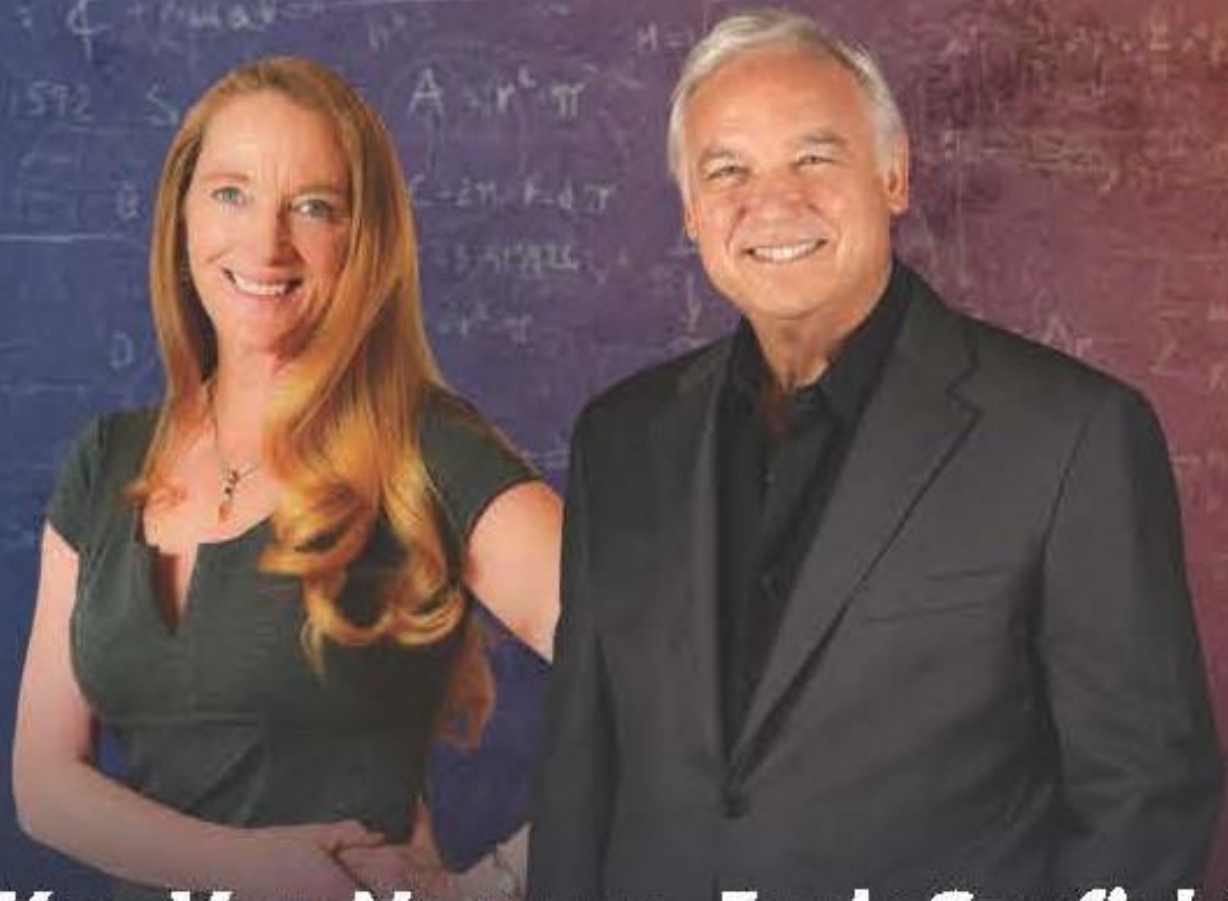


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CHAPTER 10

HEALTHY AGING SUCCESS OR SABOTAGE

WHAT'S DRIVING YOUR AGING STORY?

BY KAY VAN NORMAN

“I’m fine with becoming frail and dependent with age,” said *no-one*, ever! Yet, nursing homes are filled with *accidental* residents who fully intended to age well but failed to create a plan and take action. Ultimately, what robs you of independence and health isn’t age. It’s the gap between your intentions for aging well and your actions.

People often fear a life-changing illness or injury will derail health, yet after 25 years as a healthy aging specialist, I know it’s most often the small choices made day after day – compounded over time – that sabotage wellbeing.

So, I’m not offering health advice in this chapter. It’s everywhere! In fact, you could probably tell me what you should do to stay healthy – eat right, exercise, don’t smoke, don’t run with scissors. Instead, I’m sharing hard-won insights on how your attitudes and expectations, what I call – *aging scripts* – drive daily choices, creating a big gap between knowing what you should do and actually doing it!

This chapter illuminates your current aging path and helps you build a roadmap for lifelong health. It will:

- reveal what you're personally thinking, saying, and doing about aging well.
- illustrate how personal beliefs impact health.
- outline the *Vitality Portfolio*[®] approach – a simple 3-step-plan to help you build and sustain lifelong vitality.

The journey starts with a few simple questions.

EXPECTATIONS AND HIDDEN SCRIPTS

Do you expect to be healthy and active through your full lifespan?

When I give keynote speeches, most people answer yes to that question. But when I ask audiences to stand and either remain standing or sit down based on answers to yes or no questions, surprising gaps emerge between intentions and actions.

Do you expect to be as strong and agile five years from now as you are today?

Most people remain standing.

Do you strength train at least twice a week on a regular basis?

About 70% of the audience sits down. That's a major gap. Because unless you're challenging your muscles regularly, I guarantee you're losing strength – at an average rate of 1-1½ % per year after about age 30. Do the math to see you can easily lose half your strength by age 70!

In the past two weeks have you made a joking or serious reference to your physical performance being diminished by age, or to having a senior moment when forgetting a name or a fact?

This question reveals a hidden negative script, and takes out the majority of those still standing.

Would you still be standing?

After ten simple questions, very few audience members remain standing whose internalized expectations and actions are aligned to support healthy aging. That's surprisingly consistent around the world, from executives at seminars to retirees looking for healthy aging advice.

EXPECTATIONS WORK FOR OR AGAINST YOU

What you think and say about aging matters because to age well your beliefs must consistently work for rather than against you. Hundreds of research studies describe how aging attitudes and expectations impact outcomes. I've read most of them. But two personal experiences imprinted this concept in my mind and heart.

(1). Eldo's story

At age 82, Eldo (my horseback riding buddy) fell off a haystack and broke his back and neck. Friends were devastated – convinced he was finished. But when I walked into his hospital room the first thing he said was, "I can't believe I messed up my whole *bleeping* (use your imagination) summer of riding." Amazing! He didn't get the memo saying he couldn't recover – at his age – so was just angry he was going to miss a summer of riding in the beautiful Montana mountains!

With an ageless mindset, every decision Eldo made and action he took focused on achieving fullest recovery. He asked for what he needed from healthcare, family, and friends. He hosted a 4th of July barbeque two days after he

got out of the hospital, signifying - *don't count me out, I'm still part of this riding group!* Seven weeks later he called to report his doctor cleared him to ride and we headed to the mountains.

Eldo re-built his strength and stamina with progressively longer rides until two months later he rode our annual 24-mile loop in Yellowstone National Park. I was exhausted. He was fine! At 89 years old, Eldo continues his passion for riding. His positive expectations worked *for* rather than *against* him. Without them, his story would be very different.

(2). Ruth's story

85-year-old Ruth enjoyed life and was always open to new experiences. When she learned I was a professional dancer, she attended every dress rehearsal night so we could sit together when I wasn't on stage, discussing styles of dance from hip hop to ballet and the meaning of different choreography. My favorite memory of her was after a particularly abstract piece where the dancer draped over the back of, off to the side, and slithered around and under a chair. I asked her opinion and she just smiled and said, "I've felt the very same way waiting in a doctor's office before." I loved Ruth.

Then she fell and broke her hip. This hospital visit was very different. She talked about her kids and grandkids and what a good life she'd had. Cheerfully, I described the road to recovery – therapy and back to exercise class. She continued her life review.

Finally, after several exchanges – me looking forward, her looking back - Ruth patted me on the knee, looked directly into my eyes and said, "Kay, honey, I've never known anyone my age to recover from a broken hip." Believe me, I tried with great conviction to convince her otherwise, but I knew she was in serious trouble.

I've studied how expectations drive outcomes, but was still stunned when Ruth was gone in two weeks. She believed with every fiber of her being that she couldn't recover from a broken hip at her age – and simply wasn't willing to live the life she envisioned as her destiny.

AGING SCRIPTS CONTROL YOU

If you get nothing else out of this chapter – please know with absolute certainty that to age with vitality you must examine and deliberately control the aging scripts running in your head. They form your personal beliefs about aging, so they drive behaviors and outcomes.

No-one ages in a bubble. We learn aging scripts in family, in community, and in culture-things like:

*It's normal to become frail with age,
Now that I'm 65 I should make my life smaller,
I can't recover from a broken hip.*

OR

*I can prevent frailty and retain independence,
Age doesn't define who I am or what I'm capable of,
I can claim vitality and live fully, in spite of challenges.*

Whether you're consciously aware of your aging scripts or not, your subconscious mind uses them to choose your aging path. You have to actively work to expose 'ageist' beliefs that sabotage health.

CREATE A PERSONAL VITALITY PORTFOLIO®

I've spent the past ten years carefully developing the *Vitality Portfolio*® approach to lifelong health. Part of the motivation has been my own desire to continue dancing and horseback riding and enjoying my family and meaningful work throughout my

entire life. The other part has been watching aging go very badly for people I love – unnecessarily so – and wanting to do what I can to keep others from stumbling over the most common roadblocks to lifelong health.

The familiar structure of a financial portfolio – make a plan, balance assets, and make regular deposits – works beautifully for creating a personal vitality plan. The *Vitality Portfolio*® approach will help reveal your personal aging scripts and build a practical healthy aging roadmap in three simple steps:

1. Make a vitality plan
2. Balance vitality assets
3. Make regular deposits

Step 1: Make a Vitality Plan

How long do you expect to live? Surprisingly, most people seem to have a number in their head when asked. Consider your number. Whether it's 70+ or 100+ think about where you want to live, what you want to be able to do, and what you need to make that happen. People often spend more time planning a vacation (where, what, how) than they do planning their life! Making a vitality plan helps you set and reach your goals for lifelong health.

Step 2: Balance Vitality Assets

After years of observation and experience I identified three primary asset groups that, when combined, consistently create a strong foundation for lifelong health. The *Vitality Portfolio*® model (see Figure 1) illustrates these mission-critical assets:

- Wellness– six dimensions of health
- Core – ageless thinking and resilience
- Functional – strength, mobility, and endurance

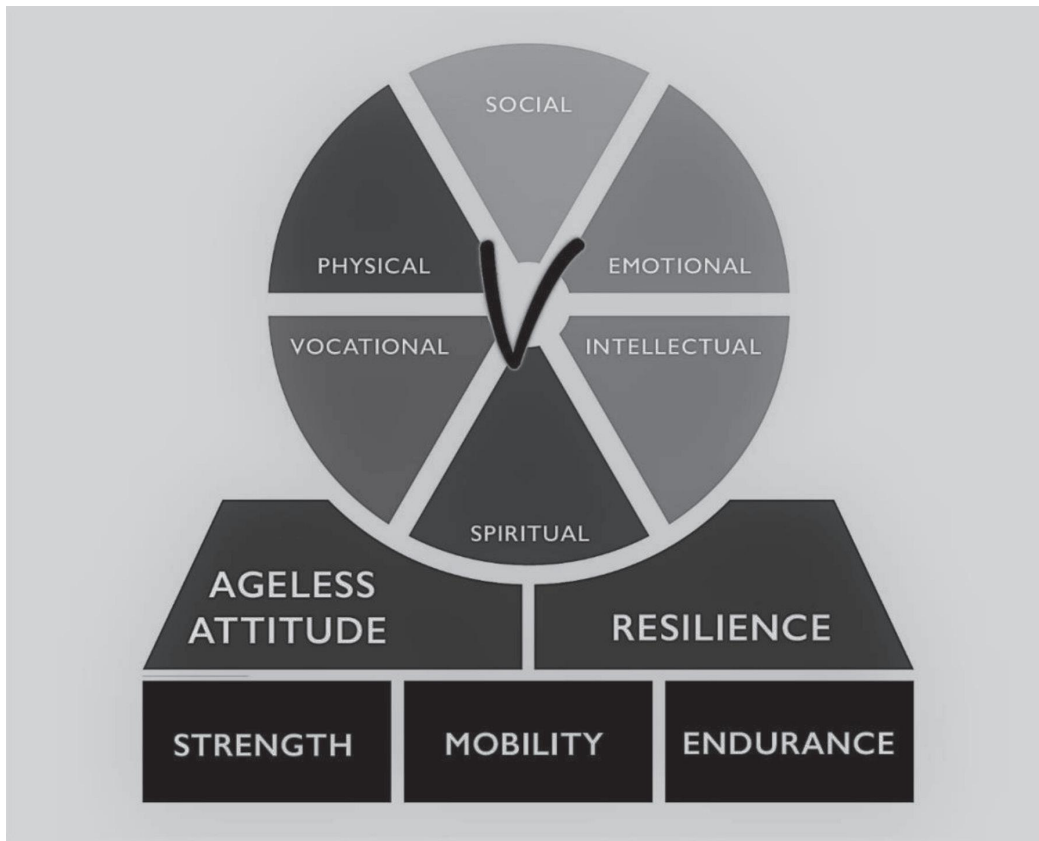


Figure 1: *Vitality Portfolio*[®] Model - © Brilliant Aging, 2019

My website: www.kayvannorman.com offers details, but here are the basics!

- a. **Wellness Assets:** Consider your life's balance by visualizing the six dimensions of health – physical, social, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and vocational – as spokes on a wheel. Consider how many regular deposits you make into each dimension (spoke), then draw your Wellness Wheel. Yes, it looks more like a pie but Wellness Pie seems like an oxymoron!

Are some spokes really large (lots of deposits) while others barely exist? Are you missing an entire spoke? Life constantly changes so dimensions overlap, ebb, and flow through life. The Wellness Wheel simply provides a visual reminder to support optimal health through a richly balanced life.

- b. Core Assets:** Ageless thinking and resilience are absolutely essential for lifelong vitality. The power of attitudes and expectations to uplift and enrich, or diminish, lives is astonishing.

For example, years ago people with disabilities were institutionalized with no expectations or hope for a future. The disability movement dramatically changed attitudes and expectations and now young people with severe disabilities are given resources, tools, and encouragement to triumph over adversity. They receive a steady diet of positive beliefs and resilience training, and accomplish amazing things!

By contrast, older adults with disabilities are most often given resources and tools to cope with, rather than overcome, challenges. Picture healthcare's focus when a 40-year-old has a stroke – it's for fullest recovery; while getting a 75-year-old stroke survivor home and comfortable is commonly viewed as a success. There's a profoundly different mindset between overcoming and coping, resulting in profoundly different outcomes.

Aging well isn't just for people without health challenges! Remember Eldo? He reclaimed his life after a severe injury by rejecting aging stereotypes, demanding fullest recovery, and taking action!

Immerse yourself in a culture of possibilities, associate with others who believe in positive aging, and decide now to engage adaptive strategies and keep moving forward—regardless of age or challenges. Use Ageless Thinking and Resilience to prevent age from defining who you are and what you're capable of in daily life, and in the face of adversity.

- c. Functional Assets:** Strength, mobility and endurance are mission-critical to lifelong vitality. The biggest roadblock

to physical independence is blaming the loss of functional ability on age. Volumes of research prove that inactivity – not age – causes functional decline, yet people still often respond to decline by making their world smaller – giving up things they enjoy because they become more difficult.

Functional loss is usually gradual, easy to ignore. Immediate feedback would serve us better! If we didn't strength train, walk briskly, or practice balance and mobility for a week and couldn't get out of bed on day seven, cause and effect would sink in! It may take years to see the impact of chronic inactivity – but make no mistake – it's devastating. Stop squandering these valuable assets and commit to maximizing function!

Step 3: Make deposits

It's not enough to have a plan and identify vitality assets. You have to choose action and make deposits! Lifelong vitality isn't a choice you make once. It's dozens of choices you make every day about what you believe, how you spend your time, how much you move your body, what you eat, and how you face life's challenges. Compounded over time these small choices either support or sabotage your chances for lifelong vitality.

Don't leave your health to chance! Consciously examine your personal aging scripts then make a plan, balance your vitality assets, and make regular deposits for lifelong health. Create a personal *Vitality Portfolio*®!



About Kay

Kay Van Norman, President of Brilliant aging is an internationally-acclaimed thought leader in healthy aging as a speaker, author, and consultant. Her passion is uncovering hidden barriers to aging well and motivating action! Knowing what to do really isn't the problem – it's the gap between knowing and doing. Kay created the *Vitality Portfolio*[®] approach as a simple pathway to action – one that helps people embrace life and ignite joy – regardless of age or challenges.

Kay started out teaching dance and co-directing the Montana State University Dance Company. She also directed MSU's *Young at Heart* exercise program for older adults and was fascinated – by both the people, ages 50 to 90, and the perfect demonstration of how daily choices *compounded over time* impact lives.

She dove into the world of healthy aging, creating award-winning wellness products and writing two books, several book chapters, and scores of journal articles on aging well. Kay is known for her innovative approach to activating wellness – one that integrates research from multiple disciplines – whole person wellness, resilience, behavior change, exercise, and the mind/body connection to lifelong health. Her super-power is helping people peel back layers of attitudes and expectations to figure out which *aging scripts* are driving health choices.

The wellness industry took notice! Kay directed the Keiser Institute on Aging, and has worked with a wide range of companies – from GE Healthcare, NuStep, and Brookdale Senior Living, to the International Council on Active Aging, and Thailand's Ministry of Health – to name a few. Her international influence also includes a Chinese translation of her second book, *Exercise and Wellness for Older Adults*, and a chapter on ageism for the World Economic Forum book, *Global Ageing – Peril or Promise*.

Kay's business IS ***lifelong vitality***, and *doing well while doing good* isn't just a catch phrase. She's a subject matter expert for consumer advocacy groups *Sixty & Me* – a community of over half-a-million members around the world, and the *Growing Bolder Media Group*, who on average reach 20 million people per week. Her mission is to change the way people view and

experience aging by revealing barriers, activating strategies, and mobilizing businesses to empower customers.

The worldwide need to activate healthy aging has never been greater, which means the opportunity to build relationships with the largest consumer majority on the planet is also unparalleled! Kay recently created a series of healthy aging videos designed to engage leads and build relationships on client websites. With a unique Montana backdrop, they've been described as – *inspiring healthy aging in a way that feels like chatting on the porch with a friend.*

Kay lives with her family and three horses in Bozeman, Montana. She performs with a local dance company, explores the glorious Montana mountains all summer on horseback, and loves spending time with her kids and grandkids.

Would you like to elevate your brand with Boomers and beyond, inspire audiences, activate healthy aging in your community, or ignite personal vitality?

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