

The idea that retirement is a continuous vacation is a myth. It takes planning to spend time with purpose. Make no mistake it is important to relax, travel while you can, and enjoy every day - but that shouldn't be a retirement thing, it should be an everyday state of mind. Too many folks think life starts at retirement but get there to find disappointment realizing that life is best lived with purpose, which takes effort. Going to work is an easy way of substituting purpose, but it is a lot harder and requires more intentionality to find purpose without work.

Ironically, according to a [RAND Corporation study](#), 40 percent of employed individuals age 65 and older say they had retired at some point previously and 56 percent of those not working nor looking for a job say they would return to work if the right opportunity presented itself.

Financial Planning

Carefully planning for the financial implications surrounding retirement is of critical importance. Ensuring you have enough financial resources through public pension plans like CPP and OAS, defined benefit plans through your employer and any savings plans you've implemented such as RRSP's and TFSA's to achieve financial sustainability after you stop working is the most obvious and visible aspect of retirement planning. For most of us this can be best accomplished by working with a quality financial advisor who can best help us navigate and optimize your financial resources throughout retirement.

Planning your finances in the most effective manner does take time. Going to look for an advisor the day before you retire is probably not going to yield the most favorable results. If you haven't already been working with an advisor through all of your life stages, you should plan to do this at least five years out from when you are hoping to retire to enable enough time for proper planning and strategies to be implemented.

Beyond the financial aspect, in order to properly prepare for retirement, there are many considerations that are extremely important but are much less often discussed and planned for.

Change Planning Awareness

The transition to retirement comes with a significant amount change. There is the obvious, front and center change, of no longer having occupational income and thus needing to get used to a fixed income from a pension or lumpsum savings and large purchases like RV's, vehicles, home reno's, and the likes not being possible without lowering ones fixed income perpetually. Then there are the less obvious changes like relationships changes, neighbourhood changes, and time allocation changes all of which affect expectations, fulfilment, and purpose in one's life particularly when they become front and center issues when one's occupation disappears and we come face to face with them.



Transitioning to Something

An individual once told me they couldn't wait to retire because they planned to golf every single day. This got me thinking about how deeply they contemplated the use of their days in retirement. They already golfed 2-3 times per week while they were working full time. An additional 4-5 rounds per golf each week was not likely to consume the same number of hours their work did. Not to mention, in Atlantic Canada, opportunities to golf can be few and far between (and much less enjoyable) through the winter months. How did they intend to fill the hours in their day, beyond simply golfing, that would provide them with what they need to enjoy a happy and fulfilling life?

The initial stages of retirement, often referred to as the "honeymoon" phase, are filled with excitement and wonder as we can now pursue many of our hobbies and interests that we previously may not have had time for. Once the excitement of this phase of retirement wears off, many individuals find themselves unhappy in their retirement. Their careers provided them with a sense of purpose. Their knowledge and expertise made them feel valued by colleagues.

It is essential ask yourself in what additional ways you plan to fill your day in order to make your retirement years as complete and fulfilling as possible. Will you pursue additional education? Will you volunteer your time in for a cause you believe in? Will you take up part time employment or start a business in a field that has always been of interest but may not have been financially feasible while you were in your prime earning years?

Relationships

Relationships are often neglected during the busier phases of life and then not reinvested in. A good portion of people wish they had more friends at retirement as a relational void is left by co-workers. Spouses tend to go through a phase and process of getting to re-know each other with the abundance of renewed time together. Furthermore, a common problem is a heightened sense of self-awareness without the distractions of day-to-day life which presents itself in feeling like a stranger to oneself. Family time can also throw curveballs as new retirees now have an abundance of time to spend with kids and grandchildren, yet the family remains busy as they haven't retired therefore an alignment of expectations is important. Start preparing for this in advance by reconnecting with friends and distant family, investing in your marriage, and getting to know yourself and establishing retirement engagements pre-retirement. Make sure you make the effort to go visit sick friends and family as it may be a point of regret if they died.

Time Planning Tool

A great tool to help with planning for a fulfilling and purposeful retirement is a weekly grid, similar to a calendar, but more emphasis on time allocation. Imagine a grid with five columns. The days of the week down the first column, Monday through Sunday. The next four columns are time segments of the day titled "Sleep 22:00 – 7:00", "Morning 7:00 – 12:00", "Afternoon 12:00 – 17:00", and "Evening 17:00 – 22:00". You are now faced with 15 blocks of 5 hours each which need to be filled. It is just a tool to get you thinking... every person has 168 hours a week to "spend"; how will you spend yours?

In Conclusion

There are many factors to consider beyond simply your financial health if you are to make the most of your retirement. Understanding your own personal situation and what drives your internal satisfaction is key to enjoying your retirement years to their fullest. Working with a financial advisory firm that understands both the financial and non-financial implications of retirement can be extremely beneficial in helping you chart a successful path through retirement.

