

Retirement doesn't mean time to relax

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Editor's note: This is the second of two parts. [Click here for first part](#)

Between now and 2050, the 60-plus population in the developed world will increase from about 245 billion to 406 billion people.

Meanwhile, the total population of the areas will remain relatively static, according to United Nations projections.

In other words, the industrialized nations are growing older. At the same time, these nations continue to consider people 65-plus as virtually useless to society — that is, non-productive people who subsist on entitlements such as Social Security and Medicare.

I talked about this with Ken Dychtwald, author and CEO of Age Wave and for 35 years considered in the forefront of advanced thinking about aging Americans.

The 60-plus years should be a time of personal growth, he says, not a time to retire from society.

"Look at what happens today," he says. "Major networks of older adults, even AARP, are more interested in advertising deals and discounts than how we heal society. If AARP talked about giving back instead of getting deals, the world would change."

Of course, the basic question is "When are you old?" And Dychtwald is right when he labels old age a "moving target." When Social Security was passed, benefits started at age 65 but average lifespan was 63.

"Once being over 60 was the bottom of the ninth inning," Dychtwald says. "People looked old, dressed old, talked old and were old. Today, physical vitality, appetite for life and ability to function has pushed that picture back to 75 or 80 years old. There's a lot of variety with what we call old age. It's not about age but a state of mind."

Society, on the other hand, cannot see the differences. Dychtwald calls it "psycho-sclerosis — a hardening of the attitudes."

People 60-plus "should be sitting beside us at community colleges, speaking out at business meetings with new ideas and great advice, providing role models and beginning to change people's notions of who they might become someday. It's a fabulous role!"

What prevents this from happening?

If you're over 60, the fault indeed might lie with you.

"Stand up and demand the attention," Dychtwald says.

He foresees a major backlash against leisure-oriented and entitled old age in the coming decade. And he challenges Americans over 60 to play a greater leadership role in creating a changing attitude.

"Re-envision the later decades as a time of growth and leadership and contribution and leaving a legacy," he says. "Live with purpose."

A quarter of the population can't afford to be silent or non-involved.

Boomers will make the difference, say experts in aging studies like Dychtwald.

My questions are: How will they do this when the economy is tight and the marketplace is skewed against older workers? How will they influence younger generations unless they mix and mingle? What can our grandchildren expect us to do to make the world a better place for them — and their children?

What, really, is the purpose of living so long?

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