



## FROM CHAPTER 8

### AGING STEREOTYPES ARE HOOEY

A common risk facing people approaching retirement is aging stereotypes. We find ourselves immersed in derogatory images of aging. We read them in newspapers, we hear them in music, and we see them in movies and on television. Consider how the grandparent characters are depicted on most television shows: as over-the-hill busybodies getting in the way, commenting on their digestive-tract tribulations, and otherwise mucking things up for their children, grandchildren, and neighbors. Funny, and not so funny. It's hooley, pure and simple.

People who fall prey to these denigrating stereotypes are at high risk of stumbling badly in retirement. Stereotypes trigger apprehension about change, a panic at perhaps becoming one of those not-so-self-flattering old folks as depicted by youth-obsessed ad execs: the “Where’s the beef” granny, or the “I’ve fallen and I can’t get up” lady, or the wrinkly gents in the lodge sauna in the sitcom *Everybody Loves Raymond*. Most of us are so imbued with these

misconceptions about aging that freeing ourselves of them takes a determined effort.

Changing demeaning stereotypes of aging will first require you to recognize the array of negative images with which you have been imprinted. Take time to jot down both the positive and negative images of aging that have been imprinted on you by the culture, by your social and religious beliefs, and by your experiences. Recall the books you've read, the songs you've listened to, and the movies and television shows you've seen. What were your parents like? Your grandparents? Your great aunts and uncles?

Initially choose one negative image you'd like to let go of. Do not push away that image, but rather redirect yourself toward a positive image that you can use to replace the negative one. It's a common phenomenon that the more you try not to think of something, the more you will think of it. The harder you fight a negative image, the more it will hold you in its grip. So, don't resist what you don't want—go toward what you do want. One by one you can walk away from belittling stereotypes of aging and stride toward positive images that can energize your third age transformation.

Many people in their fifties, sixties, and seventies have been creatively designing, or redesigning, their lives and exhibiting new, mature growth just when a person might—as conditioned by negative stereotypes of aging—expect decline. Like pioneers on a new frontier, they have been opening up in the second half of life, making it the best period in their lives. They tell each of us in quite persuasive terms: *My third age can be the best time in my life.* Let go of the hooy. Reflect on, dream about, and plan for how you might wish to change the course of your life. As you creatively change course, you, too, will discover that the best *is* yet to be. But only if you believe it, and make it so.

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