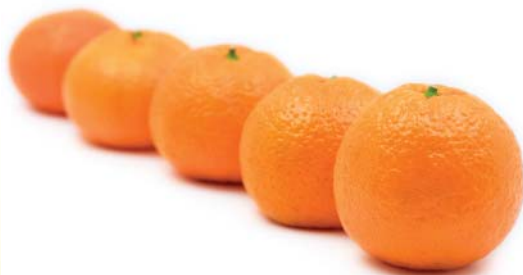


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THE VITAMIN C'S OF SUCCESSFUL AGING

by Mitch Anthony



Aging reflects the relationship of time on our being. Aging describes, in large part, the state of our body. Old, on the other hand, describes our state of mind. It has always been a matter of great interest to me to discover the spiritual and attitudinal aquifer that supplies the fountain of youth.



Look around and you will see the role spirit and attitude play in relationship to the concept of being old. Do you know any 75-year-olds who act like they are 35? Do you know any 40-year-olds who act like they are 80? If you answered “yes” to either question, you are affirming the attitudinal and spiritual source of that which separates those who are aging from those who are old. This distinction was well-described by Paul the apostle in his letter to Corinth where he stated, “Though our outward man perishes, our inward man is renewed day by day.”

There is no denying the effects of time on our bodies. Although we can slow certain physical impacts, we cannot prevent them altogether. Hair turns gray or falls out. Skin wrinkles. Senses, like hearing and sight, can begin to dull—as can short-term memory function. As George Burns once quipped, “You know you’re getting older when everything hurts, and what doesn’t hurt doesn’t work.”

Equally immutable as the decaying dynamic of physical being is the constantly renewing and refreshing dynamic of our inner being. This dynamic of engaged living until the day we die is no accident but is accomplished by the purposeful and intentional discipline of those souls who choose to live every day they are living. They are not in denial of the inevitability of death—they simply have chosen not to give death a head start in their souls. Their attitude has become the matter of preeminence, for attitude is the rudder that steers the ship in this journey called life.



Release the rudder for a single day and you can sense a sort of existential seasickness. Release it for a week and you will drift aimlessly or be tossed upon the rocks. Release the rudder for any longer period and shipwreck is inevitable. This truth I have witnessed time and again on the retirement landscape.

So, in observing the forever young, forever passionate, and forever engaged, I have come across five internal focuses and patterns that constitute what I refer to as the attitude instrument—that which steers our lives safely through the existential seas day upon day of fulfilled and pleasurable living. These focuses I call the Vitamin Cs of successful aging. They are:

- Vitamin C1 - Connectivity
- Vitamin C2 - Challenge
- Vitamin C3 - Curiosity
- Vitamin C4 - Creativity
- Vitamin C5 - Charity

Vitamin C1 - Connectivity

Why do people retire and immediately move away to a place where they have no social connectivity? Not only are they disconnecting from a major lifeline in the science of successful aging, they might also find out they are annoyed with the accents and culture into which they moved. It might be wise to spend some time doing reconnaissance on the geography and culture you plan on staging the next act of your life. Many people disconnect themselves from important social networks when they retire and don't realize it until it's too late. Stay connected to people you love, people you enjoy, and people that appreciate you and see value in your presence.

Vitamin C2 - Challenge

The latest Alzheimer research demonstrates that being intellectually challenged and having predictable taxation on our mental acuity literally has the effect of a finger in the dike holding back the



degenerative processes leading to both Alzheimer and Dementia. This research also concluded that as we hit our 50s and beyond, there is an exigency upon insuring that we have riddles to ponder, problems to solve, and things to fix. The brain is a muscle that atrophies without use. One gentleman told me that after six months of retirement he could literally sense the dulling in his cerebral muscle with signs of slowed thinking and sluggish articulation.

Vitamin C3 - Curiosity

On a recent plane ride home from Australia, I flew next to a physicist named Ken Clark from the University of Washington. In his late 70s, he is still teaching and researching. I asked him why he wasn't retired, as was expected of a man his age. His answer was, "There's so much yet to learn," and he enthusiastically began describing his latest upper atmospheric physics research project. When I saw the sparkle in Dr. Clark's eyes as he spoke, I realized how good it would be if more seniors had their heads in the clouds of higher learning. Curiosity guarantees a pulse in the brain and a reason to keep our bodies healthy. The role of mental alertness cannot be overestimated and neither can the benefits of a desire to grow. Once a person reaches a point where they no longer want to learn or grow, it is time to order the tombstone. It need not be formal education that one pursues; it can be self-taught for experiential learning. The important thing is to have the curiosity and desire to grow. Age is an uphill road. Learning tasks that demand mental alertness keep us in gear. Those individuals who stay neutral in this area will quickly find they are going backward. Rigorous mental function helps both to facilitate productivity in later years and to strengthen our need and desire to be active—facts that in turn affect our physical well-being.

Vitamin C4 - Creativity

I've long been enthralled by elderly artists in their 80s and 90s who seem as keen and perspicacious as people half their age. I once listened to an interview with a Canadian artist in her 90s whose lucidity of thought and spry articulation was most inspiring. She also



confirmed my suspicions about the virtues of creative engagement in our later years. She talked about the aforementioned curiosity being razor-sharp as well. She reasoned that artists have developed a discipline of observation that requires seeing what others, less curious, might miss. A creative soul looks at the shoreline and sees something new everyday. This might help explain why B.B. King, now over 80, is playing over 200 nights a year, and why Peter Drucker was able to write a business best seller in his 90s. Of course, you don't have to be renowned to be creative and to keep the powers of observation working. You just have to be curious, intrigued, expressive, and intentional. A couple of other gems I heard this elderly artist mention were regularly scheduled intellectually stimulating luncheons with people younger than herself, a profoundly diminished sense of self-consciousness, and two ounces of Canadian Rye each evening for good measure.

Vitamin C5 - Charity

Studies continue to surface around the ameliorative effects upon quality and longevity of life as it associates to charitable living. Those who think about helping others often talk about how such charitable preoccupations impede them from worrying so much about themselves and the degenerative effects of stress associated with preoccupation. Even if you didn't live a day longer because of charitable pursuits, you no doubt would live better.

I'm reminded of a story a financial advisor told about a client in her 70s who had more money than she could ever hope to spend but had no charitable interests. He challenged her to look around her city for places she might like to make a difference. As she began to observe and listen to her heart, a floodgate of generosity and empathy began to open up for her. Now, her life is full of causes she is passionate about—they have put a fresh spring in her step and added adrenaline to her pulse. It doesn't require money to live charitably; it just takes concern, generosity, and self-transcendence.

