

K-State Research and Extension News for March, 2022

Building Momentum As We Age

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The negative lens through which our society sees aging feeds the stereotype that aging is a process of deterioration, decline and dependency. This assumption is so engrained in America today that we rarely notice it. However, when we look closely, it can be seen everywhere.

We talk about “battling” aging. We mock ourselves for struggling with new technology as we age. We see aging as an embarrassment we do not want to highlight. We tell children it is rude to ask older people how old they are. We search for the “fountain of youth” in a variety of anti-aging products to “reverse aging”.

The challenges that accompany aging, such as health issues, loom large, while the benefits of aging fade into the background. Why is that? As we treat our aging as something to fight rather than embrace, we are at risk of becoming alienated from ourselves as we get older.

By the year 2040, there will be more people aged 60 and over than there are children – for the first time in the history of the world. Not only is our world getting older, but the experience of aging is radically different from what our parents experienced. As we age, we find ourselves staying healthy longer, contributing to our communities, pursuing new opportunities and more. We are living a new reality of aging, yet our perceptions about aging do not reflect this new reality.

We must begin to see aging as something to look forward to, not something to fear. There are many benefits of aging including the skills, knowledge and wisdom we acquire throughout our years. Each year we “build momentum” through experiences and insights. This journey empowers us with the ability to make significant contributions to our families and communities.

The knowledge we have gained throughout the years is shared with our families as we transition to the role of grandparent. Knowledge is shared in stories and journals. Skills acquired through hobbies and employment are passed down to future generations through hands-on experiences. Gathering momentum can also take place together, building on our experiences as a family through travel or learning a new hobby or skill.

Our communities benefit from our volunteer efforts on the front line as well as in the board room. 25% of individuals age 65 and older volunteer in some way to help their community. The skills we bring to the table can effect change in our neighborhoods and cities, accomplishing more with less financial resources.

Another way the knowledge and experiences we accumulate throughout our lives are displayed in the community is the large number of adults over the age of 50 starting their own businesses.

We can leverage this lifetime of experience to get started. We might take one skill from our old job and make it into an entire business. Or, use the skills learned in our previous employment to start a business that is completely different – something we have always dreamed of doing but never had the chance to do.

The good news is that if we change how we talk about aging, over time we can change how we think about it and act in response. Building momentum is something that continues throughout our lifespan. It does not have an expiration date attached to it. Neither does the knowledge we accumulate and have available to share. The key is to embrace aging. Do not be afraid to continue to grow and build momentum. What you do after 50 can be just as amazing as what you've done before 30!

Source: Sanford Social Innovation Review & AARP Small Business. For more information on family resource management or adult development and aging contact the Marais des Cygnes Extension District Paola (913-294-4306) or Mound City (913-795-2829) offices, or write to kgoul@ksu.edu or check out our website: www.maraisdescyignes.k-state.edu.