



HELPING CLIENTS NAVIGATE LONGEVITY

A BioPsychoSocial Model for Building Better Client Relationships

BY: SHERRI SNELLING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

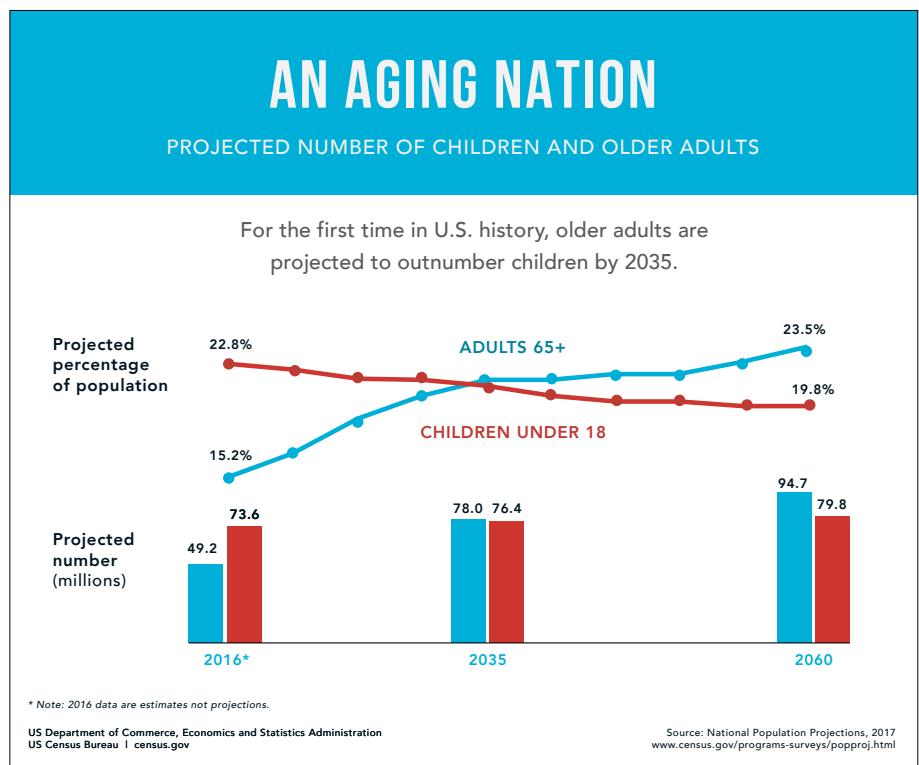
What is gerontology and why is it important in financial advisement? The study of gerontology is the study of aging, or as the experts like to say, “The study of life from the womb to the tomb.”

Most people think gerontology is the same as geriatrics which is a medical specialty focused only on the older population. Instead, gerontology is the study of what affects us throughout our lives: fetal health, genetics and epigenetics, socioeconomic factors, education, work and living environments, lifestyle choices, relationships. All of these play a role in how well we age and how long we live.

When it comes to guiding clients in their wealth management, it is not enough for financial advisors to know our society is engaged in an unprecedented age boom where we are living longer. In fact, by 2035 for the first time in American history, we will have more people over age 65 than children under age 18. Longevity is the new normal.¹

The focus for gerontologists is to look for patterns and indicators on how to achieve healthspans that equal lifespans. When it comes to financial advisement, advisors need to embrace the tenets of gerontology: biology, psychology and sociology or what is known as the BioPsychoSocial framework to help steer clients on aligning wealthspan with healthspan and lifespan. This becomes both a philosophy and a practical guide to help clients achieve their financial goals.

This paper is an exploration into how our decision-making is impacted across the lifecycle and how different priorities and purpose are driving those decisions as we enter into a new third age. Our purpose is to provide new insights for advisors about life transitions and to expand the role of a financial advisor



through a grounding in gerontology. Embracing this fresh approach helps advisors build trusting relationships with clients. Advisors become the navigators toward homeostasis—the essential balance between healthspan, wealthspan and lifespan.


In the context of lifecourse planning, we weave together the journey through early adult life, which in pure demographic terms means millennials (also known as the “echo boomers”) born between 1981-1996—society’s largest age cohort totaling just over 83 million adults. In this phase, most are seeking self-discovery, creation of careers and families and the building of social connections both personally and professionally.

Mid-life, which right now is our Gen Xers born between 1965 and 1980, is about increasing life’s responsibilities, maximizing personal and professional potential and starting to focus on passions and purpose.

For baby boomers who were born between 1946-1964, this huge age cohort of 75 million who were recently eclipsed by millennials, is about leading the way in “disrupting aging” according to AARP. For the generation who ushered in both consumerism and counterculture revolutions, a reinvention of how and where we will live as we age is part of this group’s groove (just don’t call them “elders” or “elderly.”) The focus as we go is on finding meaning and relevancy, achieving quality relationships and beginning to plan for leaving a legacy.

What all three age demographics have in common is caregiving. One in four millennials care for an older parent or grandparent. Gen Xers are the largest caregiving cohort often called the classic sandwich generation caring for the younger and older generations who bookend their lives while eight in 10 also juggle their most productive and lucrative years at work. And boomers, whether retired or not, are caring for aging parents or spouses or other loved ones who are living well into their 80s, 90s and even entering what author Dan Buettner called the Blue Zones of centenarian-ville.

The impact of caregiving cannot be understated as its influence and impact on healthspans and wealthspans of these three generational demographics will be the focus of another important topic we will tackle. And, since one of the largest investments throughout our lives is our homes, we will also investigate the evolving and expanding choices, costs and conversations of where to live as we grow older whether that means adapting our homes for lifespan livability or seeking new adventures in transformative alternative communities.



**IF YOU BELIEVE YOURSELF WORTHY OF THE THING YOU FOUGHT SO
HARD TO GET, THEN YOU HELP THE SOUL OF THE WORLD
AND YOU UNDERSTAND WHY YOU ARE HERE.**

PAULO COELHO, THE ALCHEMIST

INTRODUCTION

The era of living longer is here. Thanks to medical breakthroughs, advances in technology and increased public health access and information over the last 100 years, the average American's life expectancy has grown 60 percent from age 47 in 1900 to age 78 today. Information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports the increasing older population in the U.S. is continuing to be fueled by two of its largest generational cohorts—baby boomers and millennials. Today, the 46 million Americans over age 65 is expected to double to 98 million by 2060. In fact, a woman age 55 today has a 1 in 50 chance of living to 100 and 50 percent of today's 10-year-old children will live to 104.^{2,3,4,5,6}

**THE QUESTION IS NOT HOW TO LIVE LONGER
IT IS HOW TO LIVE WELL AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.**

Many experts in the field of gerontology argue over “optimal aging” (and be advised to not use the term “successful aging” which has been ridiculed by anyone working in gerontology as assuming frail, chronically ill people cannot achieve quality of life). According to recent research, optimal aging is defined as the capacity to function across many domains—

physical, functional, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual—to one's satisfaction and in spite of one's medical conditions.^{7,8}

Thanks to the Baby Boomer generation, the conventional way of thinking of life's third age—traditionally known as the age of retirement—has expanded. Many people are either working longer in their jobs or creating encore careers. There is an increasing entrepreneurship among seniors who are productive past the traditional retirement age of 65. And, boomers are now planning for the 20-30 bonus years later in life previous generations never experienced.

According to Joseph Coughlin, author of *The Longevity Economy* and founding director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology AgeLab, we live our lives in 8,000-day increments. The first 8,000 are from birth to age 21, the second 8,000 are college graduation to mid-life crisis, the third 8,000 from mid-life to the traditional age of retirement at 65. That was the traditional third age with not much planning for the future because the road beyond was shorter. Yet, we just reviewed that Americans are living longer and reaching our 80s, 90s and 100s is more of a reality

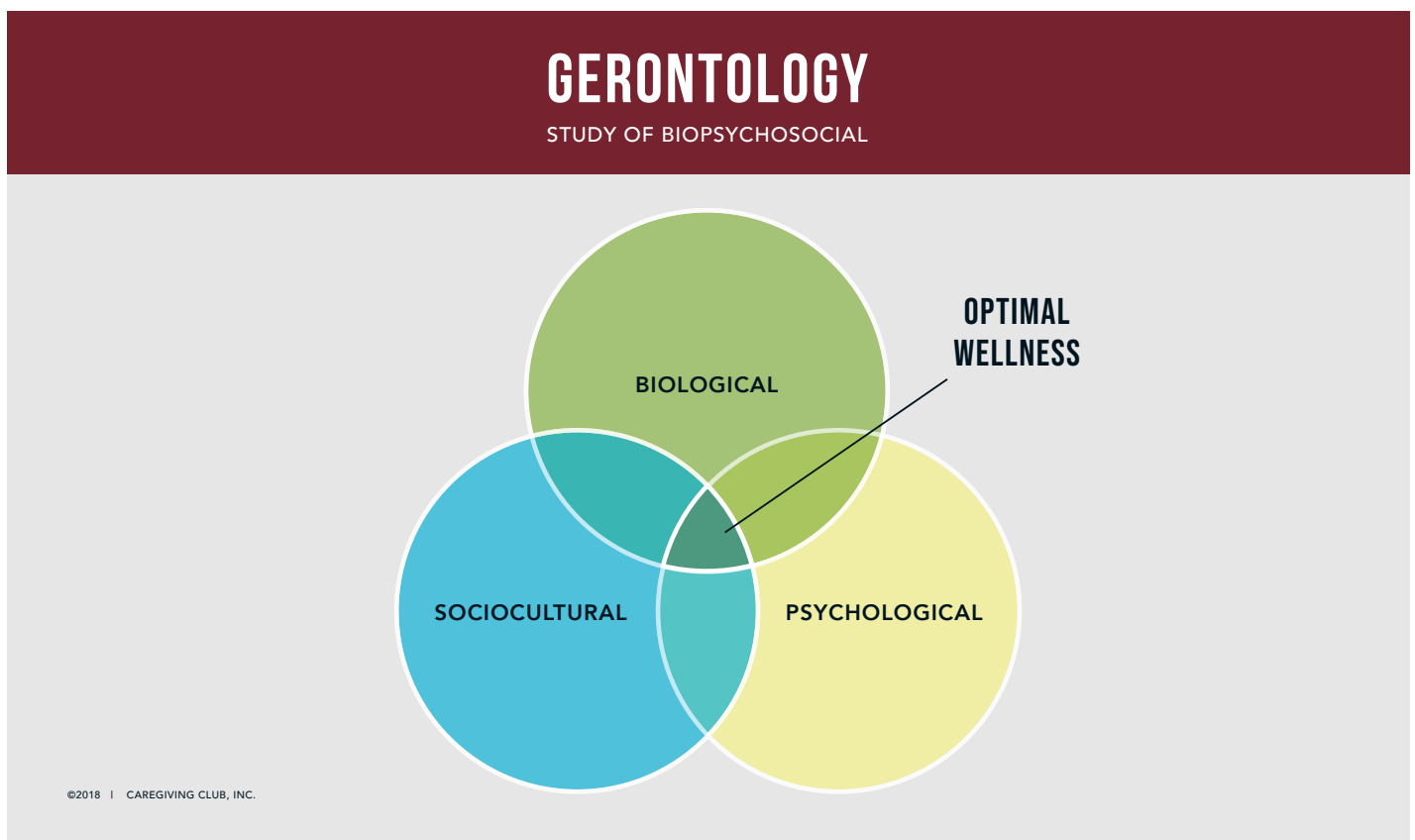
every day—there is more road to travel and it is an open road with no signposts. Few are planning for the 8,000 days we will live between ages 65 and 85—years that can be fulfilling and vibrant despite the challenges of aging minds and bodies and life transitions.⁹

Coughlin's new math when it comes to aging states that each 8,000-day period influences the next. Yet planning for the last 8,000 days we find "a virtual vacuum of guidance for one-third of adulthood." It is through these 8,000-day stages, and especially the last 8,000 days, where advisors can provide the most value to clients.⁹

Consider that every member of the iconic 1960s rock band, The Rolling Stones, are over age 71. Despite a recent heart valve replacement for lead singer Mick Jagger, the Stones' rigorous concert tour resumed in summer 2019. And although the hoodie-wearing

millennial CEOs of Silicon Valley capture much of the news headlines for their disruptive businesses, the chairmen or top leaders at AIG, Penske Automotive Group, L Brands, Fox Corp and FedEx, who are all in their late 70s and 80s, are at least 25-30 years older than the average CEO age of 50. And, let's not forget Warren Buffett, who at age 87 just happens to be older than several Fortune 500 companies including Amazon, Apple, Home Depot, Nike, Starbucks and Verizon. He is a living legend still going strong in value investing.

Yes, later life looks a lot different than it did 50 or even 20 years ago. In fact, in order to help clients map out their optimal aging goals at the intersection of lifespan, healthspan and wealthspan, financial advisors first need to understand the changes that come with aging in the BioPsychoSocial framework.



CLIMBING MASLOW'S PYRAMID

UNDERSTANDING HOW NEEDS CHANGE AS WE AGE

Let us begin in 1943 with Abraham Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* also known as Maslow's *Theory on Human Motivation*. Many business organizations have used Maslow's five-stage pyramid about the ascending transitional nature of life. This theory can also be applied to financial planning beginning with the physiological survival needs including breathing, food, water, shelter, sleep and sex (which are still essential into your 80s and beyond) ultimately reaching the top of the pyramid of self-actualization that includes morality, creativity, spontaneity, discovery and contribution.¹⁰

Shortly before his death, Maslow interestingly added a sixth and lesser known top of the pyramid he called **self-transcendence**. This pinnacle is focused on intrinsic values to show that even if an individual has reached self-actualization, the continued motivation for greater good still exists. Maslow acknowledged that ultimately, and often later in life, individuals want to address the desire to go beyond the self to achieve ego-transcendence. Examples of this stage of life include: truth, simplicity, goodness, altruism and spiritual awakening. This ultimately led to the study and focus of transpersonal psychology which translated for advisors means clients are seeking peak experiences.¹¹

This journey by Maslow in his own theory and his inclusion of the sixth level at the end of his life, provides great insights into the lifecourse journey overall. It becomes an important tool for financial planners who find their role being as much about wealth management as life fulfillment. In other words, the role of an advisor is about becoming the GPS navigator for many clients as they ascend Maslow's pyramid and enter the third phase of life. Understanding these needs and aging challenges become fundamental to the financial advisor's value to clients.



HOW THE BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL FRAMEWORK APPLIES TO ADVISOR-CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

BIOLOGY

UNDERSTANDING OUR BODIES AND OUR BRAINS

Just like Maslow's bottom layer of the pyramid, we are going to start with the basics and what is happening to our bodies and our brains as we age.

There are many physical challenges associated with aging from declining hearing and eyesight (which can begin in the 20s and 40s respectively), joint pain and arthritis (affecting children and adults), brittle bones and broken hips (more common in the 70s and 80s, often from falls), the onslaught of chronic illness from diabetes, hypertension and digestive issues (which typically begin in our 40s and 50s).

While we typically think of these physical declines as being associated with old age, the reality is the underlying root cause of many, if not all, of these health issues is chronic stress which can begin decades earlier.

STRESS AND THE TELOMERE EFFECT

We know the stress response is an instinctual and necessary survival mechanism inherent in most animals. Fleeing from T-Rex and saber tooth tigers is no longer part of our daily activity. However, our bodies continue to react to perceived danger and harm whether physical or psychological. The natural "fight or flight" response to environmental stressors such as storms, noise pollution and traffic jams; relationship stressors within our families, friendships and at work; concerns about personal and family welfare, security and our position in a social hierarchy; all contribute to the physiological changes within our bodies to survive these threats.

Acute stress situations are beneficial—it is what gives Olympic athletes the adrenaline release to push past logical physical limits or for a first responder to react quickly to save other lives. On the other hand, chronic stress leads to a host of health issues that accumulate within our bodies and can lead to cardiovascular disease, diabetes and dementia. All these chronic conditions impact our quality of life later in life and are related to lifetime stress that has not been well-managed or mitigated. It is one of the reasons why there has been exponential growth over the last few years in the wellness economy which reached \$4.2 trillion in 2019.¹²

In 2009, noted researcher and author, Elizabeth Blackburn, PhD, won the Noble Prize in Physiology or Medicine for her transformational research into telomeres and their relationship to stress. Essentially, she found that telomeres, which are the protective caps on the ends of DNA strands, can dissolve and cause the chromosomes to fray with chronic stress. This disintegration results in shortening of the DNA strand and thus, reduces how long an individual will live (think of a shoelace losing its plastic ends and fraying). Her scientific discovery proved one year of chronic stress equates to a reduction of six years off of life. The good news is Blackburn's research also discovered telomerase, the enzyme that can actually replenish the telomere once stress is alleviated.¹³

WHY IS UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF STRESS ON HEALTH IMPORTANT FOR FINANCIAL ADVISORS?

First of all, when a client seems anxious, depressed, irritable or distracted, stress and its affects on our bodies and minds is playing a key role. Taking inventory of what is going in in a client's life offers insights to not only help advisors navigate



conversations but also help identify issues that can impact financial planning.

In medical school, students are taught to identify the disease and treat the body. Today, medical education is evolving to embrace a holistic approach to patient care. Understanding a patient's lifestyle, relationships and other external factors can add invaluable insights for physicians into what is happening in the body. Medical schools are also focusing on empathy which has become essential training in medicine and in health care. This holistic approach makes diagnosis more precise and medicine more personal.

THE SAME HOLISTIC, EMPATHETIC APPROACH IS BECOMING CRUCIAL FOR FINANCIAL ADVISORS.

Understanding the numbers around budgeting, retirement planning, insurance costs, fluctuating markets, globalization and more are essential for successful advisors. What becomes even more valuable in an era where we are all on the brink of being replaced by a robot and artificial intelligence, is the holistic view of a client's needs and lifecycle goals.

Knowing if a client has a personal health issue or is caregiving for a loved one and how these overwhelming stressors can impact their ability to focus on the future becomes a crucial element in developing a lifelong client relationship. And while higher socioeconomic status typically relates to more resilience when it comes to managing stress responses, clients cannot control all external factors impacting their lives. The ability to be a stabilizing and comforting voice of calm in the chaos will help increase a client's trust and dependency on an advisor.

AMERICA AND THE ALZHEIMER'S EPIDEMIC

The most alarming aspect of chronic stress is that it often appears invisible on our outside bodies while it works its evil inside. And, one of the insidious aspects of chronic stress is its connection to dementia and Alzheimer's disease (AD).

For baby boomer and older generations, the fear factor in old age was facing cancer and its grim prognosis. In 1971, President Nixon signed the National Cancer Act otherwise known as "the war on cancer." More than five decades later, cancer

remains the second leading cause of death in the U.S. However tremendous advances in technology, treatments and prevention have increased detection and survival rates of a variety of cancers. For many, it is no longer a death sentence.

Today, the new fear factor in growing older is Alzheimer's disease. This neurodegenerative disease causes significant changes in the brain that impact memory, communication and behavior. More than 5.7 million Americans live with Alzheimer's today and the projection is that 14 million will develop the disease by 2050. Women are disproportionately impacted by AD with two-thirds of all Alzheimer's cases being women. And, after age 60, women are twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's as they are to be diagnosed with breast cancer. In fact, women have a one in six chance of developing the disease compared to a one in 11 chance for men. It remains the only disease in the Top 10 causes of death that has no proven preventive measures, no treatments and no cure.¹⁴

Because of the perceived hopelessness of Alzheimer's along with the changes in a loved one's behavior (memory loss, anxiety, paranoia, language and communication problems, wandering and becoming lost, physical outbursts, assaults and social withdrawal) AD is extremely challenging and stressful for both those diagnosed and for the family.

**MORE THAN 16 MILLION
AMERICANS PROVIDE CARE
FOR SOMEONE WITH DEMENTIA
WITH ONE IN SIX MILLENNIAL
CAREGIVERS CARING FOR SOMEONE
WITH ALZHEIMER'S.**

And, family caregivers of those with Alzheimer's disease report higher stress levels than other family caregivers—79 percent of millennial caregivers report extreme emotional distress.¹⁵

Many call Alzheimer's "the long good-bye" because the disease can last for 9-20 years or more. We know chronic stress, uncontrolled hypertension, early life head trauma, obesity and diabetes are all risk factors for Alzheimer's. Lifestyle choices such as substantial alcohol consumption and chronic cannabis use can also be risk factors for developing dementia later in life.

Financial advisors need to understand the health issues that may impact quality of life both for younger clients who may have the added stress of caregiving, as well as older clients who are experiencing physical declines and challenges. This knowledge becomes a key in both relationship development and planning advisement. Everything from wellness retreats and corporate wellness benefits, home health care support or memory care for loved ones with dementia, considerations in legal issues such as decision-making and elder financial abuse, are all part of the concerns and conversations advisors must face with clients as they age.

By understanding the lifelong impact of stress upon clients and knowing the difference in typical cognitive decline, which tends to appear after the age of 75, versus the signs of Alzheimer's disease, which rarely but can start as early as age 35-45, can help advisors become a trusted and compassionate guide on the life journey.

PSYCHOLOGY

PASSION, PURPOSE AND PLANNING BEYOND A PLEASURABLE LIFE TO A MEANINGFUL LIFE

When we think about the middle layers of Maslow's pyramid—loving, belonging, esteem, friendship, family, achievement—these are all tied to our emotional wellness.

Transitioning from passion, purpose and pleasure to meaning in our lives is the expertise of psychologist and author, Martin Seligman, PhD, former president of the American Psychological Association. Known as the pioneer of positive psychology, Seligman explores the science behind happiness which he believes is only achieved once individuals have identified and employed their signature strengths. His seminal three-part theory on positivity focuses on achieving the *pleasurable life* which includes creature comforts and companionship; the *engaging* or “good” life which reveals each individual's unique virtues and strengths and how to put them into action to enhance one's life; and the *meaningful life* which taps into an individual's unique strengths and virtues for the good of others. According to Seligman, this final stage is when one achieves genuine life satisfaction by acting on the gifts one can bring to the community and society.¹⁶

When it comes to life satisfaction, many define it as true happiness which may be why University of California at Riverside psychology professor Sonja Lyubomirsky observes, “Happiness is the new Holy Grail of science.” She should know, her research leads the more than 14,000 academic studies published since 2012 on the pursuit of happiness.

For some, happiness can seem elusive at any age but especially in middle and later ages where life transitions can disrupt and upset our psychological balance. This third age seems to usher in a lot of

endings. In relationships, one may face divorce or widowhood and the loss of lifelong friends or other family members. At work, leaving positions of power can be unsettling and cause concern about one's new place in the world. In health, having physical limitations or changes in cognition can be frustrating and frightening. In society, loss of independence and mobility can create social isolation, loneliness and depression.

AFFECTIVE FORECASTING FOR AGING

While the average age for Americans who are chronically depressed is 32, older adults face a myriad of issues that can cause later onset depression. Seniors with depression face greater health issues such as developing dementia at 2.6 times the rate of the general population. Older depressives can also experience riskier decision making such as in financial matters.¹⁷

HOW TO NAVIGATE THESE LATER LIFE TRANSITIONS AND REMAIN POSITIVE RATHER THAN NEGATIVE, REMAIN DOERS RATHER THAN WATCHERS, BECOMES A CRITICAL PART OF AN ADVISOR'S PSYCHOLOGICAL INSIGHTS INTO CLIENT BEHAVIOR.

Part of this positivity science also plays into an advisor's role in helping clients understand **affective forecasting**. This psychological exploration, which began in 2002 by researchers Dan Gilbert and Timothy Wilson, probes what people really want in life. Essentially, affective forecasting relates to one's ability to determine future events and predict the happiness impact on one's life—both short and long-term—of those decisions.¹⁸



SIMILAR TO THE POOR ACCURACY RATES OF TV'S WEATHER FORECASTERS, THE RESEARCHERS FOUND INDIVIDUALS ARE WOEFULLY INACCURATE IN PREDICTING WHAT WILL CREATE A SUSTAINABLE LEVEL OF SATISFACTION AND HAPPINESS IN LIFE.

Part of this is based on looking only at immediate, material achievements which may bring pleasure but do not always offer meaning ("if my Amazon stock keeps increasing I can buy that vintage Porsche" or "if I keep working for five more years we can buy that vacation home in the Bahamas.") Using our weather analogy, clients may know what to wear for today's forecast but most don't know how to plan for the next seven days of weather.

Gilbert, a Harvard psychology professor who focuses on decision-making theoretical research, states, "Change is one of the only constants in our lives and amazingly

human beings at any age constantly underestimate how much their personalities and their dreams change decade by decade well into later life. These personality changes bedevil decision-making in really important ways."¹⁹

This is the perfect storm where financial advisors can bring the sunshine to avoid the rain. With the knowledge that clients may not be great predictors of their long-term happiness goals or at least knowing these goals will probably change every decade, coupled with the insights gained from Seligman's meaningful life theory and Maslow's self-transcendancy level of altruism and spirituality, a financial advisor's affective forecasting can be a more accurate and sustainable plan for client happiness in later life.

THE FEMALE FACTOR IN AGING

Individuals change but large cohorts of individuals also change. For instance, when it comes to life transitions, the age of retirement can create a vacuum in later life. Starting at age 20 and working an average 40 hours a week (which is a low number for high-achieving career



people), with an average two weeks of vacation time off every year and retiring at age 65 totals 90,360 hours of life. That is a large void to fill in retirement. This harkens back to Coughlin's last 8,000 days of later life. Yet, trotting the globe playing golf or taking an endless series of cruises is the old view on retirement. While these activities might be pleasurable, they are not typically viewed as meaningful.

Taking an abrupt turn on the retirement highway, today's older workers are not slowing down once they leave a job, they are just charting a new course. A recent survey found entrepreneurs over age 50 make up more than half of America's small business owners (57 percent) and 17 percent of these entrepreneurs are age 60-69. Twenty-five percent of these small business start-ups were created by women and 42 percent said they started their business because they had a passion they wanted to fulfill.²⁰

In fact, women are not just a driving force in later life entrepreneurship but are more thoughtful financial planners when it comes to aging. Maddy Dychtwald, author of *Influence: How Women's Soaring Economic Power Will Transform Our World for the Better*, states that currently women control 51.3 percent of the nation's private wealth.

USING HER OWN VERSION OF MASLOW'S PYRAMID, DYCHTWALD DESCRIBES THE FEMALE STAGES OF ECONOMIC POWER AS: SURVIVAL, INDEPENDENCE AND INFLUENCE.



**THE BEST MOMENTS ARE NOT RELAXING, RECEPTIVE OR PASSIVE—
THEY OCCUR WHEN A PERSON’S BODY OR MIND IS STRETCHED TO ITS
LIMITS IN A VOLUNTARY EFFORT TO ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING DIFFICULT
OR WORTHWHILE.**

MIHALY CSIKZENTMIHALYI, RESEARCHER AND MANAGEMENT SCHOLAR

She cites examples of women as they age already seeking Maslow’s self-transcendence plateau: Melinda Gates partnering with husband Bill where he acknowledges his wife’s influence in their belief that all lives have equal value fueling their family foundation’s mission to help people live healthy, productive lives; or Indra Nooyi, former Chairman and CEO of Pepsi Co. currently serving on the board of directors at Amazon, as being one of the first female business leaders to act as chief architect for “performance with purpose” to not only achieve profits but to play a thoughtful role in the betterment of the planet and people while achieving success.²¹

In her research, Dychtwald found that women in their mid-60s felt more confident than younger millennial women about their ability to manage their money and make good financial decisions. This corresponds with Coughlin’s research in his book, *The Longevity Economy*, that showed men planning for retirement years were more fixated on pleasant outcomes (Seligman’s first phase of a happy life) “independence,” “leisure,” and “vacation” were top of mind. For women it was the process of aging that was important, the desire for “investing,” “saving,” and “financial planning” to help achieve desired wants, needs and security for the bonus years of life.^{21, 22}

Whether it is building a family foundation or a nonprofit enterprise, knowledge on how to become an angel investor or creating a start-up business in the latter half of life and ensuring financial security along that path, an advisor’s role becomes understanding the gender differences in financial planning in later life but also applying Maslow’s self-transcendence and Seligman’s meaningful life to the financial planning process to help clients understand and attain their ideas of happiness.

GO WITH THE FLOW

Creating a new business or starting an encore career is the ultimate definition of “flow,” a psychological theory identified by renowned researcher and management scholar, Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi.

Flow is the creation of optimal experiences where deep concentration and enjoyment collide. Some professional athletes call this “being in the zone.” As we age, we know one of the steps on Maslow’s pyramid is achievement. Flow is the ultimate expression of life’s passion and attainment, especially in later life.²³

Csikszentmihalyi explained flow in these terms, “The best moments are not relaxing, receptive or passive—they occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult or worthwhile.”

The embodiment of flow is when one is immersed in energy, effort and enjoyment. For some this may be learning a new language or how to play a musical instrument. For others it may be singing, performing a stand-up comedy act, writing a memoir or training a pet therapy dog. It is more about the internal fulfillment than external factors such as competition or accolades. Csikszentmihalyi describes the happiness from flow as something that occurs after the experience concludes but can be an emotion that is longer lasting. This makes happiness, often viewed as a more fleeting emotion, become longer-lasting joy.

“People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy,” Csikszentmihalyi adds.

UNDERSTANDING FLOW AND ITS IMPACT ON OLDER ADULTS CAN HELP AN ADVISOR AID A CLIENT WHO IS LOOKING TO REGAIN A SENSE OF MASTERY AND CONTROL THAT MAY SEEM LOST IN OTHER ASPECTS OF LIFE.

By helping clients go from a sense of ending to a sense of new beginnings, the advisor becomes a mentor while also helping some older clients avoid the slippery slope of social isolation and loneliness that is a growing health concern for the older population.



SOCIOLOGY

WHY QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS HELP US LIVE LONGER

At the new pinnacle of Maslow's pyramid we come to self-transcendence. Embracing altruism, truth, spiritualism, simplicity and goodness are the last miles in completing the lifecourse journey. This effort in the third age is about giving back, returning to life's basics and recognizing relationships as the key to living longer. However, the secret to this personal attainment requires social interaction.

TODAY IN THE U.S., 8 MILLION PEOPLE OVER AGE 50 IDENTIFY AS CHRONICALLY LONELY.

This growing health problem, especially among our vulnerable populations of older adults and young teens, has seen loneliness rates double since the 1980s. Former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy contends a lack of social connections in the workplace is contributing to a "loneliness epidemic." Scientific studies have associated chronic loneliness with similar health impacts of chronic stress leading to cardiovascular disease, diabetes and dementia. One study declared being chronically lonely is the health equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day.²⁴

DIGITAL DETOX

How did we go from being a society of social capital to one threatened by social isolation? Eighteenth century French diplomat, political scientist and historian Alexis de Tocqueville observed that America had established itself as a society focused on social capital, where groupings of people allow individuals to achieve things they could not attain on their own.

Flash forward three centuries and the value and definition of social capital that comes from social

networks has changed somewhat. Today, millennials are digital natives and many of their relationships are built using mobile technology and social media. But that doesn't mean boomers are digital dolts. According to a Pew Research report, 34 percent of seniors over age 65 use social media, most commonly Facebook and Twitter. A 2018 AARP survey found 52 percent of people ages 50 to 64 have Facebook pages, an 18 percent increase since 2011. And a separate Gallup poll found older social media users are loyal - a third of people 50 and older who use social media say it would be difficult to give it up.^{25,26,27}

Yet all this looking down at the phone or at the computer screen instead of into someone's eyes is making people miserable and depressed. While it can be argued social media connects people, it seems to also be isolating people. Recent studies, including one from researchers at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, have found increased Facebook usage over the period of one year correlates to decreased physical health but especially decreased mental health resulting in greater levels of depression and life satisfaction.^{28,29,30}

HUGS, HANDSHAKES AND HEALTH

This lack of physical contact is also playing into our interpersonal communication as well. For financial advisors, many clients—especially millennials—are looking to have conversations through digital and mobile communication tools. However, building a relationship is something that has to include reading body language, hearing someone's tone of voice, giving them a handshake or even a hug—it is all vital for healthy and prosperous human relationships.

Despite the politically correct implications, physical touch is a form of bonding. It generates trust, comfort and safety. Touch is the first of the five senses to develop in newborns and thus, is inherently built into

our DNA and nurtured through relationships over our lifetimes. Science has proven newborns who are cuddled and hugged thrive physically and are emotionally calmer versus those who are not held and express increased agitation, stress and lower weights that impede cellular growth. Similar studies have been done among people in their 60s and 70s and found that as essential as newborn nurturing and hugging is, it actually becomes a necessity throughout the lifespan.^{31,32}

Neuroeconomist Paul Zak actually prescribes eight hugs a day to increase oxytocin levels, the feel-good hormone in our bodies that fosters well-being and happiness. When it comes to our bodies and our minds, hugs can also alleviate stress by reducing blood pressure and boosting immunity. And, this level of the oxytocin hormone delivered daily actually has neuroprotective qualities that support brain health.

THUS, A HUG (OR HANDSHAKE) NOT ONLY HELPS CLIENTS PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY BUT HELPS ADVISORS AS WELL AND LAYS THE FOUNDATION FOR A STRONGER RELATIONSHIP.³³

CONNECTIONS AND CONFIDANTES

Whether advisor-client communication includes email, texting, phone calls or handshakes, the one essential element in our lives that makes us live longer and better is trusted relationships.

Harvard has conducted the longest longitudinal study on adult development with an amazing yet not surprising finding. Starting with the first cohort in 1938 and adding the second in 1970, researchers observed the lives of two groups of men: the first a group of college undergraduate students at Harvard that included former President John F. Kennedy and the late Washington Post editor Ben Bradlee; the second teenagers from some of Boston's toughest and economically-challenged

neighborhoods in Charlestown and the South End (women and second generation of these men were added cohorts in the study over the last 50 years).

Some of the original participants in the first cohort are still alive—men who are now in their mid-90s. The researchers analyzed their educations, careers, marriages, children, geographic location, living arrangements, physical and mental health—and despite their disparate beginnings and many changes over their lives, they found only one commonality among those who lived the longest: having at least one confidante. It could be a spouse or best friend, and the confidante could change throughout life as losses occur, but having one person where they were their authentic selves and who they knew “had their back” became their key to longevity. It was the quality relationship factor that protected these men against chronic disease, mental illness and memory decline and gave them longer life.³⁴

Robert Waldinger, the current director of the Harvard Adult Development study, a psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital and a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, declared:

TAKING CARE OF YOUR BODY IS IMPORTANT, BUT TENDING TO YOUR RELATIONSHIPS IS A FORM OF SELF-CARE TOO. THAT, I THINK, IS THE REVELATION.

ROBERT WALDINGER

CONCLUSION

The era of living longer means that financial advisors must transform their value for clients, they must become financial gerontologists. They must curate opportunities beyond investments and savings and apply Maslow's self-transcendence view into planning not just for financial security in later life but for happiness. Successful advisors will learn how to apply a BioPsychoSocial lens to financial planning that helps clients define their happiness.

In many ways, this is the moonshot moment for financial advisors. The trajectory of Maslow's pyramid is always upwards as one attempts to find self-transcendence. Conventional thinking is that life is an arc where we begin by shooting up but then with healthspan declines and other life transitions we start a downward descent later in life like a shooting star. Instead, life is like shooting for the moon. We begin grounded to earth but eventually aspire to reach higher and find new frontiers. The human elements of hope and happiness drive us ever upwards. Once in orbit we become like the moon—a natural satellite that continues to stay aloft.

Just as Magellan navigated the seas, Lindbergh navigated the skies and Armstrong navigated space, all were explorers of new worlds. Successful advisors will adopt a new role becoming navigators of this ever-upwards lifespan exploration for clients. Serving as a steady, stable guide, using the latest tools but understanding the fundamental BioPsychoSocial underpinnings of a client's needs, advisors who become financial gerontologists will harness the power of relationships and know that the future relies on the intrinsic human value delivered to clients that no technology, robot or artificial intelligence can replace. This is the homeostasis that clients need—the balance between lifespan, healthspan and wealthspan.

The map for this success is human contact: looking into a client's eyes and conveying trust, speaking to a client with authenticity and empathy, telling a client you understand their hopes and their search for happiness, shaking someone's hand or giving them a hug to express comfort and safety. This is the alchemy that translates to success in financial advisement and in life.



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RECOMMENDED READING AND VIEWING

The Alchemist—Paulo Coelho

Authentic Happiness—Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment—Martin Seligman

The Blue Zones of Happiness—Dan Buettner

Flow and the Psychology of Optimal Experience (2008 edition) and **Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology**—Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2014)

Influence: How Women’s Soaring Economic Power Will Transform Our World for the Better—Maddy Dychtwald

The Longevity Economy—Unlocking the World’s Fastest-Growing, Most Misunderstood Market—Joseph F. Coughlin

Look Up—Gary Turk (*YouTube video on social isolation and social media*)

Stress: Portrait of a Killer—PBS/Nat Geo video

Stumbling on Happiness and **TED Talk on “The Psychology of Your Future Self”**—Dan Gilbert, PhD

The Telomere Effect—A Revolutionary Approach to Living Younger, Healthier, Longer—Elizabeth Blackburn, PhD and Elissa Eppel, PhD

Top 10 Early Warning Signs of Alzheimer’s Disease—Alzheimer’s Association

The Unlonely Project—Drawings for My Grandchildren
(*YouTube video on old age and social media*)



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ABOUT SHERRI SNELLING AND CAREGIVING CLUB

Sherri Snelling is founder and CEO of Caregiving Club, a strategic consulting firm focused on the \$20 billion caregiver health and wellness industry and the \$7 trillion longevity economy. She is the author of *A Cast of Caregivers—Celebrity Stories to Help You Prepare to Care* and is a contributing columnist on caregiving for PBS Next Avenue, Forbes.com, Thrive Global, Stria and USA Today.

Sherri's clients have included: AARP, Keck Medicine of USC, UnitedHealthcare, Wells Fargo, Goldman Sachs, LifeCare, CareLinx, Martha Stewart Living and QVC. She is also the Chief Strategy & Gerontology Advisor for the VR immersive training platform, Embodied Labs.



As a gerontologist and national caregiving expert Sherri has been featured on the CBS Evening News, ABC World Evening News, MSNBC, Fox Business Network, CNN and in the New York Times, USA Today, PARADE, Prevention and WebMD. She has served on the caregiving advisory councils for the White House Middle Class Task Force on Caregiving, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Alzheimer's Association and was a representative to the United Nations International Caregiving Summit in 2009.

Sherri was recognized as No. 4 on the Top 10 Influencers on Alzheimer's by Sharecare, the online health and wellness experts site created by Dr. Mehmet Oz. She is the former Chairman of the National Alliance for Caregiving, the leading caregiving research and advocacy non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C. and is a local chapter board member for the Alzheimer's Association.

Represented by the American Program Bureau, Sherri speaks to organizations across the nation on a variety of caregiving and aging topics. She has a master's degree in gerontology from the University of Southern California, the No. 1 gerontology school in the nation, and a B.A. in journalism and political science from USC. Sherri was a caregiver for her maternal grandparents and provided end-of-life care for both her father and stepfather.

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