



Book
Review

The Upside of Aging

Author: Paul Irving

REVIEW BY ERIKA T. WALKER, MBA, MSED, CSA

As aging industry professionals, we often find ourselves entrenched in day-to-day business activities, striving to serve our clients better by keeping up with industry trends. Most of us are very familiar with the industry-specific resources or journals that help us keep track of the latest financial/insurance product, regulation, legal issue, clinical concern, or technology that will help us do our jobs better. One of the benefits of being an advisor is getting access to information that allows us to understand the bigger picture of “aging” outside of our industry sectors. We get an opportunity to learn from other aging industries and other CSAs how to improve and enhance our existing programs and services.

Reading *The Upside of Aging*, I was reminded that we continue to benefit our clients by staying connected to the big picture. What are respected leaders in the aging industry telling us? How can we help our clients approach aging from one of dependence and disability to one of productivity and potential? Which directions should we be encouraging and advocating for? This newly released book contains a collection of essays that provides creative solutions to a range of aging issues. As a recent review in *USA Today* states, “The 16 voices, from university deans to nonprofit heads, assembled in this book, weigh in with fresh and even contrarian looks at the positive impact of longer lifespans and the nation’s aging population.” (Hannon 2014). The fact that this book is edited by Paul Irving, president of the Milken Institute, encouraged me to place it on my priority list as a “must read.” The Milken Institute School of Public Health is a highly respected nonpartisan think tank dedicated to improving public health and aging across America. Milken’s report, *Best Cities for Successful Aging* (Chatterjee and DeVol 2012) is also referred to in this book and is one of my “go to”

resources to help communities clarify criteria for advancing their aging services. As a result, in *Upside of Aging*, I expected to find some new thoughts and ideas which could be shared with my clients and help me to accomplish my business goals.

I suspect that many of the themes in this book will be familiar to experienced professionals in the aging industry. However, having read a multitude of books on aging issues, it was a pleasure to find such positive perspectives supplementing these ideas. For example, in chapter four, Joseph F. Coughlin, Ph.D., founder and director, Massachusetts Institute of Technology AgeLab, promotes longevity as a gift, not a curse, encouraging aging as a “call to innovate.” He credits the seed of this knowledge to an experience growing up and hanging around with some older gentlemen in a fishing shop near a New York vacation home. According to Coughlin, these older friends, then in their seventies and eighties, taught him something more: learning, living, and laughing did not have to stop at any age. “The example of their spirited lives inspired me to combine my love of technology with institutional engineering to build a career devoted to living not only longer, but better (p. 148).”

Now that Professor Coughlin is seeing these innovations come to fruition, he suggests that the bigger challenge will be to determine how our society will deliver these innovations to support the wants and needs of older adults. Who will deliver these products, services and policies? He maps the innovation market as a cross-section continuum by answering the questions, “Who Delivers Services” and “Who Pays for Services” with answers including the public sector, private sector, and public-private partnerships (p.192).

Chapter three, “The Bold New World of Healthy Aging,” takes innovation to the health care sector.

Freda Lewis-Hall, Executive Vice-President and Chief Medical Officer, Pfizer, Inc., states, “Breakthroughs from the world’s medical labs will help narrow the gap between our healthiest days and the end of our lives with a medical trifecta—data and diagnostics, new medicines and vaccines, and a surgery revolution—to help deliver the full promise of healthy aging.” Using her words, *The doctor will always be in*,” Dr. Hall suggests these innovations and directions will provide a good chance that the baby boomers will exceed their life expectancy.

Moving to a broader picture of the business industry in chapter five, “A Longevity Market Emerges,” reminds businesses that they need to adjust their selling from the youth market to their parents and grandparents who have the money and the clout. Dr. Ken Dychtwald, President and CEO of Age Wave, has emerged as a visionary and original thinker regarding the lifestyle, marketing, healthcare, and workforce implications of the longevity revolution. Representing 32 percent of the total U.S. population, Americans over fifty now have a combined annual income of over \$3.9 trillion and control 77 percent of the total net worth of U.S. households—nearly \$46 trillion of wealth. This vast market awaits. They don’t like to be thought of as old, and seek ways to postpone physical aging. Further dialogue focuses on the fifty and older interest in purchasing experiences—NOT things—and that older adults see themselves as ten to fifteen years younger than their actual age.

The wealth of knowledge and issues discussed in *The Upside of Aging* is meant to trigger conversation and transformation in the way we view aging. However, I suggest this conversation move to the next level and not only transform our views, but transform our industry. We, as aging industry professionals, have opportunities every day to make that happen. As I reflect on the chapters, it is clear that there are concepts being discussed that should be considered in the development of new products and services such as:

- cyclic life plans
- personalized aging
- nutrigenomics
- the psychology of security and safety
- global aging
- digital health

- age-friendly workplaces
- serial mastery
- sagacity
- the new “Indian summer,” a gap year for grown-ups
- un-retiring
- vocation vacations
- LiLAs (lifelong learning accounts)
- boomer philanthropists
- live-work flexhouse
- visit-ability
- gerotranscendence

If you are a visionary and welcome the opportunity to explore new directions, *The Upside of Aging* should provide tremendous food for thought. •CSA



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