

# Late Bloomers

## Introduction

- What exactly does it mean to be a late bloomer? Simply put, a late bloomer is a person who fulfills their potential later than expected; they often have talents that aren't visible to others initially.
- The key word here is expected. And they fulfill their potential frequently in novel and unexpected ways, surprising even those closest to them.
- They are not attempting to satisfy, with gritted teeth, the expectations of their parents or society, a false path that leads to burnout and brittleness, or even to depression and illness

## Early Bloomer Obsession

- increased anxiety seems to have little to do with real dangers in the world.
- The changes don't correspond with widespread famine, systemic poverty, wars, security threats, or any other such events that normally affect mental health.
- The rise seems to have much more to do with the way young people experience the world
- More weight is given to tests and grades than ever before. ability to compare with and seek approval from others feeds into the crisis described by Twenge: Twenty-somethings are constantly comparing their extrinsic selves—their looks, wealth, status, and success—to unattainable standards of perfection.
- Creativity is not the sole province of the young. Some of us simply need more time, experience, and experimentation to develop a path and realize our talents.
- Life is often defined by snags and setbacks, by detours and disappointments. Purpose and wisdom, strengths of the late bloomer, come from a portfolio of these experiences, making late bloomers more reflective, more considerate, and more patient.
- Late bloomers often have a higher level of empathy. They are usually better at regulating their emotions. They have higher levels of emotional intelligence, and they have better coping skills
- Not surprisingly, handling adversity and setbacks is something late bloomers do better than early achievers

## **The Cruel Fallacy of Human Measurement**

- Society is in a crisis. Our obsession with test scores, perfect grades, and measurable early achievement developed from a good idea that has been way overshot.
- Instead of a meritocracy that rewards a variety of human talents, we have created a narrowing IQ/SAT oligarchy.
- A cohort of early bloomers win big in this new order, but most young men and women find themselves left behind before they even reach adulthood, their natural abilities lying fallow and undiscovered by the algorithm-biased conveyor belt of success
- We must stop excessively glorifying precocious achievement and seeing human development as a “fast track” on ramp for early success

## **A Kinder Clock for Human Development**

- Each of us deserves the opportunity to bloom in our own way. We need to give ourselves a break.
- We need to recognize and celebrate the fact that we’re all different, with different skill sets, developmental profiles, and backgrounds, and that each of us will forge a different path toward blooming. But today we do the opposite.
- Our society is grossly lopsided toward individuals who show themselves to be cognitively exceptional and precociously focused at an early age.
- We ask teenagers and young adults whose brains are still developing to “prove” themselves by gaining admission to the right schools, taking the right classes, and getting the right job.
- We hold up those who are exceptional in select and tragically limited ways.

## **Worth the Wait: The Six Strengths of Late Bloomers**

- In facing the ups and downs of life, many late bloomers gain a greater sense of compassion.
- They show greater reflective thinking, diminished ego-centeredness, and a deeper appreciation of others’ challenges—what psychologists call greater prosocial behavior.
- Prosocial behavior leads to a profounder comprehension of the contradictions, imperfections, and negative aspects of human nature, making many of us more forgiving, understanding, and compassionate.

- Early bloomers enjoy many advantages in affluent societies. But one huge disadvantage they face is that by dint of their youth and accomplishments, they give themselves credit for their success, more than the rest of us do
- The problem arises when early bloomers have a setback: Either they put all the blame on themselves and fall into self condemnation and paralysis, or they blame everyone else

### **Create Your Own Healthy Culture**

- Normative thinking creates the belief that the right pathway is the one followed by the person we see as a normal member of our social group.
- There are, of course, good aspects to it. Life is complicated. It's often easier to observe and model our behavior on that of others in order to navigate the complex situations we encounter throughout life.
- But normative thinking also creates challenges. Many of us want to believe there's a road map to how our lives should unfold.
- The reality, however, is that there's no single "right" pathway for human development—physically, cognitively, morally, or professionally.
- This reality exposes a couple of clear drawbacks to normative thinking.
- First, normative thinking creates informal social barriers that segregate us by income, class, race, religion, gender, and education.
- The second drawback is that normative thinking leads to a seemingly endless—and destructive—process of comparison.

### **Quit! Subversive Advice for Late Bloomers**

- Quitting, done for the right reason, is not giving up. It's not submitting or throwing in the towel. It is saying that a job just doesn't suit us. It is trying something and not liking it.
- In this way, quitting is actually part of the process of discovery. We define who we are by quitting, whether it's a club, school, job, or hobby. Forced adherence or unquestioned devotion leads to atrophy—to slowly dying. But quitting is the process of growing, the process of living

## The Superpower That Is Self-Doubt

- Most of us allow far too much self-doubt into our lives. That's true of late bloomers and early bloomers alike. But for hopeful late bloomers, self-doubt can seem a heavier load.
- Self-doubt, odd as it may sound, is actually a secret weapon for blooming. When properly managed, it is a source of information and motivation. As a result, it can help combat complacency and improve our preparation and performance.
- It drives us to question results, experiment with new strategies, and be open to alternate ways to solve problems—all tactics that correlate with late bloomer strengths such as curiosity and resilience.
- The ability to turn self-doubt into information and motivation is key.
- The best strategy for managing self-doubt is compassionate honesty. We must learn to acknowledge our self-doubt and to reframe it in a healthier, more constructive way. We must learn to see self-doubt for what it truly is: information—no more, no less.
- Self-doubt and self-efficacy are not the same thing. People with a strong sense of self-efficacy view challenging problems simply as tasks to be mastered
- They develop a deeper interest in the activities in which they participate and form a stronger commitment to developing their interests. They recover more quickly from setbacks and disappointment.
- People with a weak self-efficacy, on the other hand, avoid challenging tasks, believing they are beyond their capabilities. They tend to focus on personal failings and negative outcomes, which causes them to lose confidence in their personal abilities.
- Put another way, self-doubt is okay. Lack of self-efficacy is not. All healthy people have self-doubt, but we late bloomers often have too much of it.
- We make our situation worse by adopting unhelpful coping mechanisms, such as self-handicapping, to protect our self-image.
- But these coping mechanisms only take us further away from blooming. Self-efficacy is what thriving late bloomers seek in order to convert self-doubt into a friend.
- Self-efficacy is our belief that we can accomplish a specific task with a reasonably positive attitude, make a plan based on facts, and bloom by cultivating self-talk, framing/reframing, and self-compassion.
- These techniques are foundational to late bloomer success, leveraging many of the traits—curiosity, compassion, resilience, equanimity—that make us exceptional.
- Self-doubt, properly used, is not a handicap. It's a superpower for late bloomers.

## **Slow to Grow? Repot Yourself in a Better Garden**

- It's often difficult to acknowledge that other people have a stake in our blooming—or not blooming. And just like the flowering rosebush that's grown too big for its container, you might need to change jobs, or companies, or even cities, in order to reach your full potential.
- Otherwise some people may define and treat you as that outdated and lesser version of yourself
- When you make a concerted effort to improve yourself, to move beyond your current limitations, your act of self-assertion risks upsetting the social status quo
- The central question to ask yourself is, Am I in the best possible pot to bloom?
- Be careful, however, that when you repot yourself, you're not running away from something.
- You blame all your problems on the people you're with, believing that if only you had a fresh start in another city, things would be different.
- But aside from that type of rationale, if your current pot is not helping you bloom, it might truly be time to repot.