

## Baby boomers are approaching ageing in a different way...



by Keren Smedley

I'VE worked for almost 30 years as a coach, consultant and counsellor. I'm a baby boomer and I've reached a 'certain age' but internally I'm still full of energy and innovative ideas. I was aware when I turned 50 that I was entering a new phase of life. I was no longer young but I certainly wasn't what I thought of as old.

Talking to friends and colleagues about this, I quickly discovered they felt much the same. I also became aware that many of my 50+ clients were regularly raising issues related to age in coaching sessions. Which just goes to show that baby boomers are approaching ageing in a very different way from our parents and that there's no longer any blueprint.

As a specialist in organisational and peo-

ple development, I have both the life skills and expertise to help others to challenge these issues and to find new and interesting ways to manage their lives. So, I set up Experience Matters, a company that specialises in coaching and consulting on age-related issues and helps individuals and organisations to find positive solutions. I feel passionate about altering out-dated stereotypes about age and helping people to change their beliefs and attitudes so this period of their life is as productive and fruitful as everything that went before.

I was, I must admit, a bit shocked at my response to the CEO of a centre that offers activities and services to the over-55s when they asked me if I'd come to the centre in a non-professional capacity. My immediate response was no! I was working with the management and very happy to do that but realised that I wouldn't want to become a member. I was rightly questioned on this and I've been pondering it ever since.

I started to reflect on who I spend my time with and wondered if I had deliberately moved myself towards a younger group of friends. Then

I realised that most of my close friends are six or seven years either side of me age-wise. Of course, there are exceptions but, if I'm honest, the young people I know, who are part of my children's generation, are not intimate friends in the way those who have common shared life experiences having been born, like me, in the 1950s. We were all brought up in an era when life was very different. This generation, by contrast, have redefined stereotypes and done life differently.

No one can help getting older but no one wants to become an old person. Age no longer defines what you can or can't do: these days, it's possible for people in their 50s or 60s to start a new career, find a new lover, get remarried, have a young family, run a marathon, travel the world, take up a new high-risk sport or start a new business.

My reason for not wanting to join a centre clearly isn't because I don't like people who are over 55. So what is it?

I've never been someone who likes to be defined as a particular type of person. I've tried to be very flexible and to fit in with a wide group of people. I see people at activities for this age group

labelling themselves as 50+ or 60+ and I'm fearful of that having an adverse affect on me. Maybe I'm in denial: I know I'm older but, by avoiding places that cater for my age group, I can pretend I'm not part of it. On the other hand, I'm an advocate for activities that are appropriate for the users and I know I want to do different things from most 30-year-olds, so a centre that caters for my needs would be ideal.

When I scanned my life, I realised that I'm not a good joiner and never have been. I love my friends and spending time with them. I enjoy going to talks, concerts, and films. I like walking and taking exercise but I don't like doing it in a group. I've worked for myself in collaboration with others for the past 30-something years. I last worked full-time for an organisation when I was very young.

The more I pondered, the clearer it was that it's nothing to do with centres or activities for the over-50s. It's to do with me! I wouldn't join a centre for women with blonde hair or who had three sons because, well, I'm just not a joiner. Once I arrived at that conclusion, I felt better – and I wasn't being hypocritical.

I do genuinely believe

that centres for the more mature are right for those who want to get involved. But, just because I'm older, I don't need to change if I'm happy as I am. That said, I'm also not too old to change my mind so I might just give it a go and see if I've been missing out on something I'd really enjoy.

I'd be interested to know your thoughts...  
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