

Let's Celebrate Age Together!

August 21 is "Senior Citizens Day." Though the term is outdated, it's a reminder to appreciate the treasures in the "older" people who enrich our lives and who share their life experiences, their stories and their wisdom. Let's also take stock of what folks are doing as they age, putting experience and wisdom to work. Take time to notice the impact that purpose-driven people, no matter their ages, are having on their own lives, the lives of the people in their communities, and in particular, the lives of people like me who are regularly inspired by the constant demonstrations of what's possible for each person through each stage of life.



Evidence of noticing and enacting change can accompany days of recognition as we have here. I'm fortunate to have seen several cultural progressions in my lifetime. Today, we celebrate diversity of all sorts in our world and have ways of learning about one another that are often born from these moments. "celebrations" can help break down barriers and remind us of the ground we've covered on our shared human journeys. The Civil Rights Act of the 1960s, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Marriage Equality Act of 2011 have all bridged some divides. Motion forward is always good even as our work continues.

This "Senior Citizens Day," I'm asking we all encourage conversations around "ageism." Despite a cultural bias about aging here in America, the number of people 65 years old and above will more than double by 2040 and the number of people over 85 will quadruple. For the first time in U.S. history, older people will outnumber younger generations. There is similar disparity in generations throughout the world. The impacts are massive and will be untenable unless we can recognize the real possibilities that exist in lives where people are connected in community, learning from one another and continuing to drive lives with greater focus on purpose, health, and well-being through means that are constantly evolving.

How do we move forward? Language is powerful. Changing how we use it can have impact. Ageism is frequently unnoticeable and can be found in casual conversations. For example, we say someone is "still" working when they work beyond the "traditional" retirement age. As if remaining in the workforce is remarkable. This unconscious bias may seem innocuous, but actually perpetuates

ageism.

Yesterday, our colleague Katie Wade posted a note on LinkedIn around the premise of a question asked in a column in The New York Times: “How old is too old?” The words are disabling and ignore the reality that we actually grow and strengthen in so many ways that are too often ignored, let alone celebrated! And by the way, the truth about working older adults is that nearly 22% of Americans ages 65 and older are part of our country’s workforce, some out of necessity to supplement their income but many because they know they have something more to contribute.

Another way to make a difference is to think differently about retirement and have conversations with people from all walks of life and learn what they feel retirement means. Unlike the generation that came before them, boomers view it far differently. For a boomer today, retirement can mean travel, continuing education, mentoring, second careers, volunteering, sports, or a host of other significant life events that are far from passive and belie the notion of “retiring,” which at its root means “to go away.”

In our work, we struggle with terms such as “retirement” and “senior citizen.” Let’s keep asking ourselves, “How do we want to be referred to?” A recent joint study from the American Medical Association, the Gerontological Society of America, the American Psychological Association and Associated Press says that terms such as *seniors*, *elderly*, *the aged*, *aging dependents*, *old-old*, *young-old*, and similar terms connote a stereotype and thus should not be used. Instead, terms such as *older persons*, *older people*, *older adults*, *older patients*, *older individuals*, *persons 65 years and older*, or *the older population* are preferred.

Do you agree? Have things changed again? Talk about it. Ask questions. Explore opportunities to change the narrative around aging and become an advocate of awareness. There’s always more than we might imagine. Let’s go!

— Sean Kelly

Chief Executive Officer

Front Porch