

Companies can benefit from their 'sages'

Americans are obsessed with aging. But how many think about "sage-ing"? Though aging is inevitable, there is a difference between getting older and becoming a sage. According to Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, author of "From Age-ing to Sage-ing: A Profound New Vision of Growing Older," a sage is a person who:

- Provides wise, prudent leadership.
- Offers their experiences and wisdom for the welfare of society.
- Expresses their hope for the future by the contributions they make for the following generations.
- Gives encouragement generously.
- Mentors younger people who are drawn to their wisdom.
- Models a life that finds validation, self-worth and meaning from within.

In a quest to learn more about how to better prepare leaders for the future, I interviewed 30 sages, many of whom were identified by The Wall Street Journal and Forbes to be the top executive coaches in the country. Here are some of their thoughts:

- It's best to live from the inside out. Fulfillment comes from knowing your talents and values and living with integrity.
- Life is a circular process of self-renewal, growth and discovery rather than a linear sequence of accomplishments.
- Life is a story with many chapters. Each chapter has a beginning, an end and a

transition to the next chapter.

- People do not resist change. We resist transition.
- Understanding transition can lead to personal growth and renewal that benefits us and everyone around us, both personally and professionally.
- Acknowledging our fear of dying allows us more freedom to live. How do we want the last chapter of our life to turn out?

R i c h a r d

Leider, author of "The Power of Purpose: Creating Meaning in Your Life and Work," has interviewed more than 1,000 people who had distinguished careers with leading companies. He asked them to reflect upon what they had learned and what they would do differently if given the chance to start over. Several themes emerged:

- Life picks up speed and the focus shifts. In the second half of our lives, we tend to think about our legacy and what we are leaving behind instead of how high we are climbing.
- They would be more reflective. As they got caught up in the "doing," they forgot about the "being" and "meaning."

- They would take more risks. Being busy from business made them numb to their creativity and sensitivity. Learning, growing, stretching and exploring made them feel more alive.

- They would strive to find what gives them fulfillment or purpose: doing something that contributes to life and adding value that goes beyond oneself.

There is a disconnection between what individuals need for a quality life and what corporations are doing. Even though longevity in the workplace does not qualify a person to be a sage, there are plenty of sages who are being encouraged to retire early or are being pushed out.

When sages leave organizations, more is lost than institutional history. Organizations are not taking advantage of the mentoring and training that could help others learn from past experience.

Sages offer value to the company not because they are more virtuous than younger people, but because they have learned from a lifetime of experiences.

Even if their primary focus is on the bottom line, organizations should create environments worthy of people's fullest potential. The bottom line for individuals is to try to be more like sages rather than just aging. All organizations can benefit from their wisdom. □

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