

Universal Design - I'll Be Fine

By Konrad Kaletsch 2009©

I go to sleep at night, not wondering if the sun will rise tomorrow. I don't ponder if there will be a winter next January. I won't check the night sky to see if the moon is still there. All those seem like certainties - they seem guaranteed.

I also don't wonder if I will be alive tomorrow. I don't worry about how much time I have left. I don't worry if the salt and sugar is hardening arteries and forming diabetes. I don't even worry if I'll have enough cash when I get old. So, how could I spend much mental energy on universal design when myself and my surroundings suggest, "don't worry about it; you'll be fine; you'll figure it out."

Thinking about aging puts a knot in my stomach that I would rather not feel. I'm much happier pretending that I will be fine. I'm much happier worrying about the past day and the next one. To concern myself with the life I'll be living 30 or 40 years from now just doesn't hold my interest.

Is there a technique that I can apply that would help me take actions today that would assure an independent, secure, comfortable and joyful future? How do I get excited and motivated?

Remember the vacation you always said you would take and then finally took? The process began with a dream or maybe an impulse. A bit of research, a few conversations, some internet, and then one day, you hit CONFIRM and you had yourself a ticket, a hotel and a car. Did you just drift back into a ho-hum, everything-is-normal way of being, or did you have a spring in your step? Did you focus on the work at hand, or did you think about that cool cocktail being served to you as you glow in a setting sun. Once you had that ticket, you were not normal - you told the world; you cut out of work early and got a new outfit for the vacation. You were gone in a few weeks - you couldn't wait!

That's the technique that gets you revved up about life 30, 40, 50 or maybe even 60 years from now. It won't be a pretense either - you'll be on a real track. Here's how it goes: much like the dream vacation, start to imagine your dream lifestyle as an older person. Who are you? Who have you become (go ahead and say these things out loud, write them in a journal, or create a mental image)? Are you rich in cash, rich in spirit, rich in love? Do you live in the sun or the cold? Are you social or solo? Is the family big? What will make you happy? What would you like to be doing for others? Do you live in the city or country? This is your fantasy - if you catch yourself being reasonable, cut it out, go wild! Get everything in there that you want to be and have.

With this vivid mental picture of yourself as an older person, imagine moving toward the present by ten years. Ask yourself this question: what would I have so

that this dream is on track for being realized? Let's say you pictured yourself at age 70 living on a beautiful ranch in Montana. Move forward ten years to age 60 -what have you done by 60 to be on track for that vision at 70; maybe you just moved to Montana. Once clear, move forward another ten years. Fill in that picture. In the example, you are now 50; what has to be complete by 50 so that the picture of 60 is a slam dunk? Maybe you have to sort out a new means of income so you can pack up and move to Montana. As we get closer to the present (let's say that you are presently 40 years old), the time jumps are shorter. You would go from a picture of life at 50 to 45, then to one year from now, to 6 months from now, to 1 month, to one week, to now. What do you do right now so that next week will be a done deal (and then one month from now, 6 months, one year, age 45, then 50, then 60 and then 70)? Your right-now action might be to research Montana and begin planning a trip there - right now! And you are excited!

If at the beginning of this post, I asked, "what are you doing today so that being age 70 is gonna be just great," your answer might be much less passionate, "uh, I have an IRA." Now, many meaningful conversations are possible including one about universal design - in fact, it's critical to your desired lifestyle at age 70, and, it also makes the years in between much more livable.

Are you planning on living in your own home at age 70? Will you be mobile? Will you still be earning an income? Will you be social? Will others be able to visit you? What do you want to do for others? An environment with universal design will make that future much more possible than one without. Your next action, right now, Google: Universal Design Resource. Find out more, discover.