

# It's Not Your Father's Old Age



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**The U.S. must change the conversation about what it means to get older because the ingrained negativity no longer applies.**

Our ability to live longer, healthier and more productive lives is one of mankind's greatest accomplishments. Most people turning 50 today can expect to live another 30-plus years, most of it in relatively good health. That's more time than they spent in childhood, in adolescence, and, for many, it's more time than they spend working.

Yet research shows that most people view aging as a process of deterioration, dependency, reduced potential, family dispersal and digital incompetence. As a result of these deeply ingrained negative attitudes, people see the process of aging as something to fear and fight against, rather than a continued period of growth that brings new opportunities for individuals and society.

We have to change that perception. We desperately need to disrupt aging. As we approach a time when people over 65 will outnumber children under 15 for the first time in history, let's change the conversation in this country around what it means to get older. It's really not about aging; it's about living.

Disrupting aging begins with each of us owning our age — feeling good about where we are in life. We don't want to be defined by our age any more than we want to be defined by race or sex or income, or by outmoded expectations of what we should or should not do at a certain age.

Disrupting aging is not about clinging to our youth. We've all seen those ads on TV and in magazines — "50 is the new 30," or "60 is the



new 40.” That may sound nice, but as someone who was born in 1958, I don’t agree.

For one, we face different challenges and goals than people in their 30s and 40s. We’re motivated by different things. We see the world through a lens shaped by the ups and downs of life and the wisdom gained from those experiences. I am a more purposeful person because of the experiences and wisdom those years have brought me, and more and more people are discovering the same thing.

Disrupting aging is recognizing that 50 is not the new 30; 50 is the new 50. It’s not wishing we were younger; it’s redefining what it means to be our age. It’s also about building innovative systems that serve the new wants and needs of people as they age.

I think there are three areas where this is really important. I refer to these as Health, Wealth and Self.

For health, we need to begin to focus on physical and mental fitness instead of diminishment, on preventing disease and improving well-being instead of just treating ailments. We need to help people feel empowered to become an active partner in their health care instead of being a dependent patient.

Wealth doesn’t mean becoming rich beyond your wildest dreams. It does mean having financial resilience to not outlive your money. We must work to demonstrate that an active, engaged, employed older population has the potential to be more of an economic boon than a social challenge — that the growing number of older people is not a drain on society but a key driver of economic growth, innovation and new value creation.

Corporations, entrepreneurs and small businesses are finally beginning to view the aging population as an opportunity — a growing market for goods and services, a pool of untapped talent and resources, and a driving force behind economic and social innovation — instead of an unaffordable cost and financial burden.

And when we change the conversation from “unaffordable

costs and financial burdens” to “opportunity” — and we change the reality to be more of an “economic boon” than a “social challenge” — that’s disrupting aging.

For self, we must change the conversation from aging as a decline to aging as continuous growth. We must help people go from feeling useless to having a deep sense of purpose and positive self-image.

If we can help people gain confidence in navigating life transitions and feel as though they are an integral part of society instead of being isolated from society, that, too, is disrupting aging.

Fortunately, the movement to disrupt aging has already begun. As the boomers move into their 50s and 60s, they are disrupting aging as they have every other phase of life they have passed through.

At AARP, we truly believe that 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 rather than something to fear, we can begin to discover the real possibilities for becoming the person we’ve always wanted to be and build a society for all where people are valued because of who they are, not judged by how old they are.

#### DISRUPTING AGING



#### Health

**Focus on fitness and improving well-being instead of diminishment and treating ailments**



#### Wealth

**Demonstrate that the older population can be an economic boon rather than a social challenge**



#### Self

**Change expectations from decline to continuous growth, and the feeling of uselessness to a sense of purpose**