



University Outreach  
Center on Aging and Human Services

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Dear Mary,

On behalf of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center on Aging and Human Services and the Wisconsin Geriatric Education Center I would like to sincerely thank you for participating in the Midwest Best Practices in Aging Conference.

Your keynote presentation, *Aging with Enthusiasm*, was an aspect of the conference that we were hoping would be uplifting and vibrant as opposed to the more research-based presentations that were offered throughout the majority of the conference. You certainly did not disappoint us. Your keynote address not only was lively and upbeat but you gave the audience a great deal of practical skills to use when working with older adults. The various methods of presenting you used were also so dynamic (singing, playing harmonica, doing the wiggle dance) not to mention the group and audience participation that was garnered from the audience.

Mary, you're program was extremely well received as evidenced by the comments of the participants. A few of these are stated below:

- “Marcdante was fantastic and right on target”
- “Mary was very entertaining”
- “Excellent presentation!!!!!!!!!!”

I would whole-heartedly recommend you for additional speaking engagements. Again please accept our sincere thanks and gratitude for coming to Milwaukee and touching the lives of professionals who care for older adults.

Fondly,

Nikki Panico  
Center on Aging & Human Services  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Stacy Barnes  
Wisconsin Geriatric Education Center  
Marquette University

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## **Aging with Enthusiasm** **By Mary Marcdante**

### **Program Overview**

Enthusiasm is at the heart of healthy aging, yet why do so many people shy away from it as they get older? Enthusiasm reduces stress, increases energy and productivity, enhances relationships and enriches our quality of life. In this highly informative and entertaining program, you'll discover the five secrets of enthusiastic older adults and six strategies to help you, your clients, coworkers, friends, and family turn the fear of aging into the fun of aging.

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### **Article**

## **Aging with Enthusiasm** **By Mary Marcdante**

That advice to 'act your age' is about the worst advice I ever heard. I'm always thinking, 'What am I going to do when I grow up?' It's as if I haven't done anything yet. I would say to all [women], 'Don't give up your dreams and your desires. Don't give up the ship. Don't give up. Just keep on.'

-- Liz Smith, columnist  
*On Women Turning Seventy*

Enthusiasm is one of the most under-utilized tools for improving life enjoyment, workplace satisfaction, and maintaining vibrant health at any age.

If you're like a lot of people, you're nodding your head in agreement right now and thinking about how fatigued you are, how you don't have enough time, and how enthusiasm is something that belongs to the young and restless.

Whatever your thoughts, recognize that by the time you finish this article you will feel more energized, have the awareness and skill to create enthusiasm on demand and use it to make your life more satisfying, your work more enjoyable, and your mind, body and spirit more alive at any age.

Enthusiasm goes by many names: eagerness, energy, excitement, get up and go, gusto, hope, joy, liveliness, optimism, pep, pizzazz, spirit, spunk, vim and vigor, vitality, zest. Enthusiasm also wears many faces. Some people express enthusiasm loudly with their voice and words. Others show it in the way that they move their body. For some it is in their eyes. And in a few, you barely notice it at

all. But you know when you're around enthusiasm because it lights a fire in everyone around the person who is expressing it.

### **Enthusiasm is Ageless!**

During the research phase of writing my book *My Mother, My Friend: The Ten Most Important Things to Talk About With Your Mother* (Simon & Schuster, 2001) I interviewed a remarkable woman named Edith Leech. Following the death of her husband, and with the encouragement of her two daughters, Edith returned to school at the age of 77. She packed up her bags in Maryland, moved into a dormitory in Oakland, California, and attended Matthew Fox's University of Creation Spirituality. Intending to stay only a semester, Edith remained an entire year and was applauded as the oldest and one of the most involved students on campus. She now leads two weekly women's spirituality groups and remarks, "aside from a few aches and pains, I'm blessed with a rich, full life. Eighty-three is a wonderful age to be alive."

Edith's positive attitude attracts people of all ages into her life. Her daughter Mary said that at a family wedding, she found her mother surrounded by several grandchildren and their friends, all of whom were in their twenties. She overheard one of the young men walk away saying, "She is really cool. I want to date her." Older people like Edith are needed for their wisdom, creativity, and experience to help shift outdated notions of older people.

### **Seven Reasons to Create More Enthusiasm in Your Life**

It is important to recognize enthusiasm in yourself and others. Why, you ask? Before I tell you why, let me first ask you a few questions. Would you agree that the world has become a little more cynical? Would you agree that our world has become a little sadder? Would you agree that we could all use a little more enthusiasm? As a professional speaker who travels the world helping people appreciate themselves and their lives and make healthier choices, I am continually reminded by my audiences of how difficult it is to sustain the personal motivation to follow through on desired goals and projects. People also tell me about the challenges of building collective positive energy at work and home to sustain healthy relationships with others, especially when a crisis has arisen or someone is having a bad day. If these aren't enough reasons to massage more enthusiasm into your life, here are seven more reasons: on a professional level, enthusiasm influences customer service and sales, hiring, performance, and workplace satisfaction. On a personal level, enthusiasm affects your health, relationships and life enjoyment, all of which impacts your longevity and quality of living.

**1) Service and Sales.** All things being equal, customers are more willing to buy from someone they like, and continue buying from someone who is

enthusiastic about their products and customers. Think about your favorite store. I'm guessing that the great products that make you want to buy at this store include a large dose of enthusiasm in their sales people and has nothing to do with whether they are seventeen or seventy.

- 2) **Hiring.** Based on a survey done at the University of Pennsylvania's National Center on Educational Quality of the Workforce, the number one skill employers are looking for when hiring is attitude. A positive, enthusiastic attitude, regardless of age.
- 3) **Performance.** Would you agree that when you have more energy you get more done? Of course. And when you're excited about something you have more energy? When you encourage enthusiasm and a positive attitude in employees, you get a higher level of performance from them. You know this, but what are you doing to encourage their enthusiasm?

The retailing giant, Nordstrom created an employee handbook that is just a five-by-eight-inch gray card that reads: "We're glad to have you with our company. Our number one goal is to provide outstanding customer service. Set both your personal and professional goals high. We have great confidence in your ability to achieve them. Rule #1: Use your good judgment in all situations. There will be no additional rules. Please feel free to ask your department manager, store manager, or division general manager any question at any time."

Enthusiasm is written all over Nordstrom's seven-sentence policy with words like "glad," "number one goal," "outstanding customer service," "set your goals high," and "great confidence in your ability to achieve." Nordstrom also has enthusiastic employees of all ages.

- 4) **Workplace Satisfaction.** Enthusiastic people experience more satisfaction and enjoyment in their work and their lives. Author of *Learned Optimism*, Martin Seligman did groundbreaking research on pessimism and optimism and found that people who were optimistic were more successful, enjoyed their lives more, and had better health than pessimists.<sup>1</sup>
- 5) **Relationships.** Simple as it sounds, most people would rather spend time with upbeat, enthusiastic people. If you've ever been around a professional critic or sad sack, you know that eventually, when you see this person, you want to walk the other way. If they call on the phone, you want to pretend you're someone else and say you're not in. Quite the opposite when an optimistic, excited person calls. We're drawn in by the happiness in their voice. Enthusiastic people inspire us to become more confident and open, which helps us to be more of our best and share ourselves more willingly with others.

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<sup>1</sup> *Learned Optimism*. Martin Seligman, Ph.D. Pocket Books, 1990.

As more and more people find themselves caring for their elderly parents, the need for an uplifting environment becomes not just helpful but necessary to survive the added stress of caring for another person whose physical and mental health may be precarious. According to the National Institute for Mental Health, 17.5 million people or 7% of the American population are clinically depressed and nearly 2 million of the 34 million Americans ages 65 and older suffer from depression.

- 6) **Health and Healing.** A 1995 study done by researchers at Loma Linda Medical Center in Los Angeles found that healthy stress hormones (endorphins and neurotransmitters) increased significantly, and unhealthy stress hormones (adrenaline and cortisol) decreased significantly in participants when they watched comedians and funny movies for an hour. How about adding a TV and VCR to your reception area and showing comedies for an hour a day. Less stress, more enjoyment equals a longer, healthier life.
- 7) **Life Enjoyment.** The research is out on happiness. Happy people enjoy their lives more. I don't think it takes a psychological study to know that when you feel good, the world around you appears brighter. However, in her well-researched book, *The Pleasure Zone*,<sup>2</sup> psychologist, Stella Resnick proves "What does make a difference [in how happy a person is] relates much more to a person's level of enthusiasm, energy, and their willingness to derive pleasure from ordinary life."

### **Six Secrets of Enthusiastic Older Adults**

1. Enthusiastic people **radiate vitality**. They have a spring in their steps, a smile on their face and eyes that sparkle.
2. Enthusiastic people **have something they love doing in their life**. Think Julia Child and cooking, George Burns and performing, Grandma Moses and painting...
3. Enthusiastic people **focus on the good and what they can do** (not what they can't do) and **what they're grateful for**.
4. Enthusiastic people are **curious and interested**. They ask a lot of questions and explore what interests them. They are life-long learners. My grandfather Charlie lived to be 98 years. When I was 17, I asked him, "Grandpa, how have you managed to live so long?" He said, "Three rules to a long life: 1) Moderation in everything (B-O-R-I-N-G to a 17 year old), 2) Be interested in

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<sup>2</sup> The Pleasure Zone. p. 13. Stella Resnick, Ph.D. Conari Press 1997.

life and you'll always be interesting, 3) Eat stewed prunes every morning." I was enchanted by his idea of "Be interested in life." As I continue my research on enthusiasm and longevity, there is more and more evidence that proves that an engaged mind assists in preventing or delaying Alzheimer's and increasing life span.

5. Enthusiastic people **express their feelings, laugh often, and keep things in perspective.** They find a way to have a good time in whatever situation they find themselves.

### **Six Strategies to Create More Enthusiasm**

To help you create more enthusiasm in yourself and those you work with, here are six strategies:

**Fake It.** Act as if you're full of enthusiasm, especially if you don't feel like it. The age-old "fake it 'til you make it" works if you're willing to push through the few minutes of resistance and do whatever you're doing with enthusiasm. It's like cleaning. You don't really want to clean, but once you start, you feel compelled to keep going until the job is done (well, okay, sometimes this works)

Affirm to yourself out loud, with great gusto, that you feel enthusiastic. Here is a powerful statement to use – "I'm full of enthusiasm and I feel fabulous!" Say this statement over and over, like a mantra, especially when you feel tired and need a boost. The key is to get your body feeling the feelings of enthusiasm.

When someone asks, "How are you?" don't say, "Not bad" or "Fine." Instead, try this: Fabulous! How are you?" Watch what happens. They'll smile and feel better, or at the very least, look at you quizzically and say, "I want what you had for breakfast."

**Act enthusiastically.** Maintaining a flexible body is also very helpful in creating enthusiasm. How often do you take stretch breaks during your day? Do you find your energy waning at times? Would you like a way to put more enthusiasm into your body? Try the body-shake. Think like a rag doll. While walking in place, shake your shoulders and your hands. Yes, you look very strange, but your body will be moving and you will be laughing. Two signs of an enthusiastic person.

Use the body-shake a minimum of three times a day and you'll find yourself more relaxed and energized. Here are three routines to get you started: 1 – When you wake up in the morning and you want to get your energy going, turn on your favorite CD, or the radio and do the body-shake to one song (about three minutes) If you live with others, get them involved. You'll all be in a better mood in a few minutes. 2 – At the end of your day, use the body-shake to eliminate the

tension you've accumulated through the day. 3 – When you want to get rid of a negative person, just start shaking. (Just kidding, but it does sound fun, doesn't it?)

**Use Music to Energize Yourself.** Every culture since the beginning of time has used music to create specific moods. Likely you're using soothing music with your clients to relax them and yourself. What about creating more energy? What music inspires you? What songs or performers get your juices going? Tina Turner? Beethoven? The Beatles? Music that contains a rhythm of 120-150 beats per minute, which is double the resting heart rate, is energizing to the human system.<sup>3</sup> Start your day with energizing music or any time you need a pick-up.

**Use Inspiring Words.** In the next ten seconds, call out as many words or phrases that inspire you, or read these words out loud, with conviction and emotion, to yourself. *PEACE! JOY! FREEDOM! I LOVE YOU! MY FAITH! CHILDREN! SLEEP! LAUGHTER! SUCCESS! MONEY! MY WORK! VACATIONS! THE OCEAN! CLEAN AIR! MUSIC! TURNING OFF MY TEENAGERS' MUSIC! MY HEALTH!* How do you feel now? You're absolutely right -- full of energy! Happy! Ready to go out and do something BIG! Don't wait for big things to move you. Your own words can move mountains. Say them out loud. Sing them. Call yourself and speak those words into your voice mail...and watch your spirit soar and move you to action.<sup>4</sup> Now sing Kumbayah...just kidding, just kidding.

David Snowden, author of *The Nun Study* interviewed 648 nuns and reviewed their autobiographies looking for key words such as "happy," "joy," "love," "hopeful" and "content." Snowden found that the nuns that wrote and spoke of positive emotions lived as much as 10 years longer than those expressing fewer positive emotions.

Inspirational and humorous books and quotes encourage enthusiasm. One of my clients who is a manager puts a "Quote of the Week" on 3X5 cards and places them on each employee's desk every Monday morning before they arrive. It is a great morale booster, and a company ritual that everyone looks forward to. If you want to keep the people in your life enthusiastic about you, write down your favorite quote, or write one of your own, and have the quote printed on the other side of your appointment or business card. Do whatever it takes to keep inspiring words around you and your enthusiasm will become as natural to you as breathing.

**Spend more time with enthusiastic people.** Who are the people you have fun with? Who loves you? Do you have a laugh buddy? Someone you can laugh

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<sup>3</sup> Walkfit with Kathy Smith. Kathy Smith. (Audiotape) Time Warner Audio Books, 1992

<sup>4</sup> *Inspiring Words for Inspiring People: 74 Postcards to Celebrate the People In Your Life.* Mary Marcdante, [www.marymarcdante.com](http://www.marymarcdante.com)

with, who calls you up and says, “Oh, life is great right now. Share it with me.” Think of five people in your life who are your cheerleaders and fans, the people who believe in you and whom you could call night or day and they’d be there for you. If you don’t have five, make them up! (You’ll need them to balance that one toxic person in your life.) Now imagine you are looking each one of them in the eyes, one by one. See yourself enthusiastically telling them that you love them and how important they are to you. Now go do it in person or by phone within the next 24 hours. Don’t worry about embarrassing yourself or them. Even if they resist you, they’ll be secretly flattered and you’ll both feel the fire of enthusiasm in your heart.

**Allow yourself the Ohhhhh Effect!** Remember the movie “When Harry Met Sally?” There is a very memorable scene where Sally and Harry are in a restaurant and Sally enthusiastically creates the “Ohhhh effect.” People are stunned, and, whether they’re willing to admit it or not, silently jealous of her delight. Now I’m not suggesting that you go out and model this exact behavior, but I am suggesting that you find more ways to connect to the images, people, and experiences that cause you to say “Ohhhhh! Isn’t that wonderful, beautiful, spectacular, fabulous, sensational, awe-inspiring,” or whatever grand thought is pulsing through your body in the moment, whether it be a sunset, a newborn child or your latest skincare moisturizer. Enthusiasm is born of delight, wonder, passion, curiosity, and connection –connection to yourself, other people, and to the mystery and the majesty of life.

### **Enthusiasm Acknowledges Pain and Offers Hope and Humor**

Enthusiasm is not just being a cheerleader or walking around in dazed delight, although that’s a great start. It is also about maintaining hope when you or others are in the midst of darkness and pain. It is remembering that when it’s raining, the sun will eventually shine again, and in the meantime, you might as well sing in the rain, find the silver lining in the clouds, and make mud-packs. You can always cry later.

Some people are very good at showing a happy face, no matter what the circumstances, and calling that enthusiasm. That is not my definition. Enthusiasm includes acknowledging pain and then helping yourself or others mentally shift toward what is good and healing and supportive in the moment.

### **Yes, There’s Baseball in Heaven**

My friend, Henry Gardner is eighty-seven years old, a widow for the past ten years, father of three children and five grandchildren. He is also an avid tennis player, current events enthusiast and joke-teller. He recently was diagnosed with multiple myeloma and has been on chemotherapy. At a family dinner a few

weeks ago he told this joke: "A man prayed to God asking him if there was baseball in heaven. God said, 'Good news bad news. The good news is, yes, there's baseball in heaven. The bad news is, you're pitching tomorrow.'" Henry laughed his usual hearty laugh when he finished telling the story. We all laughed along with him. Silently, I realized that in his wonderfully unique and humorous way Henry was modeling for all of us the power of using humor to acknowledge the possibility that this cancer would end his life sooner rather than later.

When I finished laughing, I took the risk of asking him about his chemo, which I'd heard he'd started (during our appreciation ritual at dinner when his children acknowledged Henry for his courage in going through with the chemo).

Henry said, "It's really hard and makes me nauseous. He then got up and rushed to the bathroom. When he came out, he sat down, looking pale and weak. I said, "Here, have some water. You're probably a little dehydrated." Everyone laughed and we proceeded on to dessert.

After dinner I mentioned that I'd known him for eight years and remembered vividly his 80th birthday. He said, "Yes, this year I'll be 88. They're going to trade me in for an Oldsmobile. Did you know Geraldine Ferraro has the same thing - multiple myeloma? They say you have two - four years. I just want it to be fast. Well, everybody's got to do it someday."

I said, "I know, can you believe that! Who made those rules!"

We laughed again. And in between the laughter, we acknowledged death. As I reflect on that dinner with Henry, I am reminded again and again that what we do and say in moments like this – or any moment, really – can be transforming...especially when we say and do what first comes from our heart. Enthusiasm is heart language.

And you know, sometimes we don't have the words and enthusiasm is just being there, holding a hand. There may be someone in your life right now -- a client, employee, friend or family member – who feels lost, depressed or hopeless, but you don't know it, because some people are so good at putting on a happy face. And simply by connecting and holding hands you help another know that no matter how bad it gets that they're not alone, that we're all in this together. As Barbara Streisand so magically and enthusiastically sings, "People who need people are the luckiest people in the world."

### **Enthusiasm is a Choice**

Everyone has the opportunity to choose enthusiasm every moment of the day. What will you choose? Your clients, employees and most importantly, your own mind, are waiting to hear the words, "I'm full of enthusiasm and I feel fabulous." Surprise yourself. Say it out loud. Jump up and down. Laugh. Who knows, what may be waiting for you tomorrow morning. Live with enthusiasm NOW!

### **How Do You Feel About Getting Older?**

Take a few minutes to see what your beliefs are about aging. Respond to the following statements by writing down your answers and simply notice how you feel when you finish.

1. Name an enthusiastic person older than you and what you appreciate about them.
2. One good thing about getting older is...
3. One positive thing I have learned from my mother about aging is...
4. One positive thing I have learned from my father about aging is...
5. One thing that makes me laugh about getting older is...
6. When I am an old wo/man I will...

"You must reach old age before you can understand the meaning - splendid, absolute, unchallengeable, irreplaceable meaning - of the word today, today."

-- Paul Claudel

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## **Resources:**

### **Books**

*Aging With Grace: What the Nun Study Teaches Us About Leading Longer, Healthier, and More Meaningful Lives* by David Snowdon (Hardcover - May 2001)

*Another Country: Navigating the Emotional Terrain of our Elders* by Mary Pipher (Riverside Books, 1999)

*Are Your Parents Driving You Crazy?* by Joseph A. Lardo and Carole R. Rothman (VanderWyk & Burnham, 2001)

*My Mother, My Friend: The Ten Most Important Things To Talk About With Your Mother* by Mary Marcdante (Simon & Schuster/Fireside 2001)

*The Fountain of Age* by Betty Friedan. (Simon & Schuster, 1993)

*The Okinawa Program: How the World's Longest-Lived People Achieve Everlasting Health--and How You Can Too* by Bradley J. Willcox, et al (Hardcover - May 2001)

*Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt (Paperback - January 1986)

*Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom

### **Magazines**

*Modern Maturity Magazine* <http://www.aarp.org/cgi-bin/redirect.cgi>

### **Movies**

*Driving Miss Daisy*

*Finding Forester*

*Fried Green Tomatoes*

*Grumpy Old Men (1 & 2)*

*On Golden Pond*

*The Trip to Bountiful*

### **Music**

*Ancient Mother* by On Wings of song & Robert Gass. Spring Hill Music, 1993.

*Fire Within* by Libana. Ladyslipper, Inc. 1990.

*Four Seasons* by Vivaldi

*Ode to Joy* by Beethoven

*Sun Spirit* by Deuter

### **Websites**

[www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) (800)-424-3410 St. NW, Washington, DC 20049

[www.marymarcdante.com](http://www.marymarcdante.com) Includes several informative pages on keeping yourself inspired. Click on "Inspire Yourself"

[www.ncoa.org](http://www.ncoa.org)

National Council on Aging –. Very thorough site with many helpful links to other aging websites.

[www.womenshealth-aging.org/index.html](http://www.womenshealth-aging.org/index.html)

The Coalition for Women's Health & Aging

**For more information contact:**

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