

Age Esteem at any age

Ageing is a part of life. We may have different expectations about ageing, but for some, having no control over this natural course triggers anxiety and denial. Not so for Bonnie Lou Fatio (pictured here), an internationally recognized motivational speaker and author and founder of AgeEsteem. Her vision is a world where age and ageing are celebrated and people of all ages are respected as contributing members of society.



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VERONICA RIEMER, WHO

With a background in education, human resources development and career planning, Bonnie is on a path to start a metaphorical pandemic. This, however, is a pandemic with a difference. “I want to infect people with positive thinking so that they infect others with “AgeEsteem”. I want to inspire individuals to become role models, become icons – we don’t need to feel younger, or ageless, but just vital, alive, engaged and connected; passionate about what we do and still feel we have that purpose in life”.

Talking about the theme for International Day of Older Persons 2016, “Take a Stand Against Ageism”, which challenges everyone to consider the negative attitudes and discrimination based on age, and the detrimental impact it has on older people, Bonnie feels we are often our own worst supporters. “How frequently do you catch yourself thinking, “My memory has gone! I can’t find my words.” or “I wish I could do that.”? Both infer that we are lacking because we are too old. I find much of ageism is how you feel about yourself and it is why I launched AgeEsteem”.

Bonnie aims to feel good about herself and to walk tall with confidence and a smile. As a result she is treated with respect as a person. She stressed the importance of

interacting with people of all ages and remaining current on trends and technology. In this way there is a sharing of knowledge and experience in meaningful ways as we learn from each other. “With knowledge, you will be more comfortable and confident in all situations and thus dispel negative attitudes and discrimination based on age. If each of us were to feel confident and secure with our age, so would society”.

Bonnie (aged 73) has recently been presented with the Women’s International Networking (WIN) Global Inspiring Women Worldwide Award which she found to be a humbling yet empowering experience. “As women we applaud others, yet rarely recognize our own contributions” she explained. “This award is so meaningful to me as it focused on what I have done since turning 60; for opening new paths and improving the confidence of senior women, mentoring young ones and bringing an innovative voice to the space of women’s leadership”.

Having recently retired as Global Ambassador of Women’s Leadership of the World Young Women’s Christian Association (World YWCA), where she helped to introduce programmes in intergenerational shared leadership and mentoring, she has more time and energy to take forward Inspired

10 daily practices To live with pizzazz at every age

- 1 When you wake up, give thanks for the day that is about to unfold
- 2 Say to yourself “I am going to have a wonderful day”
- 3 Speak to yourself and others with encouraging words
- 4 Eat your meals leisurely; savour the flavours
- 5 Give your full attention to the present moment
- 6 Look in the mirror and tell yourself what a beautiful person you are
- 7 Have contact with people who are younger and older than you
- 8 Laugh! Dance! Sing!
- 9 Plan one activity that will make a difference in the life of someone else
- 10 Praise yourself for three qualities you admire in yourself.

Women Lead, a cross-border, cross-culture global leadership mentoring programme. She explained how the programme works. “I mentor 10 women from 10 countries during six months. It is my gift – to them, and to myself. In return, they each pledge to mentor another woman using the leadership mentoring model for the following six months. My present mentees reside in Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Malawi, Lesotho, Portugal, France, Switzerland, and USA and their ages range from 18 to 58”. Her vision is to encourage more women of all ages to join the movement so that it grows

exponentially. The award has already drawn eight women into the next programme to begin in December 2016, two of whom are 60+, and she is always looking for more members.

With all United Nations agencies (except FAO, WFP, and WIPO) implementing the Mandatory Age of Separation (MAS) at 65 by 1 January 2018, many of us will still have a third of our lives yet to live, and that is increasing daily. Bonnie recognised that many retirees today must continue to work in order to have enough to live on, but she would like to see a system where you work much longer, with fallow years built in regularly to enable people to leave work for a period of time to travel, develop new interests and skills, and gain a richer perspective of life. “With our world transforming so rapidly, this constant reinvention will become a necessity” she said. “At the same time, this approach would stagger the times when people are receiving pay without working, rather than having several generations of seniors on social security all at one time. I believe it would relieve burn-out and create greater productivity”.

Staying healthy in later life is not just about physical fitness but also mental fitness. Bonnie explained that having a purpose in life, a reason to get out of bed, is essential. “Keep learning and we are more interested and interesting to others. If you have a dream or a burning desire to ignite the world in some way, then now is the ideal time. The world needs your experience, expertise and wisdom”.

She suggests also changing a daily routine, which forces you to use your senses differently. Another possibility is to learn a new language or technical skill, enrol for a study course, join a book discussion group or be active in a group that is intergenerational. “Being with people of other ages stimulates us to think differently and keeping contact with children keeps your own inner child alive” she enthused. “Continue to play and to laugh. I love creating rain dances or sun dances with my granddaughters. The laughter, creativity and exercise is energizing and the ideas are endless. Begin with one and then add another”.

And for those who are not yet retired, Bonnie advises preparing for retirement as early as possible. She recognised that women often have an easier adjustment because they are multi-taskers and many

taking responsibility for running the home. “But often people feel a sense of loss at retirement, especially those whose work has become their life and their sense of value. Having multiple interests, a hobby, or volunteer commitments outside the work environment makes the transition easier” she explained. “Cultivate your interests; seek new challenges; accept a volunteer leadership role; take classes; and do this when your work life is most active”.

Bonnie reminds us all that life is a series of choices. “You choose how to accept change when you get older. You choose your attitude – to be happy or miserable.

The former is a lot more fun, and research shows it keeps you much healthier!” ■

If you would like to share your expertise, experience and wisdom and would like more information about Bonnie Fatio and her work with Inspired Women Lead, please contact ageesteem@gmail.com

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