



Midlife crisis a myth for most men

Middle age for men doesn't always look exactly as we might expect, with most experiencing a 'transitional phase' into midlife between the ages of 35-45 rather than full-blown crisis. So shelve the stereotype of the red sports car, trophy wife and toupee - few men will experience a 'midlife crisis' in these terms.

While new research from UniSA confirms much of what we already know about most men in middle age, it also reveals the importance of personality type in how men deal with midlife transition.

"Men in midlife re-evaluate, reassess and regroup," said Dr Rob Brandenburg, UniSA's first graduate Doctor of Counselling, "but the manner in which a man responds to this instinctive midlife re-evaluation varies according to their personality type."

"Typically what we find is that men re-evaluate their personal and professional relationships, their careers and their achievements in midlife. The criteria they use to assess their level of success and their response to that assessment varies according to personality," said Dr Brandenburg.

Based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator ©, Dr Brandenburg looked at Sensing-Thinking and Intuitive-Feeling personality types to compare just how men deal with the curve balls life throws in middle age.

"Being aware of your personality type can help to make navigating the path of midlife transition easier," he said.

Dr Brandenburg says in broad terms the Sensing-Thinking person tends to base their decisions on logic and objective analysis of cause and effect, focusing on the present and on concrete information gained from their senses.

"For this person, more likely to be the traditional career driven male, midlife finds him feeling fulfilled in a material sense, but often seeking more meaning from life. His journey is more likely to involve aspiring to a completely new career field, often typified by a shift from business and sales to human services."

These men had clearly defined career goals from the outset, but in midlife most commonly did not believe they had achieved their goals, according to Dr Brandenburg.

"On the other hand, the Intuitive-Feeling male is likely to feel he has achieved his career goals, but having done so, is more likely to be disappointed or left wanting.

"The Intuitive-Feeling person tends to focus on the future, with a view toward patterns and possibilities. These people prefer to receive data from the subconscious, or seeing relationships via insights. They tend to base their decisions primarily on values and on subjective evaluation of person-centred concerns."

According to Dr Brandenburg, this group of males is more likely to already be in the human services area and reevaluation of their career goals is more likely to take the form of seeking fulfillment through different channels in the same work environment. They will tend to seek more self-determination and autonomy within that workplace or start their own business in a similar area.

In his study, Dr Brandenburg found that in midlife men reported increased intimacy with their partner and were also looking for a deeper connection with their children and friends.

“In re-evaluating personal relationships in midlife, the Intuitive-Feeling man found increased intimacy or connectedness with their partner by learning to reframe the relationship to one of friendship. Sensing-Thinking men also sought to improve their relationships finding a greater capacity for listening and empathy was instrumental in their success.

“Encouragingly the common overriding theme for both groups was their sense of empowerment at the variety of lifestyle options open to them. And both groups expressed a desire to make a positive contribution to society, leaving it a better place than they found it.”

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