



**Age Power: How The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Will Be Ruled By The New Old**  
Notes by Frumi Rachel Barr

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Author bio and credits: Ken Dychtwald, Ph.D. is a psychologist and gerontologist and the founding president of Age Wave, LLC. He is one of the leading authorities on the aging of America with more than 25 years of study to explore how extraordinary demographic and economic shifts are causing the emergence of Age Power.

Noteworthy information regarding contents and chapter titles:

This book is a "Wake-Up Call"! Dychtwald focuses on how the Baby Boomers have transformed every phase of human life in America as this massive generation (78 million people) has aged through the years. The *age wave* (which Dychtwald likens to a tsunami) is fast approaching with the oldest boomers reaching age 65 in the year 2011. In the decades ahead, the boomers will complete their transformational journey as America becomes a gerontocracy where they take control of the nation's social and economic power. Dychtwald points out that if our government and social institutions continue to operate inside the current paradigm for aging adults, we will be woefully ill-prepared as a society. There are already ample warning signs in the approaching insolvency of Social Security and the mounting problems with access to health care and long term care. Dychtwald lays the groundwork well by describing the essence of elder hood in America in the past century, how patterns have shifted in the past 50 years or so, and what all generations will face as the Boomers move ahead into the future. He compellingly proposes a paradigm shift - rather than focus our time, energy, and resources on "fixing" and strengthening our current institutions to deal with an enormous aging population, many of whom will have one to many chronic diseases for many years, Dychtwald offers us a new vision of aging that presumes a continuously healthy life free of chronic disease until the very last few years

of life. In this book, he offers cultural and societal solutions for how the later years of life can be transformed in this way.

This book consists of an Introduction, 8 chapters, a Conclusion and 19 pages of Notes that are referenced throughout the text. In actuality, this book is written to address two main areas of emphasis. Chapters 1 through 3 set the stage and provide the history and current patterns regarding the aging of the Boomers in America. Chapters 4 through 8 are each in-depth discussions of major societal forces for this aging population and the implications for younger generations - the danger signs followed by possible solutions.

**Introduction:** The story of how Ken Dychtwald came to be a gerontologist in the study of aging is told and the context for the book is set. Primary realizations that have shaped his work in this area are:

- Aging is not something that begins on one's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. Rather, all the choices we make regarding how we care for ourselves and manage our lives will ultimately shape who we become in our later years. Many of the painful, punishing challenges of old age could be prevented if informed choices were made earlier in life.
- Our modern world is designed, top to bottom, to match the shape, size and style of youth. In thousands of ways, we have been influenced to like what's young and dislike what's old.
- Likened by demographers to a "pig moving through a python", baby boomers have radically transformed every stage of life through which they have traveled.
- Now, there are 78 million boomers barreling toward old age. We are about to confront a demographic shift of enormous proportion - increasing longevity, declining fertility, and the aging of the baby boom...an enormous "age wave".
- The age wave has the potential to create vibrant new stages of life - and an equally compelling potential for social, financial, political and personal catastrophe.
- The irony...the very thing we have blanked out of our societal paradigm - aging - is about to engulf us.

Dychtwald is convinced of two things:

- "Age Power" will rule the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- In many critical ways, we are woefully unprepared as a society.

### ***Chapter One: Age Power***

This chapter describes how life expectancy has changed as well as the history of how elders have been viewed through human history. Until very recently, elders were revered as the source of wisdom and knowledge for a long life. With advances in sanitation, public health, food science, pharmacy, surgery, medicine, and wellness-oriented lifestyles, most of us *will age* where for previous generations aging was rare. This age wave is of concern in all modernized nations of the world and the developing nations will also follow suit in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This chapter presents a significant amount of demographic statistics to

demonstrate the trends in aging and longevity. Also presented are the primary drivers for the shift in demographics as well as the societal relationship to aging:

Old used to be "In":

- The elderly used to be exemplars of morality and health. If you lived longer than most, you were thought to hold the knowledge (some even felt it divinely inspired) for long life.
- The elderly held the most power, especially when power was exemplified by land holdings and the fact that land was passed down to the next generations. You respected your elders or you might not inherit the power of land-owning.
- People used to exaggerate their age and tried to look older because old age was so highly valued.

Industrialization toppled the earlier American gerontocracy:

- New jobs allowed young men to break free from economic dependence on their elders.

Germs, not divine intervention:

- The development of germ theory in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and a better understanding of disease led to treatments that extended life. This new knowledge led to thinking that it wasn't God who determined who was to live the longest and the elderly were no longer considered divinely selected experts on how to achieve old age.

Gerontophobia becomes the new norm:

- From rural, family-based lifestyle to an urban, workplace-oriented one; from divine selection to germ theory; from veneration to a growing disregard for the old - sent the status of the elderly plummeting. By the 1930s, 30 percent of the nation's elderly were living in poverty.

Reversal of Fortune: Elders growing financial power:

- August 14, 1935, FDR and his "New Deal" created Social Security. Since that day, elders have been rising from *underdogs* to society's economic and political *bulldogs*. A growth in pension coverage and the GI Bill also contributed to this new wealth and power. Pages 20-22 contain a list and charts of the nature of wealth for 50+ year old men and women. Pages 23-29 discuss the political clout due to the large voting blocks. An in-depth piece on the AARP is included in these pages and is not very complimentary. The author sees the AARP as an enormous political force for needed change that is, instead, putting its clout behind sustaining current systems that are doomed to failure.

***Chapter 2: The New Wild, Wild West of Human Enhancement and Life Extension***

- This chapter focuses on the history of and current state of the scientific and behavioral advances we have made in recent history. The author also predicts new anti-aging sciences available in the near future.

- Super-nutrition, hormone replacement, gene therapy and the manipulation of cellular aging, bionics, and organ cloning/"spare parts" technologies.
- More progress has been made in the battle against aging in the decade of the 1990's than in the previous 10,000 years.

### ***Chapter 3: The Age Wave is Coming: Is the World Ready for Elder Boomers?***

This chapter is the stage setter for the following 5 chapters by discussing how the Boomers have transformed all stages of life they have passed through thus far. The author makes the compelling case for the Age Wave that is coming and the need to take action.

- At the leading edge of the baby boomer generation, American institutions were totally unprepared: not enough hospitals, not enough homes and apartments, a shortage of baby food and diapers, a shortage of toys in department stores to meet the demand.
- Boomers' parents lived through the Depression and WWII. They believed that a lifetime of commitment was required to accomplish their goals. Duty came before pleasure. As a result, they were determined that their children would have a better life than they had - one with a higher level of stability and comfort.
- Television was born at almost the same time as the boomer generation. It served as a potent homogenizing medium.
- Hundreds of new homes and communities were built and the "suburbs" were born. School systems were not prepared for all the new students. In general, public institutions were late across the board in responding to the needs of this new generation. In contrast, businesses were quite adept at pouncing on the boomers' changing needs.
- More boomers continued education after high school which caused an unmanageable strain on the higher education system.
- Self improvement became a growth industry.
- The auto industry boomed.
- The housing industry was also caught unprepared so housing prices soared because of unmet demand.
- The 1980s: boomers became increasingly materialistic shifting to interest in success at work and amassing wealth.
- As boomers became working parents, the daycare industry was born. Employers were caught by surprise by demands for flexibility, especially from working moms.
- During the 90s, family life became front and center in the lives of most boomers - 3/4 were married, many for the second time, 3/4 had children, and 2/3 were homeowners. Boomers reconfigured many of the traditional

marriage and family roles. Many boomer parents experience a déjà vu when they found that the school systems were again unprepared to handle their children.

- 85% of boomers hold jobs. The single biggest change has been the number of women who work outside the home.
- Rising salaries have allowed boomers to invest which caused the stock market to swell.
- In other words... the boomers have dominated American culture for 5 decades. When they have reached any stage of life, the issues that concern them have become the dominant social, political and marketplace themes of the time. Examples of how the boomers have transformed all facets of society can be found on page 69.
- The emerging "Silver" Market is discussed which is described as the continuing marketplace revolution that will occur as the boomers pass through middle years and on to maturity. Impacted areas include healthcare, anti-aging/human enhancement, technology, financial services, work/leisure, lifestyle support, housing/transportation, and death and dying.

#### **The Baby Boom Was Born to Become an Age Wave:**

- In 2011, the first boomers will turn 65. The number will skyrocket from approximately 40 million to 70+ million by 2030. As they age, the look, meaning, experience, and purpose of maturity will be transformed.
- Just as society's institutions have been grossly unprepared for the baby boom, the teen boom, the yuppie boom, far too little has been done to prepare for the coming elder boom.
- When boomers become elders, their demands will be large and their political clout formidable yet the economic benefit that society will derive from investing in them is unknown at this time.
- After seeing how unprepared we've been for the "pig moving through the python" again and again over the last 50 years, how will we now respond? Five social "train wrecks" are offered that we need to prevent:
  1. Forget "65". As the marker for old age and the onset of old age entitlements, it's meaningless, unfair, and even dangerous. (Chapter 4)
  2. Without a dramatic shift in healthcare skills and priorities, our society will face epidemics of chronic disease. (Chapter 5)
  3. A care giving crunch could become the social and economic sinkhole of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (Chapter 6)
  4. Tens of millions of boomers are heading toward a poverty-stricken old age. (Chapter 7)
  5. Without envisioning a new purpose for old age, we are creating an "elder wasteland". (Chapter 8)

#### ***Chapter 4: The Changing Markers of Aging:***

- This chapter asks the question, "How old is Old?" The history of how we've viewed old age is provided.
- With the extension of life, a new life stage has emerged... middlescence...age 40-60.
- The author offers 4 solutions for the conflicts that are arising as yesterday's markers of aging meet tomorrow's life spans. These solutions are:
  1. Unhinge old age from the obsolete marker of 65 and index entitlements to rising longevity.
  2. Let people choose to retire when they are ready and when they can afford to.
  3. Smash the "silver ceiling" and make it easier for people to pursue meaningful employment in maturity.
  4. Replace the "linear" life paradigm with a new "cyclic" one that takes maturity into account as a time of new life pursuits and passions.

#### ***Chapter 5: Tithonus' Revenge or Healthy Aging?***

An ancient Greek fable tells of the story of Eos, the goddess of the dawn, who falls in love with the human warrior, Tithonus. Wanting him to have mortality, she begged Zeus to grant him immortality, which he did. However, she forgot to ask that Tithonus also remain eternally young and healthy. To her horror, he grew older and sicker, eventually reduced to a painful and decrepit creature who continues to live forever. Dychtwald asserts that this story is a fitting allegory for what is occurring in our healthcare system today.

- People used to die primarily due to infectious diseases, accidents or in childbirth. In the past century, medical breakthroughs have eliminated many of those threats. Now very few American die from the once epidemic diseases. Although we've managed to prolong life, we have done far too little to promote healthy aging.
- One century ago, the average adult spent only 1% of his/her life in a morbid or ill state. Today's average adult will spend over 10% of his/her life sick. While we've added over 29 years of life expectancy, many older adults will spend their later years with illness, pain, disability and suffering.
- Part of the problem is we now have the wrong healthcare system for our new aging-related needs.
- Healthcare professionals are not skilled in geriatric medicine and our financing mechanisms do not emphasize the prevention or cost-effective treatment of age-related illnesses. Our long-term care services are undeveloped and fragmented.

- The healthcare "train wreck": 85% of the 65+ population have one or more chronic diseases, 50% have two or more, 24% have problems so severe as to limit their daily living abilities. 62.5% of the 85 and older population cannot sustain basic activities without help. Those 85 and older are multiplying faster than any other segment of our population. By 2040, there will be 16 million people over 85 including more than a million people over 100.
- The cost of our unpreparedness is staggering due to enormous costs associated with heart disease, cancer, strokes, musculoskeletal disorders and Alzheimer's disease.
- Dychtwald offers the following solutions:
  1. Commit greater attention and scientific research required to delay or, if possible, eliminate the diseases of aging.
  2. Provide the academic training and continuing education to ensure that healthcare professionals are fully competent at meeting the needs of the new old.
  3. Make disease prevention and self-care a national priority.
  4. Orient the economic incentives of our healthcare system toward healthy aging.

### ***Chapter 6: The Caregiving Crunch:***

- *Am I my parents' keeper?* Today, 80% of all long-term care is provided by friends and family members outside of hospitals, nursing homes and other institutions. Healthcare trends that are creating a care giving crunch include:
  - Increasing longevity of the chronically ill
  - Worsening strain on sandwiched generations
  - Insufficient financing for long-term care
  - The absence of integrated and accessible long-term care services
  - The premature death of men
 Each of these trends is discussed in depth on pages 144-156.
- How we can ease the care giving crunch: the four-part solution
  1. Finance long-term care through private insurance or reverse mortgages
  2. Establish new eldercare-oriented employee benefits
  3. Expand and integrate long term care programs and services
  4. Develop health-related affirmative action programs for men.

### ***Chapter 7: Financial Wake-Up Call:***

- By the 1990s, total personal savings from families saving on their own as well as employer pension contributions averaged only 4.9% of disposable income. Excluding pensions, the rate is less than 1-2%.

- Even if government entitlements continue, the current approaches to financing will fail the boomer generation. Too many people, living too many years and having too little savings will place increasing tax demands on smaller working generations.
- A sizable segment of boomers, as much as 1/3 (a group disproportionately female) has virtually no savings, investments, pensions and little likelihood of inheritance. Unless dramatic changes are made soon, 1/3 of today's middle-agers will become tomorrow's impoverished elders.
- The author asserts that two interconnected elements are therefore creating the boomers' financial insecurity:
  1. The *economics* of old-age entitlements don't add up. Politicians are playing a game of "pyramid power" with our future.
  2. Many boomers are caught in a dangerous state of *financial paralysis* and are not taking the necessary steps to plan for their financial futures.

Each of these elements is discussed in depth on pages 174-183.
- Four commonsense changes are offered as solutions:
  1. Increase personal savings rates.
  2. Make pensions more portable and flexible to match the boomers' mobile lifestyles.
  3. Affluence-test and target entitlements to match the diverse needs of tomorrow's elders.
  4. Privatize portions of Social Security to generate better returns.

### ***Chapter 8: Intergenerational Relations: Melting Pot or Gerassic Park?***

- In an evolving, fluid society such as ours, there are wisely conceived checks and balances that prevent any particular group from dominating the political and social agendas.
- The rise of age power poses a new and perplexing problem. Our founders never imagined the challenges of managing the relative contributions and demands of three and four living generations - particularly when the elder generation was so large and powerful.
- Our policymakers must learn a new and complex skill: how to manage a *multigenerational melting pot*.
- While we normally assume that the groups with the greatest differences in social and political issues would be conservatives and liberals, in the years ahead, new political action lines will be drawn between age groups and generations.
- Although the existence of 3 and 4 living generations offers the unprecedented possibility of a wonderful range of intergenerational friendships, mentorships, and learning opportunities, the absence of such positive relationships could lead to insensitivity, bickering, fierce competition for limited resources, and social "age wars".
- Generational identity is a relatively new dynamic brought about by rapid changes in technology, media and social mores that have given each generation its own set of

experiences and values. In the past, groups could be identified by social class, race, religion, or political affiliation. Today there is enormous connection to the era in which they grew up and with whom they have shared so many experiences. A table characterizing the different generations can be found on page 205.

- The view from 65: in general, self-confident and involved with life; team players who trust authority; seeking security; a more homogenous racial makeup; politically wired.
- The view from 45: exciting, productive yet hectic and overextended lives; distrust of authority; looking out for number one; seeking security with a different blend of ingredients; a more heterogeneous racial mix; politically unplugged.
- The view from 25: worried about a lot; diversity in all forms is fundamental; technology is fundamental; seeking security is a mixed bag with a lot of anxiety; more racially and culturally diverse; tribal politics.
- The age power of the boomers, if unrestrained, could have a destructive effect. "All successful societies need to make long-term investments in education, infrastructure, and the basic research that leads to growth industries. How is this going to happen when the largest and most powerful voting bloc is the elderly, who know that they stand no chance of seeing the benefits of these investments?" (Lester Thurow, MIT)
- Weaving a new set of unifying patterns among the generations: Dychtwald offers 4 important adjustments we can start making today that could turn potential social disaster into intergenerational cooperation:
  1. Drawing on wisdom and generativity to create a new purpose for elder hood
  2. Crossing age lines to forge a multigenerational melting pot.
  3. Taming the two-headed giant, or, scaling AARP down to size.
  4. The importance of Elder heroes.

### ***Conclusion:***

- Dychtwald offers four outcomes that are certain as America becomes a gerontocracy:
  1. More of us will live longer than in any previous generation
  2. The epicenter of economic and political power will shift from the young to the old
  3. We will need to change our current mindset about how to spend our extra years of life
  4. How we decide to behave as elders will, in all likelihood, become the most important challenge we will face in our lives.

**Author's main point (what will you remember about this book?):** Our current societal paradigm of addressing and "fixing" the problem after it has occurred must be replaced with a new cultural mindset of investing in prevention of disease and in financial

security and prosperity. Investment in solutions that will prolong later life in ways that allow for healthy aging is of utmost importance and priority or we will be faced with large numbers of long-lived, yet infirm and financially-dependent elders.

### **Anything of interest in the chapter notes?**

Some additional data and statistics are provided re: demographics, morbidity, etc. The notes contain an extensive bibliography.

**Reviewer's recommendation:** I think this book is a *must read* since it affects *everyone* across all generations. It's a primer on major forces already powerfully set in motion and it is already past the time to begin responding with innovative solutions. With the current scarcity model that rules our society, current institutions and entitlement programs for the elderly will be woefully insufficient. As Dychtwald says in his introduction...

"The elderly are not "them" - they're "us", a few decades in the future."

...except we no longer have those "few decades" to take action.



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Frumi and Deborah Gaal are co-founders of the Leaderly Learning Center, a leadership development company specializing in women. We get results because our workshops are led by women who have been CEO's, entrepreneurs and certified coaches. We walk the walk.

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