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As a coach, Sharkie led El Camino College to nine league and two state titles, and with her husband, Pat, she helped the South Bay Spoilers club team win multiple national titles.

Sharkie holds degrees in kinesiology and instructional technology. She teaches health and fitness at the community college and hosts "Sharkie's Pep Talk" on Healthy Life Radio. Sharkie is a certified health coach with the official sanction of the New York State Education Department and the Institute of Integrative Nutrition. She is also a dynamic speaker and is passionate about inspiring people to live their best life at any age.

Sharkie has authored five books, including:

*Have Fun Getting Fit; Simple Ways to Rejuvenate Your Mind and Body*

*Take on Aging as a Sport; The Athletic Approach to Aging*

*Shark Sense; Getting in Touch with Your Inner Shark*

*Youth Volleyball; The Guide for Coaches and Parents*

*Empowered Aging; Expert Advice on Staying Healthy, Vital, and Active*

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## ***Let's Reframe Aging; It's Time to Get Empowered***

### **Sharkie Zartman**

We've all heard the saying, *Aging is Not for Sissies*. I never thought much about that statement because it sounded ridiculous, although now that I find myself in my mid-sixties, I wholeheartedly agree. Every living thing ages and we are no exception. And as we all know, there are bound to be several challenges and unpleasant changes as we get older. However, the good news is that we can control HOW we age. Don't you know people in their eighties, nineties and beyond who are vibrant and living life to the fullest? They seem to transcend their age and not let it affect the quality of their lives. And then there are others who hit a milestone, let's say 50 years old, and decide that it's all over for them. When I turned fifty, my family *threw me an over the hill party*, complete with decorations, hats and even a cake that said 50—over the hill! It was the most depressing day of my life. But it woke me up. I didn't feel old, but everyone else thought I was because I was now fifty. I have since put myself on a mission to make sure that I don't ever give up my life because of a number and I want to help others do the same. In fact, I want the second half of my life to be the best half. Don't you?

What do most of us want as we get older? Usually it is quite a different list from the one we had in our earlier years. As we mature, we aren't as interested in improving our sport or looking hot in a bathing suit anymore. Instead, we want to have mental clarity, be able to move our bodies without pain, and have enough energy to enjoy our lives to the fullest. We want to be able to play with our grandkids, travel, and make new connections. We also want to contribute to a greater cause and share our talents and experience with others. What we don't want is to end up feeble, be a burden on our families and society, or feel too old to do the things we want to do. Basically, we want to continue to enjoy our lives all the way to the end.

Is that possible? YES! However, we can't just sit back and expect these things to happen. Instead, we have to step up and take charge of our lives and habits. We are no longer coasting in life. In fact, some experts believe that most of the symptoms of aging are caused by our bad (unhealthy) habits catching up to us. So it's time to make some changes if we don't want aging to beat us up.

This chapter focuses on the Mind-Body connection and how important it is to get your mind on board before you do anything else. As a former world class athlete, I know how important it is to have an empowered, *can do*, mindset. I've have seen some of the most gifted athletes in my sport have success elude them because they focused only on their bodies, skills and physical conditioning and allowed their lack of mental conditioning to pull them down. However, if you spend time practicing some of the ideas in this chapter, everything can come together so that you can be so distracted by having a great life, that you don't even realize that you are getting

up in the years. I know that if you change your mind, you can change your life. So let's explore some of the psychosocial secrets of empowered aging.

### **Psychosocial Secrets of Empowered Aging**

What are psychosocial secrets of empowered aging? These are the missing ingredients in most people's quest to age successfully. Why are they considered the missing ingredients? Because most people don't consider them to be essential to live a vital, healthy life. But they are, and when you see how simple they are to add to your lifestyle, you will start to take charge of your health and wellness. Consider these ingredients the "spices of life."

If you have ever had a secret recipe that is both nutritious and delicious, you probably had the usual, basic ingredients that most other people used to make the same dish. But what made it special, is what you added to it that others didn't.

Having a healthy, fit, disease-free body would be considered the basic ingredients that we all want in our lives, especially as we get older. However, it's sometimes the little extras that make life delicious, special and oh so much fun!

So here are the special psycho-social ingredients:

1. Change outdated beliefs
2. Develop a positivity practice
3. Become accountable for your choices
4. Build your own support team.
5. Practice the second half of life relationship rules (for us old married folks😊)
6. Realize that there are perks to getting older

Adding these elective "spices" to any healthy lifestyle plan will not only make it easier to get and stay healthy, it will also make life more FUN! And who out there doesn't want to have fun?

### **Change Outdated Beliefs**

When elite athletes step onto a field or a court, the last thing on their minds is losing. They have a winning mindset and most of the time will be focused of what they need to do to be successful. It doesn't matter if the team is ten times stronger or what the predictions say. In fact, those kinds of factors usually motivate them even more.

Athletes who don't have this type of mindset are just going through the motions and probably also are hanging onto negative beliefs. Such as:

The other team is too good. We are going to lose.

This negative belief can be easily switched to:

The other team is good, but it is going to feel so great to beat them, or even get close and scare them 😊

Which belief would you prefer to have when you step into a game? Do you think the second one would give you a better chance to win and also make the game more enjoyable? Well, we probably all also have some negative, outdated beliefs (paradigms) about aging that could also use some rewiring.

### **Old paradigm**

### **New Paradigm**

Aging sucks

Aging is an opportunity to finally follow my purpose

Aging is an inevitable period of decline

Aging is a challenge and a privilege

You stop having fun when you get old

You stop getting old when you have fun

I can't do-----because of my age

I can do whatever I want regardless of age as long as I am healthy

My doctor is in charge of my health

My doctor is a part of my team. I am in charge of my health and the choices I make every day.

You can't teach an old dog new tricks

I can learn any new tricks that I want to learn.

As you can see from the following examples, the old negative paradigms are destined to make people sad, sick, and disempowered and you might recognize them because a lot of people believe they are true. However, we can change our beliefs anytime we want. If you really want to make a difference in your life and your health, you have to get your mind on board. Change your beliefs----change your mind---change your life.

### **Develop a Positivity Practice**

“Look for the good and you will find it.” This quote from the ancient Greeks is the cornerstone for living a happy, fulfilled life. The opposite is also true: “Look for the bad and you will find that too.” Unfortunately, most people find themselves focused on what is wrong or what they don't have in life, complain to anyone who will listen, feel sorry for themselves, and ultimately make themselves sick. It's almost as if they have a dark cloud above that rains slime following them around.

And yet, yes, I know and understand that the world we live in right now is out of control with the political unrest, terrorism, natural disasters, shootings, and the threat of nuclear war. I'm not suggesting that we ignore what is going on in our world today. However, we don't need to

be paralyzed by situations and events over which we have no control. So what CAN we control?

Very simply, the only things we can control are the actions we take and our attitudes.

Why is it important to practice positivity? Look again no further than the mind-body connection. It's almost as if our body cells are listening to our thoughts, and our physical health can either suffer or thrive as a result. We all want to be healthy in order to reach our goals and enjoy our lives, so if our thoughts are that powerful, it's time to start training our minds similar to training our bodies. And the best way to do that is with a positivity practice that we do every day.

So what's a positivity practice? It's flipping your focus on life and also using the fine art of reframing stressors. This is similar with what we did with the negative beliefs.

Did you know that your feelings are not so much influenced by what happens in your life but by how you define or perceive these events? For example, an argument can either be a depressing event, or it can be an empowering opportunity depending on how you want to perceive it. We do this all the time, and once we figure out that we have the choice as to how we want to view life challenges, then we can really start to change our lives.

Here is a 5-point plan to enjoy each and every day to the fullest:

1. Instead of asking someone, "How are you?" instead ask, "What's new and good?" This might stop someone dead in his or her tracks who was getting ready to dump their psychic trash on you. This technique works and it's also fun to watch people who have never had anyone ask them this question before. They sometimes look as if they are about to short circuit.
2. Practice mindfulness by trying to live most of the day in the present moment. Stay away from worrying about what might happen in the future or obsess about what happened in the past. It's over. And remember, that holding onto resentment is like taking poison and hoping it will kill someone else. Try to forgive, and let it go.
3. At the end of the day, write down 5 things you noticed that were positive into a gratitude journal. If you did this one exercise every night before you go to bed, you will be surprised how your life changes and also how well you sleep.
4. See if you can go for a whole day without complaining about anything. If that's too hard, just try for one hour and then add more time as you start to be successful. It will be challenging at first, but keep trying until it becomes second nature.
5. Look for the good in other people and difficult situations. There's always a lesson to be learned and every person you meet does have at least a few positive attributes. Find something nice to say if possible to a person who is upset. I find this to be a great way to get other people to shift their awareness as well. Also, It's fun to give unsolicited compliments and watch people light up.

A positivity practice not only feels good, but makes you more attractive to others and affects your overall health. So what do you have to lose? Remember also to be positive towards yourself and focus on your strengths instead of always noticing your weaknesses. As John Wooden, the famous UCLA basketball coach used to tell his athletes, "Focus on what you can do, not what you can't."

Each and every day is a chance to start again and fall in love with life. As far as we know, we only get one shot at this life so don't miss out by being a negative grump. Start your positivity practice today and watch your life blossom! You will also be an incredible role model for others who will want to know your secret.

### **Become accountable for your choices (actions)**

This is simply taking the responsibility for your choices. You would think that this would be easy, but unfortunately, most of us have learned the how to blame others and situations for our problems. While it takes the pressure and humiliation off us for a short time, it is a flawed technique because it is disempowering. However, once you become accountable for your actions, you finally can take charge of your life! So whatever you are not happy with in your life, see what you might have done to make it happen. Once you start practicing accountability and not projecting blame on others, you become unstoppable! How's that for empowered aging?

### **Build Your Own Support System**

Once we went to a restaurant in Japan that had "fresh lobster." However, this lobster was "over the top" fresh. You could view the big pot where the lobsters were being boiled alive. I was horrified as I watched these crustaceans scrambling about in the water, and when one of the brave ones tried to climb out of the pot, the other lobsters would reach up with their claws and pull the poor guy back into the pot. Needless to say, I didn't order lobster that night, but it did get me thinking not only about how cruel we are to some of earth's creatures, but also how we humans tend to pull others down to our levels when we are suffering. We don't want others to succeed if we can't or won't even try.

The reason I mention the lobster pot is because, unfortunately, Americans tend to have a fatalistic, negative view about aging. Our society tends to view the aging population as not having a productive role in society, is undeserving of respect, and that declining health is a certainty. I don't know about you, but I want OUT OF THE POT. I also need to find others who want out with me.

It's time to start putting together your team. If you were an athlete, you most likely were chosen for a team based on your skills and previous success in your sport. But putting together a support team is different as we age... *we get to choose our own teams*. One of the best insights I ever got about understanding people is a quote my husband always says to me when I

get frustrated and disappointed with some of the people in my life, “Limit your relationships to what you have in common.” I consider this to be great advice.

Here are five tips on how to build your support system and get OUT OF THE POT!

1. **You Must Be “All In.”** In order to build a support team, you must care deeply about your quality of life and make your health a priority. Also, it’s time to stop beating yourself up and realize how amazing you really are. In order to be on a great team, you must be a great teammate.
2. **Evaluate Your Current Relationships.** Your family, friends and colleagues are currently the people on your team. Take a look at these people and ask yourself, are they like the lobsters in the pot pulling me back in, or are they trying to climb out like me? Cherish your supportive relationships and crowd out the negative ones by finding some new teammates.
3. **Where to Find New Teammates:** This is where we need to get bold. We are not magnets, so we must get out there and recruit, and the first place to start is in our own community. There are many community centers, senior clubs, and YMCA’s that have activities for seniors including, exercise classes, games, and dances. There are even some that organize travel excursions and cruises. I remember once on an Alaskan cruise, there was a vivacious group of seniors who literally “rocked the boat” with energy and fun. They made all the young couples and groups seem old. Also there are many online communities where you can have virtual teammates!
4. **Do You Need to Fire Your Doctor?** Your medical doctors and practitioners are also members of your team and you should be able to choose them if possible. Besides being excellent at their jobs, they also need to be someone you can talk to about your concerns and answer your questions. Any doctor who blows you off because of your age should be fired.
5. **Be Aware of the Psychic Vampires.** These are the people who literally complain all the time. Avoid these people if you can because they can literally suck out your energy. I had one woman at my last presentation ask what to do if she is married to a psychic vampire. I told her to make sure she crowds him out with lots of other people in her life who are more supportive, fun and positive. I think I put her on a mission!

Remember that there is strength in numbers and we need to be a part of a supportive group if we want to live an optimal life at any age. So don’t be in survival mode. Let’s be in a thriving mode and be a part of an awesome team to play the toughest sport we’ll ever play, the aging game.

### **The Second Half of Life Relationship Rules (For the mature, long- term married folks)**

Being married for any length of time is truly an accomplishment these days. The other day, someone asked me how long I had been married and when I said, 42 years this July, her eyes got huge and she said, “To the same person? How is that possible?”

When I married my husband, people were taking bets on how long our marriage would last. The average bet was between two weeks and two years because of our age difference and personalities. Let's just say, he is calm, wise and conservative and I am the exact opposite. I did get really nervous during the vows... "For better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and health, till death do us part." That's a huge promise! Could I really do this?

Flash forward forty years. We are still married and happy, but it hasn't been an easy road, and our relationship has taken many turns throughout the years, and I'm sure more are to come as we navigate through our senior years. However, he is my best friend, my lover, and the father of my beautiful girls and I know that he is a keeper.

I remember someone once said, "I married you for better or worse, but not for breakfast and lunch." I never really understood that until now. Obviously when we first got married it was exciting, challenging, romantic, and fun! We both worked full-time, coached, played our sports and when we had our kids, it got even more challenging but was even more fulfilling. We looked forward to seeing each other when we got home to talk about our busy days. But now, as we have more time at home and our kids have moved out, we are starting to run out of things to talk about and it seems like we keep running into each other, especially in the kitchen.

It's not bad, it's just different! So in order to keep a marriage going all the way to the end, here are six rules of engagement.

1. **Stay Vibrant and Interesting.** Learn Something New! You can do this together, or separately. No one likes to get stuck in a routine or a mundane life, so make sure you keep reinventing both yourself and you as a couple. I see too many couples who do the same thing every day. They are bored with life and each other.
2. **Have Date Nights at Least Once a Week.** Always have something to look forward to!
3. **Make sure you don't "let yourself go."** Personal hygiene is a must in a marriage.
4. **Accept your partner for who they are.** Don't ever try to change him or her.
5. **Never go to bed mad at your partner.** One of my friends said that he and his wife, when they are mad at each other "fight naked." He said that there is no way you can fight in bed snuggled up to someone you love. We haven't tried this yet, but if we need to, we won't count it out.
6. **Listen!** We have two ears and one mouth for a reason. We are supposed to listen more than we talk, especially in a relationship.
7. **Don't forget to say "I love you" at least once a day.**

These rules seem simple, but how many couples do you know who don't seem to abide by any of them? Are they happy? Are they fun to be around? I saw an older couple at a restaurant the other day, and they just sat there and ate their food, and never spoke to each other. It was sad! I wanted to write them these rules of engagement on a napkin, but I doubt they would

have read it. So keep the fires burning, and love the one you're with. All it takes is a little effort, ingenuity and a lot of love.

## **The Perks of Getting Older**

Okay, I get it. We are a society that idolizes youth. What could possibly be good about getting older? The terms anti-aging, ageless, and fountain of youth have led many to believe that aging is something to be feared and somehow avoided. But the truth is, when we put another candle on our birthday cake, there is a lot to be thankful for. Along with actively participating in keeping our health and vitality by being accountable for our lifestyle choices, it really helps to realize that there are some great perks to getting older. Seniors definitely have an edge on their younger counterparts in some areas.

### **Here are the Top Ten Perks of Aging.**

**1. People over 50 tend to be happier than the younger generation.** In a survey conducted in San Diego, California of people aged 21 to 99, the results indicated that there was a clear relationship between age and mental health. The older the people were, the happier they felt. People in their 20's were stressed out and depressed and the happiest people were in their 90's. The results were published in the Journal of Clinical Psychology. The phenomenon is referred to as "the paradox of aging." How cool is this?

**2. Mindfulness becomes easier.** With all the research about how staying in the present moment benefits our health, this actually becomes easier as we age. We no longer care to think about where we will be in 20 or 30 years. We're just happy to just be in the present!

**3. We no longer care what people think of us.** We can have more fun and not be concerned about looking immature or conforming to stereotypes. We already grew up and now we can be like a kid again! If we want to paint our nails all different colors or wear clothes that don't match, so what? Live your life and forget your age.

**4. We finally have time to follow our passion.** Going to school, getting a job, having a career, nurturing relationships, and paying the bills sometimes takes up most of our energy and time when we are younger. As things start to slow down, we can finally ask, "What do I want?" Getting excited about waking up in the morning to do what you want instead of what you have to do is fun!

**5. We appreciate life and enjoy things we never even noticed before.** My Dad always told me to "Slow down and smell the bees..." I thought he meant roses, but now I know what he meant. I was always too busy to notice the simple amazing things in life, like a beautiful sunset, the sound of the waves, or how food actually tastes when you eat it slowly.

**6. We have life experience that is invaluable.** Most of us have been there and done that. We can become great resources for the younger generation. So what if we don't know everything about computers and technology? We know how to communicate face to face and didn't have Google or Wikipedia at our fingertips. We had to learn the hard way and apply what we learned to life.

**7. We no longer have to raise our children** In fact, they better be nice to us if they want any money when we move on. Also, they should want us to be healthy so they don't have to take care of us. And if grandkids come along, we can love them, play with them, spoil them, and give them back.

**8. Seniors get great discounts!** At first I was embarrassed to ask for a senior discount, but now it is fun, especially when they ask to see my ID first. Take advantage of cheaper prices for movies, entertainment, food and travel. It all adds up.

**9. Self-Care is now a necessity instead of a guilty pleasure.** Yes, we now need those massages, facials, manicures, body treatments, and entertainment. We need to laugh and dance and have fun. It is important for our overall health now more than ever!

**10. Each and every day is now an opportunity to love, share, experience, and be grateful.** We begin to realize that we are not going to live forever, and can finally slow down and appreciate the gift of time.

So are you ready to add some psychosocial spice to your life? Remember that these can be sprinkled into your life at any time. And the next time someone asks you your age, don't lie or be embarrassed. If you take good care of yourself you won't look your age, and you will inspire others who are afraid of aging. Be a great role model and wear your age well. My Dad is 93, and he looks and acts like a vibrant man in his sixties. His motto is: "Everyday above the ground can be a great day. Don't waste it!"