



Opinion: I Asked Several People Well Past Retirement Age Why They Keep Working. Here's What They Told

Me

By: Stephanie Griffith

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It's no exaggeration to say that Dr. Howard Tucker has worked in medicine for a lifetime. The average life expectancy for men in the US is 73 years; Tucker has been a physician for 77. In July, he'll turn 102.

Tucker, a neurologist who started practicing medicine in 1947, teaches medical students in Ohio. The Guinness Book of World Records has recognized him as the "Oldest Practicing Doctor."

Tucker is also a notable example of a growing phenomenon: Americans eschewing retirement and working later in life. That includes the two men — President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump — vying for another shot at what has been called the hardest job in the world.

Some critics have suggested that neither Biden nor Trump, given their advanced age, are fully up to the rigors of another turn in the presidency. Their supporters say such statements are unfair and ageist while Biden and Trump themselves have brushed their detractors aside.

Biden, 81, has been leaning more into his age recently, making light of his advanced years — even as aides have encouraged him to be out in public more to show that he can still carry out the duties of the presidency ably. Trump, 77, has sidestepped the age issue for the most part, although he has pointedly dismissed detractors who imply that he is experiencing cognitive decline. He once even famously posted online that life begins at 80.

The question for some of us is, why some people want to keep working decades beyond retirement age? CNN Opinion editor Stephanie Griffith asked seven people who are past the conventional retirement age why they are still at the job and got as many responses as there were respondents. Some keep working to make ends meet; others, because they love what they do and can't imagine giving it up. And some insist that they are better than ever at their chosen professions and love leaning into their growing sense of competence. They continue to work happily and productively, and were happy to explain to us how and why they do it.

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Ana Marie Forsythe, teacher, Ailey School, 80

A modern dance evangelist passing her knowledge to the next generation

I used to teach 12 dance classes a week. Now I teach four, and that reduction in schedule has made it possible for me to be just as energetic as I was when I was doing 12 classes. I have beginning, intermediate and advanced classes. So, I get the full range of levels. And I can watch my students grow and can kind of pull them through that thread of all the stages of how to become a dancer.

I started out as a ballet dancer. Because our teacher knew that we all were not going to be ballet dancers and get into companies, we were encouraged to learn modern dance. Our ballet teacher invited then this wonderful woman — Joyce Trisler — to teach us modern dance. And Joyce was phenomenal. She'd just come from the West Coast and was a student at Juilliard, and came with this new information about dance because we have never heard of Lester Horton Technique in the east.

Horton is the style of modern dance that I still teach at the Ailey School, and it is the foundation for dancers at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. What came next for me was a lifelong of teaching at the Ailey School and other dance studios as well. I taught at Vassar College and a lot of other universities, so I've been around.

How long will I keep teaching? I think as long as I continue to remember all these crazy counts that Lester Horton created — and as long as the students seem responsive and are learning and growing. I'm willing to continue to go forward until I think I've done enough and I'm tired of doing it. But I am never tired when I get into the dance studio. I'm rip-roaring ready to go. I know I have things that I can teach these young dancers that they wouldn't get in another place. And I love seeing my students grow and change.

What also keeps me going is sharing this important American modern dance technique that I learned as a young dancer, that I think is still so relevant today, not only just because of the Ailey company, which tours internationally and is so successful.

Martha Graham had the contraction and release. José Limón had the rise and fall and other modern choreographers had other ways of instilling dance. But Horton had a very specific idea. He wanted to see how many different ways the body can move. When you see Ailey's masterpiece *Revelations*, you see it's full of Horton technique.

Can I still demonstrate the movements myself? I can still get out there and demonstrate the easy stuff. But I'm better at using my words than I used to. I feel as if teaching keeps the body supple but keeps the mind supple as well. I still think that I have information to share with these young dancers that maybe some of the younger teachers don't have.



There's something very special about having a historical basis for your teaching. That's why I co-authored the book about Horton along with Marjorie Perces and Cheryl Bell. We got together for many, many weeks in the public library sitting on the floor, trying to write down the technique because we were concerned that the nuances, the studies, the counts would be lost if someone didn't finally write them down. I also made six DVDs with a dear friend of mine, Babette Coffey-Fisch, to preserve the technique.

So, I have knowledge to pass down. I think that happens when you've taught a long time and you're really involved in the technique. You know how to explain things to students. And it's wonderful to see the students that have come out of the school who have joined the company and who are now doing those movements really well. And when they don't, sometimes I sneak in a correction.

Ana Marie Forsythe has taught modern dance for more than 50 years at the Ailey School in New York City, where she is the chair of the Horton Department.

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