

New directions

How to make some changes and stay in your prime

“It’s never too late to be what you might have been,” said writer George Eliot and that’s never more true than when you’re *in your prime*. You’ve now reached the stage where you’ve accomplished much in your life, had many experiences – good and bad – and as a result, have accumulated a considerable weight of insight and knowledge into the way the world works.

So the challenge now is to use your wisdom, insight and knowledge to identify and address your unfulfilled ambitions and dreams – and by doing so, become even more of the person you have always wanted to be.

‘A leopard can’t change its spots,’ you may say. That’s absolutely true and neither should you. After all, you’ve been who you are for at least fifty years now and in a whole number of ways, it has stood you in good stead. But even if you wanted to, no one can change *that* dramatically, so what we’re looking at here is how to make small and ongoing changes to the essential you, in order to ensure you keep developing and growing.

The starting point for a happy old age

Fundamentally, change keeps you young. Those fabulous elderly people who we all admire because of their infectious enthusiasm, wry humour and inquisitive minds are like that because invariably they never stop taking on board new information and seeking out new experiences and challenges. What’s wrong with being old if we knew we could be like them?

Of course, there are no guarantees that you will experience a long and happy old age in full control of your mental faculties. But now’s the time when if you put extra effort into broadening your horizons, you will improve your chances of that happening and also, more importantly, see amazing new opportunities opening up for you *now*.

What does it involve? Well, nothing too difficult – just a positive mindset that looks for interesting new experiences and is prepared to take a few

risks. How to go about it? Well, here are a few pointers to start you off to a new way of thinking:

Watch your language

I think therefore I am. Translate that into *I think I am old, therefore I am*, and you can see the danger inherent in adopting thoughts and speech patterns that reflect your feelings that you’re over the hill. Stop it now!

Be careful of what you say. When talking to others, don’t mention age at all unless you really have to, and certainly then if you do, don’t refer to yourself as a fogey, an old git, an old-timer, a golden oldie, a TOG, or a silver anything.

You are **in your prime**. If you’re going to talk about this time of life at all, put a positive spin on it and accentuate the huge new opportunities that open up to us now we have got so many of life’s career and family challenges out of the way.

Manage your attitude

Beware of being negative, angry, uptight and hostile. Why should you be – this is an age where there is much to be cheerful about, with the possibility of shedding many of life’s previous inherent stresses. Be careful also of ranting, repeating yourself or just being self-opinionated and boring. Perhaps you have always been like this, but at this age, being so is a serious turn-off.

Victor Meldrew (*One Foot in the Grave*) was such a successful character because he was so clearly based on reality. So if you find yourself thinking or sounding like Victor, stop it immediately! If necessary, get someone to tape you next time you start banging on and listen to what you sound like. Appalling, isn’t it?

Whatever life throws at you, try to react by being sunny not sour, brave not bitter, and try laughing rather than lamenting how bad things are. If you absolutely can’t find it in you to be cheerful (and no one can be sunny-natured all the time) then try to keep it to yourself and steer clear of others for a

while until you feel better. It's all right to have an 'off day' – but try not to inflict it on others.

Steer clear of stereotyping

Make a deliberate effort to keep well away from anything that marketers think 'over 50s' should buy. That includes comfy slippers, non-slip bath mats and anything else you wouldn't have been seen dead in, or with, when you were in your twenties. Nothing has changed except the fact that by now you should be at your most tasteful and discriminating.

Similarly anything that is badged 'over 50s' should be given a wide berth. That includes over 50s holidays, clubs, or entertainment unless the upper limit is under 70. Otherwise all you are going to be doing is mixing with the seriously elderly – in fact, your parents' generation. You didn't want to do that when you were in your twenties either, so why would you want to now?

This isn't to say you shouldn't have elderly people as friends – of course you should. Diversity is the spice of life, but as part of this approach you should have younger people as friends also. In fact anyone who you have things in common with other than just your age.

Seek out role models

Who are the people you admire and would like to emulate? What do they look like, what are their attitudes? What do they do, and how do they do it? What do they continue to contribute to the world? What do you and other people think of them?

No doubt when you were younger you had role models and people you looked to for inspiration. It's still appropriate to do so – in fact you should positively seek them out. Keep reminders of them about the place – photographs, quotations, or whatever, just to constantly remind you that there are still new heights to reach, new goals to aspire to. Even if it's just a picture of someone who looks particularly stylish or elegant – keep it where you can see it to remind you of what *you* should be working towards.

Keep an optimistic outlook

Ultimately the difference between those who are truly **in their prime** and those who aren't, is attitude. Being **in my prime** means always looking forward, not back (although of course everyone is allowed to reminisce every now and again).

Remember, yesterday is gone, and tomorrow we can't control, so the only time that really matters is today. Realistically, **in my primers** do have fewer years left, but probably almost as many years still

as your whole working life, so certainly there's still a good long period of time to do remarkable things with.

Now's the time to be innovative not conservative; adventurous not afraid; expansive rather than restrictive. Optimism is the order of the day. Okay, so something might not work, or it might not turn out quite as you might have wished or planned. But ultimately, *does it really matter?* Won't it be better to have at least tried it, rather than never to do it at all? And, guess what – it might be a huge success!

Create a life of interest and challenge

One of the fundamental laws of life is that *attractiveness attracts*. If you look good, people will want to be seen with you. If you're interesting, people will want to listen to you. If you lead a dynamic life, people will want to associate with you. If you are a skilful person, people will want to learn from you.

What does this mean? Well, if you concentrate on developing new interests and skills that you find rewarding and fascinating, other people will be drawn towards you. In this way, almost without trying, you start to become the sort of person that *you* have always respected and admired.

Plan ahead

Some things happen by chance, and certainly **in my prime** is a great time of life for serendipity.

But you must also *plan and design* your own future – however you want to be. Keep a box, notebook, or scrapbook and list all the things you want to do one day perhaps with pictures of places you want to visit. Write another list of all the things you love about life currently and all the things you really *love* to do.

Look at it when you hit a brick wall and can't see the way forward. Use it to remind yourself of unrealised opportunities, how much potential you still have, and how wonderful the world is.

Believe in yourself and be courageous

Perhaps at the moment you believe that nothing will ever change and whatever is currently wrong with your life will continue forever. Wrong! There are thousands and thousands of examples of **in my primers** who have taken the initiative and made changes which have had a huge and happy impact on their lives. Whether changing jobs, setting up a business, finding a new partner, moving abroad, taking up a new hobby – just changing one thing can activate a whole avalanche of positive experiences in your life. But guess what? The only way you're going to prove whether this will work for you, is to try it and see...