longevity in action  
USE it or lose it

# Facilitator Preparation (What You’ll Need)

* Use It or Lose It worksheet
* Writing utensils
* A copy of Dr. Roger Landry’s *Live Long, Die Short: A Guide to Authentic Health and Successful Aging* (optional)
* A copy of the Human Capital Survey for each Participant

# Session Content:

Please read this aloud:

In one of artist Leonardo DaVinci’s notebooks, he wrote, “Iron rusts from disuse, stagnant water loses its purity, and in cold weather becomes frozen; even so does inaction sap the vigors of the mind.” In other words, if you don’t use it, you lose it. The practice of maintaining your skills and abilities shows up again and again. In John Rowe and Robert Kahn’s book, *Successful Aging*, they share that one of the three keys to successful aging is maintaining physical and cognitive function (using your body and your brain) *and* the concept is so important that “Use It or Lose It” is Dr. Landry’s first tip in his Ten Tips for Successful Aging. In order to maintain physical and cognitive function as well as the skills and abilities we’ve focused on learning throughout our lives, we must *use* those skills and abilities.

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 how to build resilience throughout all of life’s stages.
* To begin determining what physical, social and intellectual tools are needed for long-term health.
* Identify what areas to focus on in terms of maintenance and growth.

# Opening Passage: Rust is a Crouching Predator

Read this excerpt from *Live Long, Die Short* aloud: Page 80.

As the human species evolved over the millennia, life was about survival, requiring constant physical work, movement, and using whatever faculties we had for the success of the tribe or village. Since this is, in fact, the experience we humans have lived for over ninety percent of the time we’ve been on earth, it is understandable that our physiology is wired to use our skills. Whether our muscles or our brains, we tend to get better at something the more we use it. And what we don’t use tends to go the way of a discarded bicycle, left out in the elements. It basically rusts to the point where it is no longer usable. We lose the ability to do what we could before.

*We don’t usually choose to not use something.*  Over the many years of counseling people on how to stay healthy and perform at their best, I’ve never heard anyone declare, “I think I’ll let this skill wither by not using it.” Rather, it sneaks up on us like a predator. Take the bicycle we left leaning against the house months or years ago. We intended to use it, but just never got around to it. Maybe we got a new car and preferred the faster and less tiring way to get around. Or we got a new job and had less time to ride. Or maybe we hurt our leg and couldn’t ride anymore. Whatever the reason, the result is the same, the bike rusts and eventually is unusable. And so it is with the many faculties we take for granted over many decades. Without a big announcement, they can disappear, and we are one day surprised that we are not what we used to be.

Even though we may ignore skills for years, we still expect them to be there when we need them. But they may not be there. Once we could crouch down without pain. Once we could walk five miles without any difficulty. Once we could memorize a phone number immediately. Once we were the life of the party. Once we thought deeply about the meaning of life. But somewhere along the way, life happened.

We took a job where we moved less. Our schedules got busy and we had less time or inclination to be physically, intellectually, or even socially growing. A painful joint may have caused us to use that joint less. Difficulty with hearing or having to urinate frequently, or trouble with memory may have prevented us from socializing and before we realized it, we were avoiding social interaction. When learning began to take a little more time, or required complete quiet or concentration, we stopped taking classes or just avoided learning situations altogether.

Our inability to do what we could do in our twenties or thirties or forties, might cause us to not want to “embarrass” ourselves by engaging in that activity at all. If we are in a sedentary or intellectually stagnant environment, our peers may cause us to “move toward the mean’ i.e., to be more like the average person in the group rather than to continue to challenge ourselves and grow. When Dr. Ellen Langer placed older men in an environment similar to when they were twenty years younger, the group began to act younger than those in normal environments. Studies of obese young adults show weight loss is influenced by the group you associate with. On the other hand, it’s been shown that obesity can be “contagious,” that is, more common in groups where members are obese.

So, whether it’s inattention, embarrassment, or more pressing needs, when we no longer regularly use our skills or faculties, whether physical, mental or social, those skills decline, rust, and eventually—without warning, fanfare, or any notice at all—they are unusable.

# Group Discussion

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

# Question: What stands out to you most about this passage?

# Question: Use it or lose it can be viewed through the lens of the 4 pillars of healthy longevity: Social Engagement, Intellectual Vitality, Physical Health and Peace and Fulfillment. Which of these 4 is your strongest pillar and what makes it the strongest?

# Question: What are some of the skills and abilities you’ve developed in your life that you would like to refocus on?

# Group Activity: Complete the Human Capital Survey

(Give participants time to complete their Human Capital Surveys after reading the following aloud:)

Each and every person accumulates a valuable set of competencies over the years of their life including knowledge, experience, creative ideas, interests, problem solving skills, education and abilities. This set of competencies you’ve acquired is your Human Capital. In this exercise, we will begin to think about the concept of Use It or Lose It and how it relates to your human capital. It’s an opportunity to think about what was important to you in the past, what you’ve been focused on presently and what you would like to create next.

# Group Discussion About Your Activity

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

* Question: Was there anything about your responses to the Human Capital Survey that surprised you?
* Question: The mix of all the human capital at the community is our greatest asset. If you could share one of your talents or skills with the community, what would you share?
* Question: The human capital survey focuses on your skills and interests of the past, present and what you would like to learn in the future? What did you identify as something new you would like to learn?

# 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.