, build new ones.
- In crisis times of loss and pain, it will be your relationships that will carry you through.
- The biggest fear of growing older is loneliness – by keeping your social network in tact - with your grandchildren, children, friends, the church etc., it will be critical for your survival.
- To be certain about your relationship with God is very important. Know your destiny.

Strategy FIVE: You will only grow if you know how to give and how to receive.

- Happy older persons are normally those that know all about sharing, caring and receiving.
- Volunteering will help you a lot to be renewed as you become part of life outside of yourself.
- People, who give of themselves, will always stay in demand.

Strategy SIX: Forgive yourself and others

- This is a major challenge to forgive yourself, others and circumstances.
- An attitude and lifestyle of forgiveness is good for your health. Unhappy and sad people are normally miserable and ill.
- Persons, who accept that we live in an imperfect world, are able to manage the many challenges of ageing, well.
- Laugh at yourself.

Strategy SEVEN: An attitude of gratitude

- Gratitude is a mighty weapon against the losses and fears associated with ageing – it is like faith-in-action.
- To make peace with the many imperfections in life, will unlock amazing potential towards finishing well

- Consider keeping a gratitude journal – jotting down three things every day that you are grateful for.

APPLICATION OF THE STRATEGIES

The seven strategies represent a set of tools and form a big picture on active ageing. Each strategy is like a single note on a piano. Only when they are played together, will good music come forth.

Where and when can one start to implement the strategies? First, evaluate what strategies are important in your life and those you may struggle with. Make a deliberate decision where to start and set targets. It can be helpful to discuss the strategies in a group, which can be a good way to help to motivate one another.

If you wish to talk to me about the strategies, feel free to phone me at 086 111 6122 or 082 337 8762.

Good luck!

Syd Eckley
Chairperson

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- Roberts & Hill. Seven strategies for Positive Ageing with Norton and Company, New York. London – 2008.

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