



Be a Comeback Kid: How to Reinvent Yourself at Any Age

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How old is old?

The results of a new survey by the [U.K.'s Department of Work and Pensions](#) is bound to spark some heated exchanges at the next multigenerational family gathering. Those under 25 believe that youth ends at 32 and old age dodders onto the radar at 54. At the other end of the spectrum, people over 80 extend youth's final hurrah to 52 and push off the beginning of old age until 68.

The under-25 opinion was true -- about 100 years ago. At the turn of the 20th century, [life expectancy](#) was just 47 years-old. Today, it's on its way to doubling to 78 for the average American, and promises to edge even higher. Those over-80s have a good point.

The ramifications of this longevity bonus are huge. Instead of our lives proceeding in a traditional linear lockstep, we're gravitating to a more cyclic approach to life. Instead of conforming to a series of life events determined primarily by age and gender, we have more choices: We can start a family at 35, go back to school at 45, craft a new career at 56, or get remarried at 76. Instead of having one chance to get it exactly right at the right time, we all have the potential to be comeback kids.

Exhilarating, no? Well, maybe not. We're all pioneers here and forging our own futures can be nerve-wracking, if not downright scary. With new opportunities dawning before us, how can we make the most of them -- or even decide to do something about them -- before they pass by?

In my work as an entrepreneur, author, public speaker and co-founder of Age Wave, a research and consulting firm created to guide companies in understanding the effects of baby boomers and mature adults on the workplace, the marketplace and our lives, I've identified five strategic guideposts that can help us prepare for living a long life successfully in this more cyclic world. Here they are:

1. We are longevity pioneers paving the cyclic life path.

It used to be that age 50, 60 or 70 were over-the-hill. Not anymore. There's no doubt that scientific and medical breakthroughs will continue to raise life expectancy and might even allow us to look and feel far younger than our chronological age. As we embark on this new journey, one of the tools we'll be able to rely on is the wisdom gained in previous go-rounds. The capacity to change and adapt is an acquired skill developed through practice, revision and, sometimes,

even failure. The courage to move forward, even when we're unsure of what lies ahead, is also an acquired skill we'll all need to develop as longevity pioneers.

2. The cyclic life path is dynamic, not static.

The linear life path demanded that each stage of life hold us captive for a particular period of time. If we didn't succeed at that stage, we blew our one and only chance. In a more cyclic life, however, opportunities crop up wherever we sow them. We need to be ready to take advantage of these opportunities. This will require a new set of skills. Emotional and mental flexibility and agility are as important to develop as good health and physical fitness.

3. Be a beginner at any age.

The cyclic life demands that we try new things. That means we have to dare to be a fumbling beginner until we can learn enough to seem competent, no matter how young or old we might be. Only then do we get to experience what it's like to improve from bad to good. I can tell you from personal experience that it's unbelievably satisfying.

A simple example from my own life: My two children were experts at playing pool before they were teenagers. They learned the game from their dad, my husband Ken, who was a pool shark in his youth. Until recently, I'd opt out of their games -- because, I told them, the three could have some bonding time together (and to avoid humiliating myself). Then the kids and I went on a vacation -- Ken was on a business trip -- and there wasn't much to do in the late afternoons except play pool. I reluctantly agreed to let them teach me as long as they promised to be kind. And you know what? At age 50, I learned to play pool. I wouldn't go so far as to say that I'm the next Minnesota Fats, but now at least I can hold my own in friendly family competitions.

4. The rhythm and cadence of life will change.

Not too long ago, unmarried women faced despair, desperation and the disparaging label of spinster or old maid as early as their late 20s. College students who spent more than the prescribed four years in school were seen as slackers, either in academic achievement, ambition or self-control. And imminent retirees who hadn't reached their career or personal goals were considered a failure with no opportunity to try again.

Not anymore. On the cyclic life path, we are freed from the onus of getting from the linear point A to point B as punctually as possible. We don't need to move in lockstep with everyone else. Perhaps most importantly, there is no longer a single finish line. We can each have our own goals and objectives, and aim to reach them according to our own rhythm and timing. There's no penalty for slowing down, speeding up or starting over. We can relax a little and enjoy the ride. And we have the opportunity to succeed at any age. Late blooming may be the best revenge.

5. Setbacks and detours are inevitable.

Because of its adaptability and range of options, the cyclic life is more complex and less predictable than the linear life path. There will be moments when we'll feel like we've lost our way or, perhaps, made some questionable choices. That's OK. The cyclic life offers ample time to assess any damage, pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and move ahead, on whatever road we choose. The important thing to remember is we can learn even more from our missteps than from successes.

When the average human life span was 47, less than 50 years ago, there was little opportunity for many of us to apply the kind of wisdom, clarity and talent that absolutely required decades of experience and observation to obtain. Imagine, though, how many more men and women will have the opportunity to bloom now that our life spans have nearly doubled! Do you, for example, view the world the same way now as you did at 19? Could you have possibly understood the alchemy of your successes without the counterpoint of your failures? And how in the world could you have focused on the meaning of life when you were busy changing diapers or paying the rent?

Ultimately, what the new cyclic life offers us is time. Time to relax. Time to explore. Time to reconsider. Time to reinvent. Time to fire up our engines and time to dial them down again. As the survey I mentioned at the beginning of this blog shows, youth and old age are a matter of individual perspective. And if your perspective is cyclic, the opportunities are endless.

This article can be found at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/maddy-dychtwald/reinventing-yourself_b_1225322.html.