

Meyler Campbell

PRESS RELEASE

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Positive Approach to Ageing Can Have Huge Impact, Meyler Campbell Annual Lecture Hears

Professor Felicia Huppert Outlines Five Key Points That Make a Difference in Performance and Wellbeing When Getting Older, As UK Life Expectancy Increases By Five Hours per Day!

A more positive attitude towards ageing and the need for older people to connect, be active, take notice, keep learning, and do things for other people, will be crucial for individuals and communities as we confront the new realities of ageing. This was one of the key messages which came out of the 2009 Meyler Campbell Annual Lecture given by Professor Felicia A Huppert, Director of the Well-Being Institute at the University of Cambridge. The lecture was the fifth Meyler Campbell Annual Lecture and took place at the Royal Society of Medicine on Wednesday November 12th 2009.

In her talk *'The Science of High Performance Ageing'*, Professor Huppert brought 160 guests right up to date with the latest research on ageing and the significant implications it brings for coaches, policymakers and leaders.

Research demonstrates that people are living longer, healthier and more productive lives, and that through a positive mental state, they can have a broader focus of attention, generate more ideas, and contribute more to both the workplace and society as a whole. According to Professor Huppert, ageing is, to a certain extent, 'malleable', and that increased well-being can have an enormously positive impact.

Professor Huppert argued that there must be a dramatically different attitude towards ageing both in and outside the workplace, a greater focus on continuing career development, and an acknowledgement that age diversity is valuable.

Professor Huppert warned, however, that social structures and attitudes are continuing to lag behind the new reality of ageing with negative age stereotypes having a potentially devastating effect on performance, confidence and physiological functions.

Meyler Campbell Managing Director, Anne Scoular, commented:

"The Meyler Campbell Annual Lecture is all about bringing experts in a related field to shock, surprise and challenge us into new ways of thinking and different approaches to coaching. Four years on from delivering the first annual lecture, it's fair to say that Professor Felicia Huppert has met and surpassed her brief!"

“What is ageing potential? Who are the people who thrive and why? And how can we better harness the huge capabilities and resources of the post-65 retirement generation? There were so many positive things which came out of this year’s lecture and so many things we can apply to our roles as coaches in bringing positive changes both to individuals and the community.”

“What came through to me was essentially a very positive message – that we are not powerless in the struggle against ageing’s seemingly inexorable progress and that, if we can increase well-being for older people, this will have a profound impact on mental health, the workplace and society in general. Thank you Felicia!”

We Are All Living Longer!

Professor Huppert pointed to research (which includes a series of longitudinal surveys carried out over many years) showing that 80% of people are living up to a third of their lives past the retirement age of 65. Key research highlights included:

- That people in the UK are living two years longer every decadeⁱ. That amounts to a remarkable increased life expectancy of five hours longer per day, with no signs of this increase tailing off.
- That people are ageing more healthily with it being important that people are able to carry out typical neurological functions, such as the ability to reason, discuss and get excited. Professor Huppert cited a 2001 study in the Leicestershire town of Melton Mowbrayⁱⁱ where for residents of 75 years of age or above, over 90% of their remaining years would be ‘cognitive impairment-free’.
- Professor Huppert also pointed to research which found that common mental disorders, such as depression and anxiety, dropped significantly among both men and women when they reach retirement ageⁱⁱⁱ – a significant indictment of today’s working culture.

Drawing conclusions from this research, Professor Huppert argued that the original retirement age of 65, set by Otto von Bismarck in 1889 (when few people lived long enough to retire), was no longer useful and that negative age stereotypes and the inability to accept the current reality was leading to a huge financial burden and a huge potential waste of resources.

Professor Huppert also suggested the concept of phased retirement, where people don’t stop their careers abruptly, but reduce their workloads over time, so that their accumulated wisdom can be better shared with colleagues.

The Ageing Process is Malleable!

Professor Huppert also looked in detail at the ageing process and how we can adapt our physical ability, sensory functions and mental capabilities, as we get older. While she acknowledged that such areas decline with age, there are ways in which we can lengthen our life and increase our contributions.

Research highlights included:

- That people who keep up a form of physical activity slow their decline in physical abilities. For example, research has found that active people in their 60’s can have a similar physical ability to a ‘sedentary’ thirty year old^{iv}. Even

people with an average age of 87 can significantly improve their muscle speed, walking speed, and stair power through physical activity^v.

- Professor Huppert also acknowledged that research has found sensory functions and mental capabilities decline with age but argued that this doesn't need to be devastating. Research, for example, has found that variability in cognitive functions increases with age^{vi}. Older people who do well cognitively activate more areas of the brain and can grow new pathways at any stage in life.
- What was also interesting to draw from the research is that other variables, such as education, can be as important a pull on the brain as age. While research finds that the older the group, the worse their numerical ability, the older group with a degree still outperformed the youngest group with no qualifications^{vii}.
- Research has also found that cognitive training on older adults has clear benefits with improvements in memory, reasoning and speed^{viii}.

The Psychology of Ageing

In her lecture, Professor Huppert also pointed to the very strong relationship between well-being and cognitive capability. Research has found that people in a positive mood have a broader focus of attention, generate more ideas, and are more resilient in stressful situations.

Positive people are also likely to live longer. To demonstrate this, Professor Huppert pointed to the study of 180 nuns who wrote autobiographies when they were around 18 years of age. These autobiographies were grouped according to positive emotional content. A nine-year difference in the probability of survival in later life was found between those nuns who were most positive in their autobiographies and those who were least positive – remarkable for a group of people who live close to identical lives.

Receiving and giving support is also good for health and survival. Research shows that people have a 20% less risk of dying if they have support and 30% less chance if they give support^{ix}. Research also shows that positive attitudes through meditation has a beneficial effect on the immune system^x.

Translating Science Into Practice

So how do we translate the science into practice? How can these findings help policy makers, local authorities and individuals?

Professor Huppert pointed to the work of the new economics foundation (NEF) and the UK Government Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Well-Being which drew up five ways to improve mental well-being. These are:

- **Connecting.** It's important for people to be connected with others. For example, people feel less pain when given a shock if they are sitting beside someone. Sociable people are also less likely to get the common cold.
- **Being Active.** People develop better brain structures if they are active. In the words of Professor Huppert, being active is "*the best anti depressant we have.*"
- **Taking Notice.** It's important for us to be aware of what is going on around us. One technique which trains people in the skills of awareness is called

mindfulness. The Mental Health Foundation will be publishing a report in this area in January 2010.

- **Keeping Learning.** Learning and taking on more information gives us a sense of confidence and mastery and also increases brain connectivity.
- **Giving.** Finally, giving makes us feel better about ourselves. We have micro-neurons in the brain that reflect other people's moods. Benefiting others makes us feel good.

Professor Huppert said that encouraging work in these areas was already taking place, such as better treatment and care for mental disorders within the Department of Health and the dissemination of the five key messages to well-being in local schools in Norfolk.

Further information on the UK Government Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Well-Being can be found at www.foresight.gov.uk/OurWork/ActiveProjects/MentalCapital/Welcome.asp and on the new economics foundation (NEF) at www.neweconomics.org.

Professor Huppert ended her lecture with a rallying call to coaches, policy makers and individuals:

“The five paths to mental well-being may seem obvious, but the key difference today is that they are now underpinned by good science. You can now have full confidence in these methods and can recommend them to clients and friends alike. Positive attitudes towards ageing reinforce health and capabilities and will make a crucial difference both to individuals and society as a whole.”

Meyler Campbell (www.meylercampbell.com) trains and develops senior business people to coach in demanding contexts through its fully accredited Business Coach programme. Meyler Campbell also hosts Europe's most dynamic learning community for business coaches and leaders and is currently celebrating its tenth anniversary year having put on over 130 events.

This is the fifth Meyler Campbell Annual Lecture, an opportunity for business coaches to listen to new thinking by a world expert from a related field. Past speakers include Professor Carol Kauffman of Harvard University and one of America's leading academics and thinkers on coaching; and Professor Paul Babiak, a leading industrial and organizational psychologist and co-author of the highly acclaimed book *‘Snakes in Suits – When Psychopaths Go to Work’*.

ⁱ Oppen & Vaupel, Science, May 2002

ⁱⁱ Sauvaget et al, Age & Ageing 2001

ⁱⁱⁱ Villamil et al, Psychol Med. 2006

^{iv} Bassey, Reviews in Clinical Gerontology, 1997

^v Bassey, Reviews in Clinical Gerontology, 1997

^{vi} English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA).

^{vii} English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) Women.

^{viii} ACTIVE trial, 2002.

^{ix} Brown et al., Psychol Science, 2003, CLOC study, 423 couples, 5 year follow-up.

^x Richard J Davidson, Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience, University of Wisconsin