

# #endageism

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I've stopped making New Year's Resolutions. Seems they're just another way to set myself up for failure and cause me to feel badly about myself. Don't get me wrong — I certainly think the end of the year is a great time to review and set new goals or intentions for the new year. Perhaps, you might be saying to yourself, this is just semantics — different words. And you would be right, of course, but words can make all the difference in the world, can't they?

Karen Schoeneman, a long-time culture change pioneer, posted a couple of years ago, that instead of resolutions, she picks a word for the year — a word that she will think on and act on each day. That appealed to me when I read it, and I selected the word **act**. I made a sign for my office, using the three letters as an acronym for **Action Changes Things**, as a daily reminder. Then last year I chose the word Intention. I still wanted to keep act, so my theme became **Act with Intention**. This helped me to stay focused on what was important for me and not get sidetracked from my goals.

As I write this on New Year's Eve, I have given a lot of thought to my word for this coming year. Of course, I will still keep Act with Intention, but my word for 2019 will be #endageism. I know, I know, it's two words, but I used a hashtag, so I can consider it one word, right? Heck, it works for me and it's my word, so #endageism it is!

And I have the perfect opportunity in January to act on my new word.

If you have not yet heard about the "Dress Like a 100-Year-Old Day" in schools, let me tell you about it. Many schools across the country commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> day of school with lots of activities based on the number 100 — sounds fun, right? And so, it should be. I mean I'm all about themed parties. But somewhere along the line, someone got it in their heads that it would be fun for kids to dress like 100-year-olds. You can probably guess what these little 100-year old's look like. You got it — they've taken every stereotypical negative attribute about aging and piled them on these kids...powdered white hair, canes, walkers or walking sticks, drawn-on scowls and wrinkles, over-sized eyeglasses, and children bent over to simulate osteoporosis. Then they say how cute they look! Like Jill Vitale-Aussem, the President and CEO of The Eden Alternative, wrote in her August 30 blog, I too must remind myself that the schools, teachers and parents involved are not doing this to be cruel or malicious. Unfortunately, their actions reflect the inescapable barrage of ageism in our society. No other show of outright prejudice would be tolerated, especially in schools. But the underlying problem is that people don't really recognize it as a prejudice. What is needed here is education and it starts with you and me. To be honest, I only became

aware of ageism several years ago. But now I see it everywhere!! Ageism, the last socially acceptable prejudice, is just beginning to gain public recognition thanks to people like Jill, Penny Cook of Pioneer Network and Ashton Applewhite of This Chair Rocks, among others. Along with Leading Age, Pioneer Network and The Eden Alternative collaborated on a letter we can use to help schools and teachers shift from this negative representation of aging to a more positive approach for ways to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> day of school. The hard work has been done for us — all we need to do is to share the letter with them. This is where my #endageism word joins with my other words, **Act and Intention**. This will be one of my first acts of the year to #endageism. The 100<sup>th</sup> day of school in my area will be the week of January 21 (the day for your local school might be different since Florida schools begin in August.) This one small act, taken by many, can make a major shift in the way children, parents and teachers see aging. Won't you join me to #endageism?