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Redefining Retirement

Careful planning can make retirement more enjoyable

BY JO HAWKINS DONOVAN, for SBT

Sooner or later, my coaching clients open up a conversation about retirement — especially the clients who fall into the baby boomer group. Of America's 76 million baby boomers, ages 39 to 58, seven per minute are turning 50 years old — and that will keep up until 2014.

Most of them are not attracted to the concept of retirement. That's not surprising when you look at what Random House Webster's College Dictionary has to say about the word "retire." Here are five definitions Webster's offers: to withdraw or go away to a place of privacy, shelter, or seclusion; to go to bed; to give up or withdraw from an office or career, usually because of age; to fall back or retreat, as from battle; to withdraw from view.

We need another word for this phase of our lives. In the 20th century, we gained an additional 30 years of life. Robert Butler, M.D., president of the International Longevity Center, says, "It took the preceding 50 centuries to do that. That's extraordinary."

I guess so. It means most of us are going to spend two or three decades in retirement. We want to move to something rather than from, so we'll have to define it as the 3rd age or chapter, or something else a little livelier than "retirement." Nothing very juicy and appealing about "withdrawing and giving up."

The clients who dread retirement have two major questions. "What will I ever do?" "Will I have enough money to last?" Mind you, these are business leaders who have a high regard for planning within their organizations.

However, many haven't even begun to plan for a new life or the rest of their lives after they leave their offices. I think it's just a scary topic for lots of people, and more so for men who are likely to define themselves by their careers. They look to "retirement" as a

move into diminished relevance and power.

More than one executive made statements like this to me: "I'm going to work 'til I drop" or "They'll carry me out of this place horizontally."

There is no question that the boomers are redefining retirement into something more appealing than sitting on the porch for 30 years admiring the gold watch from the farewell party.

More than half the people between ages 50 and 70 surveyed by the AARP said their retirement will include some form of work. "Work" might mean a new career. Many of my clients are transitioning into entirely new fields-or making realities of old dreams. Some are scaling back on an existing career. Scaling back works as long as they enjoy the work. Obviously, it is easier for the self-employed.

Others move into volunteering, where opportunities are so plentiful you can pretty much do whatever you want, as many hours per week as you want. A Cornell University study found that retirees who volunteer improve psychologically and physically. They reap all kinds of benefits, including staying socially connected and feeling that they're making a difference. They are.

To create a fulfilling life during this "after-glow" time takes planning. It takes lots of conversations with people close to you. It takes lots of soul searching to dig out those old dreams or unfulfilled passions.

One couple I met decided to visit every ballpark in North America in their first three years of retirement. They were almost giddy with the good times they were having. A client entered the Peace Corps at age 60-some. Several have dusted off their old musical instruments and enrolled in lessons again. Some jam with their friends on a regular basis.

I dream of having more time with my grandchildren before they have babies of their own. And of course, cranking out best sellers

from my beach cottage.

These are possibilities for those plagued by that "What will I ever do?" question. Then there is that queasy feeling in the pit of the stomach that comes after the "Will I run out of money?" question.

Boomers have a reputation for "spend now-save later" thinking. Even among those more prudent who are facing retirement, stock market losses may well have altered their plans. So some boomers are redefining retirement to accommodate their lack of a strong financial base.

Here, it gets confusing. What is enough money to last? One of my clients who earns a comfortable six-figure income told me his financial advisor recommended he accumulate a \$5 million nest egg before retirement.

"Hmmm," I say. The financial plan for retirement incorporates looking at pre-retirement expenses and projected post-retirement expenses. Many factors can affect these figures. Moving to a new zip code can make a major difference. Fred Brock has published a book titled "*Retire on Less Than You Think.*" Brock presents a thorough guide to planning your financial future. His belief is: "There is an incredible disconnect between the everyday reality of how much money it takes to live in retirement and how much money Wall Street and the mutual fund industry tell us we need."

If you invest your time and resources in some solid planning for this chapter in your life, you can create a retirement lifestyle that is realistic and welcoming, if not downright exciting. What is your dream deferred?



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