

## The Future Of Your Third Act

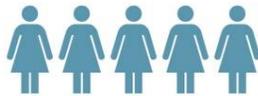
This is an exciting time in which redefining the third phase is not only possible but very much needed. Many people, as they retire from their careers, are experiencing the desire to continue to live in a creative and entrepreneurial way. This next stage (the third act) does not have the plentiful resources that are accessible as are the guides to career development in the second stage of life. The third stage of life needs to provide meaning that goes beyond the purpose-driven life of the second act. **This is a time to embrace that part of yourself that has often been limited by the practical decisions necessary as we built our careers.** Developing an understanding of our identity at this point in our lives can be exciting and rewarding. This process of redefining retirement as a time of transition to a new way of living, which embraces the unlimited potential available to those in their 60's and beyond, can bring exciting results.

**Background:** We are, today, experiencing a profound change in demographics across the world, particularly in the western world. This change is due to increased longevity, improved health, changing technologies, and an increased awareness of the potential for personal growth and life possibility after people reach the traditional age of

retirement. These changes have significant impact on the financial, social and personal resources available to communities:

In the Population Reference Bureau Report, *Aging in the United States*, it is clear that the baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964 will reshape American's older population. In Canada, according to the 2016 census there has been a 20% increase in the number of seniors, the biggest increase in 70 years. Included in this is the number of people who are living to be 100 years or older, most of whom are women.

**8,230**  
Canadians over the age of 100



**5x more women  
in this group**

CBC NEWS

Source: Statistics Canada/Census 2016

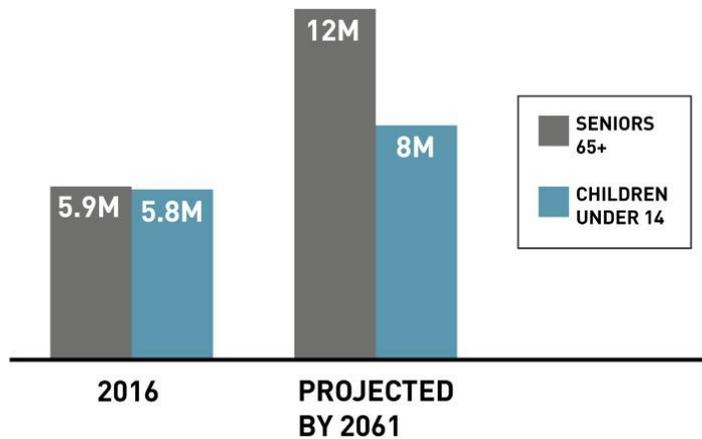
Peter Laslett (1991) in his book, *A Fresh Map of Life: The Emergence of the Third Age*, has argued for the need for a new life stage, a life stage that recognizes the changing landscape of aging which is now occurring as baby boomers reach age 65.

In the bimonthly newspaper of the American Society of Aging, Torres-Gil and Lam (2011) describe the growing shift of a population over 65 and the change in life style.

*“The United States, like other nations, is now experiencing a “silver” tsunami. And, as has occurred in other countries, we’ve seen this tidal force coming, but are not prepared for it. Millions of native-born baby boomers started turning age 65 this year. By 2032, there will be more people alive over the age of 65 than under the age of 15 there will be more older adults than children. And between now and 2050 the entire age 65-plus population will increase from 13% to 20%” Switching careers, returning to school or taking on volunteer opportunities in hopes of landing a new position or simply staying engaged in*

*their communities have become part of the “new normal” for people over age 50 (p. 1).*

In Canada, the 2016 census announced that for the first time, there are more people over 65 than there are children.



CBC NEWS

Source: Statistics Canada/Census 2016

As Marc Freedman explains in his 2011 book, "*The Big Shift: Navigating the New Stage Beyond Midlife*". There is a new group of people who are between midlife and traditional retirement, who are moving into "an *encore phase of life and also an encore career at the intersection of continued income, new meaning, and the desire to use their experience in a way that has a social impact*". **Freedman maintains that many people at this stage of their life are ready to do some of their most exciting and important work.**

He also recognizes that there is an increasing number of people over 65 who need to continue to work for financial reasons, and not just for creating more meaningful lives. In an interview on the Talk of the Nations in 2011 he states,

*“We really need to think about this period as a time not just to compel people to work longer but to invest in them so that they can move into work that is going to balance the books at home and also feed their desire for meaning in this stage of life.”*

With an understanding that there will be more people in this post 65 age group, it is important to help them become financially independent for as long as possible.

**Changing Attitudes:** There is much to be gained by society in general in changing our attitudes about the aging population. There have been some cultures that have recognized the wisdom of their elders and have created lifestyles and communities that embrace and value the aging population. There is much to be learned from these traditions and cultures who have always found a place for their elders.

James Hillman, a psychologist and author of numerous books, agrees with Marc Freedman in that there is much that society can gain from the older generation. In the TED talk, *Life's Third Act*, Jane Fonda discusses the gifts that aging can bring to the person and to society.

Like Fonda, economist David Galenson recognizes the important contribution that can be made by those who have begun to shed the socially conditioned self that has defined us during the earlier stages of their lives. During that time, there are culturally determined standards of achievement and conduct that strongly influenced their choices. Through shedding some of those limiting notions, a new form of creativity can emerge. Galenson explains that “genius clusters into two categories. Conceptual geniuses tend to do their best work while young ... experimental geniuses bloom late.”

**Galenson believes that the devaluing of the older generations will result in society being denied some of its greatest contributions.**

**Conscious Aging:** In recent years there has been much discussion about conscious aging. Robert C. Atchley, Gerontologist defines conscious aging as awakening to our true potential:

*"The vision laid out by the early framers of the 'aging with consciousness' movement involves developing and nurturing a contemplative life and engaging in service rooted in the higher levels of consciousness that a contemplative life makes available. Aging with consciousness is neither quick nor easy. It requires that we come back over and over again to our intention to be awake as we age. It requires that we practice compassionate listening and look at the world from a long-term vantage point that transcends our purely personal desires and fears."*

## **7 Keys to a Vibrant Third Act**

A search of the literature of the last ten years on conscious aging reveals a commonality between the recommendations of these leaders in this emerging field.

- 1. Take the time to review your life story to determine what is meaningful to you and create a life which is congruent.**
- 2. Foster ways of uncovering and embracing your authentic self.**
- 3. Recognize that there is a purpose to aging and an intention built into every stage.**
- 4. View this new stage of life transition as a positive new beginning.**
- 5. Develop strategies and personal tools to bring a renewed sense of meaning and purpose to your life.**
- 6. Unleash your creativity by exploring your interests and talents.**
- 7. Use your own experiences to educate the younger generation about a new way of aging.**

The journey through the third act can be your best act, if we allow ourselves to blossom and create from our true selves. In the following excerpt from the poem, *The Journey*, by Mary Oliver, we see the more that is waiting to be uncovered.

But little by little,  
as you left their voices behind,  
the stars began to burn  
through the sheets of clouds,  
and there was a new voice which you slowly  
recognized as your own.