longevity in action
Find your purpose

# Facilitator Preparation (What You’ll Need)

* Find Your Purpose worksheet
* Writing utensils
* A copy of Dr. Roger Landry’s *Live Long, Die Short: A Guide to Authentic Health and Successful Aging* (optional)

# Session Content:

Please read this aloud:

A few reminders before we begin …

* Please be respectful to one another. Everyone in this room comes from a different background that has formulated who they are as a person and contributed to their unique opinions. As a group, we will observe *respect* as a guiding principle as we interact with one another. It is our goal that all participants feel valued, respected, and heard.
* Share without imposing your beliefs on others. Please refrain from convincing others to adopt your opinions.
* Keep an open mind. Our discussions will be thought-provoking and insightful. You may not agree with everything you hear, but please be willing to consider opinions that may be different from your own.

# Today’s Objectives:

Please share these objectives with participants.

* To explore what brings meaning and purpose into our lives.
* To understand the benefits of a purpose-filled life.

# Opening Passage: Meaning of Meaningful

Read this excerpt from *Live Long, Die Short* aloud: Pages 163-164.

# Remember that one of the key characteristics of those who age successfully, according to the MacArthur Study was social connection, which was defined as having a network of friends and family, as well as continued meaningful activity. The word meaningful is key.

# The Eden Alternative was founded by Dr. Bill Thomas to remake the environments for older adults needing care by recognizing the core belief that aging, even aging with impairments, should be a time of continued growth and development rather that decline. According to Dr. Thomas, “Meaningless activity corrodes the human spirit. The opportunity to do things that we find meaningful is essential to human health. The key here is the phrase “things that we find meaningful.”

# Americans are an industrious lot. We work more hours than our European counterparts and hold productivity and outcome-oriented activity in very high regard. Add a salary to that and you’ve got the golden fleece of human effort. Which is why we often hear retired older adults explain that they “only volunteer” or “only work in my garden” or “only do some community theater.” During their earlier years, these same people, like most Americans, obviously did not value such things as truly productive. Now, on the western side of their productive years, they are plagued by their own misunderstanding of what is meaningful. The value of any of our endeavors, and therefore their level of meaningfulness, can only truly be defined by each of us. You may choose to maintain earlier value systems of reimbursement or praise and may consequently experience the growing corrosion of your spirit. Or you may redefine value as something other than a capitulation or rationalization of your new status, realizing, based on the wisdom and experience you’ve gained during your life’s journey, that enduring value might be different from your earlier assessment. Maybe what you value in life now includes a salary; maybe it doesn’t. The key, again, is meaning.

# Neuroscientists tell us that, unlike a younger person, who uses a focal area of the brain to solve a problem or make a judgment, an older adult uses much more of her brain for the same problem or judgment. This, they theorize, is the source of the wisdom of older adults. By incorporating more experience and brain faculties, the older adult sees a bigger picture. Rather than merely seeing the problem as an isolated challenge to meet and then move on from, the older adult sees it in the context of broader applicability. A driver pulls into the parking spot you’ve been waiting for. The younger person might lean on the horn, have harsh words, or move on to another space, angered by the ignorance and audacity of the other driver. An older adult might consider the possibility that the other driver didn’t see her, or is much more harried, or has less social responsibility, or is potentially violent, or just that it’s not that important to “win.” A broader context.

# So, too, a broader context should define our sense of what is meaningful. We should not be prisoners of previous, often unexamined, value systems. If an activity is meaningful to you, it will provide you with the continued engagement in life necessary to age successfully. This is another meaning of being authentic. To achieve authentic health we must be true to who we are not only as a species, but also as individuals. Whether it’s growing roses or lobbying to eliminate land mines, feeding birds or being politically active, picking up litter or saving the whales, you are the judge, the ultimate authority on what has meaning for you and therefore what will bring you satisfaction and even joy, and with that, a better aging experience.

# Group Discussion

Please read this aloud:

(If necessary, please remind participants to be respectful by limiting answers to less than a minute so that more people have time to share.)

* Question: Do you find yourself (or someone you know) saying, “I *only* volunteer,” or, “I *only* work in my garden?” As a culture, how can we place greater value on that which brings meaning to our lives?
* Question: Can you think of an example where your wisdom enabled you to see a situation in a broader concept now, whereas you may not have seen it that way twenty or thirty years ago?

# Second Passage: Giving Back

Read this excerpt from *Live Long, Die Short* aloud: Pages 164.

There is a scene in the movie The Bucket List where Morgan Freeman relates to Jack Nicholson that in ancient Egypt, in order to enter heaven, each person was asked two questions: Have you found joy in your life? Has your life brought joy to others? In conversations with hundreds of older adults, I have found that what brings meaning and purpose to lives—consistently, if not unanimously—involves other living things. Whether other humans, animals, plants, or the environment as a whole, living things give us a sense of giving back, of improving the lives of others or the planet, that particularly resonates with older adults. This is, of course, compatible with Erikson’s view of grand-generativity. Dr. Albert Schweitzer told us, “I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.”

# Group Discussion

Please read this aloud:

(If necessary, please remind participants to be respectful by limiting answers to less than a minute so that more people have time to share.)

* Question: How would you answer the questions, “Have you found joy in your life? Has your life brought joy to others?”
* Question: What do you think of Dr. Albert Schweitzer’s statement, “I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve?”
* Question: How does finding meaning and purpose in our lives make us more resilient?

# Group Event (Option #1): Writing Your Living Legacy

Please read this aloud:

Imagine that you are at an awards ceremony and a close friend or family member is talking about your many accomplishments and good qualities. What would you like to hear above everything else? What would make you feel the most proud of yourself and your life choices? What steps can you take now to ensure these things are part of your living legacy?

For the next fifteen minutes or so, I’d like you to write your living legacy and what you would like to hear. It can include anything that is from your life experience, or anything that you’d like to make a part of your experience.

# Group Discussion About Writing Your Living Legacy

(If necessary, please remind participants to be respectful by limiting answers to about a minute so that more people have time to share.)

Question: Would anyone like to share his or her legacy with us?

# Group Event (Option #2): Giving Your Acceptance Speech

Please read this aloud:

I invite you to break off into groups of two or three people. Take a few minutes to share a few of the qualities you like about yourself and what good qualities you observe with your group members. Now, use your imagination. If you were to give a one-minute acceptance speech for winning an award – what would the award be and what would you say? Or, what would you like it to be? Feel free to jot down a few notes and, if so inclined – make your speech in front of your group.

*(Note to facilitator: An alternate version of this is to have people break out into pairs and write an awards speech for the other person. What did they do? Why are they being honored? It can end with, “for all of these reasons, the award for \_\_\_\_ goes to \_\_\_\_\_.” If you are meeting virtually, you can choose to create online break-out rooms.)*

Group Discussion About Your Acceptance Speech

*(Note to facilitator: Reconvene as a group for this portion.)*

Please read aloud:

Question: Would anyone be willing to give his or her acceptance speech for us? *(Alternatively, “who would like to present an award speech to the person they were paired with?”)*

# Wrapping Up Today’s Session

Please read this aloud:

Thank you, everyone, for being here to share your time and your thoughts with each other. We look forward to many more insightful opportunities and discussions from *Live Long, Die Short* about building resilience. As a reminder, our next session is scheduled for [Day – Date – Time – Location]. Our topic is [Topic Name]. You are welcome and encouraged to bring a friend, but please RSVP for both of you. The sign-up sheet is located [Location]. Additionally, if you would like to assist with facilitating next week’s session or a future session, please let me know.

Before you go, please take a few minutes to write down a brief journal entry about today’s session. It can be anything from notes you’d like to remember or a personal initiative you might like to take. Before each entry, you’ll notice a couple of questions to think about, and you’ll have the opportunity to sum up this session in a simple word or phrase. Your journal is for your eyes only. Remember, I am always available to help answer any additional questions you may have about this journey.