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## **A Talk With Michael J. Gelb and Kelly Howell, authors of *Brain Power: Improve Your Mind as You Age***

*Is it really possible to improve your mind as you age? Doesn't memory deteriorate as we grow older?*

Yes, it's possible to improve your mind as you age. Memory can, of course, deteriorate as we grow older, if we neglect it. The good news is that there are simple practices that the average person can do to prevent deterioration and actually improve with age. Brain Power is a guide to these simple practices.

*You share that the paradigm has shifted in relation to age and the mind. Please explain.*

Most of us were raised with faulty ideas about our mental capacity — such as the notion that IQ is fixed at age five, that brain cells degrade yearly after age thirty, and that memory and learning ability inevitably decline with age. These notions, based on the scientific understanding that was prevalent in the 1950s, are myths — dangerous myths that can stifle our ability to flourish in the second half of life.

Just as Copernicus overturned the myth that the earth was at the center of the universe, so contemporary neuroscience has revolutionized our understanding of the potential to improve mental functioning as we age. We now know that mental abilities, including memory, are designed to improve throughout life. Neuroscientists call this neuroplasticity.

The brain is not, as was once thought, a compartmentalized, hardwired, static machine whose parts eventually wear out. Instead, it is a highly adaptable and dynamic organ, capable of generating new neurons and improving as we get older. People of average intelligence can, with appropriate training, raise their IQ, enhance their memory, and sharpen their intelligence throughout life.

*What role does optimism play in longevity? Do cultural and environmental stimuli influence brain function?*

According to a long-term study by Dr. Becca Levy people with an optimistic attitude toward aging outlive those with a pessimistic attitude by an average of more than 7 years. It's easier to be an optimist when you know that the brain is designed to improve with use!

Our brain function is influenced by cultural, environmental and, of course, genetic factors. And, we can, by cultivating a positive, intelligent attitude toward aging, make the most of our genetic, cultural and environmental circumstances.

***What are the most powerful techniques to improve memory as we age?***

Maintaining a positive attitude about your memory is the first step. When people believe that their memory is fading, they don't bother trying to concentrate on registering new information, thus fulfilling their negative expectation. All memory techniques ( aka mnemonics) are based on strengthening associations, so focus on connecting new information to something you already know. I also strongly recommend "Mind Mapping" (developed by Tony Buzan, author of the Foreword to Brain Power) a technique for strengthening memory and creativity simultaneously.

***What are the worst mental habits to eliminate immediately?***

The worst mental habits are those that create and reinforce patterns of anxiety, fear and stress. That's why, in addition to the chapter on how to cultivate freedom from stress, this book comes with a free download of the remarkable Brain Sync audio program that effortlessly guides you to experience brain wave states associated with deep rest and relaxation.

***What are the most detrimental phrases to eliminate from internal and external conversations?***

The way you speak can reinforce or transform negative attitudes and stereotypes about aging. Be wary of conversations that focus on commiseration (literally "to be miserable together"). If you find yourself indulging in discussions that focus on how "things ain't what they used to be," shift to an emphasis on gratitude and appreciation.

Here are ten phrases to eliminate:

- I'm having a senior moment.
- I'm not what I used to be.
- I'm too old.
- I can't remember anything anymore.
- My memory is going.
- Getting older stinks.
- Everything was easier when I was younger.
- I'm over the hill.
- My best days are behind me.
- Things keep getting worse as I get older.

***There are so many brain boosting supplements on the market, if you were only to take a few, which ones are the most essential?***

A high quality multi-vitamin/mineral supplement is the most important daily brain-booster along with fish oil and Acetyl-L-carnitine (ALC).

