longevity in action
Never act your age

# Facilitator Preparation (What You’ll Need)

* Never Act Your Age worksheets
* Writing utensils
* A copy of Dr. Roger Landry’s *Live Long, Die Short: A Guide to Authentic Health and Successful Aging* (optional)
* A DVD and video player to view *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* -OR- An audio version on a computer or via an mp3 player.\*

Here are two resources for the audio version: <https://bit.ly/35mvokG> (free through creative commons) and (available for purchase through Amazon.com).

*(Note to facilitator: The movie version of this title is 166 minutes long. Please consider the timing of this if opting for the movie. Audio versions are approximately 60 minutes. You may choose to have the lecture on one day and present the movie on an alternate day.)*

# 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 learn what it means to “never act your age” or become how someone else has defined you.
* To “scare yourself a little every day” and take appropriate risks.

# Opening Passage: Turning the Clock Back

Read this excerpt from *Live Long, Die Short* aloud: Pages 144-145.

Dr. Ellen Langer, a Harvard University researcher, conducted a now famous study back in the late seventies. Using older men as subjects, she immersed them in an environment from twenty years earlier. Room trappings were from the fifties. Conversation about fifties-era topics was in present tense. Recorded radio programs were fifties vintage. This immersion resulted in the men acting in ways similar to their twenty-years-younger self: walking more, carrying their own luggage, doing things that had previously been done for them. The results after only one week were stunning: vision, hear- ing, cognitive skills all improved. Even photos of the subjects before and after the study improved, with subjects looking younger. What were Dr. Langer’s conclusions? This work and a large body of research since this initial study convinces her that when we are aware—mindful of what we are doing and what expectations we have for ourselves—our bodies will follow; that is, our bodies will attempt to align with those expectations.

To the extent we think of ourselves as more capable, or healthier, or growing, our bodies will attempt to reflect that view. Our bodies reflect our minds. The words of famous motivational speaker Brian Tracy—“You are what you think about”—reflect Dr. Langer’s research conclusions. Her research has moved us way beyond euphemisms about being better if we try. We become better when we think of ourselves as younger, or more active, or more capable. Our brains begin to rewire to be consistent with a younger person. So, again, if we “act our age,” within a context where being old is defined as declining, it’s more likely that that is exactly what will happen. If, on the other hand, we act younger, more optimistic, more confident about what we are capable of, we will indeed grow and limit decline.

As I explained in the introduction to this book, Chuck Yeager taught me this many decades ago. Grandma Moses knew this when she began her painting career in her late seventies; Frank Shearer knew it when he celebrated his hundredth birthday by water skiing in Acapulco; Nola Ochs shouted it out to us as she received her undergraduate degree at ninety-five and master’s degree at ninety-eight!

# Perhaps F. Scott Fitzgerald was telling us much the same in his 1922 short story “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button,” the basis for the 2008 movie of the same title, which starred Brad Pitt. Benjamin Button is born an old man and ages backward. Fitzgerald’s powerful ability to articulate his sharp social insight provides us a story that holds our society’s sclerotic views of aging up in sharp relief. Benjamin Button’s experiences as a withered child and a robust older man challenges us to question our most entrenched concepts of aging.

# Group Discussion

Please read this aloud:

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

# Question: Consider this statement, “to the extent we think of ourselves as more capable, or healthier, or growing, our bodies will attempt to reflect that view.” Can you think of an example in your own experience where you’ve noticed this? *(Note to facilitator: This can also be reframed as a faith-based question. Such as, “Can you think of an example in your own life where you had faith that you were getting healthier – and did?”)*

# Question: Can you recall a personal experience where you suddenly behaved like a younger version of yourself? What was it like?

# Question: What expectations of aging do you think influence us? What can we do about it?

# Question: Can you remember a time when you were a child or teenager and were truly happy? What might it look like for you to recapture that feeling of joy?

# Group Event: What Would You Do?

Please read aloud:

I’d like you to take a few minutes and break out into small groups of 3 or 4 people. As a group, consider the question, “What would you do if you knew you couldn’t fail?” I invite each of you to think about what that question means to you. It may be that there is a dream you’ve always wanted to accomplish but feel as if you’re “too old.” How about dusting off that dream and coming up with a plan to achieve it?

For example, perhaps you’ve always wanted to swim the English Channel. What if you planned a modified version of this? It is twenty-one miles from Dover to Calais, so why not set a timetable to accumulate twenty-one miles of swimming over the course of a month? Feel free to use the worksheets provided to outline some of the next steps that you might take.

# Group Discussion About “What Would You Do?” Event

Please read aloud:

(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 a dream that you have had, and what plan they came up with in getting started to make it a reality?

# Question: In what way do you think “never acting your age” ties into resilience? (e.g. Having a “why not” attitude, Not limiting yourself to societal expectations, etc.)

# (Optional) Group Event: The Story of Benjamin Button

Please read aloud:

Anthropologist and author Margaret Mead once said about her aging journey, “I was wise enough to never grow up, while fooling most people into thinking I had.” Today, we’re going to turn the aging model on its side by [watching/listening to] F. Scott Fitzgerald’s classic, *A Curious Case of Benjamin Button.* Please remember that this story was first published in 1922, and you will notice age-related comments and societal norms that would not necessarily be considered appropriate today. Please listen with that context in mind.

*(Note to facilitator: Here is the audio link again for the creative commons version of the story—* [*https://bit.ly/3ni8PUA*](https://bit.ly/3ni8PUA)*)*

# Group Discussion About the Curious Case of Benjamin Button

# Please read aloud:

# (if necessary, please remind participantsto be respectful by limiting answers to less than a minute so that more people have time to share):

# Question: Benjamin Button was born in 1860. How do you think his experience would have been different had he been born today?

# Question: What did you think about how Benjamin was forced to conform to expectations based on his age?

# Question: How did he regard his wife’s aging journey?

# Question: We often hear, “People my age shouldn’t,” or, “At my age I can’t.” We noticed elements of this in the story. When was the last time you heard or said that?

# Question: If you could choose to re-live your young adult days with the accumulated knowledge of your current experience, how would they be different?

# 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.

*\* These materials are for OPTIONAL events.*