

Becoming a Sage

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“The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are.” — C.J. Jung

What is the difference between becoming a sage and getting older? What is the difference between aging and “sage-ing”? Through my work as a leadership consultant, I’ve learned that “sage-ing” is a new way of living.

Specifically, sage-ing is approaching the second half of our lives in a way that is positive, joyful, fulfilling and meaningful. Sage-ing involves personal and spiritual growth, making deeper connections with our friends and family, developing new passions, and giving back to others and our community.

Sage-ing means living our later years creatively and with purpose; it means distilling the accumulated wisdom of our years and sharing it with the next generation. As Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, author of the book “From Aging to Sage-ing: A Revolutionary Approach to Growing Older,” explains: “Are we really living longer or taking longer to die? Sage-ing is a program of spiritual growth that can empower you to add more years to your life and more life to your years.”

The essence of sage-ing consists of five main components:

- Exploring images of aging. Our culture bombards us with anti-aging messages and worships youth.
- Reviewing one’s life. Wisdom comes from processing our life experiences.
- Repairing relationships. Now is the time to make sure our relationships are healthy and how we want them.
- Embracing one’s mortality. When we embrace our own death, we are freer to live.
- Leaving a legacy. Plan to live the way we want to be remembered.
- In the past 100 years, life expectancies have grown to what was once unimaginable. We may live as long after our career as during our career. We need to learn healthy ways to navigate this stage of life. How will we spend this time? How will we live our life? Why does sage-ing matter?

What I have discovered in my sage-ing workshops is that gracefully aging is not based on

money or intelligence. Instead, it's based on being intentional and making conscious, thoughtful choices about how we spend our time and with whom. Many people focus on where they want to live after their careers, but just as important is with whom you spend your time. The people with whom we surround ourselves influence how active, how positive, and how relevant we are.

There are some alarming statistics for people over age 50 that illustrate why becoming a sage is so vital. For example, fewer than 10 percent of those who got divorced in 1990 were age 50 or older. Today, 25 percent of people getting divorced are in this age group. What's more, the most recent National Survey on Drug Abuse and Health found illicit drug use among people between the ages of 55 and 59 had increased more than any other group. Another troubling statistic: The rate of suicide is highest in middle age—white males in particular.

While there may be many reasons for these negative trends, one explanation has to do with meaning and purpose. What is our reason for getting up in the morning? Since we can't push back the clock, we need to embrace where we are in life and value our life experience. It is about cherishing the present and focusing on what matters most. Sages continue to remain engaged in society because they want to create a legacy through service, mentoring and activism. To be a sage, it helps to believe the rest of life can be the best of life.