



Retiring Relationships

Managing the Nonfinancial Side of Retirement

By Stephen Dennis

Retirement! Your whole career, it's out there—a distant thing that your father went through. Then suddenly, or so it might seem, retirement time is here. It may be something you elect to do or it may be thrust upon you as in “downsizing” or “layoff.” Either way, one day you are a productive member of the workforce and the next, you are a retiree. Will you be ready?

No problem you say? You have your IRA, 401(k) and your financial plan all tuned for the big day. But how about your nonfinancial plan? What are you going to do with yourself? How do your plans mesh with your spouse's? Have you thought about it? Does it matter? After 40 years in the workforce you may now face an identity crisis similar to the one you last faced as an adolescent.

Think about it. While working, you typically have structure in your day and a sense of purpose. You spend time away from your spouse. You exert influence, earn praise and have a sense of identity. Friendships often revolve around work and business. The day you retire much more than a paycheck goes away. It may come as a shock to realize that, no matter how valuable you were to your firm, they will get along without you.

So the question is, how do you prepare and execute your “non-financial” retirement plan? Fortunately, there are a few simple steps you can take to ease your slide into the retirement world.



6 TIPS FOR Retirement

1. PLAN AHEAD

As in before the day you retire

2. TALK

As in communicate with your partner

3. COMPROMISE

As in be willing to give a little

4. GET A SPACE

As in a shop, office or place to go

5. GET A LIFE

As in find something to do

6. NOTHING IS SOMETHING

As in reading a good book counts

1. Plan Ahead

Harry was shocked the day after he retired. No meetings were scheduled. His BlackBerry was silent. No one was asking his opinion. Other than eating three meals and reading the paper, his day was open. His wife was busy with her own schedule. What was he to do?

Harry shouldn't have been surprised. Without a plan, he was going through the same withdrawal symptoms that thousands of retirees face each year. Keith Bender, a professor of economics at the University of Wisconsin, found that retirees with a plan are happier in retirement than those who enter retirement with no plan or only a financial plan.

There are simple ways to avoid Harry's dilemma. Learn what to expect in retirement before you get there. Talk to recent retirees. They can be a great source of comfort and insight. Businesses, brokers and some colleges offer retirement planning seminars. Buy a good book on retirement planning. A search on Amazon.com provides a broad range of choices. Take a look, buy a book and avoid Harry's surprise.

2. Talk

"What we've got here is failure to communicate." That memorable quote from Paul Newman's Oscar-winning 1967 film "Cool Hand Luke" aptly describes many post-retirement marriages. Two people, married for years, suddenly find themselves thrust together 24/7. The "underfoot syndrome" begins to poison the relationship. Studies suggest that only a small percentage of marriages go sour after retirement but many undergo high levels of stress as they pass through a period of adjustment. If the partners don't talk freely about this new stage in life, the stress can be daunting.

The new retiree often forgets that his or her spouse already has a life and daily schedule. The retiree's presence during the day can be viewed more as an intrusion than a joy as the nonworking spouse feels a loss of independence. The partners may find they have widely differing views on what constitutes an "ideal" retirement.

■ Upon retiring, Jeff planned to sell the house and move to their Whidbey Island home full-time. Oops, he forgot to tell his wife. They didn't move.

■ Sally retired and began using Dave's home computer during the day. But Dave used it for his home business and had never shared it before. They bought a second computer.

■ Larry assumed they would begin eating all their meals together. Betty had her own schedule and it didn't include making three meals a day for Larry. They have dinner together.

■ Bill and Ann both retired. She assumed they would travel. He assumed he would golf near home with friends. They travel to golf destinations.

On the surface all these examples seem petty and insignificant. But if left to fester all of these issues can (and did) cause friction for far too long. In each case the offended spouse hoped the issue would resolve itself

and avoided talking about it until the minor irritation grew into a major confrontation. To complicate the matter further, each of these incidents was one of many points of friction. Taken out of context a single incident seemed like no big deal but, taken along with other friction points they grew to flash points, resolved only when anger and frustration grew to a breaking point.

The suggested solution: talk or communicate in ways that work for you. Following a series of miscommunications, one couple set aside Monday mornings for a weekly "meeting" to review points of friction and communicate plans for the week. After the postretirement routines were in place, the need for the meeting diminished



but, at first, it was a welcome outlet. Another pair leave their respective calendars in the kitchen so each knows what the other has planned for the week. They point out they are providing information to their spouse, not asking permission.

However you communicate, do it often enough that the little issues don't become big ones.



3. *Compromise*

My way or the highway! That management style may work at the office. It is harder to execute at home. Unless a relationship is indescribably harmonious or absolutely tyrannical, the transition into retirement will entail some compromise. Embrace it. The outcome may be better than you envisioned.

Who will take the car for service? Who will plan the vacations? Where will you travel? Do you work out together or independently? Who pays the bills? When is “my” time on the computer?

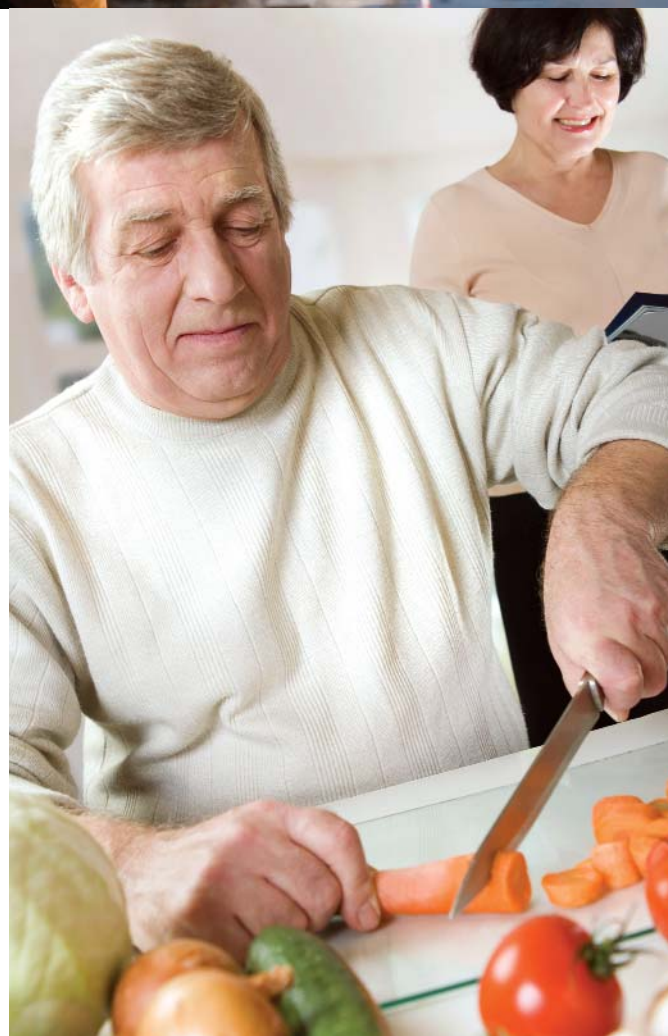
Questions that seemed resolved over years of marriage surface again when the former worker comes home. Jerry thought he would have more time to pursue his own interests in retirement and that his wife would continue to manage the home as before. Her response: “When do I get to retire? I managed the home because I knew you were engaged at work.” In her view it was time to reassign the home management tasks. Jerry was surprised; they compromised.

Compromise should not be confused with “giving in.” It isn’t a win-lose discussion. It’s a timely assessment of a new reality.

Sally and Jim, married at 50 and retired at 60, faced each other at the kitchen table discussing their retirement options. She liked sun, beaches and being near the water. He liked fishing. They purchased a 42-foot boat, took a boating safety course, joined a local yacht club and have never looked back. It was the first boat either had owned and a win-win solution.

Bill and Ann resolved their golf versus travel conflict by planning travel to destinations where golf was an option allowing Bill to play at a whole range of new courses.

A successful compromise doesn’t have to include a major purchase. It can simply involve agreeing to split household chores, scheduling computer time, allocating time to be alone or with friends (awayness time versus togetherness time.)





4. Get a Space

A psychologist could likely explain why we have a need for a place to call our own. Maybe it's because we always had a place at work that was "ours." Maybe it's a womb-envy thing. But for whatever reason, retirees need a place to call their own. It could be a desk, a shop, a sewing room, a craft area or even a rented space away from home.

The space may reflect the needs of a new hobby or of a second profession. If you take up quilting, you need a place to spread out. If you decide to build a wooden kayak, you need space to make a mess. If you are managing

your investments, you need an office area that you might not want to share with your spouse. If you are taking up a second profession or doing nonprofit work, you will need all the trappings of an office: phone, fax, computer.

Even if you are doing none of these things, you may just need a refuge to call your own. By setting up your own area, for whatever purpose, you can set the rules and avoid spousal conflicts.

Short of space? Look at options. Take a table at Starbucks. Visit the library. Find a desk at the nonprofit you are working with. Spend more time at your summer home or on your boat.

Unsure of what kind of space you'll need? Don't worry. It will evolve once you begin to sort out your postretirement activities.

One final note about space. Don't mess with your spouse's space. No spouse wants to come home and hear, "Honey, I've found a new way to optimize our closet and storage space" or "Dear, I've rearranged your things in the garage. Doesn't it look nice?" Don't go there.

5. Get a Life

There is no excuse for boredom in retirement. Period.

Sadly, not every retiree would agree with that statement. And many potential retirees live in fear of retirement because they dread "having nothing to do." Staying physically and mentally active is also good for your health. Dr. Eric Sundstrom, a University of Tennessee professor of psychology, says, "People who are engaged live longer and happier than those who sit on the porch and rock...."

Successful retirees tend to parrot a hackneyed line; "I'm so busy in retirement I don't know when I ever had time to work." It's true. There is plenty to do out there if, and it's a big "if," you are proactive and find something that matches your interests.

Manage your investments. Remodel a house. Train for a marathon. Get a hobby; there are too many to list. Work for a nonprofit. Visit city hall and find a board or committee to work on. Get active in a political party. Run for office. Take up reading. Mentor a child. If worse comes to worse, get a real job.

Unattached John capitalized on his interest in World War I, took French lessons at a community college, read

extensively and then moved to France for six months to walk the battlefields and meet the people.

Matt is a volunteer sailing instructor at the Center for Wooden Boats on Lake Union.

Sue volunteers at a hospital.

Nancy retired from teaching and now substitute teaches in the same district.

Getting a life after retirement serves many purposes. You do something of value. You have a reason to get up in the morning. It gives you some time away from your spouse so he or she can nurture personal interests.

Dr. Paul Nussbaum, a neuropsychologist at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, argues that mental and physical activity is critical to a healthy brain. Travel, for example, puts the brain in a complex environment and provides healthy mental activity. Physical activity stimulates the brain, refreshing blood flow. Start moving and keep thinking. Don't get stuck in a rocking chair with the TV remote.

One caveat. Don't get too involved. When that chance to travel comes up you don't want to be over-committed!

6. *Nothing is Something*

Do nothing? What kind of advice is that? Taken in context, sound advice. While postretirement activity is encouraged, don't forget to stop and smell the roses. It is OK to have a quiet visit with a friend or grandchild. It is OK to sit and read a book, meet a friend for coffee or take a long walk in your neighborhood. After all, you may have spent your entire working career on a schedule treadmill. You're retired. It is OK to take it easy some of the time provided you still remember the suggestions noted above.

Retirement is a time you can do things you didn't have time for in the past. Take advantage of the opportunity.

The key word is balance. Balance activity with relaxation. Balance recreation with stimulation. Balance time with your spouse with time away. Everyone is different. Find your balance point and enjoy your retirement.

Retirement years can be the best part of your life. Census numbers suggest that if you make it to age 60 odds are good that you will see 80, which means that nearly one-third of your adult life might be spent in retirement. Relish it. Take advantage of it. Enjoy the time you can spend with your spouse while respecting the time you spend away. You just may be pleasantly surprised where the retirement road takes you.



Retirement Resources

Interested in more information on retirement preparation? With 78 million baby boomers marching toward retirement, there is a wealth of information being generated to make their retirement transition as successful as possible. Here is a sample.

Local colleges offer a range of programs aimed at the retired and soon to be retired. They include:

- **Bellevue Community College**
www.conted.bcc.ctc.edu/index.asp
- **The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute**
at the University of Washington
www.outreach.washington.edu/olli/

A number of retiree resources sites are available on the Web, such as:

- www.matureresources.org
- www.mynextphase.com
- www.navigatingyourretirement.com

If you like to curl up with a good book try:

- **"For Better or for Worse...But Not for Lunch: Making Marriage Work in Retirement"** by Sara Yogev
- **"The Power Years: A User's Guide to the Rest of Your Life"** by Ken Dychtwald and Daniel J. Kadlec