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Our Youth Is to Keep or Surrender As We Choose

By Rich Sloane
UCF Forum columnist
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In the manner of Socrates, a wise man on campus recently posed the question: “What removes youth? Is it time? Or is it apathy and cynicism? Other?”

The question caught my interest since, at age 72, I’ve yet to lose my youth. Implied in the question is the thinking that sooner or later everyone loses their youth. As George Gershwin wrote for Porgy and Bess, “It ain’t necessarily so.”

The questioner, I believe, concedes that youth is not defined by years; only that it is or can be lost through one’s psychological state: apathy, cynicism and the like. I suggest the key lies in attitude. I’ve seen it carved in stone, but it might be better inscribed on restroom walls: “Attitude is Everything!”

The thing is, youth belongs to the beholder. It’s ours to keep or surrender as we choose. Given the choice, I chose to keep it. But the choice is not free, it comes at the cost of effort. You have to keep the glass at least half full. And while life is constantly tipping the glass in an unrelenting effort to empty it, there’s much we can do to keep it full.

Work, relationships, hobbies, department are some of life’s engagements that affect attitude and, ultimately, youth. People are constantly urged to identify a vocation that fuels their passion.

The saying goes: “If you find a job you love, you’ll never work a day in your life.” I’ve held four jobs throughout my life, and I’ve loved each of them. Yes, there were trying

days at work, but meeting challenges head on, occasionally with success, fuels youth. Work nurtures purpose, and purpose gives meaning - beyond a paycheck - to life.

It's not unheard of for winners of large lottery jackpots to say, "I'll be back at work on Monday." Such people love and appreciate their work as a meaningful endeavor. Work can wear you down, but it can also lift you up when you reflect on the many contributions that result from your work.

Relationships have perhaps the greatest impact on youth. Interacting with others on a myriad of levels creates a mindset that you are part of something greater than yourself. Love, as a relationship, is difficult to define, but easy to understand. Forty-five years of marriage has kept me youthful, except for the all-too-frequent discussions about thermostat settings. I admit those conversations took a few ounces out of our more-than-half-full glass of wedded bliss.

But beyond love, it's interacting with people at work, at home, in clubs and organizations, neighbors, the mail carrier, UPS driver, with folks you see every day but still don't know who they are; a nod, a word of hello, recognition that we're all in this together and that by virtue of our contribution to society in some manner or other, we have a relationship, however poorly acknowledged, that keeps us young.

Rick Blaine, of Casablanca fame, doesn't age another day once he utters the memorable line "Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship." Friendships will do that to you.

If work is a glue, avocation is the solvent that releases the imagination, the spirit, the time and place of the ordinary. Books, birds, stamps, exercise, building, bowling, puzzling, volunteering, vacationing. Activity that creates pleasure by its doing - that alone is a key to staying young. Sit and stew and surely you'll find youth slipping away; it's a matter of attitude.

For decades I have enjoyed the hobby of bird watching and while far from expert, the activity has given me cause to travel, read, learn and enjoy the company of similarly inclined individuals. It has encouraged a youthful outlook in so many ways.

What's your sign; Sagittarius, Aquarius, Notorious? How you view yourself, how you carry yourself and how others view you is a large part of remaining youthful. There's a reason motivational coaches proffer: "Chin up, shoulders back." It's not about posture, it's about self-perception and how others perceive you. A positive attitude exemplified by a smile on your face, a hand extended in greeting and perhaps a joke at the ready identifies you as someone who enjoys a youthful lifestyle.

The psychology of life is like a highway, crowded with on-ramps, merges, Bott's dots, potholes, speed limits, an occasional toll booth and, inevitably, an exit ramp.

Live life filled with road rage and surely old age will find you sooner than later.

Cruise the highway with a positive attitude and youth is eternal.

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