

What Does Aging Mean to You?

I recently had the privilege of being a guest lecturer at MATC for a class on Gerontology. The class was comprised of future social workers and case managers looking to work in the aging industry. Though I do a lot of speaking, my audience is typically seniors or the adult children of seniors. So this younger audience was off my normal path. But what a gift they turned out to be.

We talked about what old looks like, and explored the possibility that old has more to do with our attitude than a number. We discussed the concept of looking forward to the rest of your life as a young person, whereas when we arrive in our later years we have a greater tendency to reflect back on our life and the people who have been a part of our journey. We discussed the aging process and considered the change in energy we feel over time (OK, I was speaking from personal experience on this one.)

As the discussion progressed, the questions began to flow, and the insights and responses they gave were amazing. I heard personal stories, and questions that made it clear they were invested in growing their understanding of this elder generation. At the end of the class, the students were asked to share their takeaways. Here are some of the responses I got:

"I was really moved by Ms. Lund's discussion on the subject that aging has a "grieving" component as it relates to the elder population losing their independence. It brought to my mind how most of our life is spent trying to realize a level of independence, to be independent only to become dependent on something or somebody. Being independent is an extremely important concept. My takeaway is that I need to be more empathetic and sensitive to the elder population as they experience loss of their independence."

"If you have a loved one with dementia or Alzheimer's or any life threatening illness, learn to ride shot gun in a conversation and let them drive. Explore the memory or experience that they have with them. "

"Being in this Introduction to Gerontology course has been very eye opening for me and hearing you speak today made me realize that I have so much more to learn. I have a better understanding of how important it is to learn how to work with the elderly population. Having that knowledge can really benefit the family as well as the individual. One thing that I took away from today's class was that when dealing with the elderly sometimes we need to allow them to lead the conversation. If we practice active listening and give them time instead of rushing to get the answers we are looking for, we will get a lot further and even learn something new along the way."

"What I took away is when working with the older population, it is best to jump at opportunity for conversation when they bring something up. If they aren't the first one to bring up a topic, asking questions instead of telling them things might help them find their own answers."

"... you cannot ever replace time and you sure can't buy it back...so always value time."

To the students and professor at MATC in Gerontology 101, thank you for the privilege of your time and words. And to my readers, I hope their words of wisdom give you pause to consider how you approach the subject of aging.

This article is a reprint of a blog posted by Adele Lund, Laureate Group's Director of Community and Business Relations

For over 40 years, Laureate Group, a local, family owned business has been helping older adults and their families manage the challenges of aging. Laureate Group operates eight senior communities throughout the Greater Milwaukee area. Additional resources can be found at:

www.laureategroup.com/blog • www.laureategroup.com • Laureate Cares: 262-832-7113

Careers for Caring People: www.laureategroup.com/careers