

Slow and steady wins the race — to milestones

Perhaps the very first milestone birthday many remember is turning 10-years-old. After all, it was the first double-digit birthday and somehow signified the end of childhood because once one reaches the double-digits, there is no turning back. And the milestones continue from there.

It is not, however, just the birthdays that mark next the decade of one's life that are thought of as milestones. Dependent upon religious and cultural beliefs, there are noteworthy birthdays throughout.

At age thirteen, Jewish boys and girls celebrate their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, respectively. At fifteen, many Latin American cultures celebrate a young woman's Quinceanera, which might be the equivalent to the American Sweet Sixteen. Sixteen can be important for both girls and boys because it is the age when many teenagers receive their driving learner's permit — a veritable rite of passage for high schoolers.

The eighteenth birthday marks the first time teenagers can vote and are henceforth treated as adults in our society.

The age for legal drinking in most states is 21. And at 25 (the quarter of a century mark), young adults often feel like it's time to "get their acts together." But, as the milestone birthdays continue, they somehow begin to hold less water. That is, until the first mailing by AARP is received before a 50th birthday!

So, what of these milestone birthdays? What is it that makes them so darn important, or is their importance created by society and the people close to us? Who has really felt all that different on the morning of their 30th birthday than they did the day before? Is the milestone birthday all hype or can it bring with it new insight into the next decade?

Since people vary so greatly in their approaches to milestone birthdays, it comes as no surprise that there are differences in which milestone birthdays, if any, have had the greatest impact on people. Some have said that turning 30 was harder than turning 40, while others have denied any type of existential crisis near any significant birthday.

One celebrity with a long and

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successful career was quoted as saying, "I have been 40 and I have been 50. Forty is better." Several years ago, Oprah Winfrey threw herself a lavish 50th birthday party and proclaimed that she had never felt better in her life.

While some celebrities of the world reach their milestone birthdays with little in the way of regret, many average citizens face crises as they become reflective of what has changed in their lives in the previous ten years and reassess goals, happiness, and relationships with loved ones.

Turning 30 saw one bright, healthy man spiral into a clinical depression. When asked about his thoughts about turning 30, he responded that he was not at the place in his life that he thought he would have been at that age. He did not own property, was not in a significant relationship, had not been educated beyond high school, and was unsure in which direction he would have liked to take his career.

Complaining of sleepless

nights and angst-filled days, this man eventually sought treatment with a psychotherapist who helped him sort through the beliefs he held that prevented him from being more accepting of where he was in his life and the unconscious pressure he applied to himself to be somewhere other than where he was at the time.

Similarly, a 39-year-old woman was reflective about her life and career as 40 approached. "I thought I would have had a Grammy Award by now," the vocalist stated.

This woman was a successful recording artist in the late 1980s, which afforded her the opportunity to make a living doing what she loved doing for 20 years.

But, for her, the elusive Grammy Award was the barometer with which she measured her success, ignoring the fact that she had a career envied by many. When presented with an alternative way of viewing her life and career, the singer was then able to accept that the Grammy accolade

essentially would have said nothing about who she is as a person, or her lasting career as a singer and touring artist.

As milestone birthdays approach, it is important to remember that despite where one thinks they "should" be at a particular point in their life, accepting where one is can be far more beneficial. Living in regret only serves to keep people locked into where they are. Acceptance, on the other hand, allows people the freedom and flexibility to make the incremental changes they might be craving.

A slow and steady approach can garner much more lasting results than racing to the finish line.

After all, what is the rush?



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