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## Where Have All the Grownups Gone?

Where's the gravitas? Where are the leaders? I know there's talk that people want to be forever young, but I'd like to make a counter-argument. If there was ever a time that the world needed some grownups (or at least some grownup behavior), it's now. While there's a lot that's attractive about the energy, taut skin, and good intentions of youth and a great deal that's valuable about a pedigreed education, we could sure use some more experience, seasoned reasoning, and levelheaded wisdom.

### **Bring back the elders; we don't want the best sitting on the bench**

Warren Buffett, the 78-year-old lion of American industry and commerce, has been in the media of late, taking strong, thoughtful positions on our economic state. Barbara Walters is all over the airways, and Capt. Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger miraculously landed his plane on the Hudson River with no casualties. And that's how it should be.

This is no time for our most experienced professionals to be on the bench, dismissed from the game just because they've reached an "age of retirement" that is obsolete anyhow. Now is when we want the men and women who have been on the field the longest--the wisest, most discerning, smartest players--sharing their hard-earned insight and advice. It's time to retire retirement, because 65 is definitely not old anymore, and when it comes to getting out of a jam--either financial or mental, who better to help show us the way, than people who have been there before?

Late achievement, while gaining some fresh visibility of late, isn't altogether new. Groucho Marx launched a career as a television-show host at sixty-five. Mary Baker Eddy was eighty-seven when she founded The Christian Science Monitor. At ninety-one, Frank Lloyd Wright designed the Guggenheim Museum in New York City.

I also would make the case, having studied retirement now for 35 years, that most people are not all that happy with the "life of leisure" model of retirement, doing mostly nothing for 20 or 30 years. Having more time off to play, to relax, take an extended break--I totally respect that. But telling people at the top of their game in a longer-lived era, "Now just move to the sidelines, you're done," I think is a terrible mistake. It's not good for them, and it's not good for our nation.

Oscar Wilde said, "Experience is one thing you can't get for nothing," so let's not squander this deep and rich reserve of practical know-how and up-by-the-bootstraps drive. Let's face it, we may be feeling the pinch now, but our elder generation grew up in the shadow of a deep

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economic crisis and saw its fellows storm the beaches at Normandy; they are not lacking for the perspective or courage to help us through some tough sledding. These women and men have views we can use; they should be among the folks we turn to--in our families, at the workplace, and in the media--for guidance.

## **Will the boomers grow up?**

Here's the irony...the very generation that has tried the hardest to remain forever young may not realize that by seeking to live the Peter Pan lifestyle, we may be avoiding the critical role of growing up. I know it's hard for this "nip and tuck" generation to imagine, but for most of history, maturity was prized. Until relatively recently, the old, more than any other age group, assumed leadership, calmed the worried young, and set the example for others. Before the modern youth movement took hold in the Roaring '20s, and then became feverish in the post-WWII baby boom, maturity was so highly valued that people tended to exaggerate their age. Remember that painting of the signing of the Constitution? No Grecian Formula in that room. Leaders of the time hid their youthful hair beneath wigs that were powdered white to enhance the illusion of age and wisdom.

Those of us who came of age believing that you shouldn't trust anyone over 30 need to seriously--and swiftly--reevaluate our stance toward the positive dimensions of the aging process and rethink our place in society. That "won't grow up" attitude is getting old now, too. Our kids, and their kids, need us to step into our roles as society's adults, and assume our gravitas to help the world get through this fix.

You can start by modeling a positive attitude. The United States is caught in the middle of a mass pandemic of "kvetchitis" more infectious than anything I've ever seen. History has proven that proclaiming that the "sky is falling" or declaring the glass to be half empty has never lit the way. Tell someone you care about that you love them, tell your kids that everything is going to be okay, compliment a coworker, offer to carry groceries for a neighbor, help a family in need. And most of all, stop complaining; you and everyone around you will feel better.

## **Come off the bench**

A decade+ ago, *Fortune* ran a thoughtful story about mature adults and retirement with the provocative title "Candy Striper My Ass." The article was prescient--it suggested that there were probably millions of older people who would love to contribute their talents and abilities, but that the volunteer industry lacked the appeal and infrastructure to accommodate them. Today, volunteer groups of all kinds are re-crafting their vision and programs to match the appetites and schedules of a new generation of philanthropreneurs who once vowed to change and rearrange the world, now looking to re-invent their lives and get into the action. And there's a growing army of highly educated, seasoned, capable retiree-agers who have the potential to make a

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difference--again. In the past few days, the House and Senate gave the movement some momentum by passing separate bills to expand AmeriCorps and other national service programs, offering stipends to help rebuild homes, mentor children, and help poor communities with education, clean energy, health and services for veterans.

Now's the time to gather up our wits and life lessons to think on our feet, lead with our hearts, envision new solutions, and bring optimism and a can-do attitude to bear on the problems at hand. Be one of the grownups. The choice is yours.

*For more information, please visit <http://www.agewave.com/withpurpose/freechapter/>.*

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