

Success in the Second Half of Life

“The secret ... is to recognize that your weakness—your loss, your decline—can be a gift to you and others.”

—Arthur C. Brooks

This column often contemplates farm and ranch management or ownership transitions between generations of family members. Perhaps no transition is harder, however, than a more intrapersonal change: the transition to an older age and the accompanying decline in physical and cognitive abilities.

Arthur Brooks' latest book, “From Strength to Strength: Finding Success, Happiness, and Deep Purpose in the Second Half of Life,” offers helpful ways to think about your transition from a successful first half of life to a different kind of success in your later decades. Consider these elements in your own life's transition.

> UNDERSTAND OUR RESISTANCE TO TRANSITIONS

Brooks discusses several transition challenges. One is “liminality,” a word describing “the time between work roles, organizations, career paths and relationship stages.” This time immediately after a major change in your life but before your future or next step is clear can be a struggle, even confusing or depressing. You know you are transitioning away from something but are not sure where you will land.

Another challenge is what Brooks calls the “Striver's Curse”: The more successful you are, the more fearful you tend to be of your eventual (and certain) decline. Changing your role or admitting you are not as effective as you once were presents a direct challenge to your prior success.

Success may even become an addiction, where recognition and awards, material possessions, business growth or even work itself impedes progress on your personal health, family relationships and business culture. Accumulating more does not leave you happy or fulfilled. In fact, the trappings of success conflict directly with the need to let go, and the inability to define success differently keeps people in the saddle way too long. The result can be an anger-filled, control-oriented second phase of life.

Brooks offers tools to help overcome these challenges.

> SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

Brooks discusses concepts of “fluid” and “crystallized” intelligence. He draws on British psychologist Raymond Cattell, who defined fluid intelligence as “the ability to reason, analyze and solve novel problems—what we commonly think of as raw intellectual horsepower.” It

peaks in early adulthood and begins diminishing well before our 50s. Crystallized intelligence, however, is the use of knowledge gained from past experiences. Brooks explains, “Think of it as possessing a vast library and understanding how to use it. It is the essence of wisdom.”

One key to a successful second half of life is to begin sharing your crystallized knowledge. Find ways to apply your years of experiences instead of trying to do significant physical or technical work. Teaching, coaching, explaining, facilitating and encouraging are all activities that draw on your crystallized intelligence.

> INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS

When focusing on financial and business success in the first half of life, we are busy, tired, pulled multiple directions and, thus, often underinvest in relationships. Longitudinal studies have shown, however, that happier people are those who have strong relationships with their family and friends. Brooks provokes himself by asking, “How many Thanksgivings do I have left?” to focus his time and energy on the family and friends gathered around the table.

> FOCUS ON SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Finally, Brooks mentions research showing that “religious and spiritual adults are generally happier and generally suffer less depression than those who have no faith.” Focusing on your own spiritual development in the second half of life helps the transition go much more smoothly by giving more purpose and meaning to your life.

Transitions in life are inevitable; our only choice is how we approach them. Sharing our wisdom, focusing on relationships and developing ourselves spiritually hold the keys to a successful second half of life.



Write Lance Woodbury at Family Business Matters, 2204 Lakeshore Dr., Suite 415, Birmingham, AL 35209, or email lance.woodbury@pinionglobal.com.

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