

I work therefore I am

For a great number of us, work is the primary domain from which our sense of self is derived. For better or for worse, we live in a culture which strongly dictates that we identify with our work roles, defines who we are by what we do and routinely structures our lives so that we know where we are expected to be come Monday morning. Retirement from paid employment is thus regarded as a milestone event in an individual's life.

HANGING UP OUR TITLES

Many of us spend a significant amount of time and energy during our adolescence and young adulthood preparing to enter the workforce. We invest large sums of money to attend universities and vocational schools in an effort to cultivate the necessary skills required for a successful career. In fact, our choice of work is regarded as one of the greatest developmental decisions of our adult lives. Yet few, if any of us, ever really take the time to contemplate our exit from the workforce. Even fewer of us plan for our lives in retirement - beyond what is required to build a financially sufficient nest egg that will fund the retirement lifestyle that we anticipate.

However, exiting the workforce entails much more than the termination of a paycheque. Leaving work generally means leaving behind an identity, a lifestyle and a social network. Our work role reflects our position in society as it generates a sense of personal worth and identity. So when we exit the labour force we often **HANG UP** our titles. Although previously known as banker, manager or teacher, we are now referred to as retiree, and we may feel unsure of our position in the world.

WHAT'S NEXT?

As a culture we mark significant events in our lives with specific rites and rituals. We have ceremonies to mark graduations, weddings to celebrate marriage and events to welcome the birth of children. We are taught to plan ahead and anticipate the changes which will accompany each stage of development. Yet, when it comes to retirement we are simply given a gold watch or thrown a farewell dinner. We receive very little guidance about what to expect and how to navigate the retirement transition.

There are as many reactions to retirement as there are retirees. For many, retirement will be a time of renewal and rejuvenation, enabling the pursuit of hobbies and activities which could not otherwise have been pursued while working. Yet for others, exiting the labour force will bring with it a decline in well-being, as retirement challenges us to forge new social networks, routines and personal identities.

PREPARATION IS KEY

So, it is recommended that people enrol in a pre-retirement seminar 10 years before they plan to retire, so that they become better acquainted with the challenges, opportunities and changes that accompany the retirement transition. Such seminars serve to help participants understand:

- Their new roles as retirees
- What life will be like once they retire
- Reasons for exiting the work force, and ways to cope with such decisions once they retire
- The option of phased retirement and part-time work
- The impact of money and marriage on the experience of retirement
- Discover different ways of managing retirement living

The goals of pre-retirement seminars is to positively influence an individual's attitudes and behaviours regarding the retirement process and thus facilitate greater life satisfaction once the person retires.

As with every life stage, boomers will redefine the very concept of retirement to mean something different than just a well deserved reward of rest and relaxation for a life time commitment to work. Retirement is a time when people will have the opportunity to slow down, should they wish to, start new hobbies or careers and pursue interests that were delayed while setting up a home, raising children, paying for college and climbing the corporate ladder. Today's retirees want a retirement that is dynamic and filled with meaning and purpose. They should plan accordingly, because boomers, this is not your parent's retirement!

Should you require more direction and information regarding preparing for retirement then sign up for our seminar, [The art of retirement](#).

As always if you have any comments, suggestions or questions please do not hesitate to contact me at gill@directionsrc.com

I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Until Then,

Happy Planning,

Gillian Leithman

Gillian Leithman is the president of *Directions Third Age Consultants Inc*, www.directionsrc.com, a company dedicated to helping people prepare for their emotional wellbeing in retirement.

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