

Program: The Search for a Meaningful Life in Retirement

Speaker: Charles Morris, Ph.D., Sciencetech Club member

Introduced by: Hank Wolfla

Attendance: 134

Guests: Les Snyder

Scribe: J. Mark Michael

Editor: Bonnie Carter

On August 5, 2019, Dr. Charles Morris presented “The Search for a Meaningful Life in Retirement.” Dr. Morris received his PhD in Psychology from the University of Missouri in 1968. He has become active in speaking and writing about the challenges and rewards of retirement after talking with retired individuals who complained of being depressed and leading purposeless lives. Dr. Morris advised us that playing a lot of golf is not a particularly good retirement plan, even if a retiree is financially secure.

Two major factors can contribute to difficult retirements. One is the loss of the “world of work” with its extensive social connections. The second is simply aging, with associated health problems and loss of mental sharpness. Although surveys have shown that older individuals enjoy more wellbeing and happiness than younger persons, especially those in their 30s and 40s, a substantial percentage of retirees report not being happy, and many retirees do not have adequate financial means to assure a good material quality of life.

Dr. Morris’ survey of Sciencetech Club members revealed that our group is generally enjoying a high level of happiness and wellbeing in retirement.

Dr. Morris offered several suggestions to improve our retirements and aging. The first was to “tend to memory.” Using peg words and similar associative strategies to help remember, for example items to buy at the grocery store, can be useful and maybe even entertaining. He noted: “We had a handy phrase in medical school to help us to remember the cranial nerves. That will probably be the last thing I forget in this life!” Keeping a personal journal can assist our memories and help us to keep track of significant events in our daily lives.

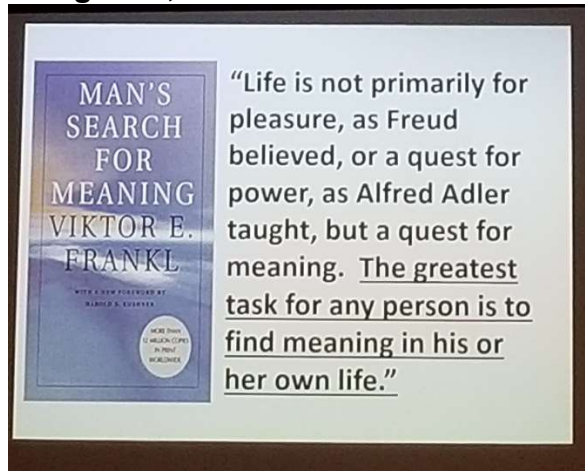
A second suggestion was to remain as physically active as possible. Keeping fit appears to be as useful for the brain as it is for the heart. A third suggestion was to identify your “signature strengths” and use them. Test yourself at: www.authentichappiness.org, www.gallupstrengthcenter.com, and <https://reflectedbestselfexercise.com>. Once recognized, an individual’s signature strengths can be used to develop good reasons to get out of bed each day (Japanese ‘ikigai’) and satisfy our quest for meaning in our lives. A fourth suggestion was to maintain relationships with others. Loneliness can be hazardous to good health.

Finally, Dr. Morris suggested that we try to enhance positivity as much as possible, using techniques such as gratitude visits to those who have helped us, maintaining a journal of good things happening in our lives or keeping a gratitude jar of fortune cookie-type notes detailing good things that we have encountered or done. There is a substantial hereditary component that determines our inclination to be optimistic or pessimistic, and research has suggested that optimistic people may enjoy greater longevity and less illness than pessimists. So, doing whatever we can to increase our level of optimism may be good, even if we’re natural born pessimists. Barbara Fredrickson’s book Positivity would be a good source for more information about this aspect of psychology. Test your level of positivity at: www.positivityratio.com.

Editor’s note: a complete set of the slides from Dr. Morris’ presentation will soon be available on the Sciencetech Club website.



Dr. Morris



A book recommended by Dr. Morris