

Turning 65 BY DAVID E. NELSON

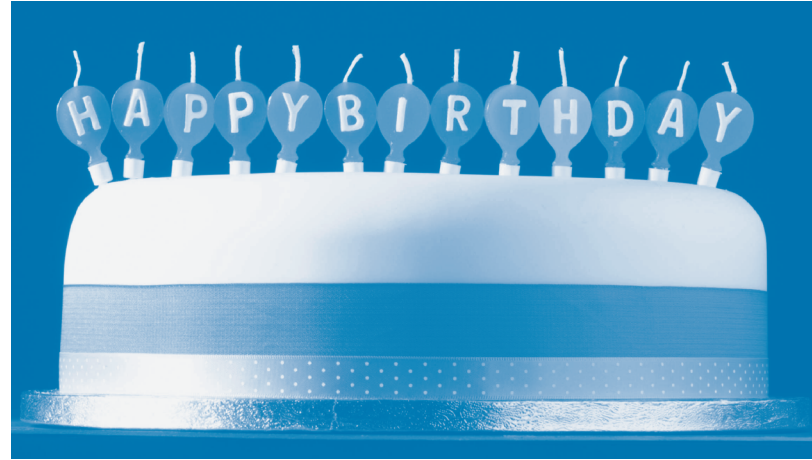
Turning 65 was not as bad as I suspected a decade ago. When my parents were 65, they seemed so old. To be honest, they always seemed old to me. The one age that seemed really foreboding was 29. When my brother-in-law turned that age I thought to myself, "Wow, could I live that long?"

Birthdays are not so much for counting years as for celebrating the mysterious gift of life. We can use birthdays as special times for gathering together to celebrate or to send greetings. Recently, I attended a program called "Explore Your Future" and we looked at birthday cards. Many of them were touching or funny. Many were almost cruel in their humor about getting older. In our Western culture, we have idealized youth so much we have almost neutralized the value of age. In the Eastern cultures, the elderly are embraced. Among First Nation people, the elder always speaks first. I attended a wonderful celebration on the first day of Kwanza this past year, and as younger members of the audience rose to speak, they asked "May I have the permission of the elders to speak?" It felt very respectful to me.

As dental professionals, you can increase your effectiveness by recognizing and honoring the strengths of all your employees and patients. Age is but one factor that makes us each unique and special. With improved health care and personal discipline, people will continue to increase the average life span. Some are suggesting our grandchildren could very likely live to be over 100 on the average. If that is true, we can look at new ways to view retirement and aging. Perhaps it is possible to rediscover the "being" part of human being.

I don't have to work for pay any longer, and yet I still seek some employment. I enjoy the engagement with people who are providing needed services in health care, education, and inter-faith communities. I drive 45 miles to a federal prison two days a week to partner with men who are changing their lives by deepening their faith, strengthening their life skills, and making better decisions. I do this because it adds value to others, and it increases my personal satisfaction and adds joy to my life.

What do you love to do personally and professionally? What are the life skills you have discovered and nurtured? What are the activities you are engaged in that bring a smile to your face and joy to your heart? What motivates you to get up each day with enthusiasm? The answers to these questions can be good indicators for your life planning.



Life planning is always a part of our human agenda. Sometimes we do it without thinking and other times we can be very intentional. Wherever you are in your life's journey, I invite you to take time out to reflect on where you've been and where you would like to go on this adventure we call life. Turning 65 is a great joy for me. Reflecting on my past, present, and future is an exciting topic to think and write about. I am very clear the past does not determine the present and future. I determine the present and the future. Understanding my history is helpful. Even more helpful is gaining greater understanding about my strengths and my dreams.

We can all tackle this undertaking in our own way. I offer the following questions for you to reflect on, talk about, and even write about in your journal.

Top Ten Questions I Am Asking Myself

1. If bringing in an income is not the critical factor in how I spend my days, how would I really like to spend time?
2. What interests have I set aside until I "have time"?
3. Where do my joys and the world's hurts or needs connect?
4. Who are the people and groups that challenge me and encourage my personal and professional growth?
5. What are five activities I can engage in to deepen my spirituality?
6. What are five activities that improve my health and therefore lengthen my life?
7. To whom do I want to write this week?
8. What are five activities I can do just for fun?
9. How can I practice extreme self care this week?
10. When I look back in another decade, what will I see then that I am missing now about my Life Plan?

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Turning 65 is really fun. Fifteen years ago, on our 50th birthdays, my wife and I hosted a birthday party for ourselves. The invitation included the comment, "Come see what a century of life looks like." We looked pretty good then. I must be honest and set aside modesty to tell you we look and feel even better today. Retirement has been great to my wife, Ann. Semi-retirement is wonderful for me. The values we have embraced, the friendships we have nurtured, the organizations we have joined, and the balance we have embraced are making these years the best so far.

*David E. Nelson, D.Min, provides "Appreciative Inquiry" coaching, consultation, training, resources, and presentations in order to encourage individual persons and organizations to be the best they can be and do their highest quality work.
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