

Life & Times

Viewpoint

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NOW IS THE TIME TO WORK ON YOUR BUCKET LIST

We all regret doing things in both our professional and personal lives. I certainly do. But, apparently, we needn't waste our time regretting the things we've done.

Over the last 6 months I've asked countless older patients a big question — '*Is there anything you regret doing in your life?*' And guess what? Astoundingly, they all reply with 'No'. None of them regret doing anything! They do, however, regret *not* doing things.

So there appears to be a difference: although younger people (who hopefully have many years left to live) regret the things they've done, older people (who are approaching the end of their lives) regret the things they haven't done. As a 29-year-old, there are many things that I regret doing in my own life, whereas my older patients regret the countless things they never got around to doing in their younger years.

So why this difference? I think it's down to how young people approach their future. When we forecast our lives, we see a career spanning over 40 years. During that time, we might marry and have kids, we might get divorced and remarry, our kids will move out and we'll care for our ageing parents. For young people, doing the things we always wanted to do — ticking off our bucket list — has to wait until retirement. There are simply far too many 'serious' things to be done first. This is certainly the case in our profession. We're committed to our patients, to providing care, to the NHS. We see consultants and senior partners retiring to the golf course, to travelling the world, to setting up businesses. But only after decades of serving on the frontline. Even Hollywood agrees with this, through Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman's 2007 blockbuster *The Bucket List*.¹ Although the terrible script only pulled 40% on Rotten Tomatoes, the message is clear — life begins at retirement.

However, we all know that life can suddenly and unexpectedly be cut short. Motor neurone disease, a road traffic collision, or a rare malignancy could end our lives abruptly and prematurely. We may never reach our retirement. And, even if we do, retirement is accompanied by failing health, dwindling energy, and declining mobility. So, the period of our lives reserved

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for our bucket list is, in fact, when we're least able to complete it.

This explains the difference between young and older people. The young regret what we've done: a wrong decision is embarrassing, a dead-end project is frustrating, a backfired risk is infuriating. In contrast, the old regret what they haven't done: not playing tennis before arthritis became bad, not travelling the world before tiredness set in, not learning a language before dementia took hold.

So, I've listened to my patients. To avoid regretting the things I haven't done in my own life, I've started to do them now. I've ticked off my own personal dreams: becoming a personal trainer, presenting a radio show, DJing at music events. I'm travelling more often, doing charity work I'm passionate about, writing the articles I always wanted to write. My bucket list is long and varied, and I've started to work on it while I'm still able to.

Working on your own bucket list is especially important in this time of relentless pressure on our profession: the contract rows, the inflating workloads, the endless media scrutiny. They all necessitate putting our own wellbeing in the spotlight. For me, the best 'resilience training' is honouring my passions, finding my 'flow', and engaging my interests.

Make sure you don't regret not doing something in your life. Whatever that something may be, start doing it today.

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