

Creating a happy retirement

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As people are working and living longer, today's retirement looks much different from that of 20 years ago. Instead of planning to simply relax for a few good years, many of today's workers expect to live for decades after leaving their careers, and they want those years to be active and fulfilling -- not to mention well-financed.

"When we think about retirement, everyone focuses on whether they can make it work financially, but they don't think about how they're going to spend all their time," says Matt Curfman, CFP professional and senior vice president of Richmond Brothers in Jackson, Mich. "We go from spending almost all of our time working, being helpful and feeling meaningful, to having an open schedule."

Because there are so many options for post-career life, it's difficult to plan financially without a clear plan for what your retirement years will look like. "If you don't develop a personalized vision for this stage of life, you take on the risks of aimlessness, lack of purpose and boredom," says Mitch Anthony, author of "The New Retirementality." "For lives to produce joy and meaning, they need to have some degree of focus and structure. Retirement planning, in spite of the inference of money, is primarily an existential issue; then it is an economic issue."

To create a clear vision for your post-career life, start by planning for these six areas.

Achieving retirement success Whether your retirement plans involve a part-time job or full-time leisure, be sure to think through the details to ensure your dreams come true.

Creating a happy retirement: Your work life

Many people "find a lot of worth in their work," Curfman says. Because leaving the workplace is like leaving behind an important personal value, completely

retiring can be depressing. When planning for the future, consider what role you want work to play in your later life -- part-time work, consulting or a completely different career are options to maintain an income stream and boost feelings of fulfillment.

Planning ahead may allow you to slowly transition into retirement, by reducing hours gradually or acting as a consultant for a while. Such a plan "can open doors and maybe allow for a second career you can control," says Terry J. Siman, CFP professional and managing director of United Capital Financial Partners' Philadelphia office.

Anthony promotes the idea of "retiring on purpose," which means using your experience and wisdom for meaningful and fulfilling pursuits. "Just as our money compounds in the later years, so does our wisdom and experience," he says. "Don't retire your heart and soul."

Creating a happy retirement: Your home life

The family home is often at the center of a family's activity during child-rearing and even grandchild-rearing years; its role often changes as homeowners grow older. Consider whether you'll want to downsize to a smaller home, build the home of your dreams or move to a new location for your retirement years. Where you will live plays a crucial role in your post-career years and your financial situation.

"Consider both now and for the foreseeable future, when health may make staying put not an option," Siman says. "Could you imagine making physical changes to your current residence that would allow you to stay should you become ill or have physical limitations? Could you move downstairs to a first-floor bedroom? Will you prefer to move and if so, to a place that *can* accommodate to physical limitations?"

Creating a happy retirement: Your spare time

At first, many retirees have more time than they know what to do with. Rather than feeling lost after leaving your career, plan now for how you will spend that extra time -- and how you will finance it. If you've never had hobbies, "You should begin trying them as soon as possible, not waiting until you retire," Siman says. "Take a few golf lessons to see if that may be your next best hobby. If so, that is an unexpected added expense you need to plan to support. Or join a

bridge club and learn a new game. Check it out ahead of time to fine-tune the decision."

People who lack hobbies and interests to occupy their time when they retire often become bored and eventually depressed, says Ben Barzideh, wealth adviser at Piershale Financial Group in Crystal Lake, Ill. So it's vital to envision yourself participating in activities that will fill your time and feed your mind. "It's very important to stay active in retirement, not only physically, but also mentally," he says. "Join an exercise group or join a new social group. Exercise helps keep your body sharp and socializing and continuing to learn new things helps keep the mind sharp. Being around other retirees and people your age can help you stay happy."

Creating a happy retirement: Your legacy

A complete vision for retirement years should include the legacy you want to leave behind, such as making an effort to give back to the world or your community. "As human beings, we are all physical beings, emotional beings and also spiritual beings," Barzideh says. "To be truly fulfilled, we have to tend to all of those areas. Ask, how can I give back and use my time on Earth to make this world a better place? Research shows the happiest people are those who are committed to helping others."

Making a plan to leave a positive legacy could include volunteering your time, giving financially to charities, or "simply sharing the wisdom that you've gleaned over the years with the younger generation," Barzideh says. "All of those acts can help make you a happier person, make this world a better place and also cement your legacy."

Curfman works with retirees who split their volunteering time between their churches and their local hospitals, he says. Others volunteer as teachers' aides in order to be close to their grandchildren.

"Find out what to do with all that passion you put into your job and redirect it to those who need it now," Siman says. "Add some intellectual stimulation to your retirement plans. It will keep you healthier."

Creating a happy retirement: Your health

There's no way to predict the level of health you will experience through your post-career years. But including health in your retirement vision will help you

maintain health-boosting habits and prepare financially for potential health concerns.

Curfman always includes health and fitness when creating a vision for clients' retirement years, "because you can't really reach your other goals without health," he says. He recommends starting by writing a list of health goals at various levels: one year, five years, 10 years. Those goals may include reaching a healthy weight, quitting smoking, drinking less or exercising more. "From there, you can create specific plans to set off in the direction you know you want to go," he says.

Creating a happy retirement: Your financial life

Once you have a clear vision for what you want your retirement life to look like, it's easier to plan financially to make it a reality. It can be helpful to work with a financial planner to develop a plan that will match your vision. "Today, people can live 30-plus years in retirement," Barzideh says. "Often, people only plan for that first decade of retirement and don't do the necessary planning for the second or third decade. A financial planner can help you develop a financial plan, and also help you stay on that plan and manage your investments in accordance to the plan and your objectives to make sure your money lasts as long as you do."

When seeking help, look for "an objective adviser who can test your plan, help you find out more about yourself and what your own priorities are," Siman says. "Get an adviser to help you through this transition, someone who does not have another agenda, like product sales, but who just wants to facilitate you creating that new vision. We're out there."

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