

What advice would you give your great-grandchildren?

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What advice would you give your great grandchildren?

Okay, you had to know THIS was coming. Lessee.

The earliest I could get a grandchild would be the end of October, 2022. Let's assume that child moves to Arkansas. Or Louisiana. Alabama. Mississippi. Southern Ohio. And that child either sires or gives birth to a child of their own on their eighteenth birthday.

That kid starts talking at around age, oh, two or so. Maybe a bit earlier. But really isn't in any shape to take any real advice (other than, "No, bugs are cool! Most of them won't hurt you." "Best to leave dead animals as they lay." "Maybe this isn't a good time to check that part of your body out—why don't you wait until you're alone, or until one of your parents can help you?) would probably be around, oh, twelve.

So I've had a birthday between now and the birth. Add eighteen years for subsequent parenthood. And then another twelve for getting-to-where-advice-might-take-seed age.

I am now ninety-four. If I am still around. And if I am of sound enough mind and body to be dispensing advice! Buuuut we can fantasize a little. That's probably the point of the question, unless you were fishing for what I just wrote...

First, you can always start over. You can always choose. You can always move forward. You may make a mistake, or a series of mistakes, or find yourself in some situation from which you believe you will never recover. Unless you're missing your arms and legs and are hooked up to machines with no way to

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communicate (and maybe even then; thankfully I don't know), accept, completely and totally, where you are. Think about how you got there only so far as that journey might have lessons to teach you so you don't end up there again, but that's it. Other than that, let it go. Completely. And figure out the best way to move forward.

I've been in places like that. I wish I knew what I just wrote then. I'd have felt much better, and probably made more progress, sooner!

You will find much more meaning in satisfaction than in exhilaration. People who seek exhilaration, in fact, almost never find satisfaction. They must continually seek that bigger and better bang, that next new thrill. Always takes a bigger dose. But satisfaction is much more rewarding. And more meaningful. Be with people you love, and love them especially when doing so is difficult. Build that home. Relish that family. Put in the time and effort required to reach a difficult and meaningful goal—people who live in exhilaration world rarely do that. They don't have the persistence. And they never know the joy.

Spend your time with people who make you feel warm and make you laugh. Do the same for them. Laughter and warmth are two of the most valuable elements of a happy life, but you have to go find them. For the most part.

Take care of yourself. Exercise and fitness have, near as I can tell, very little to do with how long you live. Look at Grandpa (that would be the child's great-great-grandpa, I guess). He lived to be eighty-seven even though he took horrible care of himself. But fitness has everything to do with quality of life. The other week, I saw one of the security staff here at the school make his way up one of the stairwells. He's not as old as I am. He had to stop midway through for I think a full minute to catch his breath.

How much fun can life be if you can't get up a couple flights of stairs without stopping to catch your breath? And how is he ever going to catch a cretin?

As I write this, I'm sixty-three. I'm not going to win any marathons, or any bicycle races, but I don't have to stop halfway up a flight of stairs because I'm out of breath. Taking care of yourself, to reiterate, has nothing to do with how long you live. Or at least not that much. Your cells are pre-programmed to split so many times. Once that process is done, and it varies from person to person, you're done, too. But it has everything to do with quality of life. Hiking, backpacking,

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rafting, bicycling—I am so pleased to still be able to do these things. Lots of folks I know my age can't even consider any of those things.

I'd be so depressed. Instead, I'm still out there having fun!

If you commit your life to someone, you will find times in which you question that decision. You might go on a fault-finding mission. Almost invariably, not always but most of the time, the dissatisfaction you feel is really with yourself. Look fresh at your partner. What if you just met? Wouldn't you want to go out again? Do things? Become a family?

And then do nice things for that person. When I'm unhappy with Mom (and I'm on my game; sadly those two things don't always coincide, but I'm trying!), I try to find two or three things about her, about her now-her, that I can appreciate. And I go out of my way to say and do nice things to her and for her. Invariably, once I've done that, I feel better about her. Oh and myself.

Always have a challenge in front of you. If you can, several challenges—physical, mental, intellectual, spiritual. Doesn't always have to be something completely new (this goes back to the exhilaration versus satisfaction thing). Just getting better at things can be a sufficient challenge. Getting better at running or bicycling. Getting better at crossword puzzles might be a thing. (Might take that up since I'm getting older.) Getting a degree, a certificate, getting better at your job. Learning to meditate, getting better at being calm. Sometimes just being calm. But, as I often told your great-grandmother, your mother or your father, when you're green, you grow. When you're ripe, you rot. Look at the people who wallow in lethargy, anger, poor health, depression. How many of those have something worthwhile towards which they are working?

Yeah, that's what I thought! Always be working for something significant, worthwhile, and you will never be among them.

Look for the good in other people. When you see good in someone, tell them. Finding issues and problems and faults—that's too easy. When you start to make a habit of saying nice things to people, you start to understand the power of doing so. And when you start doing nice things for other people, golly. It explodes. And the weird thing is the biggest beneficiary isn't the recipient—it's you.

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Okay that's much more advice than I thought I'd be throwing out. So just a couple more fast ones. These really aren't mine; they're Teddy Roosevelt's. But I love them both.

First, don't shy away from difficult tasks because you worry you won't be successful. This sounds trite; it's not Teddy's, it's Cracker Jack philosophy: "It's not the destination; it's the journey." And that is true. In the struggle is growth and learning, and even (here's that word again) satisfaction. You get so much out of putting forth a good solid effort. Yes, if you don't hit your mark, you'll experience a bit of disappointment. But you'll know. And maybe you'll have learned enough to try again, and the next time be successful. Or at least get closer, prepared for the try after that.

As Teddy put it, "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

I don't know that, in fact I'm sure I haven't, put this little gems (such as they are) in order of importance. But I'll leave with one more Teddyism: "Comparison is the thief of joy." Just about everything you can do, someone, somewhere, has done better. More often. With less effort. No matter how big your house is, how nice, someone has one bigger and nicer. And if not, I bet you're miserable. Just look at Citizen Kane! No matter how fast you run or ride or shoot or how well you dance, probably someone will exceed you. Don't look at them with envy or jealousy. Learn from them. You will find so much freedom in dropping resentment. And doing so frees you to luxuriate in appreciation. And share that appreciation. You'll be the better for it.

Okay that is more than I thought I'd dispense. And it violates my rule of learning one thing at a time. Plus, my great grandchild, I will never know you anyway! But for anyone else who might be interested in my thoughts, well, here they are!