

NEVER  
TOO LATE  
*to be*  
GREAT



THE  
POWER  
*of*  
THINKING  
LONG

TOM BUTLER-BOWDON

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

COVER

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TITLE PAGE

DEDICATION

NOTE TO READER

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

## 1. WARMING UP

*Why what you've done so far may just have set the scene*

## 2. LIFE ISN'T SHORT

*How increasing longevity is giving us multiple chances to succeed*

## 3. THE LONG VIEW

*A simple way to join the elite*

## 4. LEAD TIME

*It's the 'time in between' that matters*

## 5. THE 40 FACTOR

*Why many people never do anything remarkable until their fifth decade*

## 6. MID-CENTURY MAGIC

*'Now for my next half-century'*

## 7. THE 30-YEAR GOLDMINE

*How many, usually without intention, save their best for last*

## 8. THE BEAUTY OF PEOPLE

*How background shapes us, but only to a certain point*

## 9. EVERYTHING BIG BEGINS SMALL

*And often starts slowly*

EPILOGUE

ENDNOTES

INDEX

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

COPYRIGHT

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A graduate of the London School of Economics and the University of Sydney, Tom Butler-Bowdon was working as a political advisor in Australia when, at 25, he read his first personal development book. Captivated by the genre, at 30 he left his first career to write the bestselling *50 Self-Help Classics*, the first guide to the personal development literature.

The subsequent books in this series, *50 Success Classics*, *50 Spiritual Classics*, *50 Psychology Classics* and *50 Prosperity Classics*, have been published in 22 languages. USA Today described him as “a true scholar of this type of literature”.

Tom has also written critical introductions to Napoleon Hill’s *Think and Grow Rich*, Sun Tzu’s *Art of War*, Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* and Plato’s *The Republic*.

Visit his website at [www.Butler-Bowdon.com](http://www.Butler-Bowdon.com).

NEVER  
TOO LATE  
*To Be*  
GREAT

The Power of Thinking Long

Tom Butler-Bowdon



For parents who patiently wait for their child's  
promise to be fulfilled.

For partners who believe their loved one's  
potential can be realised.

# NOTE TO THE READER

You are invited to receive a free eBook, *Never Too Late Extra*, containing more examples and insights in relation to thinking long and slow-cooked success. To receive the bonus, just send me an email to [tombutlerbowdon@gmail.com](mailto:tombutlerbowdon@gmail.com), with 'Power of Thinking Long' in the title bar. I look forward to hearing from you, and welcome any comments or suggestions.

Please visit my website, [Butler-Bowdon.com](http://Butler-Bowdon.com), which has many free self-development book commentaries, interviews and other content. For news and updates follow me on Twitter [@tombutlerbowdon](https://twitter.com/tombutlerbowdon), or befriend me on Facebook (my personal page, not the public profile).

# PREFACE

At the beginning of his autobiography, the philosopher John Stuart Mill felt he needed to defend the indulgence of writing his own life story. Not having had a particularly adventurous life, he didn't feel that he was of great interest, but his famously intensive education – home schooled by his father, learning Greek at three, reading all the classics by ten, advanced in mathematics by his teen years – was remarkable, and he was happy to admit it.

My life certainly doesn't justify the logging of more trees, and my childhood education was in no way remarkable. However, the education I received as an adult, which fell to me by no great design, was lucky. This was the opportunity to systematically read, covering a ten-year period, hundreds of notable books in the fields of self-help, success, motivation, spirituality and psychology, to summarise their key points, and provide commentaries that put each title into the context of the whole genre, which can loosely be called 'self-development'.

As enjoyable and inspiring as it was, the more I got into it, the more I felt the literature was lacking something, and this omission rendered it close to worthless for many people. With hindsight, I had been concerned with this missing element for most of my adult life, and only later did I see how my work and personal life had converged.

Since I was 20, I had felt like I was playing catch-up. On leaving school, like most of my friends I went on to further education, enrolling in an art college where I took courses in photography and film. My idea was to become an art



photographer. However, after three years I decided that art school wasn't for me, and dropped out.

I left behind my hometown and comfortable life and started again with a new college degree in a bigger city. Now older than the other students, I felt pressure to do well to justify the decision I had made, and worked doubly hard. With no scholarships or loans, I had to pay my way with a variety of jobs that left little time for socialising.

One of these jobs was at a store selling newspapers and magazines. At the end of each week, my boss would give me the pick of the unsold stuff, and I would take them back to read in my room in a student house. One magazine really caught my attention, a title called *Success*. I was ambitious, but unsure about the future. I believed that successful people were a race apart, who got that way via fate or good luck. But *Success* told its readers that being an achiever was more a matter of *decision*. The hard part was allowing yourself the belief that you would be successful. Then, all that was needed was a certain amount of application and focus.

While this sounded fine, I couldn't ignore the fact that in terms of career progress, I was three years behind other people my age, and had already missed at least one important boat. But a positive outcome of this insecurity was that it led me to be interested in the age at which people made significant achievements. When reading a newspaper profile or watching a documentary, I found myself saying, 'Well, if he had done that by the time he was 27, how many years does that give me to do something great ...?' The media was full of stories of youthful success, and I didn't enjoy the contrast between these people and myself, still ploughing through university. I was delighted whenever I came across the biography of a person who had started out late, or who achieved something when a bit older. These examples let me relax a bit and focus on the tasks at hand.

I was 26 before, ensconced in my proper career job, I read my first motivational book. A couple of years later, I decided to leave this career behind and pursue what then seemed a very 'way out' option: writing about personal development. Though I loved the field, it struck me that it was at a similar stage that biology was before Darwin, and where economics stood before Adam Smith. That is, it was a realm of knowledge largely untested by evidence, and based on the assumptions and prejudices of its early practitioners. Much of it was about 'transforming your life', and hopefully in as short a time as possible, yet if these techniques worked as they promised, then everyone who read the books, listened to the audios or went to the seminars should have been a superstar in a year or two. I realised how little attention was given to the role of *time* in the progress of an individual. On the one hand, this was almost too obvious: of course significant achievement takes many years. And yet, none of the books I read dared mention it; all were promoting a short route to success.

The vast majority of successful people I had profiled had taken years to achieve what they did. None had been overnight successes. What if, I wondered, 'slow-cooked' success was not only the norm, but the *only* path to genuine achievement? If individuals only had limited spans of years allotted to them, then success was surely about the rate, pattern, sequence or trajectory of achievement as it was anything else. How long did it take for her to complete that masterpiece? What was he doing leading up to his great discovery? How old was he when he first had the idea for the company, and when did it start to prosper? If 'personal success' was ever going to be a generic subject that could be studied, questions such as these – all of which involved time – should be basic.

A quote I had heard kept ringing in my ears:

‘Most people overestimate what they can achieve in a year, but underestimate what they can achieve in a decade.’

This perfectly chimed with my experience and that of people I knew. I had been led to believe that time was the enemy, a force battled against to achieve our goals. Now, I began to wonder if this enemy, if we got to know it better, could become a friend. I was aware of the criticism of self-development that it got people to dream up audacious goals and plans which were divorced from reality. People are rightly sceptical that a rousing motivational seminar can lift a person from mediocrity onto the track of greatness. However, I had seen enough evidence that major goals can and are often realised by anyone, as long as they are cast within *appropriate timeframes*.

In writing my five books, I had been fed a daily diet of hardcore inspiration, and this material did improve me and increase my effectiveness in many ways. Yet inspiration itself had been no substitute for effort. It was not motivational talks that had got me to sit down and write the books, but the bare pressure of deadlines. I discovered that large projects, when broken up into smaller pieces, and spread over time, became quite doable.

I had also noticed that many of the great achievers I had read and written about had not even discovered their great project or passion until having done other things, lived other lives, had other careers. They nearly all took time to get into their stride. At many points they may have felt like they were getting nowhere, but when looked at from the vantage point of history, they were just getting ready to make their mark.

A revolution is needed in personal development. Instead of blinding people with visions of glory that can supposedly be realised in a year or two, surely it is ultimately more productive to accept the pivotal role of time in

accomplishing our goals. This does *not* have to mean reducing the level of our ambition, but simply *adjusting the timescales* in which we should expect to achieve things. This alternative theory of success also takes account of the haphazard, circular, zigzagging and simply unclear paths that life so often takes us on. Life happens, as John Lennon famously put it, when you are making other plans.

Yet by taking a longer view of things, it is possible to shape life to a greater degree than you think. And crucially, with most of us living longer now, it is rarely too late to *begin* on a remarkable path.

## **It's not too late ...**

---

Maybe you have read plenty of motivational books that told you that you 'can do anything', but perhaps what you need now is not more fists in the air or walks across hot coals to 'pump yourself up', but examples of real people who only began to achieve at a similar age to you.

Included in this book are many potted biographies of conventionally 'great' people. Though these may seem like irrelevant figures who have faded into history, I ask you to bear with me in recounting their stories. Because they were once the age you are today, and they also had their own struggles - often long before they achieved any renown.

Just as you should never discount the effect that people's lives in the past have on our lives in the present, you too may do things in the next ten, 20 or 30 years that can reverberate in a positive way through successive generations. Here is your chance. It's not too late to seize it.

# INTRODUCTION

Do you wish to do something remarkable, and feel you have a special niche just waiting to be discovered?

Do you feel there is still time to pursue something you have long desired?

Are you on the right path with your career, your company or your organisation, but still waiting for your potential to be fulfilled?

If so, this book is for you. If not, it may still be for you, or someone close to you. For in it I will show that it is rarely too late – and you are rarely too old – to achieve something that is truly important to you. Also, that the reasons most people give us – and that we give ourselves – for not doing something, lack foundation. Because the good news is that you have much more time than you think to achieve your goals.

Perhaps you feel that you have missed some great opportunity to progress, or are too ‘past it’ to take an exciting new direction. Maybe you have just missed a promotion at work, or some other big chance seems to be fading from view. Perhaps you wanted too much, you think to yourself. Family, friends or colleagues told you something is not possible, and perhaps you started to believe them. Who am I to think I can do something singular that will express my deepest interests and talents? If that is your thinking right now, here you will find another voice to listen to.

If you are like most people, you have no shortage of desires and dreams, and you do not need to be motivated by someone else to go after them. The motivational field

does its best to make people more successful, but facts alone can be more inspiring than promises to ‘change your life in seven days’. Ironically, I believe that your success is *more* likely to occur the moment you stop looking for ‘great moments’ of motivation and instead give yourself the time to bring real things into being. This way may seem less dramatic at first, but the end results may astonish you.

This book rests on two simple observations:

1. All great accomplishment may take longer than first imagined; and yet ...
2. In the age we live in, it’s rarely too late to begin something great.

With most of us living longer lives, we have an advantage over our ancestors in that we can expect to *complete* a great project. With this extra time, very little becomes impossible. Anthony Robbins observed that *people overestimate what they can achieve in a year, but underestimate what they can achieve in a decade*. Does this ring true for you? We’ve all heard about the magic of thinking big, but perhaps it is the power of thinking *long* that can lift us above the pack. My experience is that it is rarely the size of a person’s goals that is the issue, but the timeframes they give themselves to achieve them.

When people, companies or products become famous, their rise seems inevitable, yet nothing could be further from the truth. By exploring what the remarkable people were doing *before* they made their landmark contributions, this book aims to once and for all destroy the myth of overnight success, and show why the ‘slow-cooked’ way is the norm, not the exception.

The universe is filled with examples which suggest that all good things take time. No person is ever born successful, nor do great companies, products or movements rise overnight. Yet in our fast-moving age, we

begrudge the role of time and are embarrassed by the time it takes to do worthwhile things. What is quick and takes less work is always more alluring, but the desire for instant results, while understandable, makes us less and less open to the paths that will lead to lasting, major achievement.

Pablo Picasso once said, 'I don't develop: I am.' He meant that everything he created already existed in some form; he just needed the time in which to pour them out. Appreciating life the Picasso way, we don't *become* something; we are it already and simply need a few years to properly allow it to be expressed.

Your life so far, and the success you have wanted, may have just been missing one vital ingredient, and that ingredient is what this book is about. I don't claim that it will 'change your life', but I'm confident it can reorient your thinking and give you another chance at being great - *in your own way, and in your own time.*

## CHAPTER ONE:

# WARMING UP

*Why what you've done so far may just have set the scene*

'No matter how great the talent or effort, some things just take time: you can't produce a baby in one month by getting nine women pregnant'.

Warren Buffett

THE MODERN WORLD sees time as a commodity in short supply, or an enemy to be conquered, but Warren Buffett became history's greatest investor through seeing time as a *friend*. Having picked a company to invest in, he lets time reveal its true value, often holding on to a stake for decades. In a field where everyone wants good returns quickly, the Sage of Omaha's success comes from an opposite approach: make one good decision initially, then let time do the rest of the work.

With various wiles or technologies, we can manipulate the conditions to make something ripen quicker, but still the central aim is ripeness, which can't be hurried. A sage of another era, the former slave Epictetus, said:

'Nothing great is produced suddenly, not even the grape or the fig. If you say to me now that you want a fig, I will answer to you that it requires time: let it flower first, then put forth fruit, and then ripen.'

Epictetus completed his reflection:



‘If then the fruit of a fig tree is not perfected suddenly and in one hour, would you possess the fruit of a person’s mind in so short a time and so easily?’

In the logic of success, we are obsessed with questions of talent, ability and intelligence, but these make us overlook the power of our own natural unfolding. Many of us have a problem appreciating the role of time in our efforts because at first glance the ‘march of time’ seems to make us weaker, not more powerful. Perhaps, though, we just have the wrong pictures and stories in our heads, and simply need to replace them with ones that are about harnessing, not avoiding or fighting, time.

The Great Basin Bristlecone Pine (*Pinus longaeva*) is the oldest living tree on earth. Growing mainly on the high slopes of California’s Inyo National Forest, some specimens are well over 4,000 years old. Bristlecones grow at 10,000 feet, on the edge of the tree line, and in cold to freezing temperatures for much of the year. Their ‘soil’ is actually a limestone substrate with little nutrient value, and rainfall on the slopes to which they cling is minimal. Largely protected from fire by the lack of surrounding vegetation and ground cover, their very dense and highly resinous wood offers them protection from attack by insects, bacteria and rot-causing fungi.

But the cost of these very effective adaptations is very slow growth. The period in which the Great Basin Bristlecone Pine can actually grow, flower and send forth new pine needles is limited to only six weeks a year. The way the Bristlecone grows is to send new shoots out of gnarled bits of ancient, dead wood. The result is not particularly attractive, but in their particular environment, slow, careful growth means they reign supreme.

The result is that what looks like a sapling may be over a century old, and a taller tree may have seen empires and civilisations come and go. The majestic Giant Sequoia is one of the Bristlecone's cousins in the pine family, and can grow to five times its height. But in the time that a Sequoia's life cycle has waxed and waned, many Bristlecones are only just branching out.

The Raramuri Indians of south-western Chihuahua in Mexico are well known for their long-distance running. Sometimes doing 200 miles at a time in bare feet from one community to another, their running heart rate and blood pressure can be no greater than if they were walking.

With their amazing stamina, the Mexican Olympic Committee thought they could blitz the field in the 26-mile marathon, and sent two Raramuri men to the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam. But the Raramuri runners did not win the race – they did not even get close, coming in at only 32nd and 35th places.

What happened? At the finishing line, they kept on running, not realising that the race was over. When officials caught up with them, all that the men could say was: 'Too short, too short!'

The psychologist Milton Erickson liked to describe the incident to patients. 'They thought twenty-five miles was when you warmed up!' he would tell them. Erickson's biographer, Sidney Rosen, would think of the story when he could not seem to get started on a project, was frustrated by difficulties, or was on a run himself and out of breath. The phrase would come into his head, 'I am just warming up now'. By giving himself more time, he suddenly had more energy.

You may feel worn out by your efforts, but in these pages you will learn how you can get back your breath. You will discover that, in all probability, what you have been doing all these years is simply warming up. 'Life is short', you

may have been told, or 'Life is a sprint with few winners'. But when faced with challenges, we would do well to remember the Raramuri runners, just getting into their stride after 50 miles, or be inspired by the image of the Bristlecone Pine, only just branching out when other trees have long expired, and all the more remarkable and beautiful because of its extremely slow growth.

It is in the nature of true success that at first, even for a long time, it seems like nothing is happening. In despair, we think that we have picked the wrong ingredients or got the recipe wrong. Peering into the oven, we see nothing. But come back later, and suddenly we discern a dark mass rising above the rim of the tin. Things of value often come into being too slowly for us to notice, working on timescales beyond normal apprehension. Just as the human eye and brain cannot 'see' plants growing in real time, but only notice growth in hindsight, so we often cannot appreciate the progress we have made.

You may be used to thinking of outcomes in terms of days, weeks or months, but real results usually take longer. An Italian proverb goes: *Che va piano, va longano, e va lontano*. 'Who goes slowly, goes long and far.' Note that it is not 'Who goes slowly, will do quite well', but who goes slowly will *exceed* expectations.

Tragically, people often give up because the indications of progress are too subtle, but as many of the stories in this book will show, the point at which we think we are 'finished' can actually mark the beginning of our rise. At 40, Bill Wilson was a destitute alcoholic without hope. Wilson was the scion of a long line of drunks, a heritage which may have crushed him. Instead, it made him increasingly desperate to find a way out of his apparent destiny. At 43 he launched a worldwide movement, Alcoholics Anonymous. At 38, Jean Nidetch was an office clerk losing her battle with obesity. Two years later she was a different person, the founder of Weight Watchers

International. Both Wilson and Nidetch were at their nadir when they unexpectedly found success.

Each of us has foundations that we can build on to create something remarkable. At the time, our experiences may seem exactly what we *don't* want, and only later do we come to appreciate them as building blocks. The key is to take the longer view, and continually ask ourselves how we can use our background and experiences to good ends. Modern life is set up to reward the ego, but in only ever thinking what is always best for us, our lives will be severely limited. In raising our minds to what can benefit many people beyond ourselves, it is much more likely that our potential will be realised.

When Arthur Schopenhauer was 77, he felt compelled to explain why he was putting out another edition of his great work *The World as Will and Representation*. In his preface to the new edition he included a Latin quotation: *Si quis total die currens, pervenit ad vesperam, satis est.* 'If anyone who wanders all day arrives towards evening, it is enough.' The quote reminded Schopenhauer of an old rule, which he felt also justified his late-in-life work: 'Influence lasts longer in proportion to the lateness of its beginning.'

The laws of probability suggest we are all entitled to some lucky breaks, but the universe rarely offers shortcuts to anything. By once and for all admitting the truth of this, you are on the way to genuine achievement. For it is not as if slow-cooked success is an alternative route to succeeding, it is really the *only* way if you are talking about real accomplishments that come from insight, creativity and work. If you leave a bucket under a slightly dripping tap, the drip is so infrequent that you can hardly be bothered to tighten the tap. You go to bed and are amazed the next morning to find ... the bucket is full! How did a little drip do this? It was simply given a few hours to do its work.

Richard Koch is rare in the self-development and business field for taking time itself seriously. He notes:

‘... in thinking about time as a separate dimension of our lives, we rapidly slide into the view that time is finite and short, that it is in some sense our enemy, or at least a commodity in extremely short supply. Yet time is none of these things. Time is a dimension of our life and experience. Time is an integral part of what we do and who we are.’

Einstein’s theory of relativity totally subverted our familiar existing understanding of space and time as separate hard realities. The way business and society is now organised is based on time as being separate to space. We do things, and then there is the time it takes to do them. But following Einstein, Koch suggests we should appreciate time as all wrapped as part of a product or service, one of its attributes.

Genuine success is the result of ‘rich time’, or deep thought given to a work or a problem. The *result* of this thought may be a sandwiching of time (for instance, a great book that can be read in an hour may have taken seven years to write; or a product like instant noodles may be ten years in the making). What we can do quickly or easily is what will be the greatest value to others, yet invariably this speed, or ‘knack’ at something is the product of practice, refinement, love, thought and skill over several years.

While it may seem obvious to say that we are each the product of how we have spent our time, accepting this fully means we have an advantage over others who are constantly battling against time. The simple act of thinking in terms of years and decades will mean that quality is invested in whatever it is we are offering the world. For anything that has had years of love poured into it is by

nature more valuable than what is churned out with stress and hurry.

## **Before we begin**

---

As far back as Aristotle, philosophers have sought to define what it means to live the 'good life'. Today, with the increased number of years, resources and choices that many of us enjoy, we expect nothing less than the 'great life'. That is not as unrealistic as it sounds. The chapters ahead will show how the adoption of reasonable timeframes can make achievement of even the most ambitious life project more predictable than you might think.

With a broader view of time you can be re-energised to discover or embark on the great projects of your life, whether these are a new career or a business, starting a family, becoming a master at something, or having some big adventure involving travel or social enterprise. Crucial to the success of such projects is a realistic understanding of the time it will take both to get the ball rolling and/or reach completion.

You may not be totally happy with what you have achieved so far, but this book aims to bring you to an interesting realisation: you do not have to race against time, because everything is unfolding as it should. The best is still ahead of you, and whatever you have done so far in life, chances are you have just been warming up.

## CHAPTER TWO:

# LIFE ISN'T SHORT

*How increasing longevity is giving us multiple chances to succeed*

JUST OVER A century ago, a boy born in America could have expected to live, on average, to 46. A girl born in the same year, 1900, might have reached the grand old age of 48. Yet by 1950, a dramatic rise in life expectancy, due mainly to better nutrition and improved detection and treatment of disease, meant that an American baby boy would probably make it to 65, and a girl to 71. By 2000, this had gone up to 74 for males, and almost 80 for females.

Britain's longevity figures tell a similar story, except the statistics go back further. In the Britain of 1800, the average lifespan was 40 years. Today it is 80. This fact is remarkable when you consider that, between Roman times and 1800, there was no change at all in human longevity. The leap in lifespans in the early 19th century came through things we consider basic today: large-scale sewage systems and clean water supplies that drastically reduced people's exposure to deadly germs. The end of the 1800s saw the first vaccines come into use, protecting people from smallpox and other death-causing illnesses, and after the Second World War, antibiotics such as penicillin again saved millions from dying in youth or middle age.

In a little over 100 years then, life expectancy in wealthy countries has risen an astonishing 40 per cent, and it continues to rise at a minimum of two years per decade.

## The new (time) rich

---

Life may sometimes feel short at a philosophical level, and there is always the chance we may die young. But for most people in well-off countries today, life is not, as the 17th-century political philosopher Thomas Hobbes famously put it, 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. Compared to our ancestors, we are *awash* with time.

Millions are discovering that they can be active and reasonably independent into their nineties, living to see great-grandchildren come along who statistically can see turning 100 almost as a birthright. The Danish researchers (Kaare Christensen et al) who pointed out this probability also noted that increasing life expectancy is not being accompanied by severe disability. We are not only living longer, but better management of the ageing process means we can enjoy, and be relatively independent in, the extra years we are given.

Experts are fond of saying that the increase in lifespan will have to slow because longevity rises will be dragged down by rich country maladies such as obesity and diabetes. Oxford University biochemist Dr Lynne Cox is one who has predicted a slowing in lifespan increase, but also admits, 'It is a question of whether obese teenagers choose, in their thirties, to change their ways and become healthy adults ...' Tom Kirkwood, a professor in charge of Britain's Institute for Ageing and Health, notes that through the 1970s and 1980s, the UN was predicting a slowing down of the rate of lifespan increase because it was thought that medicine had done all it could to reduce the causes of early death, and therefore lifespans would reach their 'natural' limit. 'That has not happened', he notes. 'Lifespans have continued to rise at the same rate and still show no sign of stopping ... My feeling is we will see another ten-year



increase in average lifespan [from 80 to 90], but no more this century. However, we are in unknown territory.'

Unknown territory indeed. Generally, the forecasts of a slowdown in longevity increase in rich countries takes little account of education, social influences like peer pressure or, crucially, people's self-directed motivation to change. True, some obese kids will stay obese as adults, but many others will experience personal health revolutions brought on by the realisation that if they start to exercise and eat better, they could prolong their healthy lifespan by an extra 20 years.

No one predicted a 40 per cent rise in life expectancy over a 100-year period, because although you can safely say that the installation of municipal sewage and water infrastructure will save lots of lives, you can't predict discoveries in medicine (like penicillin) that will save and prolong millions more. Even less are we able to foresee the effect of social and societal factors on health. For instance, few people saw coming the personal fitness boom when jogging, aerobics and weight training caught on in the 1970s, and the kind of hard-core exercise that was once done only by sportsmen – marathon running, lap swimming, road cycling, body building – is now a routine part of the lives of millions of men and women, fitted in to busy work and family schedules. Who knows what level of fitness the average person will rise to in another 50 years?

What's more, the forecasts of an increase of two years a decade in rich country lifespans, as we noted above, is only the *conservative*, incremental picture of our future. It is based on existing science only, takes no account of the likelihood that vigorous exercise and good diet will become ever more fashionable or socially accepted, and crucially does not factor in personal motivation to lead longer, healthier lives.

On the first point, it appears that medical technology and disease prevention are not simply improving at the rate

they have done in the last 40 years, but are speeding up, with multiple breakthroughs promised that will enhance and extend life. With the pace of technological discovery accelerating, the surge in life expectancy experienced between 1900 and 1950 is likely to seem modest in comparison.

This longevity revolution involves an array of new and forthcoming technologies that will extend the healthy lifespan and increase knowledge on how environmental and personal factors (e.g. diet, exercise, familial and psychological factors) affect our ability to live long and fulfilled lives. Advances in longevity medicine will mean: instead of risky and expensive organ transplants, we will grow new organs from our own stem cells; instead of struggling with dementia, we will be able to restore perfect memory through brain cell manipulation; instead of crude metal hip replacements, we will be able to regenerate bone, joints and muscle; and in order to look younger, in place of using clumsy Botox we will have gene replacement therapy. A race is on to be able to produce commercially new tissues, organs and bones from stem cells. With a possible worldwide market of \$5 trillion, the incentives are massive. Some scientists and futurists believe that if we can just stay alive for another 25 years, such predictable medical advances will mean that people can be kept alive in reasonable health for an extra 50 years, perhaps indefinitely.

Julian Savulescu, an Oxford University expert on human enhancement technology, notes, 'There is a significant chance that my own children will live beyond the age of 120. Thereafter we could be looking at two- or three-fold increases in human lifespans'. Although that brings with it its own challenges, personal, social and economic, imagine for a moment what becomes possible: the extra careers we can have, the skills we can perfect, the travelling we can do.

Too good to be true? Let's assume that it is, and that the promised advances do not materialise. But even staying with the incremental scenario of life expectancy – which is based on present, not future science – you may still be around much longer than you think. If you have not questioned the idea that you will retire at 65, pootle around your garden and play bridge for a few years then fade away, you may be in for a shock. Even at today's mortality rates, you may still have a third of your productive life ahead of you.

On a purely physical level, the average 40-year-old today would seem amazingly youthful to the 40-year-old of 100 or 200 years ago, and if you are a non-smoker, only a moderate drinker and exercise a few times a week, the chances of leading a mobile existence with all your wits about you well into your nineties is good, particularly if the life expectancy in the country where you live is above 75.

Longer lifespans have another interesting effect: the decreasing value of money compared to health. Who would you rather be, someone who becomes rich but dies at 45, or one who is only of middling means but lives until 85? Strangely, the longer we live as a society, the greater premium is placed *on* a long life. Anyone can make a fortune (and lose it too), but not everyone can enjoy a long, healthy, productive life. Most of us *will* have long lives though, and in doing so we are joining the ranks of the new *time-rich*.

## **The Schwartz exercise and its surprising results**

---

If in doubt that your best years are still ahead of you, you may change your mind after doing an exercise devised by David J. Schwartz. Schwartz was a professor in psychology at the University of Georgia and also taught courses in career and life skills. He wrote the famous motivational