

# Living With Limits

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## Preface

I suppose it's common knowledge among you, my erudite friends in the Club, that I pretty stubbornly cling to the idea that philosophy is or should be highly personal; and that the papers I enjoy most are those where the our speaker shares not just facts and ideas but rather why their subject is so engaging or even consuming to them.

It will come as no surprise, then, that my talk tonight is based on my personal thoughts, experiences and feelings about what I consider to be a potentially vital exchange of the coping skills that are a part of growing older.

## Living With Limits

I found little literature or research for my subject...likely for good reasons. What I did discover in my last couple of decades is that clichés are mostly on the money, certainly including "old age isn't for sissies."

Perhaps there are those who might want to consider and write about the imposed limits of aging but are either too young to experience the subject firsthand or find it too depressing. And then there are those elders who are living with these problems and don't much give a damn to think or talk about them.

There are, of course, lots of advice tomes, medical admonitions, prescription drug pushers and statistical studies telling us oldsters how we should lead our lives but I found little that clearly originate from our senior peers. They inspect us, analyze us, target us with advertising and lecture us but they talk at us, but rarely with us.

Perhaps this is also due in part to the current generational abyss that, according to some, did not exist in the "good old days" when elders were respected more and allowed to continue to be engaged in the lives and thoughts of their younger friends and families. I fear the good old days are something of a sweet, conservative fantasy.

Projections on life expectancy suggest, however, that more and more Americans will live longer and thus the adjustments required to live in various stages of physical and mental limits will have to be addressed by millions more. Pretty important stuff!

And so...I'd like to depart from our usual format and present some of my ideas and personal experiences and leave plenty of time to engage with you an open discussion of how you senior members cope with age-related lifestyle limits. May I dare hope we will share things helpful to each other?

## Item 1:

Physical deterioration and the limits imposed are the foremost and most obvious problems. An old, familiar and all too true saw is the idea that when seniors gather together their talk often becomes an "organ recital."

Oh, and by the way, it should be noted that these limits are not solely a senior problem...our ability, for

example, to hear very high frequency sounds begins to diminish in our twenties!

Perhaps these senior gatherings are a form of group therapy with each participant obliged to recite their list of ailments in a sort of "venting" akin to 12 step groups meetings.

And these meetings just might be beneficial in their potential to exchange valuable information about physical problems and treatments but it seems rare that many will share more personal details about coping with them. Our generation was taught, after all, to keep a "stiff upper lip" when facing adversity.

There's also the question of the "whistling in the graveyard" syndrome...lots of "whoofing" to dance around or attempt to escape from the very real fear of the grim reaper. Maybe, just maybe ignorance or avoidance are necessary components to a workable response to aging issues.

## Item 2:

On the mental and emotional side there has been some professional attention give to the large adjustments seniors should make when their careers and/or family obligations wind down or end. They are right to understand that a sense of uselessness can become all-consuming when we allow it. The pros do offer some valuable advice and information at times and there are many seniors who successfully search for and find new challenges that productively occupy their time and energy and thus successfully accommodate to their expanding list of limits.

## Item 3:

Some of the other all-to-common senior issues that require advanced coping skills.

A very big problem...too many friends die.

Mirrors become enemies as wrinkles multiply.

Respect and gratitude from others, particularly younger others, appear to become rare or nonexistent.

Ongoing adjustment to changes in financial affairs is often worrisome.

Health is a constant concern.

Life in general becomes messy, challenging and confusing particularly with minor episodes that we once handled easily.

One finds one making inappropriate to responses to routine, even silly incidents or conversations.

Very real and timely concerns about mortality.

I invite you to add to or subtract from your own list at your pleasure or displeasure.

In order to initiate our forum I'll list a few of my coping efforts, many of which are derived from twenty-six years of participation, some would say indoctrination, in Alcholics Anonymous.

## I try:

To avoid resentments and regrets...

not to become angry and frustrated by poor health and it's consequent annoyances like waiting for doctors, etc...

To introspect with a hope to change bad habits and come to understand why they do not go away more quickly...

Looking for new beauty, thoughts, inventions and be open to other points of view.

To accept the responsibility of being a model of appropriate seniorhood...

To find and engage in quality distractions...I recently discovered TED talks and love these mini-lectures...

To stay socially engaged...particularly with younger people, like friends in AA and greetings to waiters, waitresses, store clerks and supermarket workers...

To explore and welcome new technologies...

To remember that it's OK to be bored...at least occasionally...

To keep an active sense of humor...

To enjoy the new freedoms that appear if I look for them...

To maintain an endless search for agreement.

To stay in the now...in the present.

And perhaps of most importance to me, I try to find or create and develop new adventures like starting the Cleveland TOPS Swingband at age 75 and currently devoting myself to my musical play, "The Gospel According to My Daddy."

The band continues to entertain seniors successfully without the leadership of their intrepid founding father, me, and the musical play "My Daddy" and I remain "works in progress!"

Which just about ends my myopic monologue...I sincerely hope you all will join in with your take on "living with limits."