

Program 06

Mind Your Business

Why saying can't or shouldn't to older males, might backfire

If at age 73, you were to be invited to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa, what would be your response? For many of us around that age, it would possibly be a very firm "No way!" Yet for eight members of a Port Lincoln group with an average age of 73, this is what they have done. In August 2014, and following 18 months of hard training, six women and two men climbed to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain. Creative Male Ageing challenges the 'decrepitude and debilitation' view of ageing; rather, with good health, ageing men can actually seize the day and make ageing not only less distressing, but a time that is satisfying, and indeed good.

Interviewees

Dr John Ashfield

Wayne Gotch

Christine Jettner

John Payne

Discussion Starter

A lone adventurer, an aged and gnarly orthodox priest recently reached the shores of Queensland having rowed across the Pacific for more than two months unassisted; the most recent of his many epic journeys. A muscular man who recently featured in one of the TED videos talks of his daily routine of weight lifting at the age of ninety three. Older men are playing competitive sport alongside younger men, and are far from slow or fragile.

So what is happening? What may once have been exceptions to the 'rule' are rapidly becoming commonplace. Older men are realising that what you dare to imagine is often what you can do, and that physical limitations in later life have more to do with other people's imposition of limitations than the reality of capability.

This is mostly not heroism, just taking back what is theirs: the right to live the kind of life they want, unimpeded by imposed or internalised messages of aging; older men deciding not to acquiesce to the narrative of inevitable redundancy and decline, or the cajolery of assumptions of fragility and 'playing it safe', but deciding to assert their right to continue to live a life of authenticity: one of their choosing, not other people's.

It has been said that, 'age and treachery can overcome youth and stealth', be that as it may, age can be mitigated significantly by choices we make, and ideas we dispense with (about aging), so that we can be youthful but as well wise; a partnership that mere youth cannot compete with. Furthermore, with competent health care, appropriate help seeking, sensible life rather than 'decline – oriented' lifestyle habits, and early ill-health interventions, older men can push past 'flat earth' thinking and on to new adventures.

Defying the doomsayers and triumphing over the heavy downward pull into the mire of unnecessary redundancy, is perhaps that one perverse pleasure of self-satisfaction that only the privilege of age can bring. If that happens to be a nuisance for someone, then let that be the added pleasure, like caramel at the centre.

Questions

- 1. What will it take for our culture to encourage life rather than decline in its older citizens?*
- 2. Why are we so risk averse when it comes to older people's choices in asserting their right to live their lives the way they want?*
- 3. How true is it to say that, 'a life well lived, is a life of our own choosing'?*

Project Consultant

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