

HELPFUL HINTS FOR SENIORS

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Who... me? Stubborn? No way!

Recently someone made the decision to move into our senior retirement community. She had weathered the loss of a forty-year relationship; was fed-up with all the clean-up, fix-up and “keep-up” at home; and was ready to start a new chapter of fun and friendship. Surrounded by her two daughters, her face was beaming as we completed our final paperwork and I handed her the keys:

“I could not have done this without these two,” she said lovingly, wrapping an arm around each girl’s shoulder, “They are the reason I am here.”

It was one of those Kodak moments that I am humbled and honored to share, and I knew what she was talking about. Her daughters had been the first to speak with me. They had gathered lots of information and asked dozens of questions. Both had met together after their busy work days to meet with me for an initial visit. Each one made arrangements for her family to be fed while they brought mom over for dinner and an initial visit. They rearranged schedules to bring her for several follow-up visits. They listened, read, lectured, encouraged, pleaded, gave advice, consulted experts, disarmed, prodded and eventually persuaded their mom to make the move. They read all the legal documents, completed all the paperwork, met with the financial planner, hired the movers, packed the dishes, and no doubt provided the Kleenex for the inevitable tears that she shed. They truly had supported her every step of the way. I had come to respect and appreciate the unity, respect, and care they showed their mom as she went through one of the biggest decisions she had ever faced without her spouse.

But she was wrong about one important thing: The girls were not the reason she was here.

Not long ago someone made the decision to delay a move to our community. He had suffered the loss of a forty-year relationship, was feeling overwhelmed by all the clean-up, fix-up, and “keep-up” of his lonely old house; and he had a couple of daughters who were equally eager and ready to help him start a new chapter of fun and friendship. Based on the way they had gathered the information, made the initial visit, and sought heroically to find ways to get him to budge, I have every belief they would have been just as supportive and just as helpful as the first set of sisters. It is true: neither senior could have accomplished a major change without the help of their friends and family. But “the girls” had nothing to do with the reason one is here and the other is not.

The truth is that one was willing to listen to the loving voices around her and the other was just plain stubborn. Now I’m sure that no one reading this (or writing it) has ever (nor could ever) be labeled as stubborn. So let’s scrutinize those “other folks” (we all know one or two) who well deserve the label. I met someone recently who is totally isolated and was snowbound for three days this winter without power, warmth, or food. He can only walk short distances without experiencing excruciating pain. He needs a knee replacement and a better place to live. But he’s too stubborn to change. I know someone else who insists on cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry despite many offers from his family and friends to lighten his load. He has no use of his right arm or leg. I know someone whose friends would love to provide her with transportation to a concert and to share a lovely dinner together, but because she cannot drive at night and will not accept a ride, she stays home alone.

What is this unreasonable stubbornness? Why do some folks (we all?) dig in their heels and refuse to listen to folks around who have their best interest at heart? Why did I refuse to make a doctor's appointment for my ear infection over the past two weeks despite the encouragement and advice from practically every person I know? One philosopher wisely observed that "many are stubborn in pursuit of the path they have chosen, few in pursuit of the goal." I believe this makes the point exactly: We lose sight of the real goal, whether it is fulfillment, friendship, meaning, health, or independence because we resist and fear moving away from our chosen path. We fear change or we don't want to admit that maybe there is a better path. Anthony J D'Angelo once said, "never let your persistence and passion turn into stubbornness and ignorance." For seniors this can be sad, tragic, and even fatal. So maybe it's time to listen to your kids, your friends, your spouse, or your best buddy and open your mind to something new. There really is a difference between wisdom and just plain cussedness. Like never before in history, seniors have new paths available to them for health, meaning, and happiness. Why be stubborn when life can be better? Why soldier on when the war is over?

Here's a hint: If you don't know whether or not you are being stubborn about something, just ask the people who know you best. I'm sure they will be glad to tell you! Imagine all the fun you will have watching their jaws drop when you surprise them with a bold and flexible choice that is completely out of your pattern. Who, me? Stubborn? No way!