

Yes, You Might Actually Enjoy a “Working” Retirement

An important part of your retirement plan is a discussion of the benefits of working, regardless of age. Retirement is no longer an event—it is a segue into an altered definition of life as you know it.

One definition of “work” is that it consists of actions that bring value to others and meaning to you. While you may feel that you’ve had enough work, it’s probably the underlying issues (i.e., meetings, corporate politics, commuting) that have left you drained and exhausted.

Think about this: many people who go back to work after retirement are motivated by more than money—they are also motivated by the psychological and existential payoffs.

You need to consider work and retirement in more holistic terms. What exactly do you want to retire *from*? Keep in mind that the word “retire” means to withdraw, and while it may be tempting, you need to consider the pros and cons of not working at all.

You may want to withdraw from your environment, but do you want to withdraw from the challenge of solving problems? You may want to withdraw from an egotistical boss, but do you want to withdraw from colleagues you’ve developed relationships with over many years?

Alzheimer’s and dementia research is underscoring the power of leading an intellectually challenging life, especially as we age. The brain is a highly-sophisticated muscle that needs to be used, lest it atrophy just like any other unused muscle. Any engagement that we find intellectually stimulating helps expand the computing capacity of our brains. If we treat life as a learning experience and are intentional about continued learning, we are constantly building and expanding our brain circuitry.

The discussion surrounding “who we are” has received short shrift in the retirement conversation. Most of us are unprepared for the realities that come crashing down around us once we retire: playing golf every day quickly loses its appeal; the family doesn’t want us visiting that much; spouses need space; and we don’t know where to ply a lifetime of know-how and know-who any longer.

The old retirement question was, “How will you invest your money so you can retire comfortably?” The new retirement question is, “How will you invest yourself and your time, as well as your money?” In order to answer the new retirement question, you need to talk about the pros of working and how they apply to you:

- Physical health/energy
- Intellectual stimulation
- Social stimulation
- Creative tasks
- Competition
- Meaningful contribution
- Sense of relevance
- Problem-solving

- Engagement/doing what you love)
- Opportunity for growth

If you can avoid jumping off the work cliff, and instead begin negotiating the type of balance and application that best suits your life, you will no doubt enjoy a much more rewarding and fulfilling retirement.

If you are looking toward to retiring, think about how work will be integrated into your life going forward. Many people don't do this assessment before retiring—only to end up going back to work in some capacity because they realized they were missing out on the pros listed above.

When you can't believe someone is paying you to do what you're doing, you're collecting a "play-check." If you're currently collecting a "play-check", you should give serious consideration as to whether or not you want to retire. Whether you are retired or not, collecting a "play-check" should be your goal.

Here are some benchmarks to consider (the more of these you feel strongly about, the closer you are to collecting a "playcheck"):

- My natural talents and abilities are expressed through my work.
- I have a continuing enthusiasm about the work I do.
- I feel energized by the work I do.
- I enjoy the people I work with.
- My work helps me to grow intellectually and personally.
- I bring benefit to others through my work.
- I have a sense of serenity regarding my work.

Think about what you like best, and least, about working and use those responses, along with your choices above, to help you integrate a work plan into your retirement plan.

Are you enjoying benefits but want to slow down? In that case, working some balance into your schedule will sustain your enjoyment of the work you do. Do you love what you do? If so, full retirement probably is not a good choice for you.

It is important to determine how work benefits you. Money is certainly one, and having more of it doesn't hurt. But, as the saying goes, money can't buy happiness. The psychological, social, and intellectual benefits that the right work can deliver into your life is much more difficult to tally in terms of the value it delivers to you and to those you work for or with—but it is just as important.