

It May Be Time to Reconsider What Retirement Means to You

Whether you've been told you should retire at 62, 65, or some other age, only you can decide what is right for you. In fact, you may want to reconsider retiring at all—at least in the traditional sense.

Many of us don't like the circumstances we find ourselves in—and look at retirement as the nirvana we've been missing. The truth probably lies somewhere between completely dropping out (i.e., piddling around in retirement) and never retiring (i.e., dying with their boots on).

The reason many of us find ourselves in such situations is that we have been sold on an idea about retirement that is flawed: *the idea that we should do what we don't enjoy to accumulate the money we need to someday do what we want*. This hope of doing what we really want to do is why the concept of traditional retirement is appealing to so many of us.

Although this may surprise you, many people who have retired and dropped out of the race are not altogether happy with their decision. The truth is that traditional retirement doesn't work for everyone. Instead, people want freedom to pursue their own goals and interests. They want the autonomy to call their own shots—to do what they want, when they want, and where they want.

There is no question that having money provides options. If you have enough, you can usually do things the way you want. But money is only part of the equation—finding a work/life balance is just as critical.

There are two important steps to take when planning your retirement:

1. Decide the path you want to take: continuing to work, not working at all—or a combination. If you have a partner, it's critical to involve him or her in the process.
2. Put together a plan that will enable you to achieve your goals.

These two steps will help guide you in living a life you love with the money you have—on your terms, not someone else's. People are still haunted by the old rules and media hype that bemoan their lack of preparedness to reach this artificial goal line of traditional retirement. Many don't understand that they don't have to stop working to start retiring.

Life can present all of us with challenges that can radically alter our course: disability, a death in the family, divorce, and so on. We need to plan ahead financially because our minds and circumstances can change over time. For example, what interests you today may bore you ten years from now, or an unexpected disability may prevent you from plans you made for the future. Investment savings are necessary to purchase the freedom to change course when you choose—or need—to change it.

Many of us have already seen enough of our parents' and forerunners' retirement lives to know that this is not the life for us. We have already figured out that our lives will be full of challenge, relevance, stimulation, and occupational adventure. We may slow down but we are not leaving the track for the concession stand.

When you ask many retirees how they're doing, they often reply, "I'm keeping busy." This is an acknowledgment of the void that retirement has brought. Most people are truly happy when they are busy doing what they love. Conversely, if people are not productive and contributing in some way, they are most likely not very happy.

The goal of investing—including retirement planning—is to have the resources to have the liberty to do what you want when you want. What is the point of using that kind of liberty to do nothing but play golf? It may sound like a great idea when you're commuting three hours a day, but it gets old quickly. Redefining retirement is about balancing vacation and vocation. How you define retirement is up to *you*.