

*Excerpt from Who Do You Want to Be When You Grow Old? The Path of Purposeful Aging*

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This is a book by two old friends who have known each other more than half of both their lives. It is a book about a subject of which no one can claim absolute expertise, but which each of us learns a little bit more about every day. It is a book whose purpose is purpose.

It is a book about how to grow old, with the emphasis on “grow.” Our focus is on not just getting older, but on how to grow as we do so. Everyone is getting older; not everyone is growing older. This is a book about growing whole as we grow old and how the later years of our lives can be as fulfilling and meaningful as those that led us here—if not more so. We see aging as a liberating experience, one that enables us to live with greater purpose and meaning for all of our lives.

We grow up twice: first, from childhood to adulthood; second, from adulthood to elderhood. Taking the path of purposeful aging means outgrowing adulthood and growing into elderhood, expressing more of our true selves in all that we do. Purpose and meaning emerge from choosing to follow our own path. The path is marked by a mindset that the second half of life—the “old” half—is less about outward accomplishment and more about inward growth.

The path of purposeful aging is a choice to wake up every day with the intention to grow and give. Choice is the key. Later life affords us the freedom to choose to become the person we always meant to be. Too many of us live the first half of our lives “by default;” the “choices” we made were typically made for us by societal expectations, custom, and external demands. In later life, no longer constrained by those default choices, we are finally free choose to become the person we really are, the most complete and authentic expression of our deepest self.

The path of purposeful aging is to be traveled for three reasons. First, it is energizing and life-affirming; it provides us with that “why” to get up in the morning. Second, it makes us more resilient as we face the inevitable adversities of aging. And third, it enables us to grow whole as we grow older.

Most of us will live longer than past generations. Yet the societal story of aging is stuck in a script from our grandparents or great-grandparents era. As such, it’s not doing us any favors.

The time has come to change that story from a default anti-aging mindset to a intentional pro-aging mindset. It’s time to retire retirement as we know it.

We must stop viewing aging as a disease. Aging is not a disease; it is a design problem. Growing old is not a bug in life’s program; it is a feature. Reimagining our lives for longer lives requires that we choose to grow whole, not just old. And that means exploring the path of purposeful aging.

Purpose is our aim to live a life that is meaningful, and which makes a positive contribution to the world. It is grounded in the truth that our lives are fundamentally worth living and that each of us matters. It helps us to make sense of our lives and to organize our choices and direction in life. Purpose is dynamic; it will naturally change over the course of a lifetime. The power of purpose is the power to choose our own direction in life.

We don’t “find” our purpose, because it’s not something we have to go out and look for; rather it’s something we “unlock” by going inside—by getting to know what we stand for, what we won’t stand for, and who stands with us.

Purpose is always something that we love to do and enjoy sharing with others; that we feel passionate and care deeply about; and that we feel fits our values and way we prefer to live

and work in the world. Our purpose will always express our true gifts, passions, and values for the sake of others—no exceptions.

The path of purposeful aging involves a growth mindset in which we wake up every day with the attitude that we can continue growing and giving in spite of the adversities of aging.

It's about asking questions—questions that enable us to look within, to review our past and grow from it, and to reimagine our future, at any age. Questions like these which form the chapter titles of the book:

- Old? Who, me?
- If we all end up dying, what's the purpose of living?
- Aren't I somebody?
- Am I living the good life my whole life?
- How can I stop living a “default life” and instead live a good life?
- Am I having a late-life crisis?
- Will I earn a passing grade in life?
- How can I grow whole as I grow old?
- How will my music play on?

As we explore these questions, we do not pretend to have all the answers, but having been on the path of purposeful aging for a long time together, we offer our insights informed by these explorations.

This is the path we're committed to follow as we grow old; we hope you'll travel your own path together with us.