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Pg. 24

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Pg. 28

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CEO | Age Wave

## Ken Dychtwald PhD

AN INTERESTING LIFE OF A CURIOUS, DRIVEN &

WELL-INTENTIONED THOUGHT LEADER



**T**oday's young crowd is going to be part of tomorrow's rapidly aging population. Their needs, interests and capabilities will change as they grow older. And the coming increase in the share of older individuals in society will have an impact on almost all companies, as their customers' taste and needs will no longer be the same. So, companies will have to come up with new ideas and strategies to keep their aging – but not necessarily old - customer-base loyal

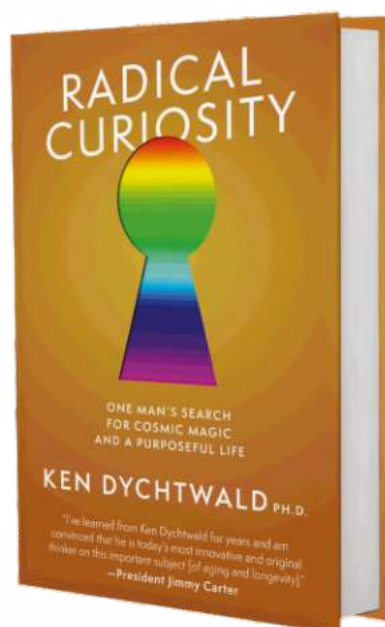
and satisfied. And, not only that, but they will also have to ensure that their growing older workforce continues to be motivated and productive. **Age Wave Founder and CEO Ken Dychtwald**, Ph.D., also a psychologist, gerontologist, and renowned author, is helping individuals reinvent themselves as they age while guiding companies to prepare for the burgeoning silver economy. Through extensive global research, writing best-selling books, producing documentary

films, providing strategic consulting, developing impactful professional and public training programs and public speaking, he is answering this question posed by CEOs of almost all major companies, across nearly every sector, “If you were running my company, and if you knew the age wave was coming, what would you do?”

Ken, now a 71-year-old modern elder himself, has for 47 years been a global influencer regarding the ways people

will think differently about aging and live differently in tomorrow's version of longevity. There is no one who understands all the ways in which the marketplace, the workplace and people's lives are being transformed by shifting demographics better than him. His clients include a mind-boggling assortment of Presidents, CEOs, and political leaders. He educates and guides them to bring the best ideas and strategies forward to remain relevant as societies worldwide experience a demographic shift unlike any the world has ever seen.

If you aren't familiar with Dr. Ken Dychtwald, have a look at his body of work. Starting with his 1977 classic *Bodymind*, he has written 18 books, including his long-awaited and recently released memoir, *Radical Curiosity: One Man's Search for Cosmic and a Purposeful Life*. For the past four decades, he has been studying human potential in the context of the demographics of an aging population, the boomers in particular, and further - how tomorrow's crop of elders will be changing the landscape of work, technology, leisure, hospitality, healthcare, financial services, technology, food and beverage, housing and retirement forever. He was the executive producer and host of the highly rated/praised PBS documentary, *The Boomer Century: 1946–2046*, which aired over 2,000 times on PBS stations nationwide; and his new Public Television special is titled *Life's Third Age*. Ken also conceived and hosted the innovative new American Society on Aging series “The Legacy Interviews,” featuring interviews with the legendary pathfinders in the field of aging.



“**THERE IS A VORTEX OF ENERGY AND POSSIBILITY. AND I THINK IT'S A COMBINATION OF CURIOSITY, BEING WELL-INTENTIONED AND DRIVEN.**”

Since 1986, Ken has been the **Founder and CEO of Age Wave**, an acclaimed think tank and consultancy focused on the social and business implications and opportunities of global aging and rising longevity. His client list has included over half the Fortune 500. He has served as a fellow of the World Economic Forum and was a featured speaker at two White House

Conferences on Aging. Ken has twice received the distinguished American Society on Aging Award for outstanding national leadership, and *American Demographics* honored him as the single most influential marketer of baby boomers over the past quarter century.

### A Winding Road of Challenges & Opportunities

*Recently, Ken agreed to talk with us about his inspiring and resilient journey and the influential work of Age Wave.*

Right off the bat, we ask Ken about the formula that has kept him as one of the most influential thought leaders in the world. And Ken tries to give us a short version, but as he says, it's a little bit of a winding road.

“Every now and then I meet people whose life goes in a straight line, but mine has had all sorts of curvy turns and surprises. Born in 1950 in Newark, New Jersey, I initially went to school to be a physicist, and it wasn't because I really wanted to be a physicist. I was good at math and science, but in truth, I didn't really know what I wanted to be. But in my junior year of college at Lehigh University, I took an elective course that was called 'The Psychology of Human Potential.' It was the late 1960s, and I had never heard of this phrase 'human potential' before. The professor had just graduated from Stanford. So, he was kind of cool and hip and was aware of California type things,” recalls Ken.

He continues, “And the key point in the class was that human beings were only using 4 or 5% of our human potential. So, whether it has to do with



the ability to heal oneself, be creative, amp up your thinking abilities, be influential, be a great athlete or an artist - we were just scratching the surface. As a young man, that idea blew my mind.”

And Ken thought that perhaps his job in life was to try to help people unleash these innumerable potentials. He dropped out of college and relocated to the legendary Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, to be at the heart of the human potential movement. There, Ken learned all sorts of both ancient and emerging practices like yoga, Tai Chi, biofeedback and bioenergetics, and he was especially interested in

incredibly exciting and motivating to me,” adds Ken.

Life threw Ken an interesting curve when he was 24. He was finishing *Bodymind* and completing his doctorate in Psychology at the time. He was invited to try out different kinds of emerging techniques and therapies on older men and women. The project he co-founded, called the SAGE Project, got funded by the National Institutes on Health and was so successful that it became the model for similar programs all over the world. But as the months and then years unfolded, Ken found that he was becoming increasingly captivated by older people and the

have—with your life from birth to death’.”

In the next group session, the elder participants were eager to explain their charts as well as see what other people had done. Ken realized that these older men and women could look back at their lives, and relatively easily, they could see the high points and low points, happy periods and unhappy ones. “Together they discussed the fact that the high points of their lives were not nearly as frequent or long lasting as they had imagined they would be when they were young (my age at the time),” says Ken.

**“ I’M MORE COMFORTABLE NOT IN THE STANDS BUT ON THE COURT OR ON THE FIELD, BEING AN ACTIVE PART OF THE GAME. ”**

mindfulness meditation. During those early years, it struck him that there was a far more holistic relationship between the mind and body than either modern medicine or modern psychology was attending to.

To help bridge that gap, Ken started writing his very first book called *Bodymind*. He was only 22 at the time. The book was published a few years later – in more than a dozen languages. He is proud to say that *Bodymind* is still inspiring readers all around the world. “What struck me in those early years was that I could possibly be a teacher and thought leader and maybe even a person that could impact the lives of others – and that was

lessons that could be learned from them.

For example, “In the early months of the SAGE Project, I was struck by how eager the elders were to make sense of the lives they had lived—and I wondered how they viewed life from a point close to the end. To find out how they saw the arc of their lives, I made up an assignment. I said, ‘Hey everybody, here’s a couple of sheets of graph paper for each of you. For next week’s session, draw a horizontal axis along the bottom of the page. On one end put year one, on the other end, put year one hundred. Give it some thought, but please chart the experiences you’ve had—or will

What struck Ken was how their long view gained through seven, eight, or nine decades of life allowed them to clearly see all the patterns of their lives, which elements made them happy and gratified and which didn’t. According to Ken, “One of the group members commented that, ‘Every teenager should take a mandatory course in healthy, successful, and financially secure aging—and maybe wise old individuals like us should be the instructors.’ Everyone applauded when they heard that idea.”

And then one more piece of Ken’s emerging puzzle fell into place. In 1982, “I became an advisor to what was then called the Office of



Technology Assessment, the non-partisan Congressional think tank. The several-year focus of our team of demographers, gerontologists, sociologists, urban planners, engineers and physicians was to study how demography was going to transform our modern world. We examined and discussed how birth rates were flattening, the baby boomers were getting older and longevity was increasing. In my mind it looked like an 'age wave.' And what struck me was that we had constructed our world to match the form and fit and stage of life that we had always been – young - and that was all about to change dramatically.”

“There were going to be more 50 and 70 and 90- and 110-year-olds in the world than ever before. And that was something for which we were unprepared – in every conceivable way, from the auditory range in our

phones to the focus of training in medical schools. With my interest in human potential and my desire to be an influential thought leader, I wanted to see if there was a critical role I could play in helping to prepare our world for the aging of our population,” says Ken. “Back then, I thought of myself as the Paul Revere of gerontology/demography: The aging are coming, the aging are coming!”

**'If you want to be a thought leader, you must aim your thinking to the future.'**

Ken realized that there were going to be a massive series of changes, both in terms of business, products, services and technology, and also in terms of identity, relationships, family and politics as a result of rising longevity and the unprecedented aging of the world's population.

Ken was also realizing that he is far more comfortable not sitting as a spectator in the stands but being a hard-working player on the court. He feels very lucky because he picked a subject that very few people were interested in, and there was a lot of room to be inventive and make a lasting impact.

Ken reflects that to be a “thought leader, you must aim your thinking to the future. Sure, you need to study history books, but you need to read a lot of science fiction too.” Additionally, “what I quickly learned as I was writing books and articles and giving speeches was that in this modern age, it's also very helpful if you can have effective communication tools. Many people mistakenly think that being able to communicate impactfully is a gift and you're either good at it or you're not. I've learned that it's like every other craft or skill. If you practice a lot



and get coached, you can get better and better with practice. Over the past 40 plus years, I've benefitted from continual coaching from various public speaking teachers and mentors in order to make my points in the most convincing and effective way – whatever medium I'm working in.”

In addition to a forward-facing vision and continually improving communication skills, Ken posits that people need to be prepared to course-correct again and again. For example, if they learn something new and important, they may need to adjust their overall gameplan. And if there's an obstacle that comes their way, they need to find a way to work around. “If there's new information, you've got to be able to digest it, integrate it and keep rolling forward,” Ken says. And

finally, life for Ken is about curiosity, and it's about continually seeking experts to help make him the best he can be, whether it's for his yoga practice, understanding investment opportunities, identifying the role that annuities will play in people's retirement financial plans, or even understanding the implications of sarcopenia on the spa industry. “I have continually reached out to others to try to up my game,” Ken says.

In addition to these traits and intentions, Ken thinks that if someone is going to try to be a risk-taking thought leader, they should be ready to be knocked down many times. “There will be things you'll try to do that will fail. You'll have some disappointments. And that's what it is to be at the leading edge. Therefore, it's good to have

loving family and friends in your camp to help you get up when you fall down.” says Ken.

### **Age Wave LLC: Unparalleled Know-how about the Maturing Marketplace**

To both help midwife the age wave and also capitalize on the growing number of businesses who were becoming interested in these demographic changes, Ken and his wife Maddy started Age Wave in 1986 with the hope of becoming America's leading think tank and consultancy focused on this phenomenon. The business got off to a roaring start and has continued to evolve and morph ever since. Maddy is a highly praised speaker, best-selling author and respected thought leader in her own right. She was recently



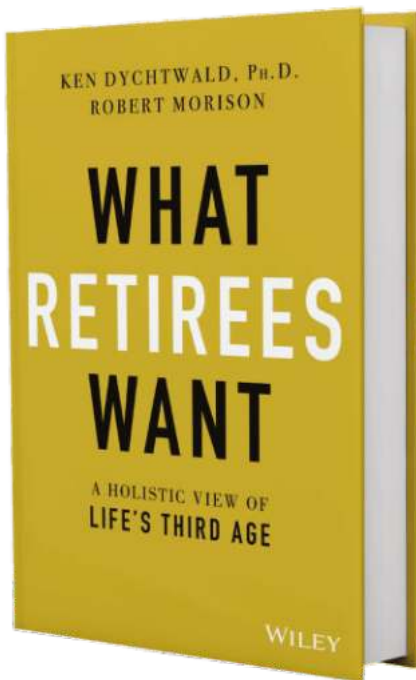
# THE McKinsey *Awards*

RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE  
IN MANAGEMENT THINKING



**PETER DRUCKER**





**“I LOVE HOW THE AGE-RELATED ISSUES ARE MOUNTING BECAUSE THE BOOMERS ARE AGING.”**

recognized by *Forbes* as one of the world's 50 leading female futurists. “In addition, over the years I've learned I am a pretty good thought leader. But, in truth, I'm only a so-so manager. I'm fortunate to have a wonderful partner in Elyse Pellman, the President of Age Wave.” She manages his company

brilliantly and lets him do what he does best.

Even today, when Ken reflects on what is most gratifying about his work, he says, “I love this subject and how it important it is. I love how the age wave-related issues are mounting because the boomers are aging. I love communicating new ideas and educating others to understand this phenomenon. I love doing research. I love doing strategy consulting. I love working with an extraordinary team of professionals, and I love that we're trying to be the best in the world at what we do.

Over the years, hundreds of people have worked at Age Wave. Today, Ken has trimmed the company and made it small and mighty. Ten people currently work full time at the company, and another 20 virtually collaborate on specific projects. So, it's an expanding and contracting team. Ken says, “I often relate to the Kurosawa movie *Seven Samurai*. Kurosawa is a spectacular producer and director, and the notion of this film was that these old timers came together to fix the world. I get to work with a lot of people that I have worked with for decades, like my wife Maddy, our President Elyse, my chief of staff Robyn Reynolds, our art director Luke VanMeter, our heads of research Katy Flick and Bob Morrison, and our head of video production Neil Steinberg.. Although Maddy and I started the company together 36 years ago, in addition to the terrific old-timers, there are new people joining us all the time.” At the core, Ken has really enjoyed being a part of a great team.

Today, Age Wave's services are reasonably straightforward. The

company's focus is on the aging world population. “We have a continually expanding and deepening body of knowledge, and we deploy ourselves in a handful of ways. One of them is that we do cutting-edge research for firms to more deeply understand what's in people's hearts and minds regarding how they're going to optimize their health, financial planning and overall well-being in the years ahead.” “For example, we examine what role new technologies can play in helping people live better lives as they age. Can our homes make us healthier? What happens within families as we live longer? What's the new role of a grandparent? What about travel: what are people's new dreams and where do they want to go? What do they want to feel and what do they want to taste? Will focused ultrasound be able to replace invasive surgery and chemotherapy as we know it? Who will we become in life's new third age? Our team likes to think we're the best in the world at the research we do. Second, we undertake a range of communications projects in various formats from books and documentaries to professional and public training programs and public speaking. I've personally given talks to over 2 million people already, and surprisingly during COVID, using Zoom and various new communications technologies, I've gone from giving 30-40 keynotes each year to more than 100.” shares Ken. Age Wave also continues to do strategic consulting for a select group of companies.

**This Expert on Retirement Doesn't Seem to be Interested in Retiring.**

Ken notes, “Although I'm at an age where I could be retired, I'm not interested in that. However, I'm making





some shifts to put more balance into my life. With the hope of establishing a better blend of work, leisure, learning and volunteering. I've started to take more time off each year and now do about half of my work pro bono for non-profits such as The XPRIZE Foundation and the American Society on Aging and also some start-ups such as Eldera and Embodied Labs where I can lend a hand. I find that giving back is enormously gratifying. I've always been a believer that you need to age with purpose, and I feel so lucky to be able to do be able to make a positive impact on causes that matter to me."

Talking about the importance of health as one ages, Ken says, "As you circle the sun again and again, you have to work really hard to keep your body fit and pain-free and do the best job you can of matching your healthspan to your lifespan. That advice applies to everyone, whoever you are, however rich you think you are or powerful you

think you are. It's essential to take great care of your body if you want to live a long life and enjoy it physically, psychologically and even spiritually. I now work out twice a day and haven't eaten meat for 35 years, trying to keep my mind and body fit and healthy. Maddy is a big proponent of staying healthy as we age, and as she completes a powerful new book on *Ageless Aging*, she has us on an anti-inflammatory diet, various supplements and also takes me for a cryotherapy session from time to time. I think I'm serving as her guinea pig! I don't know if this will keep us healthy and fit forever, but we're working on it."

Looking ahead, Ken also wants to continue to focus on his roots in the human potential world. He wants to be a guy that has a positive impact on millions of people's lives. He wants to take what he knows and who he is and try to shine a light on some of the inequities such as improving the

healthcare system, wiping out ageism and getting more older people playing a more meaningful and contributory role in their communities and society.

Another facet of his interesting life is that he's about to get remarried in a few weeks. "When Maddy and I got married in 1983, being a little bit of a hippie guy then, I said to her, "I love marrying you. Would you marry me every year? And she said, 'what are you talking about? People don't do that.' And I said, so what? We can do that. There's no law against it."

"She responded, 'All right, if we're going to do that, let's agree to get married every year in a different location with a different religion.' We've had 39 weddings so far. And through the years, I've thought about this a lot. If you have a relationship or a partnership, don't let it get lost in the busyness of life. Celebrate that relationship, renew it again and again. We've gotten remarried at the Church of Spilled Blood in Russia, at the top of the Chichen Itza Pyramid in the Yucatan, in the Sea of Cambodia, on Bora Bora and even at the Chapel of Love in Las Vegas, where Maddy was dressed as Priscilla Presley, and I was dressed as Elvis, looking like a complete idiot. Our kids have even married us several times and that's been otherworldly. But every year, when we renew our vows, there's a moment where we're looking at each other and I realize I don't want to forget how much I love Maddy and how important this relationship is to every aspect of my life." Ken says.

#### *What is Success? What Matters Most?*

Finally, when asked to share the things he is most proud of, Ken answers,



with my wife and my kids, Casey and Zak. I'm a lucky man to have found and married a loving, powerful, capable, attractive woman. And we've raised two super-smart, colorful and high-minded young adults who don't always let us sleep quietly at night because they're out adventuring in their own lives. Those are the things that I think are my greatest successes.”

Before signing off, Ken reflects, “I kind of inhabit a vortex of curiosity, drive, innovation and human possibilities. I'm a lucky man...a very lucky man.”

 AgeWave

“There's no question that I'm very proud of the work I've done and the life I've lived. We were in Kenya, before Covid, getting married, by the Maasai tribe, outside of Nairobi. And the older people there are called 'elders,' and the younger people are called 'junior elders' because they can't wait to become elders. There's pride among older people. So, I feel a little bit like I'm turning into an elder and I'm enjoying getting used to that new stage of my life. In truth, I'm working hard each day to come to terms with my own aging process – and the irony is not lost on me that I'm Mr. Age Wave.”

“However, what I'm most proud of, without any doubt, is my relationship







“IT’S GOOD TO HAVE LOVING FAMILY AND FRIENDS IN YOUR CAMP TO HELP YOU GET UP WHEN YOU FALL DOWN.”

### An Interesting Intervention Over Dinner that Changed the Course of a Career

“I was good friends with Bob Kriegel, who had been an Olympic-level athlete and then became a psychologist. He wrote the book *Inner Skiing* as well as *The C Zone*. His wife Marilyn was a family therapist and yoga teacher. And one night in the early-1980s, Bob and Marilyn were having dinner at our home. We were living in Berkeley, and I was torn between pursuing my human potential bodymind work, or moving full force into the aging, longevity and gerontology territory. As we were enjoying the meal, Bob and Marilyn did a very interesting thing. It was

almost like an intervention.

They basically said, “Let’s imagine if you pursued the bodymind work, who will you become? What happens if you do that for your life? Would that be satisfying?” And I thought, no, I think it would get pretty boring after a while. And I wouldn’t feel that I had made any big contributions. But, on the other hand, if I wander into this vastly uncharted territory of the age wave – including questions such as who are we going to be at 50 and 70, what are the products and services we’re going to want

and need and what will be the new purpose of maturity? I thought, well, if I do that, it’s far less certain, but it’s far more interesting. And it could also lead me into territories that I never imagined. Maybe meetings with presidents, CEOs, thought leaders. And Bob said, “You can’t do both with excellence. Pick one.” And I did. That night, I decided to transition out of all the work and projects I was doing in the bodymind world and turned all of my attention to the aging field. And I am SO GLAD I DID! Thank you Bob and Marilyn Kriegel.”