

Logos
we Love



Rock the Classroom is a brand new nonprofit in the Los Angeles area that puts very talented (but often underemployed) local musicians into elementary school classrooms to complement existing reading and writing programs with a new third R: rhythm. Be advised, though: "School of Rock" this ain't. RTC infuses carefully planned literacy curriculum with music to more actively engage public school students and boost test scores. (Visit www.rocktheclassroom.org for more information.) Patricia Kovic, a principal and graphic designer at Studio Morris, gets the credit for a logo that is as clever and inspired as the program it represents. ■

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GOOD IDEAS FOR GOOD CAUSES

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Speaking your audience's language is a golden rule of communications, and one worth remembering when your audience is entering its golden years.

There's no escaping it: we're all getting older, but how would you feel if someone described you as *aging*. According to the dictionary, an *elderly* person is only "somewhat old; between middle and old age," but is that really the image the word conjures in your mind? And when you decide to stop working and enjoy the fruits of your labors, would you like to be called a *retiree*?

This is not an academic exercise in semantics. The first baby boomers will turn 60 next year, and by 2030 over 75 million American will be

65 or older. Products and services for this huge audience will be in greater demand than ever, including social services offered by thousands of nonprofits and government agencies across the nation. Speaking to *older adults* (or is it *senior citizens*?) in the language they want to hear will be critically important.

So what are the right words? After eighteen months of listening to this particular audience talk, one nonprofit in Atlanta has a pretty good notion of how to talk back. ▶

**WISER
ABOUT
OLDER**

► While the national population of adults 65+ is projected to double by 2030, in Atlanta that doubling is expected to occur by 2015, so there is a greater sense of urgency in the home of the Braves. In the 10-county area surrounding and including the city of Atlanta, services for older adults are coordinated by the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC). In 2002, ARC launched "Aging Atlanta," an initiative to improve this coordination so that more seniors could function successfully within their own homes and communities.

Thanks to a planning grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Aging Atlanta used the first 18 months of its existence to thoroughly survey the region, talking to both the target audience and service providers to learn what was working and what wasn't. According to Communications Coordinator Grace Trimble, Aging Atlanta conducted roughly 50 focus groups with older adults across the ten-county region and used surveys to reach 400 more. "We went to where people were," Trimble reports. "Senior centers, hospital waiting rooms, church basements—any place where older adults were getting together or we could get them together, we were there."

Project Director Kathryn Lawler recalls the aftermath of one focus group in particular. The meeting took place in South Fulton County and had attracted a particularly vocal group of older African Americans. After the formal discussions were over and the crowd was milling around, four grey-haired ladies dressed in their Sunday best walked over to Lawler. "I am Ruby Jones, and this is Martha, Laurette and Agnes," their ringleader said pleasantly, gesturing to her compatriots. *(The ladies' names have been changed to protect their privacy.)*

The pleasantries disposed of, Ruby got down to business. "We were glad you held this meeting to discuss the needs of seniors, but you've made a mistake. I may be 78 years old. My hair is gray and my knees certainly don't work like they used to, but I *feel* like I am 25 inside." Before Lawler could reply, Martha chimed in, "I don't need services for *old people*. I just need help fixing a leaky sink and rotten front steps. That has nothing to do with aging."

Laurette got to the heart of the matter: "I don't know why people call me a 'senior.' I don't even know what the word senior means." Finally, Agnes put in her two cents, adding, "Honey, what we're trying to say is that aging is something that happens to cheese, not people. We are just residents of East Point, Georgia. We attend church every Sunday. We've been volunteering since before you were born. We're glad you all are interested in helping us stay in this community as long as we can. But words are important—and you've been using the wrong words."

The Aging Atlanta partnership had suspected that the word "aging" might not speak to Baby Boomers who were approaching retirement age, but they were surprised to hear such negative reactions from septuagenarians and octogenarians. Prior to launching Aging Atlanta, the Atlanta Regional Commission operated a telephone information line known as Aging Connection. Lawler began to wonder if the service was undermined by its own name. "Who wakes up and thinks, 'I've got an aging problem today?'" she asked herself. Even her initiative's name, Aging Atlanta, started to appear problematic.

Lawler recalls that it was around this time that she was contacted by Risa deGorgue. A marketing specialist at Georgia Pacific, deGorgue has an aging father in California and had encountered problems connecting him to senior services in that state. Hoping to help seniors in her hometown avoid similar difficulties, she began volunteering with Aging Atlanta. DeGorgue was aware of the language issues that had surfaced in the focus groups and sent Lawler an email suggesting the name "AgeWise."

Aging Atlanta began testing the term. "We started at senior centers," Lawler reports, "and people said, 'Yes, that means something to me. It means I am wise because of my age.' Another person said, 'I can be wise *about* my age.'" Baby Boomers, whom Lawler refers to as "future older adults," also responded positively. "It didn't have the baggage 'aging' did," she says describing their reactions.

The Atlanta Regional Commission is now using the term to brand all its consumer services and programs for older adults. ARC's information line has been renamed "AgeWise Connection," a network of service providers is called "AgeWise Network," and the web site which serves as the primary online resource for information is www.agewisecommunity.com. When 640 agencies from across the U.S. gather this summer at a conference for the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, ARC is determined to share this story with anyone who will listen.

Hopefully, they'll have many chances to tell it. How Aging Atlanta learned to speak its audience's language is a good story, and *unlike* you and me, good stories never get old. ■



Mary Maddux of Atlanta, who is neither aging nor elderly, pumps iron.

