

# Dr. John Medina Shares His Brain Rules for Aging Well

Totem Report January 3, 2018

By Dann Mead Smith

**President Mark** kicked off the first meeting of 2018 and introduced **Jeff Gill** who led us in prayer with a reflection on some of the momentous things that took place in our country 50 years ago this year. **David Woodward** with **Freeman Fong** on the piano led us in Auld Lang Syne for those of us that “don’t remember New Year’s Eve...”

President Mark announced the sad news that our longtime member, **Mason Sizemore** passed away over the weekend while traveling in Arizona. We had a moment of silence and Mark said we will have a more formal look back on his life at a future meeting.

President Mark introduced John Medina, the author of *Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School*, who has founded two brain research institutes. This is his fourth time at our podium.

John’s talk focused on boosting cognitive performance after the age of 30 and was divided into the three parts of his book: Introduction, Looking Forward and Looking Backward/Reminiscing.

Introduction to the book: the visual inspiration for the book was siblings who recreated family photos from their youth; “that was then, this is now.” One example he shared was four siblings who recreated their photo when they all were in the bath tub together when they were young.



Our bodies change but what happens to our brain? What can we do for the 75% of the brain that we have control over, i.e. that is not affected by nature/our genes?

He mentioned that our cognitive erosion begins sooner than you might think. Based on research we now know that our intellectual peak is at 24 years old, followed by “genetic free fall.”



He asked, “Is there anything you can do now to aid cognitive erosion?” Your brain needs “intervention to look forward and backward. You need a love affair with learning.”

Some suggestions: when you retire, go back to school. Get a degree in something you are not comfortable with; be aggressive with new learning; get involved in activities where your assumptions are routinely challenged; you need regular mental workouts. We need to take part in aggressive learning past the age of 65. If you do this, the long-term effects can be dramatic.

What can help is the evidence-based cognitive boosting of learning a new language or musical instrument; and to teach people so you “become a school.”

He encouraged us to regularly argue and engage with people who do not agree with us; and “to get out of our bubble.” This idea of cognitive assault is an example of Part II, Looking Forward. He mentioned the unusual friendship between very conservative and liberal Supreme Court Justices Scalia and Ginsberg as an example.

“We need vigorous learning. This is not an opinion, it’s how it works.”

He then used President Mark’s earlier example of hearing a song from our youth and how good it makes you feel and that it brings back memories. This is an example of Part III, Looking Backward.

He read some famous rock song lyrics and had the audience raise their hand if they recognized them. He talked about neurotransmitters and how they make you feel when you get nostalgic which he said is “unbelievably powerful.”

He suggested that we start to collect important things from our past and put them in a room. Going into this room as we get older “will serve your brain” as we also “have to look backward.” When our “dopamine drops, we need nostalgia, so we need to visit them in that room.”

He concluded with, “we need to not just be aggressive in the forward direction after we turn 30 years old, we need to also go in the backward direction. We all have to age but not all the same way. Look forward and remember our past.” He received a standing ovation

We have two new members to kick off the year.

**Charley Dickey** introduced us to **Sue Bean** of Sound Mental Health who has been involved in development throughout her career in the Seattle area, including with the Seattle community colleges. **Rob LoBosco** introduced **Gene Boes** of the Northwest Center whose career includes time in the Navy, working at Microsoft and serving as an adjunct professor. More details on both of them are in the Totem email.

**Virginia McKenzie** invited us to attend the Peace Builders Committee’s End Sex Trafficking Now potluck event on January 21<sup>st</sup> to celebrate a successful 2017 and learn about next steps for this project.



As part of our **Foundation Flash** series that highlights the impact of everyone’s support of our Service Foundation, **Robert Stadler** gave an overview of the **Dictionary Delivery project**. Every November through January our members deliver special dictionaries to a number of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classes in Seattle public schools. Robert said that this “entire project is made possible through your support which is another reason to make your annual Rotary Service Foundation contribution;” and

pointed out the thank you letters from the students who received them that were on each table.

**Kathy Williams** gave an update on our **Seattle Rotary Service Foundation's annual fundraising campaign**: we are at about 70% of members participating and we need to get to 100%. She thanked everyone that has already donated and said the next stage was to start follow-up phone calls to those that have not made their contribution yet. The quickest way is to give online and she mentioned that the glitches are now fixed with our online system and thanked everyone for their patience.

She also announced that we are at 49% or \$45,000 of our \$80,000 goal for **the Rotary Foundation**. Last year we hit 74% so we still have a ways to go. We need a minimum of at least 54% for our club to participate in the district grant program; and that 50% of all Rotary Foundation contributions via our member's donations come back to our district which then matches it.

**President Mark** closed the meeting reflecting on the passing of **Mason Sizemore** as we start a new year. He mentioned how precious and fleeting life is and encouraged us "to leave nothing unsaid and live with a purpose and meaning; let's make it our best year yet."