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The Wisdom Paradox: How Your Mind Can Grow Stronger As Your Brain Grows Older

By Elkhonon Goldberg



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The Wisdom Paradox explores the aging of the mind from a unique, positive perspective. In an era of increasing fears about mental deterioration, world-renowned neuropsychologist Elkhonon Goldberg provides startling new evidence that though the brain diminishes in some tasks as it ages, it gains in many ways. Most notably, it increases in what he terms “wisdom”: the ability to draw upon knowledge and experience gained over a lifetime to make quick and effective decisions. Goldberg delves into the machinery of the mind, separating memory into two distinct types: singular (knowledge of a particular incident or fact) and generic (recognition of broader patterns). As the brain ages, the ability to use singular memory declines, but generic memory is unaffected—and its importance grows. As an individual accumulates generic memory, the brain can increasingly rely upon these stored patterns to solve problems effortlessly and instantaneously. Goldberg investigates the neurobiology of wisdom, and draws on historical examples of artists and leaders whose greatest achievements were realized late in life.



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Editorial Review

From Scientific American

The possibilities of cognitive decline and dementia are among the most frightening aspects of aging. But according to New York University neuropsychologist Elkhonon Goldberg, brains get better in key respects as they get older. Moreover, he argues in *The Wisdom Paradox*, people can do much to ward off the debilities associated with aging. The brain's capacity for pattern recognition is central to Goldberg's premise. Moving through middle age and beyond, the brain develops a vast store of "generic memories"—knowledge of the shared patterns in events or things. This reservoir gives older people an improved ability to size up situations and solve problems without going through the step-by-step assessments a younger person might need. Such pattern recognition underlies competence and expertise and can compensate for age-related declines in attention or memory. Pattern recognition can even amount to "wisdom"—basically, knowing what to do. The author cites various elderly achievers to demonstrate that mental vigor can persist late in life. He notes that sculptor Eduardo Chillida retained formidable abilities even as his Alzheimer's disease progressed. Delving into the relevant neurobiology, Goldberg points to a growing body of evidence that the brain's left hemisphere is oriented toward familiar patterns, whereas the right hemisphere focuses on novelty. He argues that this dichotomy is more important than nuts-and-bolts partitions, such as the left hemisphere handling language while the right handles spatial reasoning. This maturation of mind means that the left hemisphere becomes increasingly important over a person's lifetime. Moreover, the brain is shaped by how it is used. For instance, musicians who practice consistently develop a larger Heschl's gyrus, an area involved in processing sound. And contrary to onetime scientific belief, the brain forms new neurons throughout adulthood. Through such observations, Goldberg emphasizes the importance of maintaining an active mind as a defense against mental decline. Though not a new idea, Goldberg impressively fits it into a wide-ranging picture of the aging brain. He speculates, for example, that art serves a central societal function in boosting mental acumen. He also outlines a "cognitive exercise program" he runs in which participants engage in computer-based exercises. The discussion here would have benefited from home-based exercises readers might try. Altogether, *The Wisdom Paradox* makes a compelling case for the possibility of maintaining a sharp mind far into old age. The book merits attention from the old and not so old alike.

Kenneth Silber

Review

Brilliant . . . Highly engaging . . . no less than a grand piece of scientific reporting and 'popular' science. --
Oliver Sacks on The Executive Brain

From the Back Cover

Praise for *The Wisdom Paradox*:

"Impressive. . . Wide-ranging. . . *The Wisdom Paradox* makes a compelling case for the possibility of maintaining a sharp mind far into old age."

—KENNETH SILBER, *SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN MIND*

"Good news: Our brains can and do improve with age. The evidence Goldberg presents is thorough and indisputable . . . Informative and entertaining."

—Diane Stressing, *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland)

"[A] graceful exposition of the latest findings in developmental neuropsychology, brain mapping, and

computational neuroscience. . . Goldberg overturns stale assumptions about the different functions of the two sides of the brain and about the roles of the frontal lobes. . . It is still cheering, in an era that worships youth, to be reminded that age can bring its own intellectual gifts."

—Emma Crichton-Miller, *The Telegraph* (London)

"*The Wisdom Paradox* is unusually easy and enjoyable to read for a book loaded with information and ideas about the brain. . . [Goldberg] is a gifted explicator and a talented writer."

—*Cerebrum*

"A book of wise reflections on the gains, not the losses, that come to the older human mind. Here is a valuable addition to the literature on aging."

—ANTONIO R. DAMASIO, AUTHOR OF *DESCARTES' ERROR*, *THE FEELING OF WHAT HAPPENS*, AND *LOOKING FOR SPINOZA*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Shirley Jones:

Here thing why this kind of The Wisdom Paradox: How Your Mind Can Grow Stronger As Your Brain Grows Older are different and trustworthy to be yours. First of all studying a book is good but it depends in the content of computer which is the content is as yummy as food or not. The Wisdom Paradox: How Your Mind Can Grow Stronger As Your Brain Grows Older giving you information deeper including different ways, you can find any guide out there but there is no publication that similar with The Wisdom Paradox: How Your Mind Can Grow Stronger As Your Brain Grows Older. It gives you thrill reading journey, its open up your eyes about the thing in which happened in the world which is maybe can be happened around you. You can easily bring everywhere like in playground, café, or even in your approach home by train. When you are having difficulties in bringing the branded book maybe the form of The Wisdom Paradox: How Your Mind Can Grow Stronger As Your Brain Grows Older in e-book can be your alternate.

Irma Kellner:

A lot of people always spent their very own free time to vacation or perhaps go to the outside with them loved ones or their friend. Were you aware? Many a lot of people spent many people free time just watching TV, or even playing video games all day long. If you need to try to find a new activity that is look different you can read a new book. It is really fun for yourself. If you enjoy the book that you read you can spent the whole day to reading a publication. The book The Wisdom Paradox: How Your Mind Can Grow Stronger As Your Brain Grows Older it doesn't matter what good to read. There are a lot of individuals who recommended this book. These folks were enjoying reading this book. In case you did not have enough space to deliver this book you can buy the e-book. You can m0ore quickly to read this book from the smart phone. The price is not very costly but this book provides high quality.

Richard Valadez:

Your reading sixth sense will not betray you, why because this The Wisdom Paradox: How Your Mind Can Grow Stronger As Your Brain Grows Older book written by well-known writer we are excited for well how

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Joseph Vargas:

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