

Aging's Four Freedoms

Longer lives enable us to pursue happiness, learning and lifestyles in new ways. But all of society must be involved to make this possible.



On Jan. 6, 1941, the eve of the United States' entry into World War II, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt stood before a joint session of Congress to deliver his annual State of the Union address. In that speech, Roosevelt argued for an end to the isolationist policies that grew out of World War I and offered a new ideology based on Four Freedoms: Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Worship, Freedom From Want, and Freedom From Fear. Roosevelt's Four Freedoms resonated with the American people as a statement of the

country's underlying values, and to this day, they ring true as the basic values that define American life and examples of American exceptionalism.

In much the same way that Roosevelt's Four Freedoms inspired America to wake up and realize what was happening in the world and to act, there are Four Freedoms of Aging that will define the future of aging, inspire us to challenge old beliefs and stereotypes and spark new solutions for living and aging in America.



Freedom to Choose

It's up to you how and where you want to live as you age. When it comes to aging, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. If you want to follow a traditional path to retirement, you should be able to do that. If you want an active, engaged life, you should have

options to pursue that as well. Whether you want to continue living in your own home as you get older, move to a retirement community or live in an institutional setting, those options should all be available to you.



Freedom to Earn

A key part of the retirement model that most of us have grown up with is freedom from work. Today, a key part of extended middle age is the freedom to work. Many of us want or need to continue earning a living and are searching for ways to make a difference in society through the work we do. This requires reimagining work and breaking down social and institutional barriers that stand in the way.



Freedom to Learn

Our world is changing so quickly. New technologies, new ways of communicating with one another, new ways of receiving and processing information—it's hard to keep up. If we want to stay engaged, involved and productive during our extended

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middle age and beyond, we need to keep learning. If we want to continue working, we need to keep learning to keep our job skills up to date. We need to keep learning to avoid isolation. We need to keep learning for our personal fulfillment and simply to enjoy life. But let's face it. The opportunities for us to keep learning diminish as we get older. In many cases, they're just not there. As we disrupt aging, we will break down the barriers and create new opportunities to learn as we get older.



Freedom to Pursue Happiness

Discovering and fulfilling your purpose is what it's really all about. Our longer lives give us an extraordinary opportunity to become the people we have always wanted to be. No longer burdened by many of the day-to-day stresses that consumed our lives as we were advancing our careers and raising our kids, many of us are using our extended middle age to turn inward and focus on finding and fulfilling our purpose in life. We have the power to reimagine our lives and change course if we choose.

Civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph keenly observed, "Freedom is never given; it is won." Winning Aging's Four Freedoms begins with each of us. We have to work together to create a society where we have access to the care, information and services we need to lead healthier lives with independence and dignity, where we have the financial resources and opportunities to match our longer life expectancy and where we are seen as an integral and inspirational asset to society.

Aging's Four Freedoms reflect the belief that the future of aging is not about decline, it's about growth. It doesn't only present challenges, it creates opportunities. Older people are not burdens. They are contributors.

Age and experience can expand life's possibilities for every member of our society. When we disrupt aging and embrace it as something to look forward to instead of something to fear, we can begin to discover our real possibilities for becoming the person we always wanted to be and build a society where all people are valued for who they are, not judged by how old they are.

This article is adapted from Jo Ann Jenkins' 2016 book, "Disrupt Aging: A Bold New Path to Living Your Best Life at Every Age."