



SALES AND MARKETING ROUNDTABLE #271: Rethinking Aging: Insights from a “disruptive force” in the senior living industry with Bob Kramer

Thank you to everyone who attended our latest Sales and Marketing Roundtable! To provide anonymity during the Roundtable discussion, participants and their communities will not be identified.

ABOUT OUR GUEST

As the co-founder of the National Investment Center for Seniors Housing and Care (NIC) and founder of Nexus Insights, Bob Kramer has been called a “disruptive force” in the field, always challenging us to think differently about aging, housing and care.

Bob joined us on Roundtable to talk about the prevailing negative perceptions of aging, how ageism is a prejudice against our future selves and what gives him the most hope about the future of aging in America.



“I hate the phrase ‘active adult.’ It’s ageist. Think about when you can no longer live as an active adult. You’re inactive. That means we literally put your body in a box.” (Bob Kramer)



FRESH PERSPECTIVES

- **SHIFT FROM AVOIDANCE TO ASPIRATION** – Embrace the transition from offering "avoidance products" to "aspirational products" in senior living. Focus on enhancing the quality of life and wellness over mere longevity, fostering environments that encourage engagement and purpose for those in their 60s, 70s, 80s and beyond.
- **VALUE OF OLDER ADULTS AS PROBLEM SOLVERS** – Older adults play a crucial role in addressing societal challenges like workforce gaps, loneliness and healthcare costs. Recognize them as assets who contribute through work, volunteering, and mentorship, transforming perceptions from seeing them as burdens to seeing them as problem solvers.
- **FOCUS ON PERSONALIZED CARE** – Boomers seek personalized experiences, which technology and AI can now enable more affordably. Shift from uniform services to customized engagements that address individual wants and needs in real-time, improving overall care and experience..
- **EXPAND MULTIGENERATIONAL AND COMMUNITY LIVING** – There is a rising trend towards multigenerational and smaller community clusters, offering varied living options. Encourage these setups to foster personal connections and shared family experiences, enriching the living environments for all ages.
- **LANGUAGE SHIFTS AND ASPIRATIONAL LIVING** – Rethink terms like "senior moment" and "senior living," which carry outdated connotations. Instead, promote concepts like "next stage living," emphasizing possibilities for community, engagement, and thriving in later years, moving beyond stereotypes and limitations.

LINKS & CONTACT INFO

Bob Kramer ([Linkedin](#))

NexusInsights ([website](#))

"Familiar Touch" film ([trailer](#))

COMING UP ON VARSITY'S ROUNDTABLE!

Please join our next Roundtable gathering on Thursday, August 28 at noon ET, 11 a.m. CT and 9 a.m. PT. We'll be joined by Mary Jane Fitts of Greystone Communities. Mary Jane will present a roundtable with residents from three of Greystone's communities.

HERE MORE FROM BOB ON VARSITY'S PODCAST!

We were lucky to also have Bob as a guest on Varsity's podcast, Roundtable Talk. In the episode, Bob discussed misconceptions about aging and identifying ageism as prejudice against who we might become. He also shed light on the often ignored yet immense capabilities of older individuals in the workforce and discussed the pervasive issue of loneliness across generations.

Check it out the [episode here](#) on the Varsity website!





What are the biggest misconceptions Americans have about aging?

A Hallmark card for turning 40 humorously portrayed life as declining, reflecting society's negative view of aging. This mindset sees aging as a disease, which is ironic since we age from birth. Viewing aging negatively as just decline fosters internalized ageism. While aging does bring challenges, it also brings significant gains. Society often labels aging as a downgrade, missing the positives.

Ageism damages future selves, as younger people facing a longer lifespan may encounter social and economic irrelevance in later life. Historical experiences, like a WWII veteran's surprise at living long, show ageism's impact. The term "silver tsunami" furthers the negative perception, branding the aging population growth as disastrous when, in reality, older adults represent an untapped workforce, contributing through work, volunteering, and mentorship.

Older adults are crucial in tackling loneliness and adding life perspective for younger generations. They are also vital in healthcare, shifting focus from reactive to preventative care, leading to "thrive years" over mere survival. Changing perceptions of aging and valuing older adults creates a society where longevity is cherished, not dreaded.



Why is it so important to shift from an ageist to an asset-based view of older adults?

In the 20th century, the U.S. saw a remarkable increase in lifespan from 47 years to 78 years. This longevity should be seen as a "bonus," but without viewing older adults as assets, it risks becoming a "longevity curse." The focus should be on adding life to years, not just years to life—a concept pivotal to senior housing and care sectors.

When engaging with new community members, we often focus on needs and costs, not identity or aspirations. To build real community, we should ask about their hopes, goals, and joys, fostering connection and purpose. These questions delve into identity, essential for meaningful engagement, rather than highlighting loss or decline. Shifting our questions can transform retirement and aging into a phase full of potential and vitality.



What new models of care do you think will define the next era of senior living and care?

The real opportunity lies in shifting from an "avoidance product" to an "aspirational product" in senior housing. While traditional care settings often focus on the last few years of life, there's a vast opportunity for lifestyle housing that enhances the quality of life for those in their 60s, 70s, and beyond. This approach aligns with matching healthspan with lifespan, prioritizing well-being over mere longevity.

There's a growing trend towards small, smart housing communities that offer a more personal touch and appear less institutional. Multigenerational living is also making a comeback, driven by financial reasons and the benefits of shared family experiences. The rise of smaller community clusters reflects this shift, providing various living options.

Programs like PACE, traditionally Medicaid-only, could expand to offer wraparound services to a broader audience, supporting the aspiration to age well. The key is diversity in offerings; different generations, especially boomers, resist "one size fits all" approaches. By embracing a variety of options, we can address the unique aspirations and needs of today's aging population, offering more than just basic care.



How do technology and data fit into the future of aging services?

Solutions in elder care should focus on freeing caregivers from mundane tasks to enhance personal interactions and anticipate needs rather than just reacting to them. Boomers want personalized care, and technology, including AI, allows for this customization which was previously impossible due to high costs. Data should inform real-time decisions rather than retrospective analysis, adapting care to immediate needs.

Japan's approach to an aging population involves 60 to 80-year-olds caring for those older, supported by advanced technologies like exoskeletons and smart devices. These innovations, initially underappreciated in the U.S., found commercial success in Japan. Now, as the need for efficient care grows, these technologies are gaining recognition in the U.S., highlighting the importance of intentional tech investment in eldercare.



What gives you the most hope about the future of aging in America?

I'm hopeful about the future because boomers have historically influenced cultural change, and their large demographic will compel marketers and society to respond to their needs positively. Older adults can address major societal issues like workforce gaps, loneliness, and healthcare costs, acting as key problem solvers.

Furthermore, shifting societal attitudes bring hope. For example, the film "Familiar Touch," ([trailer here](#)) featuring an 80-year-old actress as a potential Academy Award contender, highlights evolving perceptions. This mainstream film tackles sensitive topics, showing a more inclusive view of aging and caregiving, which is thrilling and promising for the future.



What advice do you have for senior living sales and marketing professionals?

I realized the term "silver tsunami" was ageist when challenged to reconsider its use. In our industry, we often unintentionally reinforce ageist stereotypes, especially in how we deal with prospective residents and their families. We need to shift this narrative and view residents not as passive recipients but as contributors and problem solvers.

The focus should move away from doing everything "to and for" older adults towards a collaborative approach that emphasizes doing things "by and with" them. Sales and marketing professionals should aim to inspire older adults, countering internalized ageism and highlighting their capabilities and potential. Let's ensure we're part of the solution by promoting a more empowering and inclusive view of aging.

QUESTIONS

HOW CAN SHIFTING THE FOCUS FROM THE "AGING BUSINESS" TO THE "LONGEVITY BUSINESS" CHANGE PERCEPTIONS ABOUT GROWING OLDER, AND WHAT ROLE DOES LANGUAGE PLAY IN MAKING LONGEVITY MORE ASPIRATIONAL?

While I agree with the idea of focusing on "longevity," I find the term a bit academic and potentially off-putting. It's more about "aging well and living well," rather than just living longer. The true goal should be improving how we age, which is crucial for our economy and society. While there are promising movements toward being age-friendly, we're not yet on track as a nation. Changing terminology alone isn't enough; we must address societal views on older adults head-on.

DO YOU THINK THE PHRASE "HAVING A SENIOR MOMENT" SHOULD BE RETIRED?

I do believe the phrase "having a senior moment" should be retired. It wrongly implies that forgetfulness is exclusive to seniors and affects all of them, which is simply untrue. Forgetfulness is a universal experience, not limited to any age group. The term reinforces stereotypes, and it's essential to move away from that mindset.

Additionally, terms like "senior living" should also be dropped as they're considered outdated. Using "senior" signals a focus on serving previous generations, not appealing to boomers. Similarly, phrases like "adult daycare" carry connotations that might deter boomer women who value their independence.

IS THERE A BETTER PHRASE THAN SENIOR OR SENIOR LIVING OR OLDER ADULT?

Someone will likely excel when they find a compelling alternative. Currently, no phrase has become widely accepted. "Older adult" is the least offensive option compared to "senior" or "elder," but it's not particularly attractive.

The focus should shift to terms that emphasize aspiration and reimagining what it means to be in your later years, such as "next stage living." While acknowledging the realities of aging, it's important to highlight opportunities for community and connection as key to healthy aging. Expanding social networks is crucial since friendships naturally shrink with age, and well-designed communities can support this effort.