



Don't Retire. Accelerate.

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In February I celebrated my birthday. Another year older. By the way, you celebrated, or will celebrate, a birthday this year too. Some would say we are getting 'closer to retirement.' No me.

I will never retire. I will accelerate.

Huh?

Learning is Wasted on the Young

When we're kids, all the way through to our university

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diet of learning ... a buffet of mental challenges. By choice AND by force we are given a breadth of academic topics (six to eight at a time depending on where in the world you are being educated). We are romantically challenged and engaged: our first kisses, first boyfriend or girlfriend, first heartbreak.

We develop social skills, learn to make friends, manage anger and more. Most of us learn a sport or two or more ... and maybe a musical instrument. We are exposed and forced to learn such a wide range of things. Our sponge-like brains soak it up. Our brains are continually 'surprised' with new information, new feelings, new ideas.

As We Get Older We Stop Learning Broadly

Early Adulthood ... learning narrows. Later, we enter the professional world, usually in our twenties or thirties. We typically find a partner, have kids ... our jobs are challenging but narrower than the diverse curriculum of learning in school. Our time and energy spent on learning continues but it narrows and focuses. We don't 'need' to learn such a broad set of topics so we go deep on a few as we grow in our jobs. Our 'strengths' emerge.

Middle Age ... we 'play to our strengths' and learn MUCH less broadly. Our 45th, 50th birthdays come and go; our kids grow up, and we've reached a place in our careers where we're becoming capable, even expert. We've been told for years to 'focus on our strengths' ... there's even a popular book and approach called StrengthsFinder that if you didn't find when you're younger than you already know and intuitively do by 50. Strengths enable you to perform, and you're rewarded for that performance. You double down on them; you should. In fact people look to you 'for' your areas of strength and you love it. As Mark Cuban said, "you tend to like the things you're good at."

All the while you further narrow the breadth of your learning.

Retirement ... we 'do what we want to' and learn MUCH, MUCH less broadly. One day, you have the opportunity to retire. You've saved enough. The kids are out of the house. It's time to do what you WANT to do all the time.

And you move from learning to golfing; from being stretched to 'the morning stretch.' And you should (right?) because you're told your joints wear out; you need to slow down and rest. After all 'retirement' literally comes from 'retiring' ... like getting away and sleeping.

You read that crossword puzzles might help you fend off the onset of dementia. So you do them religiously. Every day. And you golf. Relax. See the grandkids

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You've earned it.

You've earned what? A life of shutting down your brain and body?

So What's Happening Inside Our Brains?

Imagine that at age 35 you stop for good doing math in your head. Many of us do. Instead of math in your head though, pretend you stop using your left arm. At 55 you stop learning any new language skills. Your english is enough to get you by. Imagine that was your right arm instead of learning language. Then at age 65 you halted all interest in science, and replace the science with the use of your right leg. If you stopped using both arms and a leg for a few decades, imagine the atrophy of those body parts, the muscles. You can't carry things; you'd find it hard to walk.

You would eventually be almost crippled, if not totally crippled. You'd find yourself in a wheelchair.

Now go back to the math in your head, language skills, and sciences ... you stop thinking about them, stop doing them. Voluntarily. Your strengths and interests are elsewhere. By focusing on our strengths and later on just what we like, we are allowing the synapses and blood flow to different parts of our brain to stop being used, like stopping the use of your arm. It stops functioning; atrophies; you are, mentally, headed toward a wheelchair.

Shouldn't we stay enrolled in the lateral learning (more subjects) world. The expansion of breadth AND depth of knowledge and stimulation.

It's just as true of exercise, by the way. But that's for another post.

The Call to "Arms" and "Brains"

So here's my 'call to arms' (and legs and brains). Let's not slow down. Instead of aspiring to retire, let's ***accelerate as we age***. Start new careers and even new companies; learn new things; develop new interests; exercise more intensely and with more variety.

It's been ingrained in our brains that as we get older, our brains are less effective at storing and processing information. But my hypothesis is that it's just like those arms and legs: use them or lose them.

The brain is, in fact, full of neurons that process and transmit information electro-

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chemically. And in some ways this part of your body is different. Neurons aren't like other cells because they don't divide or die to be replaced by new ones. That means that while you may lose some, you've always got a tremendous number. In fact, the average human brain has 100 billion of them. And each may be connected to 10,000 other neurons. That means signals are passed back and forth by as many as 1,000 trillion synaptic connections. You can keep them stronger, 'in shape', through usage, just like a muscle.

I hope retirees reading this don't feel offended, angry, or even sorry. It's not too late. Like an atrophied leg can be rejuvenated through exercise and weight training, the brain can usually be rejuvenated, too (if you start before it's too late!). Studies show a remarkable resilience in the basic capability of the brain, showing that use of even an aging brain that has been neglected has huge effects. Just one example: The multi-tasking skill 'lost' by those at 70 at a horrible rate was restored to a level beyond a 20 year old through mental training (ie, using it!).

With this in mind (pun intended), I'm advocating that we engage in new things in life. Don't retire. Accelerate.

You don't have to learn Mandarin (though that might be one good idea). Nor do you have to turn semi-pro at tennis. Start online courses; make new friends; take up a new sport. Read deeply on a new subject. Find someone who is interested in it and talk to them about it.

I'm very excited by the prospect of accelerating as I age. And I know it benefits my work too because I'm constantly trying new things and learning from them.

Join me and never retire. Of course you might have to retire from a job at your big company or even change from whatever it is you're doing, but promise me you will find a constant stream of new 'jobs' (paid or pro bono), new interests, and new things to learn.

Don't let learning and life be wasted on the young. Accelerate.

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Colin Holland 8h ...
Independent Management Consulting Professional

Oh dear. Written by a man with good intentions but not having reached anywhere near retirement age it is utopian.
The first task in retirement, forced or voluntary, is good health. This is the bedrock to achieve in order to advance into new learning modules and increase your strength in intellect ar ...see more

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Bracken Darrell 5h ...
Head of Logitech

Thank you so much for the comment, Colin. Health is so easy to take for granted. And you're right that my post does not address this at all. Maybe for another post.

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Lisa Tillman 2h ...
Global Account Manager at Artesyn Embedded Technologies

You are spot on as always!

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Bracken Darrell 2h ...
Head of Logitech

Thank you!!!

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