



30 LESSONS FOR LIVING

by Karl Pillemer, Ph.D.



Overview

Although we all inevitably learn what paths and practices can help us to pursue the life course we want, we often learn them too late for them to have practical application. Dr. Karl Pillemer spoke with more than one thousand older Americans and compiled the results into this book. It aims to show what has and has not worked for the most experienced Americans over the course of their lives. Lessons include how to choose a marriage partner, how to avoid regret in decision-making, and how to handle one's career situations.

Chapter 1. Who Are the Wisest Americans and What Can They Tell Us?

"A younger person simply can't know life as intimately and deeply as an older person does."

Interviews were conducted with over 1,000 of America's elders. "The experts" as Dr. Pillemer (a gerontologist) calls them, hold the knowledge to guide us in our desired direction. And yet this knowledge is regrettably underappreciated. The experts offer a unique perspective for those looking to get the most out of life, built atop bona fide experience. They are a unique, but unfortunately fading, source. This insight must be preserved lest we risk losing it completely. "The experts" have lived through some of the toughest situations humans can face, and have made it out just fine. Besides simply showing us that we too can make it through these hard experiences, they also share valuable knowledge. Many have experienced the hardships of war and poverty, but have also lived in a world in which people interacted very differently than today. Their advice both highlights and helps understand how social conventions have changed over the years. They can teach us both how to achieve the ideal life within the cultural values, and also to question current social conventions.

*"The experts possess **deep knowledge** of just about **every problem** a human being can experience."*

Chapter 2. Great Together – Lessons for a Happy Marriage

On one hand, 50% of all U.S. marriages end in divorce, but on the other hand, 90% of all Americans get married, and around 75% of all divorcees remarry. Older Americans felt many of the same things today's couples feel, and thus their insight is still invaluable despite the methods of courtship having changed.

1. **Marry Someone a Lot Like You.** Older Americans agree that the most important thing to look for in a long-term partner is similar core values. Similarities in core beliefs will make it simpler to approach life alongside someone. Arguments over seemingly trivial things often stem from deeper differences. It is necessary to first understand your own values before you know how well they align with others'. This is backed up by evidence that similar values lead to longer, happier marriages.
2. **Friendship Is as Important as Romantic Love.** Older Americans suggest you look for the characteristics you seek in friendship. For example, you should feel comfortable around them, able to talk freely, and enjoy the time you spend together.
3. **Don't Keep Score.** Both parties in a marriage will benefit the most by entering the marriage under the assumption that each plans to *give* more than *take*. By planning to put effort into helping the other party, rather than personal gain, each partner ends up lightening the load for the other. One example could be simply asking how you can make your wife's day easier, which can change her entire day.
4. **Talk to Each Other.** While it is reasonable to have minor taboo topics, "the experts" suggest that you should aim for a partner in whom you can discuss anything. The ability to communicate *any* topic becomes essential to a long, happy marriage. Conflicts should be addressed before turning into resentment. Do not avoid fights, but rather be willing to address them and move on from them.



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