

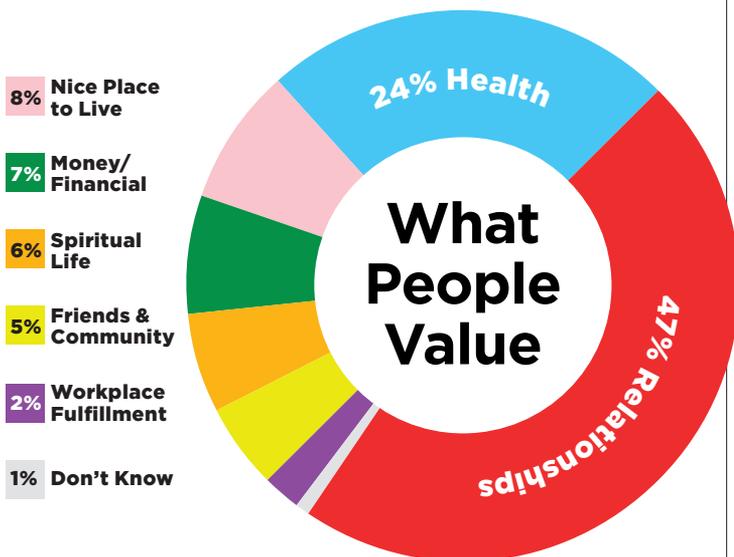
BY JOEL KURTZMAN

# Extending Human Life

Those of us lucky enough to have worked on this issue of *Korn Ferry's Briefings on Talent & Leadership* have learned that humanity is about to give itself a gift of staggering generosity. We are about to give ourselves the gift of longer lives. This gift is likely to be measured in years, not weeks or months. And, we are giving it to ourselves not because we are better or more deserving than previous generations, but because science, building upon the findings of those previous generations, is accelerating at a pace never before known.

**H**ow much is an extra five or 10 years worth? You can calculate it the old-fashioned way, which is the way I was taught. Multiply those extra years times the amount you expect to earn and reduce that number by the rate of inflation in each year.

If you look at it that way, this priceless gift receives a price tag—and it's not all that big. Don't get me wrong, a gift of \$233,000 for the average American for five more years isn't nothing. But, it turns out, it's not really what people most value.



Think about what matters more to you—five years of earning power or five more years to spend with the people you love? We know from research on happiness that the most important thing in people's lives—the part of life that makes them happiest—isn't money or titles or bright shiny objects or a storage locker filled with Bon Jovi tapes. It's relationships

with other people. As the pie chart here shows, even when it comes to what makes us happy, it's all about who you know. Relationships matter more than anything else.

The more you are engaged in activities you enjoy with other people, the more life matters. Relationships take the sting out of mortality. Even the people who always seem to be complaining are complaining about other people. That might not be the best kind of relationship to have, but it's a relationship nevertheless.

Decades ago, I wrote a book about the scientific assault on the aging process and the quest to prolong the healthy part of our life spans. Back then, a number of people were researching this subject, and I learned two things: First, for reasons unknown, there are people all around the world who lie about their ages, and when their lies are corrected, they seem to live about as long as everybody else. Vilcabamba, a tiny town in Ecuador, seems to have made exaggerating one's age as popular as the World Cup.

Another thing I learned was that, even back then, researchers like Harvard's Dr. Alexander Leaf were aware that human connections were an important factor in keeping older people youthful in ways that can be measured and that matter.

Since then, I've tried to keep up with research about what enables people to live long, healthy lives. It's not bulging muscles, nor is it adherence to a diet rich in yogurt, exotic teas and certain types of nuts and fruits. The secret to a long, healthy life seems to be having people in your life you really enjoy, even if they tell the same stories over and over. The secret to a long life is having lots of friends! //

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