

5 Keys to an Evolving Retirement

By Dr. Bob Hassmiller

Even though I've read many books on retirement, the beginning of mine feels like a voyage into undiscovered territory. I imagine yours might feel that way, too, so here I'll share my first impressions and early findings since I retired on Oct. 31.

I've always suspected that financial success is necessary but not sufficient for retirement success. After more than eight years of preparing with *RJR*, I feel fully confident that I am financially ready for retirement. This is not about that.

Instead, I've realized that I had prepared much more completely for every other milestone of my life, except perhaps parenting, than I had for my retirement — and that this transition is requiring a more comprehensive re-thinking of my life than I'd anticipated. It's been surprising!

But as Abigail Trafford, the author of *My Time*, said: "My Time is about smashing old rules of aging to create a new standard of development in later life." I'm sure there are more topics to consider, but let me hit five.

Health

All of you who are the same weight you were when you were 30, who can run as fast and lift as much, and who eat healthfully — tune this out. You're ahead of me. But if you have slowly made excuses for exercising less or eating more, if you feel that those aches and strains are just part of growing old, if you put work and family first and yourself second; then you have a wonderful opportunity coming in retirement.

The best retirement gift from my wife and daughter was a personal trainer. Over eight weeks, I discovered something I'd never known about: my core. I worked on strength, conditioning, toning, and core training. I went slowly (because I've got plenty of time), but I lost a quick 10 pounds. And stretching is a miracle! What I thought was chronic hip and knee pain gradually went away. Almost nightly leg cramps when I did exercise never came back. I stretch with my wife, and watching her is worth the effort.

Finally, who knew that after 66 years I'd enjoy cooking? I know I'm a complete rookie, but in the time it takes just to drive to a fast-food restaurant — and that's what two busy professionals usually do — I can put together something a lot tastier and with more nutrition.

I've looked at the data, and a healthy lifestyle doesn't necessarily lengthen a life. However, it does lengthen the quality of life that you have — significantly.

Life Skills

I've always considered myself a "planning" sort of person. My career and the financial part of my retirement were carefully planned. I even prepared to do volunteer work in retirement by starting early with The Motley Fool, the Red Cross, and other organizations. But what surprised me was that although people knew how to use my skills when I had very limited time to give them, they (and I!) were confused about using my availability now that I have more time on my hands. The world did not beat a path to my door to use my skills, and I had to get over resenting it for a while.

What Color Is Your Parachute? For Retirement points out that retirees have 20 to 30 more productive years ahead of them. The book provides tools to assess your life skills and shows you how to best use and fulfill your strengths. What I've done is revise a simple, effective tool I used at work for many years. You ask yourself two questions:

1. What does my life look like five years from now? Be specific.
2. What do I have to do now to make that happen?

Yes, you're simply setting goals — but what's important is that you save your responses and look at them the following year, when you repeat the exercise. As I reviewed my responses over time, I found that some things I wanted to do weren't so important anymore, and it's fine that they dropped out. But some things *are* important, and it's much too easy to forget about them in the stress of day-to-day life. Writing down my goals, now in retirement, is an important part of shaping my undiscovered territory.

Family

I have a master's degree in counseling from years ago, and I recently remembered from my studies the symbolism of a baby's mobile, often hung over a crib, in which various fish, birds, or shapes are hung by thread or wire from a single base. The entire mobile is often motionless unless the baby swats at one figure, and then the entire mobile bobs and moves until some new equilibrium is found. Welcome to the family in retirement.

Even though my family knew my retirement was coming, everyone treats me a little differently. My daughter was the highest in congratulations and now seems to think of me as a nice old man suitable for limited chores. My son sees me as a potential business partner (and bank) for his many entrepreneurial ideas. My mother-in-law, who has lived with us for more than 25 years, wants to be sure she doesn't need to spend her Social Security on the day-to-day expenses or change the life she's loved. My wife has the extra burden of actually having me around after a commuter marriage.

I'm adapting to all of these expectations, plus the pleasure of living in a new 55-plus community with friends not related to my children's activities. Like that baby's mobile, the family dynamic is bobbing around considerably, and we all need to take some time to find the new point of

equilibrium. If things get too heated, do what I've done: Find a paid counselor. I always hired qualified outside expertise when I was working. Why not now?

Relaxation

Before all your days are filled with other things — part-time work, volunteering, cooking, grandchild care — think about yourself. Beyond your personal health, practice finding things that will help you relax. I'm taking golfing lessons after a 15-year hiatus and spending time on my bicycle. I'm also taking a road trip with my mother-in-law and our dog, Jake, to see friends and places she hasn't seen in decades. If I'm at Retirement 1.1, my mother-in-law is at 9.2. She appreciates every color of every bird, the configuration of the clouds each morning, the trees on each street, and always a good cup of coffee. I will learn a lot from her on this road trip.

Save Some Money

I know; I sorta promised not to talk about financials. But it has been fun negotiating, which I never had time for. I reduced our cell-phone costs by \$50 a month with no reduction in service. I was also able to reduce our cable bill. (Everyone should renegotiate cable every year.) Before retirement, I refinanced the mortgage on my New Jersey home, reducing the monthly payment by \$70 per month with no increase in the term. I paid off the mortgage on my condo in Virginia and turned it into an investment property. That should be about a 6% return on a property that should appreciate with inflation. I changed electric and gas providers, found several automatic rollover expenses on my credit card that I don't need, and seriously decreased our cost of eating out.