



FROM THE CEO, DREW DYSON

The Power of Visualization

Dear Friends,

Several years ago, while on vacation in the Outer Banks in North Carolina, my daily drive for coffee and the newspaper took me down Route 12 and past the Currituck Country Club. With a week packed with activities with our children and family, I knew that I would only have one opportunity to golf at the end of the week. Yet each morning, while driving (slowly) past the fourth tee, I would imagine myself making the perfect drive — a long, gentle fade moving from left to right and ending up fifty yards from the front fringe of the green. Golf perfection.

Fast forward to Friday afternoon. Standing on the tee box, I once again envisioned my drive landing perfectly in the right-center of the fairway. I drew my driver from the bag, stepped confidently to the tee, closed my eyes for one last visualization, took a deep breath, and swung the club. The ball started off strong down the left side, began to fade perfectly midway in its flight path, and landed softly on the right side of the fairway — believe it or not, fifty-two yards from the fringe at the front of the green. See the shot.... Be the shot!

A recent study conducted by researchers at Oregon State University found that visualization may be the key to healthy aging. If you believe that you are capable of becoming the person you want to be in your older years, the study highlights, you have a much better chance of making that vision a reality.

The study looked at the influence of two key factors on healthy aging: a person's perceived ability to become the person they want to be in the future, and optimism as a personality trait. Researchers measured self-perceptions of aging in response to statements like, "Things keep getting worse as I get older," "I have as much pep as I had last year," or "As you get older, you are less useful." Optimism was measured in a similar way, with study participants ranking their personal agreements with statements such as "In uncertain times I usually expect the best."

The study showed that higher optimism was directly associated with a more positive self-perception of aging with internalized ageist stereotypes as a major factor in how people see themselves as they get older.

Karen Hooker, co-author of the study and professor of gerontology and family studies at Oregon State University, contends that "People need to realize that some of the negative health consequences in later life may not be biologically driven. The mind and the body are all interwoven.... If you believe these bad



things are going to happen, over time that can erode people's willingness or maybe even eventually their ability to engage in those health behaviors that are going to keep them as healthy as they can be."

The study goes on to highlight the importance of intergenerational relationships, such as those developed in our PSRC GrandPals and Seniors-for-Seniors programs. "The more younger people are around older people, the more you realize that it's not all bad," offered graduate assistant and study co-author Shelbie Turner. "Older people can do some things better than young people do. Increasing opportunities for intergenerational relationships is one way we can make people more optimistic about aging."

The study underscores the importance of optimism in aging — and the significant impact that positive outlook and visualization of a hopeful future can have on one's ability to thrive in older adulthood. "Previous research," offers Dr. Hooker, has shown that people who have positive views of aging at fifty live seven-and-a-half years longer, on average, than people who don't."

And it's never too late to improve your outlook or to focus on visualizing a healthy future! Visualization certainly worked for me that day on the golf course, enabling me to hit one of the best drives of my life. Unfortunately, on all those drives up and down Route 12, that was the only shot I visualized. I guess I should've visualized my chipping and putting a little more!

All the Best,
Drew A. Dyson, PhD
Chief Executive Officer