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KAREN SANDS, MCC, BCC Possible Interview Questions with Answers

*Author of **The Ageless Way, Gray is the New Green, The Greatness Challenge***

1. Among your career titles is GeroFuturist. What is a GEROFUTURIST ?

GeroFuturistSM is a term that I coined and is a unique combination of a gerontologist, who studies adult development and aging through the life course, and a futurist, who studies the future using strategic forecasting and futurecasting—I have spent decades researching, teaching, and transforming the language and conversation around growing older. My intention at this timely juncture is to share that experience in order to illuminate the way for all of us, of all ages, to co-create a new story that is relevant for today and the future. It is a story with personal, communal, and global implications that, as with any new endeavor, will inevitably include trial and error and refinement. And we can only succeed if we do it together. It will take each of us, as a Jackie Mutcherson quote goes, to make a difference for all of us.

2. In your materials, I have seen the term Future by Design. What do you mean by this?

For many of us, the future has been determined by both the internal and external biases about aging. So one aspect of the Future by Design model is that we can design our own aging process by finding the pathways to living in an Ageless Way, which involves embracing the aging process while not letting it define us. In my book *The Ageless Way*, I offer new ways to think about age in general and specifically, growing older across the life span for all generations, and all the ways we can redesign our lives and communities to live more fully in our later years—and as life spans are continuing to extend, this is a concern that will become increasingly important.

Future by Design is also about the power we all have to reinvent at any time of our lives. We can design our futures, given we have the tools and principles to do

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so. I offer 52 principles of reinvention that help to catalyze and guide the radical reinvention process.

3. Can you tell us more about those principles. How did you determine what they were—and if they actually work.

Back in early January 2001, our home with my home office burnt down due to an electrical fire in the walls of our 1940s Bauhaus residence. We lost much that we valued dearly, catapulting us into a 3yr journey to reclaim our lives...our homebased businesses crashed and burned as a result.

Fighting our P&C insurers B.S. was the biggest challenge. To rush us into final negotiations, we were being moved to a new rental residence every few of months. It was breaking our spirit.

To give us a needed rest, we took a winter respite to Tucson AZ. My husband attended a major industry conference, while I spent my time taking in the desert beauty. All good medicine while I reflected on what was, what now, and what's next.

As I sat with fingers poised on my laptop keyboard, I prayed and asked the Universe to send me a sign, share a message – provide anything to guide me as I began my reclamation. Before I knew it, my fingers were flying across my keyboard, pumping out what I now refer to as my “52 Principles of Reinvention” These tenets or commandments anchored me as I returned to reframe, rebuild, and reinvent our tomorrow. Over the years, these 52 principles continue to be anchors during both good and disruptive times for all those I share them with... most especially right now in these VUCA times.

4. In your book you make a distinction between *real* Radical Reinvention and “rearranging the furniture” Can you tell listeners more about this difference.

Scott Maxwell said, "Every seed destroys its container." Part of being human is that as we grow and develop, the forces to reinvent ourselves often take us in new directions throughout the course of our life span. And in some cases, external events like the pandemic, rather than developmental forces, will be the compelling catalyst for change.

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However, what is *true* reinvention?

I compare it to the difference between changing the furniture and burning down the house. For many of us, the pandemic has now shifted our work and professional lives to a virtual reality. Therefore, we have to restructure how we work so that we can adapt to a predominantly online platform.

There is reinvention when it is more like moving the furniture: a new job or a new position...still staying in the same enterprise and/or same sector. Radical Reinvention is when transformation truly happens and that is where we move into the crucible of who we really are and what we came and to be. It is a deeper dive and is not for the weak-kneed.

When you do that kind of deep dive, it is like doing a forensic inventory as you review where you have been, what has worked, what has not, when you felt the clearest and purest--and what is your unique vision that makes you get up every day with joy and excitement and vision. That is what radical reinvention is about.

The pandemic has let loose a wave of reinvention-radical and otherwise- not only for individuals but for our society as a whole because of the massive job loss and closing. And for leaders who are at the helm, that same kind of forensic inventory has to be done now in many enterprises, small and large. The enterprises that will thrive are those that are guided with foresight and courage by today's fearless leaders and

5. "Shaping the new story of our AGE?" Great tagline, but what does it mean?

Shaping the new story of our AGE is an extension of this notion of Future by Design. The last of the "isms" is Ageism and it is still rampant in the marketplace, the workplace and in our own personal space -- thus perpetuating separation instead of bringing together all 5 generations at a time when what we need most is more inclusion, diversity and collaboration, not continued exclusion due to being "too young" or "too old". In these VUCA times the experience of the oldies but goodies is needed in tandem with our youth's openness to the everything new and unconventional, dropping all pretense and separation to blaze the new trails, we will need to move into the new world of whole beings and whole systems of our design.

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Bottom line: Our age is determined completely by the tools we apply to our futures and by transcending bias at any age to create the lives and communities that really matter to us.

6. Are you saying, then, that there are no differences between being 20 and being 60?

I am different now than I was in my 20s. Right? It is a false statement to say I'm the same. Physiologically, I am not as fast. My recovery is kind of slower. Cognitively, I think my thought process is much quicker, so it's not erasing. It's about equality not sameness. It's acknowledging the pros and cons.

But remember weaknesses can be strengthened and strengths can also be strengthened, so I'd rather take it that way. It's a positive, it's just positive shift. It's like comparing an adolescent to someone in their 30s. Of course, there are differences, but we're pulling on that whole continuum of life experiences as we age.

As a young person, I might be looking for a promotion. I want old people to retire because that clears the path for me to take a bigger role, and yet as a more senior person, I wonder how can I contribute even more.

But there might be a solution for everyone: The older worker might be a consultant or might job share. And those kinds of flexible solutions that build a positive culture have to be really supported by top leadership. It has to start at the top.

For example, job sharing could be a young father who wants to be home part time. The older person could be in a mentoring role and the younger mentee could help the mentor stay on top of the newest trends.

You know, the old apprentice model, apprenticeship model, I believe has to come back. We have a shortage of skills. We do not have enough skilled workers. How best to do that with our younger generations but to team up in an apprenticeship mode with those who are more advanced, more experienced, and perhaps even more successful?

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7. You referred earlier to VUCA times. Can you say more about what this means?

The acronym refers to volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. These are all the factors we are facing today, and into the future. And these VUCA times are highly disruptive. But disruption is not necessarily a bad thing. Nature tells us that disruption often leads to new creation.

When a volcano erupts, everything around it shakes with its explosive vibrations, and then the lava that pours forth over the land, rivers, and seas begins in time to harden, creating new shores and banks, and becoming home to emerging plants, insects, and animals. From the molten lava and ashes of volcanic disruption can come new life—but also a trail of death and loss.

I link the idea of eruptions to Nobel Laureate Ilya Prigogine's Theory of Dissipative Structures, which explains that a system that is perturbed sufficiently will either shake up or shake out—will vibrate into extinction or vibrate into a whole new and more evolved system. Both natural phenomena offer valuable lessons for us. When structures reach the collapsing or explosive point, there are two possibilities: destruction or transformation.

This is the choice of our time.

Not only are 79.6 million Americans currently in midlife or moving through their 60s and into their 70s, scientists estimate that we are midway through the anticipated life span of the solar system. We are moving through a momentous transition point--and everywhere around us it seems that things are falling apart, right at the tipping point of long-lasting change.

And, just as is true for individuals, the potential for collective Radical Reinvention is larger now than ever. Each of us is being called--no matter our age or stage--to Radically Reinvent ourselves in response to the current pandemic, racial unrest, explosive politics...and the ongoing disruption of severe Climate Change which will collide with the aging of the globe.

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8. Can you explain what the Longevity Economy is all about?

The now ubiquitous term, “Longevity Economy” was coined by Jody Holtzman on behalf of AARP, now founder of Longevity Venture Advisors, LLC, defined it as the sum of all economic activity related to serving the over 50 demographic in the U.S. In Europe it is called the “Silver Economy.”

This economic activity serving this demographic has benefits for all generations. For instance, may be by designing a new retirement financial product or more affordable LTC products. Or you might be creating new socially impactful designs for new housing initiatives to enhance and expand aging-in-place or shared housing. Or perhaps you’ll be creating age-friendly cities, or new technology that’s easy for every generation to use, but starts with innovations around living well with diseases of older adults, e.g, arthritis, etc.

The sum total of U.S. economic activity, which is currently **\$8.3 trillion just in this 50 plus market is projected to rise to 28.2 trillion by 2050**. The Longevity Economy is a wellspring for innovation and intergenerational collaborative, problem solving.

9. Are you hopeful about the future?

Yes. I believe that we in an evolutionary process, although it may not seem or feel that way. The reinvention process and the questions people are facing along the way have not changed over the decades; however, the circumstances clearly have. Many of my clients and followers are looking to discover how to navigate both the realities of getting older and adapting to these VUCA times.

I have studied reinvention for over 40 years, and am honored to play a role in shaping the future of those with whom I work and their enterprises. I am looking at how we might leverage the Longevity Economy in ways that involve inviting more multigenerational teams and approaches as we live life digitally and create platforms that expand far beyond our hometowns.

The potential for innovation from telemedicine to new ways of doing business offer an expansive view of tomorrow. However, as always reinvention is not an easy process; often times to forge the new, we must confront the grief of leaving something behind. As we do this, we are able to lean more fully into the essence

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of who we are as individuals and as a culture to become more responsive to our “soul calling” as we evolve into more transformed planetary beings in times of discontinuous continuous change.

Not only am I optimistic about the future for all of us conscious sentient beings, I am overly thrilled about the future of, by, for, and with women to create the Ageless Futures I envision.

10. Do you have any last words you can share with listeners today?

Among the 52 tenets/principles that I share with clients and followers is “Trust the Process.” No matter how difficult things get, we must confront our challenges and bring the best of who we are to them. It is often the most difficult times that give rise to the greatest innovations individually and collectively. We have to trust evolutionary processes and honor that we are part of a natural world that is constantly changing and evolving. In the same way, we are in constant flux, and it is critical we trust that each obstacle brings us closer to the expression of what I call our signature DNA, our greatness DNA.