

PASSAGE MARKERS

Boomers Can Live by a Timeless Philosophy

My 30th high school reunion is this spring. In fact, the first event is this weekend, which has me thinking.

Like most Boomers my age, I see this event — and others, like my 25th reunion for college last year — as important markers in one's life. On the one hand, it seems like just yesterday I was in high school and college. On the other, it was yesterday — or only five years ago — when I

was at my 25th high school reunion. I remember walking around with a "25th Reunion" button on my lapel wondering when it was I had become my dad. I guess growing older isn't a generational thing; it's a human thing.

The question running through my head as this marker approaches is how did 30 years go by, and what do the next 30 (more or less) portend? As I pondered that, I was reminded of something I had come across years ago. At the time, I was a junior account manager at Ogilvy & Mather, one of Madison Avenue's biggest and best advertising agencies.

OGILVY PUBLISHED an "alumni" newsletter back in 1985 as a way for former employees to stay connected with the current staff. One item that caught my eye was a piece by a former media planner, Bob Silverberg, who was by then a 58-year-old radio ad sales person. Bob used his space in the

newsletter to submit his "philosophy of life," prepared as part of his own 40th high school reunion. Bob's simple five-point list was both poignant and sophisticated at the same time.

To this day, I remember it and, as much as possible, believe it and try to follow it. Even though Bob and I are from completely different generations. That's because some things are timeless, or in this case, *transgenerational*.

Bob was a leading-edge member of the Silent Generation: He was born during the Great Depression and came of age during World War II. His generation has never been viewed as self-indulgent, entitled, or even optimistic (like Boomers). Rather, the Silents are dedicated, pragmatic, and duty-bound. But by age 58, some 40 years removed from high school, he created a list that anyone from any generation at midlife and beyond would appreciate and value.

Reminded this week of my 30 years (and 30 pounds) beyond my high school graduation, I remembered Bob's list. It's time to share his philosophy with my fellow midlife Boomers, and younger generations as well. One caveat: Memory has faded some of Bob's poignancy, as this is my recollection of his list (generated before digital storage).

HERE IS A "philosophy of life" that's timeless and transgenerational:

(1) *Don't wait for life to happen to you.* Essentially, it's up to you to make your own way. Those who wait for the world to beat a path to their door may be home to answer the door, but no

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one is knocking. It's in our own hands to shape our own destiny.

(2) *Life is a series of choices.* Long ago Pogo said, "them that makes the choices, gets the choices." (Younger readers, you can wiki "Walt Kelly.") For every choice one makes, a decision is reached and consequences follow. Sometimes good, sometimes not

so good. Not making choices is a choice, too, so you're better off making them yourself.

(3) *Happiness is important, especially in your work.* We spend our adult life working, so we might as well do something we're passionate about. If not, change jobs. In fact, maybe you should change jobs every 10 years no matter what, just for intellectual stimulation and motivation.

(4) *Money counts.* More makes everything else easier. It also lessens the arguments at home.

(5) *Live in the now.* Don't spend your life planning for your life. Live now, in the moment, making as many minutes count as you can. Living for tomorrow ruins today, and today is much too fleeting. (Ironically, one of Oprah Winfrey's faves these days is Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*, which espouses a similar approach. Could Tolle have read Bob's list back in 1985, too?)

That's it. Five timeless ideas for living a vital life at any age. Maybe we Boomers won't have to reinvent *everything* about growing older. Bob's wisdom cuts across all generations and is more appreciated with age. In hindsight, the only missing ingredient is the importance of family and friends. But a list of six is much harder to remember than one with five. Especially 30 years past high school.

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