

What Matters Now?

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According to the [most recent survey](#) by the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners (NBCE), almost 40 percent of our profession has been practicing for 25 years or more.¹ This puts many of us close to or over 50 years of age, and within a decade or two of retirement.

There is an interesting shift in your perspective when you reach the age of 50. You begin to realize you are probably closer to the end of your life than you are to the beginning. You also tend to have a better understanding of what's really important and what is just "part of life." As you look ahead, the end of your days begins to peer at you over the not-too-distant horizon.

A close friend of mine came across an interesting lecture (given as one of the "TED Talks") that he found particularly meaningful. He shared the link with me the day before Christmas. After viewing it, I thought it important to share it with you.²

[The talk](#) is given by Robert Waldinger, a psychiatrist who is the current director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development. The study began in 1938 and has been tracking the lives of two groups of men for more than 75 years. The two groups consist of men who were attending Harvard College at the time and men who, at the time, were "a group of boys from Boston's poorest neighborhoods, boys who were chosen for the study specifically because they were from some of the most troubled and disadvantaged families in the Boston of the 1930s."

A total of 724 men were studied from their teens through adulthood. All but 60 have died. Every two years throughout their lives, they filled out questionnaires, were given medical exams and were interviewed, along with their parents, spouses and children. The interviews took place in their homes, where interactions with their families also could be observed. As you might guess, they represented the full spectrum of success, from factory workers to a president of the United States.

With thousands of pages of data, the researchers determined "the clearest message that we get from this 75-year study is this: Good relationships keep us happier and healthier." According to Dr. Waldinger, the study revealed three lessons about the importance of relationships in our lives:

- "[S]ocial connections are really good for us, [and] loneliness kills. It turns out that people who are more socially connected to family, to friends, to community, are happier, they're physically healthier, and they live longer than people who are less well connected."
- "[I]t's not just the number of friends you have, and it's not whether or not you're in a committed relationship, but it's the quality of your close relationships that matters. It turns out that living in the midst of conflict is really bad for our health. High-conflict marriages, for example, without much affection, turn out to be very bad for our health, perhaps worse than getting divorced. And living in the midst of good, warm relationships is protective."
- "[G]ood relationships don't just protect our bodies, they protect our brains. It turns out that being in a securely attached relationship to another person in your 80s is protective, that the people who are in relationships where they really feel they can count on the other person in times of need, those people's memories stay sharper longer. And the people in relationships

where they feel they really can't count on the other one, those are the people who experience earlier [memory decline](#)."

Many of us grow up with dreams of fame, fortune and success. But the truth is all those things eventually fade, even if you're able to attain them. What matters most for our health and happiness is the quality of the relationships we build.

So, whether you're winding your way to the end of your career or still climbing to the pinnacle of your success, you will eventually ask yourself the question we all eventually ask: "What matters now?"

The answer is family, friends and other important relationships. As [Dr. Waldinger](#) concluded in his talk, "Over and over, over these 75 years, our study has shown that the people who fared the best were the people who leaned in to relationships, with family, with friends, with community."

References

1. *Practice Analysis of Chiropractic 2015*. National Board of Chiropractic Examiners.
 2. Waldinger R. "What Makes a Good Life? Lessons From the Longest Study on Happiness." Access via the online version of this article.
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