



## Human Longevity and The Third Act

(Briefing notes)

The Third Act is a new developmental stage in human evolution arising from advances in human longevity.

- We are living on average thirty-five years longer than our great-grandparents, a whole new adult lifetime. What was old age for them is now middle age for us<sup>i</sup>.
- Never before have so many people lived for so long: two thirds of those who have ever lived over the age of sixty-five are alive to-day<sup>ii</sup>.
- More years have been added to life expectancy in the last 100 years than all of the previous millennia of mankind combined<sup>iii</sup>.
- Human longevity has been described as the “greatest societal achievement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century”<sup>iv</sup>
- ‘Average’ life expectancy in the developed world is now 80 years<sup>v</sup> up from 35 years in 1800. It is forecast to rise to over 90 by 2050.
- If you are 65 years of age today, your average life expectancy is even higher, 83 for a man and 86 for a woman. And, about one out of every four 65-year-olds today will live past age 90, and one out of 10 will live past 95.
- And, we are currently adding two and half years in longevity per decade, that’s three months a year or six hours a day<sup>vi</sup>.
- Most children born today in the developed world can expect to celebrate their 100<sup>th</sup> birthdays<sup>vii</sup>.



- Advances in human longevity however are not evenly distributed:
  - Life expectancy in Monaco is 89, in Botswana it is 47
  - Life expectancy in well to do neighbours can be 20 years higher than less well off neighbours.
  - Women live on average 4 years longer than men
- In the developed world at least, third-actors are now the fastest growing segment of the population.
- By 2050 there will be 2 billion people over 60, that's 22% of the world population. Currently in Italy, Germany and Japan 20% of their populations are over 60: UK it is 17% in Ireland 12%.
- The Third Act is a major societal shift. In the US for instance, 70% of retirees say they want to continue working; 50% of them want to re-invent themselves and do something new and the other 50% want to stay in their chosen fields but work more flexibly<sup>viii</sup>.
- Reflecting this change, there are now more entrepreneurs coming from the 55-65 age bracket than from the 25-35 age bracket (USA)<sup>ix</sup>.

## What are the 'political, economic, social and personal' implications of such a change?

- **Politically**, how will we vote? Will we be regressive, voting for the status quo, for those things we know and feel entitled too (even though society can no longer afford them)? Or will we be progressive? Will we behave like Elders, looking to the future as well as to the past?
- **Economically**, how will we provide for ourselves? The state can't afford our pensions, nor can the companies, and not because they are bad people but because we are living longer. If you want to blame anyone blame the fact that you live in a prosperous country with a good medical system. This is after all a first world problem. Life expectancy in Botswana is 47.



- **Socially**, what sort of contribution will we continue to make? With our families growing up and moving on, what responsibilities do we have for our communities, to the society of which we are part, to the planet we are inhabiting? What legacy are we going to leave?
- **Individually**, what are you going to do and be in your third act? For instance, if you knew that you had a whole new adult lifetime ahead of you, what would do? What would you be? How would you live it?

## Retirement to be replaced by transition

Human longevity has created a whole new developmental stage in human evolution. We have a choice though; we can passively live our third age or actively live in our third act. Retirement encourages the former, transition the later. Retirement comes from the French verb Retirer; to withdraw to a place of safety and seclusion. Transition means to see the reality that is arising and embrace the opportunity it presents. Retirement does not prepare you for the third act, transition does.

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<sup>i</sup> Jane Fonda Ted Talk. The Third Act In Life. 2011

<sup>ii</sup> The Further Reaches of Adult Development. Prof Robert Kegan, RSA Talk, 2013

<sup>iii</sup> Stanford University professor Laura Carstensen

<sup>iv</sup> Alexandre Kalache's ex director of ageing at The World Health Organisation

<sup>v</sup> ERSI Report Ireland, March 2105

<sup>vi</sup> Broken Limits to Life Expectancy, James W. Vaupel and Kristin G. v. Kistowski, 2005

<sup>vii</sup> Most Babies Born Today Will Live 100 Years, Scientists Say. Bloomberg.com 1/10/09

<sup>viii</sup> American's perspectives on new Retirement Realities. Merrill Lynch Age Wave Report, 2013

<sup>ix</sup> The Coming Entrepreneurship Boom. The Kaufman Foundation, June 2009