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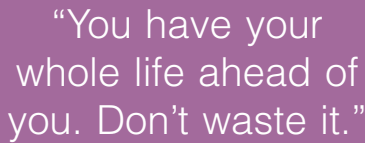


# Motivation

You have your whole life ahead of you

“Millions who long for immortality don’t even know what to do with themselves on a rainy Saturday afternoon.”

*Susan Ertz*



“You have your whole life ahead of you. Don't waste it.”

Did anyone ever say this to you when you were young? Have you ever said it to anyone else? Of course, it is true about all of us – ahead of us lies our future and it is up to us to spend

however many years we have in the best way possible. The decisions we make about every aspect of our lives are not just taken at age 18 or 21 but throughout our lives.

### **Which do you want first – the good news or the bad news?**

Well the good news is that of the people alive in Britain today, 10 million will live to be 100 (currently the number is 12,640). These people are called the Generation C (for centenarian) and it is estimated that three million of them are presently under the age of 16 and a further five and a half million are under the age of 50. Nine out of ten boys can now expect to live to reach the age of at least 65 (whereas, in 1901, life expectancy for men in this country was 45 and for women it was 49).

According to a 2011 report from the International Longevity Centre UK, with the support of Age UK, those who live until they are 100 tend to avoid specific cancers and have been able to resist certain diseases. So that those who do reach 100 “effectively avoid many of the conditions associated with old age”.

### **There's plenty of time then. So what's the problem?**

First of all, there isn't much time between the cradle and the grave. A new-born boy today can expect to live for 78.9 years and a girl to 82.9 (although it varies depending on where you live – a man living in Glasgow has 13.5 years fewer years than a man in Chelsea). You might think, “Well, I'm only 38 that gives me another 40 years to pursue my dreams”. The trouble is that it doesn't work like that. The problem is that the increase in life-expectancy has not been matched by an increase in “healthy life-expectancy”.

## What age would you be happy with?

Anyone under the age of 65 will have benefited from a lifetime of free National Health Service care. Medical advances in our lifetime have improved mortality rates from heart disease and strokes and have made us aware of the dangers of smoking and drinking too much alcohol.

We are more aware of healthy eating and we live in a more affluent economy, with a consequent rise in living standards: people live in more comfortable, often central-heated, homes and are likely to work in safe and air-conditioned work places. So we should be living longer, but we don't just want extra years – we want extra active and healthy years.

### Health Survey

Half of all Britons in a survey by Benenden Healthcare said that anything over the age of 83 would be a bonus. Out of 2,000 people, the researchers found that one in six said they would be happy to live until they were 70, while only a quarter had any desire to live to be 100.

Seven out of ten admitted they believed that the way they were living their lives would have an impact on their quality of life as they grew old. Four out of ten thought their diet would cause problems for them at a later date and a quarter thought they would suffer because of the amount of alcohol they presently consumed. Lack of exercise was also a big worry. Six out of ten said that they would rather die than be left alone in old age or be a burden to others because of infirmity and illness.

## What does healthy life-expectancy mean?

So we want to live as long as possible, but we want to be in good health. Healthy life-expectancy is an estimate of the number of healthy years (free from disease or disability – like cancer, dementia or severe arthritis) that a person born in a particular year can expect to live. The average number of years spent with some kind of debilitating illness is subtracted from the average life-expectancy to give us “health-adjusted life-expectancy”.

So what do you guess is the average healthy lifespan for the UK? (Write it down.) Once you know this age, try asking other people you know. Their guesstimates will vary wildly (in my experience from 40 to 80 years). People tend to guess based on the health of their relatives, or sometimes just because they know one person who has lived an active life to a great age: “Well, my aunt is 93 and she still does her own shopping and cooking.”

Remember, like lifespan, healthy lifespan is an *average* age for the whole of the UK (including Glasgow). It does not mean that you will begin to suffer from an illness or disability at this age (and, indeed, everyone you ask will decide that the figure doesn’t apply to them). So what do you think it is?

*The average man in this country can expect to enjoy good health until he is 63 and the average woman 65, according to a report by the Office for National Statistics in 2011.*

So, although life-expectancy has increased and our bodies are living longer, this doesn’t necessarily mean that we will be leading the kind of active, adventurous life that we might hope for as we get older. As you read these figures, you, like everyone else, will be saying to yourself, “Well, that’s the average. It’s not going to be me. I’m determined to stay fit and well and lead a fulfilling life right to the end.”

(If you want to know where to live: Monaco has the highest life-expectancy in the world at an average of 89.7 years. Chad has the lowest level of life-expectancy at 48.7 years. The United Kingdom comes in 30th at 80.2 years, while America ranks 51st in the table with 78.5 years. Japan has the greatest proportion of over-90s, followed by Sweden, Italy and France.)

Scientists at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore conducted a study of 6,200 men and women over a period of eight years and isolated four habits that are the most likely to help you to have a long but healthy lifestyle. They said that not smoking made the biggest difference, followed by a Mediterranean-style diet (vegetables, fruit, whole grains and fish), regular exercise, and keeping a normal weight.

**“Be happy while you’re living, for you’re a long time dead.”**

*Scottish proverb*

Of course, you don’t just want to live healthily – you want those years to be happy and rewarding. You want to be able to look back on your life and know that you have fulfilled your potential; that you haven’t wasted it in an unhappy relationship or a job that bores you. Indeed, you want to be aware that you are living a life worth living while you are living it – to know that you are learning new things and using your talents and abilities to the full.

If you think of people you admire, they are usually people with a passion: people who have discovered what they enjoy doing and then perfected their sport or their craft and pursued it to its limits. For most people, this is not easy to do. We all have the same things holding us back: that little voice telling us that we’re not good enough; the family background that makes us

conform; the tendency to laziness that stops us from achieving our potential.

It is easy to make excuses and to compare your lot in life unfavourably with others. It is true that many people who have made a success of their lives have done so with the help of a comfortable background and family support. It is, however, equally true that many of our heroes have come from humble backgrounds and have achieved their success almost despite their family upbringing or difficulties.

**“Don’t be afraid your life will end: be afraid it will never begin.”**

*Grace Hansen*

It is, of course, easier if you know what you want to do with your life from a young age. We watch the young Olympic athletes like Jessica Ennis and Tom Daley and know we can never be like them because they realized right from the start what they wanted to do and they were given the support and encouragement to fulfil their dreams. But all the support in the world wouldn’t have made them champions without their own dogged determination and desire to win. We often forget this when we see them sail across the finishing line: the 5am starts, the strict diet, limited social life, the denial of pleasurable activities with their friends and families. All we see is the result: the modest smile to the camera; the self-deprecating comments; the cup held triumphantly aloft.

**“Just don’t give up trying to do what you really want to do. Where there is love and inspiration, I don’t think you can go wrong.”**

*Ella Fitzgerald*

### **Is it too late?**

It is true that there are some things that have to be started when you are very young if you are going to excel: it takes a



young body to be the best in some sports. It is possible, though, to do almost anything you want – whatever your age. You may not be able to become an Olympic champion, but it is certainly possible to decide on something that you want to achieve and to become good at it. For some sports and many creative areas of life, there are no age limits – you can become an artist, or an author, or a musician, or a traveller, or a canoeist, a marathon runner or an entrepreneur – whatever you want and whatever your age.

It is not just these kinds of creative activities that can be taken up later in life, many people have changed career and done something totally different in their 40s, 50s and even 60s and 70s. It is sometimes because of a life-changing event, like being made redundant, or having a baby, that makes people realize that they no longer want to do what may have suited them quite well when they were younger.

In fact, lots of people fulfil themselves *only* as they get older. They may not become famous because they just get on with it: studying for a degree in their 70s, setting up a business in retirement, writing a first novel, travelling around the world, becoming a good photographer, a keen birdwatcher, learning a new language, taking up horse-riding, singing or learning to play a musical instrument.

You may feel that you have been held back because of a difficult start in life, or poor schooling, or the lack of direction and support from friends and family. Almost all these things can also be a motivation – if you are able to put the past behind you and decide that it is never too late you can still, with a great deal of determination, and some planning, fulfil your dreams.

**“Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.”**

*Mark Twain – who wrote The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, aged 50*

## Some people who have succeeded late in life






### Authors

- 📖 Mary Wesley wrote her first novel for adults when she was 70.
- 📖 Jean Rhys wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966 at the age of 76 (after a lapse of almost 30 years).
- 📖 Laura Ingalls Wilder was 65 when she started *Little House on The Prairie*.
- 📖 Flora Thompson wrote *Lark Rise to Candleford* when she was 63.
- 📖 Raymond Chandler was 51 when he wrote his first novel, *Big Sleep*.
- 📖 Marina Lewycka wrote her first novel, *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*, when she was 58.
- 📖 British doctor, Peter Roget, produced *Roget's Thesaurus* when he was 73.


### Politicians

- 🗣️ At the age of 70, Golda Meir became the fourth prime minister of Israel.
- 🗣️ Ronald Reagan became president of USA just before his 70th birthday.
- 🗣️ Nelson Mandela became president of South Africa in 1994 when he was 74.
- 🗣️ Stanley Baldwin became chancellor in 1922 at the age of 55 and prime minister the following year. He resigned when he was 70.
- 🗣️ Lloyd George was 53 when he became prime minister in 1916.
- 🗣️ Churchill became prime minister for the first time when he was 65 and began his second premiership in 1951, when he was nearly 77.





## Scientists

-  Dorothy Hodgkin studied x-ray crystallography and was awarded a Nobel prize when she was 54.
-  Lisa Meitner continued her atomic research into her 80s.
-  Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin at the age of 47.
-  Charles Darwin published his findings *On the Origin of Species* age 50.
-  Barbara McClintock was awarded a Nobel prize when she was 81, for her discovery that genes can move within chromosomes.




## Sport

-  The oldest Olympic champion is Oscar Swahn, who won two gold medals in 1908 and 1912, and silver in 1920 at the age of 72 (for deer-shooting).

## Music

-  Verdi was 74 when he composed *Otello* and 80 when he composed *Falstaff*.
-  Wagner was in his 60s when he wrote *Gotterdammerung*, *Tristan and Isolde*, and *Parsifal*.
-  Beethoven was 53 when he wrote his ninth symphony.
-  Susan Boyle won *Britain's Got Talent* at the age of 47.

## Artists

-  Michelangelo began *The Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel when he was 61 (and it took him five years to complete). He did not begin his work in St Peter's until he was 71.
-  Titian painted *Diana and Actaeon* in his 70s.
-  Tintoretto's work in the Scuola di San Rocco in Venice was done in his 50s and 60s.

- 🎨 Rubens, Goya, Velazquez and Rembrandt were at their peak in their 50s.
- 🎨 (You can see Toira Beck-Friedman's video of three octogenarian women artists by visiting: [tbfstudio.com/a\\_portrait.html](http://tbfstudio.com/a_portrait.html)).

David Galenson, a professor at Chicago University, studied the ages of innovative artists considered geniuses in their field. He discovered there was no proven correlation between someone's age and being at the peak of their creativity. He divided all artists into two classes: Conceptualists – who, right from the start, have a clear idea of what they want to do – and Experimentalists – who develop slowly over a longer period and don't have such precise goals.

### Conceptualist or Experimentalist?

It may be easier to follow your passion and develop your creativity when you are young, perhaps living at home, or with other young people. Students, who have a firm idea of what they want to be, often do well at school, because they have motivation and a clear goal. Being young usually means you have no real responsibilities to anyone else but yourself. Your overheads are virtually non-existent if you live at home – and minimal if you are a student or are single and living in a house share.

Being free of “grown-up” responsibilities no doubt gave Mark Zuckerberg the time to found Facebook at the age of 19, Tom Hadfield to create soccernet.com at the age of 12, and Nick D'Aloisio to develop an app called Summly while studying for his GCSEs (and sell it to Yahoo, in 2013, for £20 million). It is why all the young musicians, actors and sport stars, we see today are more easily able to follow their dream.

If you had no clear idea what you wanted to do when you were young, you may have found yourself studying for the wrong exams, the wrong degree, and then taking a job that wasn't

really what you wanted to do. Sometimes, this is because of lack of self-confidence or direction; but it may be that you are simply a late-developer and that you didn't have the ability, facilities, or encouragement to do well when you were young.



## Change one thing: your secret deadline

You may have given yourself an unspoken deadline: "I want to be working for a national newspaper by the time I'm 30" or "I want to be working for myself in the next three years".

In fact, a poll of 1,000 40-year-olds by Skipton Building Society, in 2012, found that the average adult is as much as 19 years behind their own schedule with their life-goals.

This feeling of dissatisfaction is surprisingly common, not only in terms of career, but also in terms of the milestones that people want to reach in their personal lives and relationships. The research showed that most adults hoped to start a family by the age of 28 but that 38% are unlikely have done so 10 years later. Of those polled, most had hoped to have met their life partner by the age of 25, but 33% of them were still looking at the age of 40; 13% of them admitted they had yet to find a full-time job.

The targets that had been missed by a significant proportion of the people surveyed were: owning a car, writing a will, going abroad twice a year, getting married, or having a civil partnership, starting a pension, and – for 71% – earning more than £30,000 (which they had hoped to do by the time they were 31).

If you could go back in time and start all over again, what would you do differently? Would you still pursue the same career? If not, what do you now wish you could have been and done?

A study for the recruitment website, Monster.co.uk, revealed that 47% of adults in their 40s regretted not following their childhood dreams (compared with a third in their 60s). The report showed that the most common unfulfilled ambitions were being a doctor, a vet, a sports star or an actor. Those who gave these as their dreams had mostly ended up in education, or administration, or with a job in IT. Men seemed to be slightly more dissatisfied with their present jobs (44%) than women (40%).

When, however, they were asked what career they would like to pursue now, their aims had changed to the arts and entertainment industry, with one in 10 wishing they worked in broadcasting, film or music. A third of recent graduates also wished they had followed their childhood dreams, adding that they had become more realistic as they got older. One in six said they were now more focused on being happy rather than achieving money or fame.

The (perhaps secret) dreams that you may now have for yourself could well be very different from the ambitions that you had when you were young. You will have changed. Your life has moved on. You are not quite the same person that you were as a young man or woman with few cares or responsibilities. Your long-cherished dreams may have changed, perhaps because you realized that you didn't have the patience to be a doctor or that you didn't want the long hours of studying involved for many professions.

Sometimes, the changes that have happened to you will be because of outside events over which you have no control. You may have suffered illnesses, or your parents may have split up at a critical time in your education, or you may have had to move house, to a new area where you knew nobody. These kinds of experiences can affect your confidence, so that you feel reluctant to take risks or simply feel that you are not the kind of person who can follow your dreams and do what you would really like to do.

You may have realized the insecurity that accompanies many more apparently glamorous careers such as acting, or being a musician, or writer. As you get older, the importance of a steady income and regular working hours take on a new significance. You may be a whizz on the bass guitar, or hilarious as a stand-up comedian, but will it pay the rent? Perhaps you tried for a while and then gave up when instant success or critical acclaim didn't happen. Or it may be that you do still yearn for your childhood dreams, but somehow they have fallen by the wayside and you have found yourself following a different path.

### Wanting it all

The prospect of trying to achieve everything can mean you achieve none of the things you most want. Many people rush headfirst down a career path they think will lead to money, status and success without considering the consequences to their personal lives. Sometimes, you just have to stand back and reflect. What do I really want in life? Who are the most important people in my life? Am I proud of my life so far? What could I do to improve it?

If you have a family, you will want them to thrive and to do well so your personal dreams and ambitions may have been pushed to one side. Having to juggle the often conflicting demands of modern life is stressful and sometimes, ironically, leads to the breakdown of family life that the paid work was intended to support.

The status and financial rewards of any job are meaningless, if you are feeling constantly miserable and anxious.

The trouble is that, in the drive to “have it all”, the most important things in life can slip to the bottom of the pile, as “wanting it all” comes to mean a relentless drive to earn

more and buy more. We all know of relationships that have ended, children who long to spend more time with their parents, and friendships that are neglected, because work has taken precedence over the things that once mattered the most. The status and financial rewards of any job are meaningless, if you are feeling constantly miserable and anxious.

### Quality time?

The UK has some of the longest working hours in Europe: the average working week is 43.5 hours (three hours longer than the European average). More than four million full-time workers work more than 48 hours a week and one in six works more than 60 hours a week, according to the TUC.

According to the Office of National Statistics, a typical working mother spends about 19 minutes a day with her children; working fathers spend even less. A UNICEF report in 2012 warned that British parents were caught in a “cycle of compulsive consumerism” – buying toys, gadgets and designer labels in an effort to compensate for the lack of quality time with their children. Their research showed that what children, and their parents, really wanted was more stable family time at home. The report also suggests that many women, who may have wanted children, find themselves childless because they have delayed motherhood until it is too late because of financial pressures or career ambitions.

The problem is, if you are a late-starter, by the time you have a clear idea of what you would really like to do with your life you may already have commitments and rent and bills and all the trappings of modern life. Once you have started on a



life-path that takes you on a certain course, it is much more difficult to decide that you have made a mistake and to change track. This often causes a great deal of inner torment as it is difficult to balance duty and rationality with the realization that you have made a mistake and that there is something else that you would rather do.

It is common then to feel a sense of failure if you are a “late-developer” and if your life is not going the way that you had hoped it would. The overwhelming feeling when you have a general dissatisfaction with your life is one of helplessness: a feeling that this is your lot in life and you just have to get on with it. The result is that you do nothing and life continues as before.

### It's your choice

It is, of course, much easier to ignore these niggling doubts and to put up with a life that isn't quite the dream, or even particularly happy. It can be frightening to move out of your “comfort zone” because, by definition, this is a reassuring place to be. The alternative is not necessarily doing something frightening or risky, just doing something you long to do, but which you feel you “shouldn't” because it doesn't conform to what people expect you to do.

You may feel trapped in a job that you hate, with colleagues you don't particularly like, because it is well paid, or at least pays the bills. Some people spend their lives making money, in order to lead a better life, and often sacrifice their health and their relationships in the process. Quite often, they then spend their later years trying to recover their health (belatedly joining a gym, “detoxing”, having therapy) or patching up their relationship with their children.

Whatever age you are now and wherever you are in terms of career, or relationships, or family, you have the rest of your life ahead of you. Don't squander them by letting the days go by,

doing things you don't enjoy with people you don't want to be with. These are the best years of your life and it is possible to

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make a living doing something you enjoy, to spend more time with people you like and to live a happy and fulfilled life. Lots of people do it and there has never been a better time to start.