

# Refire!

## Don't Retire

Make the Rest of Your Life  
the Best of Your Life

Ken  
Blanchard

#1 *New York Times* Bestselling Coauthor of *The One Minute Manager*®

& Morton  
Shaevitz

Psychologist, Bestselling Author, and Expert on  
New Models of Aging



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"This book is full of simple truths of profound value to mature adults in transition who are ready to focus on significance rather than success. It is also playfully inspiring, encouraging the reader to be open and spontaneous through such things as identifying a 'Last Minute Gang' and living by the 'Nothing Ordinary' rule. It's a delightful read!"

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## Refire! Don't Retire

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**To “Zig” Ziglar**  
1926–2012

*An author, salesman, motivational speaker,  
and inspiring friend who first introduced Ken  
to the concept of refiring. With his incredible,  
positive energy, Zig made a difference in the lives  
of everyone with whom he came in contact.*

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# Introduction

It's often said that there is no such thing as a coincidence. Given the dynamic nature of the universe, when things happen, they happen for a reason. So, when the two of us met on an early morning flight from San Diego to New York, it was not by chance.

Perhaps it was *serendipity*—something that was destined to happen, that was meant to be. If we pursue this concept further, we find the Yiddish word *bashert*, which roughly translates into “a happy, joyous event that was meant for good.”

“So what are you into and what's new in your life?” was the beginning of our plane conversation. For the next fifteen minutes, we spoke with growing enthusiasm and animation. We talked about the things we were doing, and especially what we were excited about. When Morton mentioned he was working in the area of older adults and looking at aging from a new and different perspective, Ken

pped up and said he'd been thinking about similar issues. The term he was using was *refire*—an attitude of embracing the years ahead with enthusiasm rather than apathy. At that moment, this book was born.

We continued talking nonstop, leaning over the airline seats that separated us. Finally, we had to be forcibly seated by the flight attendants so that the plane could take off. Throughout the five-hour flight to New York, we continued to exchange ideas until the movie came on and silenced us. As we deplaned, we decided to meet soon to continue the conversation.

By the time we met again, Morton had attended a birthday party for someone he had known in college. He came back intrigued by what he had observed. It wasn't just that everyone looked older—of course they did. It was how differently they were approaching aging. While some seemed intellectually energetic and engaged in the world, others seemed to have little joy or sense of a future—nothing they were striving for.

Coincidentally, Ken and his wife Margie had just returned from a two-week cruise. Ken reported similar observations about his fellow travelers, most of whom were seniors. Some were vivacious, taking advantage of the classes and activities offered by the cruise ship, while others were withdrawn and didn't come alive until mealtime.

As we discussed what each of us had experienced, we began wondering what accounted for these two different ways our age group was handling aging. Why were some

people seeing the rest of their lives as an opportunity, while others were treating it as some kind of sentence?

Talking about this with our adult children, we discovered that this view of life was not limited to seniors—our middle-aged kids had some friends who also had the “best years are behind us” approach to life.

We thought about those of our friends and colleagues who were embracing—rather than enduring—life and tried to figure out what made them different. We concluded that much depended on what they believed about growing older and how they were approaching life. We also concluded that if those who were merely enduring could be helped to think differently, they might begin to behave differently and, if you will, *refire*.

What are you going to do with the rest of your life to make it healthy, joyful, and meaningful? We wrote *Refire* as a guide to answering that question. In the parable and suggestions that follow, we hope you find inspiration to create an exciting future.

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# 1

## A Wake-up Call

Larry Sparks took his wife's hand as they headed to the entrance of the hotel ballroom. He did so partly for moral support, but mostly because after nearly forty years of marriage, he was prouder than ever of Janice, his still beautiful bride.

"The registration table's got to be up here somewhere," he said.

Around them a crowd of people—nearly all of them approximately their age—moved with Larry and Janice toward the ballroom doors.

Larry leaned over and whispered into Janice's ear. "Who are all these old geezers?" he joked.

She looked over at him and smiled. "I'm sure they're thinking the exact same thing about us."

"Nah," said Larry. At that moment the registration table came into view beneath a sign that read:

**LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL**  
45TH REUNION — GO EAGLES!

Janice ducked into the ladies' room and Larry was busy filling out a name tag when he heard a vaguely familiar voice behind him.

"Larry Sparks! Is that you?"

Larry turned to see what he thought was a complete stranger making his way toward him. The man appeared world weary, with slumped shoulders and thinning gray hair. It wasn't until the man gave Larry a good-natured slap on the back that he recognized Rob Briggs, the smart kid who'd helped him through chemistry and physics in his junior and senior years.

"Hey, Rob. Wow. Long time no see! How you been?"

"Ah, you know, not great—but consider the alternative, right?" Rob let out a half-hearted laugh. "I wasn't sure if it was you or Kevin. But I knew it had to be one of you guys."

With those words, Larry had a major flashback. This was just like high school, all right. During his entire four years at Lincoln, Larry was forever being mistaken for his fraternal twin, Kevin.

"I'm afraid Kevin couldn't make it," said Larry. "He's off somewhere putting together another deal." Larry shook his head. The sibling rivalry he'd once felt with Kevin had mellowed. Still, he couldn't help but compare himself to his twin.

"So Kevin's still an overachiever, huh?" Rob laughed. "I guess things don't change that much in forty-five years. Are you still with Janice?"

“Absolutely, and we’re having more fun than ever.”

Right on cue, Janice appeared at Larry’s side. She recognized Rob at once and gave him a big hug. The three of them caught up on kids and careers and promised to reconnect during the big dinner and dancing event at the end of the weekend.



Two nights and a lot of reminiscing later, Larry and Janice returned to the hotel ballroom and enjoyed a surprisingly good reunion dinner. After a chocolate mousse dessert, the music began. Janice—the extrovert of the pair—dragged Larry onto the dance floor for a few numbers and then encouraged him to join her in finding and catching up with old friends.

They were heading back to their table when they finally found Rob again.

“You two having fun?” Rob asked.

“We’re having a blast with a lot of folks,” said Janice, “but I’m worried about a few people in this crowd.”

“What do you mean?” asked Rob.

“Based on our observations over the course of this weekend, the biggest activity for some of our fellow classmates is eating,” Larry replied.

“And eating a lot,” Janice added. “Not to mention drinking.”

Rob shrugged. “Isn’t that what you’re supposed to do at a reunion?”

Larry nodded toward the dance floor. “Yeah, but they’re missing out on the dancing, and only a few people have

turned out for the outdoor activities that have been happening the past couple of days. I at least try to stay in shape. As I always say to Janice, 'Someday I want to be one of the four guys on the tour bus in Hawaii.'

"The tour bus in Hawaii?" said Rob, looking puzzled.

Larry laughed. "Yeah. Whenever you see a crowd of seniors getting off a tour bus in Hawaii, there are about thirty well-preserved women and only about four old guys—because all the other men have died off."

They all had a good laugh at that.

"Kidding aside," said Janice, "it makes me sad that some of our fellow Eagles are approaching getting older as a life sentence rather than a wonderful opportunity."

"It's not just seniors who act that way," said Rob. "I work with a bunch of thirty- and forty-year-olds at a tech firm. You'd be shocked how many of these people do nothing after work but go home to their couches, complaining about old athletic injuries and mumbling jokes like, 'Old age is no place for sissies.'"

"That's a funny line, but it's a terrible motto," said Janice. "I want to embrace what's left of life, not complain about it."

Larry, an avid golfer, nodded and said, "I know I'm on the back nine, but I want to finish strong."

"If you want to finish strong, that's the person you should talk to," said Rob. He pointed to a handsome man with a thick head of salt-and-pepper gray hair who was chatting with some others near the dance floor.

"Is that our ninth-grade biology teacher, Mr. Jeffrey?" asked Larry.

"Yeah," said Rob, "but it's Dr. Jeffrey now. He taught for a couple of years but left teaching to go to graduate school and get his PhD. He now heads the department of psychology at our local university and teaches in the interdisciplinary psychology/philosophy program. He's become pretty well known. Really, you should go talk to him."



Larry tapped Dr. Jeffrey on the shoulder.

"Excuse me, sir. You were my favorite science teacher." He extended his hand. "Larry Sparks—and this is my wife, Janice."

"Good to see you, Larry!" said Dr. Jeffrey, vigorously shaking Larry's hand. "And hello, Janice."

"Biology wasn't exactly my best subject," said Larry. "Thanks for the B on that final. I know you were being kind."

"I'm sure you earned it," Dr. Jeffrey said with a laugh.

"I have to say, you look great," said Larry. "What are you up to these days? Are you retired?"

"I'm not even considering it!" bellowed Dr. Jeffrey. "Some of the greatest people in my field made their best contributions in their later years. I'm not retiring—I'm *refiring*!"

"*Refiring*? That sounds intriguing," said Janice. "What does it mean?"

Dr. Jeffrey didn't hesitate in answering. "To *refire* is to approach life with gusto. It's to see each day as an opportunity for adventure and learning! It's to infuse passion and zest into every area of your life—emotional,

intellectual, physical, and spiritual. Heart, head, body, and soul." He punctuated each word with the very passion of which he spoke.

"Sounds like you've given this some serious thought," said Janice.

Dr. Jeffrey nodded. "I've spent the better part of the past decade studying aging and exploring how the later decades in life can be rewarding and dynamic rather than limited and depressing. I teach and write extensively on the subject. I'll be happy to give you guys some coaching if you ever feel yourself falling into a rut."

Before Larry or Janice could answer, a woman in a red dress grabbed Dr. Jeffrey by the sleeve and pulled him onto the dance floor.



All the way home, Larry and Janice compared notes on the reunion. Once again they talked about how sad it was that some of their classmates seemed resigned to declining health, limited activities, stale relationships, and dreams turning to dust.

"Do you think we're in a rut?"

Janice's question took Larry aback.

"No. Why?"

"You don't exactly seem as excited about your construction business as you used to be. And I know I'm not approaching my life with gusto and infusing it with—what did Dr. Jeffrey call it?—passion and zest."

"Yeah, but come on," said Larry, suddenly feeling defensive as he pulled into the garage. "Is that even realistic? I mean, to a certain extent, life really is a grind."

"Now that's a zesty attitude, right there," kidded Janice as she got out of the car.

Inside the house, the phone was ringing.

"I'll get it," said Larry. He raced into the kitchen and caught it on the final ring.

"Hello?"

The line was silent. Larry thought he'd missed the caller and was about to hang up when he heard the distinct sound of a woman crying.

"Hello? Who is this?"

"It's Angie."

Angie—his brother's wife. Beneath her snuffling, her voice was very small.

"Are you okay, Ang?"

"He's gone, Larry." She sobbed openly now.

A cold wave of fear flowed through Larry's body. "What? Who's gone?"

"Your brother had a massive heart attack. He's gone, Larry! Our Kevin is gone."

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