

Retirement Planning
Beyond Financial

Navigating the Retirement Jungle



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“When I retire I want to live the life I have dreamed and be able to do the things I want with my wife on my arm as we continue our journey together. But there are so many variables to be considered and to plan for, everything from finances and affording to retire to choosing where to retire and then figuring out what to do once retired. Laws are constantly changing, health issues can arise, fears of the unknown need to be faced, how can we hope to keep it all straight? Without planning ahead, I fear I might be woefully unprepared to enjoy the retirement life I am working so hard to reach.

I started LoveBeingRetired.com in an effort to figure out for myself and others approaching retirement how to identify, understand and better prepare for the myriad of issues that impact retiring. The primary goal is to offer useful insight with real-life recommendations to help prepare NOW for a rewarding, fulfilling retirement. Financial security although important is only one piece of the puzzle. Finding a passion for what you do once retired and a purpose to live each day is just as critical. The aim is to help assure that the quality of our retirement is the best it can be. And ultimately, maintain our sanity while living each day to the fullest. Retirement is only the beginning.”

Taken from my ***Retirement - Only the Beginning*** blog, this theme has been the cornerstone over the past years. Retirement ultimately offers each of us the tantalizing promise of an escape from the stress-packed working world that we have endured throughout our career. Even if we were fortunate enough to enjoy what we were doing for a living, once retired we hope to have the luxury to ***choose to do what we WANT to do*** rather than what we must do in order to survive. For me personally, this is the ultimate enticement of retirement – our ability to choose how we will spend the moments that will fill our days. If we decide we want to sleep in, there is no one we need to call nor must we make up an excuse to justify our tardiness. A good book can become our focus for hours on end if we so choose. Travel on short notice to take advantage of specials is a-okay. We can now commence those guitar lessons that we promised ourselves for years as we explore our musical side in more depth. The possibilities are truly limitless. We can finally do what we want to do and we have the freedom to do it.

During the First Act of our lives, we worked tirelessly with noses to the grindstone juggling our lives and loves to fulfill our many responsibilities. Typically we struggled to raise children and teach them right from wrong in a world where such clarity is often sadly lacking. We postponed satisfying our own personal wishes to focus on providing a secure and supportive environment for our family.

Children’s needs came first and foremost as we attacked an intimidating and sometimes overwhelming need-to-have list which included but was not limited to providing clothes,

food, doctors, dentists, education through college and maybe beyond, hobbies, cars when they reach sixteen, insurance, and allowances. When looking back it is truly amazing that we survived with our minds and hearts still intact!

And then, finally, upon ultimately completing their college education, we breathe a sigh of relief. We have successfully provided for them and now send them on their way toward an independent, satisfying life of growth and new experiences. Having done our part, it is now their turn to step up and take control of their own destiny.

With that chapter completed, we can now take time to adventurously peek ahead to view life after the kids leave the house. Depending on when we had them, we are probably in the forty five to fifty five year range. Ideally we are healthy, basically sane, employed, and optimistic about the rest of our life. Hopefully we have grown closer to our spouse as together we faced challenges of raising a family and now have some time to get reacquainted. Finances should start to improve with reduced expenses (once we pay off any loans, credit cards, mortgages, etc.). And so we can now look ahead to our next adventure, the next big thing. And there is a big one looming large on the horizon - Retirement.

Retirement – the World’s longest coffee break
~ Author Unknown

There is no reason why a good, fulfilling, happy retirement cannot be had by each of us. It does not require multi-millions of dollars saved in a nest egg whose real cost is years of sweat and tears often with the unintended consequence of putting distance between us and those we love most. We should expect there to be high points and not-so-high points along the way. We may not feel as sprightly as we did at thirty. Sometimes that seemingly little thing we used to so easily handle can require a bit more effort. Or we may on occasion find our self challenged with the whereabouts of an elusive set of car keys. But we are here. The world is an ever-changing, stimulating place to inhabit. Every day is different than the day before, and we get to do what we want to do when we want to do it.

Before we go any further, let me highlight what I believe is a too often overlooked but critical area to attaining a happy and fulfilling retirement.

Preparing to live a fulfilling retirement does not start the day after you are officially retired. Retirement does not just happen. Making the most of each day, whether relaxing in the garden or climbing the nearest peak requires effort. If you wait until after

you retire to start figuring out what your new life will look like you risk putting yourself at a serious disadvantage.

To make the most of your retired life you need to ***start planning and preparing now.***

The variables and topics, laws and regulations, risks and rewards, challenges and opportunities of retired life are complex and confusing. You have never done this before and you want to get it right the first time. It is truly a jungle out there. But you can navigate that jungle more effectively by taking time to research, investigate, plan, and prepare yourself.

Preparing and Planning

It will not do to leave a live dragon out of your plans if you live near one.
~ J.R.R. Tolkien *The Hobbit*

In life unexpected events often litter the landscape and frequently our future seems less than sure. The economy may take a tailspin or the security of our job of twenty years can become unsure. There are just some things we cannot predict or foresee. However, we have the ability and responsibility to plan as best we can to at least prepare for what is expected. This planning and preparation is crucial to improve our chances at a happy retirement.

Financial and Non-Financial Planning

There are two broad categories we should address when it comes to preparing to retire – financial and non-financial. Few of us will disagree with the importance of being financially prepared as we enter retirement. Without sufficient savings and investment income along the way our retirement will not likely be everything that we want. That being said, as I have noted in my blog, I am no financial adviser. During my research and interaction with others planning retirement, when I identify key retirement issues within the financial arena I turn to reliable, knowledgeable websites and experienced sources where I can find the best, most accurate information. There are a lot of qualified professional finance folks out there who can answer questions and help guide us effectively through the confusion.

The problem with doing nothing is not knowing when you are finished
~ Ben Franklin

Although no expert, there are some basic financial concepts that I will highlight. In my post [“Retirement – can I afford to retire?”](#) I discuss the importance of creating an accurate budget for our retired days. Understanding where our money will go compared to what we will have coming in allows us to identify potential shortfalls and highlight areas of concern. And since we are planning now, before retirement, corrective action can be taken to address problems we uncover while there is still time to fix them.

The good news is that some costs we have been bearing will go away when we retire. These include our mortgage (assuming we have been paying this down over the years. If we do have a remaining balance, we should be getting close to the end of our indenture), education (the kids are outta here), allowances, dry cleaning for business

clothes, car payments, putting aside money for retirement savings, and costs associated with commuting to work.

The bad news is that there are still bills to be paid and even some additions to the list:

- Medical expenses increase as we age – just the facts of life. According to Fidelity Investments, the typical couple age 65 will have to come up with \$220,000 over the course of their lives just to cover out-of-pocket medical expenses such as insurance, co-pays, deductibles, and prescriptions.
 - Navigating Medicare is a daunting task but one helpful site from the National Council on Aging can be found at https://www.benefitscheckup.org/moreprograms.cfm?partner_id=0
 - Another useful site explaining Medicare prescription coverage details can be found at <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/prescriptionhelp/>
- Insurance - life, health, home, auto – they keep on coming and in general increase as we get older. You may want to research Long Term Care Insurance to protect you as you age as well.
- Basic necessities such as electricity, water, garbage, cable, internet, and phone will still need to be accounted for.
- If possible it is wise to set aside additional funds as a safety net in case things do not go as planned (which is often the case).
- On a more positive note, most of us plan to do some serious traveling once we retire. When budgeting, don't scrimp on what many consider the most rewarding and exciting parts of retirement. No one wants retirement to be about not doing, but rather about doing what we want, especially what we want most.

Once the bills are calculated, we need to understand where our income will be coming from to do a comparison. Sources include social security (order your social security earnings statement to review your estimated retirement benefits and double check for accuracy <http://www.ssa.gov/mystatement/>), retirement accounts (401k, IRAs, pension funds), other income (rental units, royalties from books, etc.), inheritance, stocks, bonds, and any other miscellaneous money makers you may have access to. If you plan to work in some capacity, you can add that amount to the totals.

Now take a look at what you will have to pay compared to what you expect to be coming into your accounts and see where you are. If you fall short on the income side of the equation, you may need to push out your planned retirement date or figure out additional ways to balance your books.

One way to reduce your expenditures is by taking a closer look at your current lifestyle to better understand how you are spending and what changes you might comfortably make.

Where are you spending your money and on what? Do you have a good understanding of exactly where your hard earned dollars are going? One helpful tool is a spreadsheet of basic and extraordinary expenses to quickly see where the money is going. Commit to tracking everything you spend for three months. Be honest - document it all. At the end of that time, take a look at just where your money is going. You may be surprised. In addition you can now track variations in the bottom line and quickly identify the culprit when exceeding the budget.

Where do you choose to buy your clothes? There are many stores like Ross, Marshalls, and Target that sell designer labels at reasonable prices. Some smart shoppers do their search to determine just the right fit with specific brands at the department stores and then purchase items at a reduced cost online. Returning clothes that do not fit properly has become a breeze typically with free shipping and no questions asked. If you do your research and are patient, you can reward yourself with high-quality clothing at reasonable prices, always a good strategy when living on a fixed budget.

What is your dining out behavior? Treating yourself to a bottle of wine at an expensive restaurant will likely cost more than the rest of the dinner. If you are not big eaters as is the case with my wife and me, you and your partner may want to share a few appetizers and a big salad. If you decide to order separate meals don't be shy about taking home leftovers. Local newspapers and discount coupon sites offer affordable dinner deals that are sometimes hard to beat so it pays to keep our eyes open. There is no reason you cannot eat frugally and still enjoy those special meals out.

Do you really need a new car? Do you even need two cars now that you are retired? If you can get by with a single car, you can do away with all the insurance, repair, and maintenance typically required for that second auto.

What about downsizing your home or relocating? If you have equity in your home, you have the flexibility to consider a few options. This may be the opportunity to move to that area of the world you have always wanted and begin a new life. Just be cautious so you do not find yourself paying a brand new mortgage when you are finally paying down your current one. Or you may be attached to the local neighbors and happy to stay in place. If you are really adventurous, there is always the possibility of moving internationally to experience an entirely new culture and lifestyle abroad. Without the

requirement of staying close to work, you can try out options that would not otherwise be available.

Before we retire, it is helpful to get a clear understanding of our spending behaviors and identify those areas where we can improve. This budgeting exercise can provide a way to view our situation at a high level and to shine a light on red flags now while we still have time to do something about it. Start now so corrections can be made if needed.

Never spend your money before you have it
~ Thomas Jefferson

In addition to understanding our basic money-in-and-money-out status, there are a handful of other areas to stay on top of. We want to be sure the mix of investments is appropriate as changes occur over time. We want to regularly revisit our investment portfolio in light of what is going on in the economy and world around us and make adjustments where appropriate. We want to have a plan to draw down against our savings over our retirement years without the risk of running out of money. All of these are important considerations and with the help of a qualified financial person you can better prepare to deal with them.

*Live the good life.
If there are gods and they are just,
then they will not care how devout you have been,
but will welcome you based on the virtues you have lived by.
If there are gods, but unjust,
then you should not want to worship them.
If there are no gods, then you will be gone,
but will have lived a noble life
that will live on in the memories of your loved ones.*
~ Marcus Aurelius

Beyond Financial

On the other side of the retirement planning and preparation coin is non-financial aspects of retiring. This is the area that LoveBeingRetired is zeroed in on. I have come to believe that ***the single most significant item to address before retiring is what we will do with our newly realized free time.*** In our working world busy days unfold at a hectic pace and we are challenged to get everything done by the end of the day. Our calendar is filled with meetings, our cubicle walls are plastered with projects in progress,

even time for lunch is a rarity – we are just plain busy. We don't worry about what to do but rather if we will have enough time to get it all done.

Enter retirement life. Our calendar is now empty of appointments, there is no “boss” to confront us requesting the up-to-the-minute status on pending projects, and we have no looming deadlines. From this point forward, what we do is up to us. It is important that we understand this state of affairs and realize we are now solely responsible for planning our day (of course our spouse may have a little input on this one).

The first six months to a year of retirement is generally the honeymoon period. We busily attack that list of to-dos we have been building for years. Gradually we whittle away at the long-accumulated stack of books to read. Projects around the house finally get completed. We do some travel to places we have dreamed about. And we take the time to savor our situation as we sleep in a bit and live at a pace of our own choosing, no longer having to be anywhere at any specific time. But before too long, the initial frenzy dies down. What are we going to do with ourselves now and for the next twenty or more years?

*The important thing is this:
to be ready at any moment to sacrifice what you are
for what you could become.
~ Charles Dickens*

It is up to each of us individually to determine our destiny. Rather than fear, we should be filled with hope, enthusiasm, and curiosity. We are incredibly fortunate – we get to choose what we want to do. All of those things that our career prevented us from spending time pursuing - those childhood dreams that we abandoned as we grew up, those wishful thinking moments that have come and gone – can now be revisited.

And don't let others tell you how you should spend your retired life. In [“Senior Warning: avoid the “I really should...” trap”](#), I voice a concern that we not let what others think we should be doing dictate our actions. Others do not have the insight into our life and should not attempt to overly influence what we contemplate doing. Too many remain shackled by feelings of what is proper and right for our “time in life”. Hogwash! If we want to do it – as long as we are not hurting someone else or endangering ourselves – what is to stand in our way?

How well is your relationship prepared for retirement? Have you and your spouse talked about what retirement will look like from each of your perspectives? You may have different expectations of the retired life you will be living together. One of you may be an

adventure seeker forever in motion searching for the next adrenaline rush while the other is happy taking things easy and letting life flow as it will. It is helpful to identify these differences early in the game to help assure smooth running down the road.

If one of you has already been working from or maintaining the home, the introduction of a full-time companion can be a bit challenging. Imagine the good intentioned recommendation of what you can do to improve what you have been successfully doing for the past twenty years. Or what about a sudden follower who hangs at your heel unsure of what they should be doing with their newly discovered free time. It can take some getting used to as the two of you figure out how to be together 24/7.

Have you considered who you will be in retirement? After a career of working in a role that you have become an expert at, how will you describe yourself when at a cocktail party someone asks you, "What do you do?" We so often associate who we are with what we do that this can be a confusing moment for many. In my blog [**"What is Your Retirement Personality"**](#) I take a closer look at important considerations to help in your efforts including becoming comfortable with the new role that you personally get to define for your second act. It is important to realize we are each much more than the job we have done. We have our own personality and inspiration, our unique perspective and commentary on life. There is no need to fear fading into obscurity just because we are no longer a member of the working masses.

What will you do in retirement? After having your days dictated by the duties of the job, what a refreshing experience it is to experience the freedom to do what you want or to do nothing if you so choose. But along with this new freedom comes a shift of responsibility. From now on, you are tasked with filling your days with worthwhile and interesting activities. And it is not a short term proposition as we are talking about the next 20 or more years. Do you have enough hobbies to keep you engaged for that long? Are you creative enough to fill the empty hours? How long can you do nothing before you need to undertake something a bit more meaningful? Planning ahead for the free time you will have can help equip you with sufficient interests and passions to avoid the threat of boredom. But you have to get started.

Do you have any goals that you hope to accomplish in retired life? To help plan what we will do, it is helpful to set goals. Putting something down on paper requires us to quantify and formalize our thinking, an important ingredient in effective planning. [**"Retirement Planning Must Have – Goal Setting"**](#) describes three types of goals to think about, all of which are valuable:

- (1) Short-term – target accomplishment today or tomorrow. For example, upon my return from Paris, I set a goal of uploading pictures to a shared website for the family to view.
- (2) Medium term – weeks to months. For example, researching and choosing the best option for TV based on your usage and desire to be frugal where possible.
- (3) Longer term – how about learning to play an instrument? Or learning to speak a new language and then visiting the country of origin to submerge yourself in the culture?

By thinking of our goals this way we can avoid overly focusing on just the short term at the expense of longer term goals.

There are so many things that we can do with our time but it is important to make some decisions before retiring so we can hit the ground running. Let's take a look at some of the things that really matter in life and retirement in the next chapter.

What Really Matters

*What is the meaning of life?
To be happy and useful.
~ Tenzin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama*

Why Money is Only Part of a Fulfilling Retirement

Many financial folks combine their skills and broad knowledge to help us better prepare financially for our retirement. Based on their experience, we follow guidelines such as saving enough to provide 80 percent of our current income or having enough in our nest egg such that we only spend 4 percent each year to assure we do not outlive our money. There is a formula for everything these days.

I believe we can become obsessed by that magical what-I-need-to-retire number and pursue it at the expense of what really matters in life. The real cost in our time and attention should be carefully weighed and our priorities clearly defined because we cannot go back to change our course. Sacrifices we make to pursue ever more money are significant and include missing quality time with our family and friends along with downtime that could be spent recharging and slowing down to a healthier pace. We must live with the decisions we make so it is important to make the right ones.

Early in my sales career, I figured out that to pursue life in the fast lane and earn the big bucks, I needed to join the ranks of outside sales. Road warriors who know airports better than their own neighborhoods, heading out each Sunday to spend the coming days selling their wares on the road, returning late in the week exhausted and far behind in administrative requirements of the job, ultimately left with no energy or real time for the family. They make great money but at quite a cost.

Instead, I decided to pursue a career of inside sales where I was home each evening for dinner. Because of this decision I had the luxury of sneaking out a little early on occasion to catch a baseball game with my son at bat or a ballet practice with my fleet-footed daughter. I can honestly say that I have not regretted for a moment my decision. But it was a conscious decision on my part.

*Our incomes are like our shoes;
if too small, they gall and pinch us;
but if too large, they cause us to stumble and to trip.
~ John Locke*

What does it really take to live comfortably once we retire?

Ernie Zelinski in his book *"How to Retire Happy, Wild and Free"* says "Although most people don't know what exactly they want from life, they are absolutely sure that money in large amounts will provide it for them. They fool themselves about how much happier they would be with much more money."

Having enough money to be comfortable and not lay awake at night worrying is a good thing. But how much of your limited resources do you want to dedicate to achieving that incremental bit more? What is it worth to you and your family? If you will not be able to enjoy your life without the knowledge that you have three times what you will ever need to live, I do not envy your path.

A Nobel-winning psychologist found the cost of happiness is \$75,000 per year. Below that we are unhappy and no matter how much more than \$75,000 people make, it does not bring them proportionately greater joy.

My humble recommendation is to do your budgeting exercises diligently to see where you will be financially upon your retirement. Based on that, make the lifestyle adjustments you need to live within your means. Unless you plan on leaving your children an estate when you get to the end of the road your balance should be as close to zero as possible. In that case you enjoyed your life to the maximum at least from the point of view of your finances!

*I am opposed to millionaires,
but it would be dangerous to offer me the position.
~ Mark Twain*

Retirement Planning with a Purpose

In 2009, MetLife did a study focused on a group age 45 to 74 called ["Discovering what matters: Balancing money, medicine, and meaning"](#). One major insight was the importance of purpose - people who believe there is purpose in their lives are happier and describe themselves as living the *Good Life*. "Having a reason to get up in the morning is associated in numerous scientific studies with better mental and physical health and greater longevity. Purpose can add not only to your life but life to your years".

To get the most out of your retirement it helps to have a purpose, a reason to get out of bed each morning and take on the day. For many of us our family and friends and our relationship with them is at the top of the list. Face it, when making someone happy has

the effect of making YOU happy I think we are on to something. Leaving behind friends in the workplace is one of the most common negatives felt by those of us heading into retirement. We are a social creature for sure.

If you could see my parents, you would quickly understand exactly how important two people can be to each other. I am convinced that the purpose of each is to love the other and I have to say that it is very cool to witness firsthand. Taken from [“Checking in with the parents”](#), here is two things that the folks do to appreciate each other:

- Each morning, rain or shine, dad gets up and puts together a breakfast tray with fresh fruit, toast, piping hot coffee and the newspaper. Typically a flower from the garden graces the tray just so. With this in hand he returns to bed where they read a bit, comment on what is new in the world, and prepare for the upcoming day.

Take-away for the rest of us: slow and steady - start each day together sharing a quiet and reflective moment instead of immediately jumping into the fray.

- On the birthday of each of their children, dad takes mom out to dinner. The kids have their celebration and each receives a birthday card and a call with best wishes. But the real work on each birthday was done by mom. Dad appreciates this and celebrates with her three times a year, once for each kid.

Take-away: just plain a great idea!

Pursue your Passion

*Waste no time talking about great souls
and how they should be.*

Become one yourself.

~ Marcus Aurelius Antonius

Whatever your chosen career or wherever your working life ultimately led you, hopefully somewhere along the way you experienced some level of satisfaction and feeling of a job well done. In addition to the money made satisfaction with our job and recognition for our efforts plays a big part in our overall level of happiness. Work takes up so much of our waking life that we hope for some positive impact on us. And it does not just have to be monetary: the boss goes out of her way to stop you in the hallway and praise your project completion on time and under budget; at a company meeting you are mentioned for the contribution that you make day in and day out; your sales team buys you a cake and a card signed by everyone in appreciation for being such a good manager. Do you remember any similar moments and how they made you feel? After the warm glow

subsided, were you somewhat more satisfied with what you were doing? Did you maybe feel a little invigorated and ready to get back to doing what you do so well for the company and its employees? Imagine if that satisfaction, that newly found passion was the way you faced each day.

In [**“Will you need to work after you retire?”**](#) I talk about the importance of finding or creating that job or endeavor that enables us to pursue our passion. What we are in search of is something to ignite us so that when we wake up each morning we look forward to getting under way.

While working, we did not have the time or energy to launch that website or to make those clever tee shirts to sell on Amazon or to write that great American novel. In retirement, it is all about how we choose to spend our time.

I really enjoy my recently undertaken journey into blogging and for the first time in a long time – heck, maybe ever – I find myself waking up a bit early with an idea in my head and I cannot wait to get in front of the ‘ol keyboard.

Think back to when you were a kid when dreams knew no boundaries and anything was possible. Is there a particular dream that you would like to make a reality now? Or if as you grew up and had inspired thoughts of “boy would I like to do THAT”, what was the THAT and is it time to live out your inspiration?

You have the time to do it now. You are retired, you get to decide what you want to do and when you want to do it.

Only passions, great passions can elevate the soul to great things.
~ Denis Diderot

Do you have a passion? Is there something in your life that excites, inspires, turns you on and makes it worthwhile getting out of bed each day? It doesn't matter if you are making coasters for coffee cups or writing a memoir that will only be read by members of your immediate family (and maybe not even all of them) or heading back to school to learn French so you can spend some time immersed in France and its culture. It is YOUR passion and therefore it is the RIGHT passion.

I believe there are numerous passions out there waiting to be discovered by each of us. And as we journey through retirement, having more than one passion is a great thing. Should one lose its magic for us, we can roll over to the next and continue enjoying those things nearest our hearts. I am so convinced of the importance of finding your passion that I wrote a book “Are You Just Existing and Calling it a Life?” where I share

some thoughts as I try to figure things out for myself. If you would like to take a peek, the first chapter is available at [Are You Just Existing and Calling it a Life?](#)

If you can find your passion and pursue it, boredom in retired life will not rear its ugly head. How can you be bored when you can't wait for a new day to continue doing what you love to do!

Frugal Retirement

Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can.

~ John Wesley

Having money is a nice thing. Better said, having enough money is a nice thing but having too much money is not proportionately so. Enough money allows us to meet our basic needs of safety and security and with a little creative juggling enjoy our lives a bit more. A little extra cash and we can pick up that pair of shoes that we have been wishfully tracking on Zappos or plan a week escape to the East Coast to enjoy the fall colors in New England. On the other hand too little money and we are forced to make tough decisions.

Once we retire, we tend to live and think in terms of a fixed income. Not necessarily 100 percent fixed as our investments tend to grow and shrink but we have an understanding of what are our expenses, our income, and what if anything is left over at the end of the day. We may have to make adjustments due to a changing economy or personal situations and we do if we can. But what do we do if we have little leeway when it comes to finances? If we are strapped and unexpected expenses invade our safe retirement bubble it can be challenging.

Unless you are fortunate enough to have more money than you need a frugal retirement lifestyle is a good way to maximize your buying and living power. Carefully, even obsessively watching where you spend your money and looking for ways to reduce costs or increase buying power can help you keep on top of your game.

Frugal can be fun! Just think about how satisfying it can be when due to your financial diligence you find a way to save \$100 a month without significantly impacting how you live. Or after months of keeping your eyes peeled for those \$200 shoes that you are not willing to pay more than \$75 for, you find a pair at a sale and they fit! Not only are these little victories inspirational but once this kind of thinking becomes part of you, you will stay diligently on the lookout for the next “frugal find” to better your wallet or purse.

Realize that if you can find a way to save \$100 per month you will be saving \$1200 per year. If your retirement lasts thirty years you will reduce your required income for that period by a total of \$36,000. That’s not chump change!

Frugal Retirement Living

Living frugal is a state of mind. It is made up of a community of like-minded individuals who realize with a little effort they can spend their money more efficiently and more effectively. Why pay more than we have to? Careful examination and monitoring of lifestyle choices helps to identify areas of potential improvement and positive changes that can be made. It is an on-going effort with quickly realized benefits. Here are a few ideas to help us all join the ranks of the frugal:

(1) Prioritize what is important so we can save and spend accordingly – what are luxuries and what are must haves? What do we “need” and what do we “want”? In [“Retirement “Luxuries”? Not for Baby Boomers”](#) I list what many consider to be basic needs including pet care, professional hair care, and internet connectivity. I am sure a case can be made for each of these and if they truly are important to you, if you truly need them to experience a happy retirement, then so be it. But pet care a basic need? Each of us maintains a mental list of what is really important. The trick is to fund these “needs” with money from other “wants”. It does not hurt to create a written list of priorities. Maybe have your spouse create one and you create one to see what really lights your respective fires. Then figure out a way to do the top ones together.

NOTE TO SELF: If something is really important to you, something you have waited for and worked for all your life, do not short change yourself in retirement. Cutting back here can undermine your happiness and take away from really enjoying your life. You will never forgive yourself. For me travel is a big one. While I enjoy short excursions around the area, I live for those big trips across the pond or to a tropical island. I figure that in retirement my wife and I will make two big trips each year. Reasonable accommodations, frugal eating out, and discount airfare. It will not be cheap but we are willing to cut back elsewhere to have this as we agree it is very important to our living a happy retirement life. I have some other frugal travel ideas in [“How to Afford to Travel in Retirement – and why you can’t afford NOT to”](#).

(2) Closely examine current expenses and see if there are places where you can save money – not necessarily doing away with something but maybe making modifications. Take a close look and discuss ideas that make sense for your specific situation.

Here is what we have personally done along those lines:

- a. Cable TV – we were paying over \$100 per month for our services which include HBO and some HD channels in addition to local channels. The fact is that we watch very little TV – maybe some Big Bang at night or thirty minutes of news but that is really it. Oh and of course San Jose Sharks games when the season is under way. I did some research on services available using just an antenna. (<http://antennaweb.org> allows you to search by your address to see what type of antenna is best for your location and use requirements) It turns out that we are located near all of the major broadcast stations and have access to everything that they broadcast with just an antenna. We also have an old TIVO box and so for \$10/month, we are now able to watch all the TV we need with a nice search capability and record what we want as well.
- b. Gardening – our gardener was charging \$120 per month for cutting the lawn and cleaning up leaves every two weeks. He did a great job and the place looked neat and trim but this was one place we decided we could adjust to improve our bottom line. I went to Home Depot and bought a push mower for \$139, a weed whacker for \$70, and a leaf blower from Sears for \$99. Within three months we will be in the black and I do enjoy a little garden work with the right tools!
- c. Electric bill – my wife is from Switzerland where families hang their clothing outside to dry after a wash. We bought a mobile clothes line – officially called a “Stewi” - for a little over \$100 and now use the dryer infrequently. As an added benefit drying clothes in the fresh air makes them smell wonderful.
- d. Grocery shopping – stores have various pricing schemes that they employ to drive business. If you pay attention you will be able to take advantage of the best sales prices offered especially for your staples. Shopping at local stores I now know the regular prices, the sales prices, and the “real” sales prices, when the sales price is the best it will be. This cycle repeats itself on a regular basis so as long as I can wait for the rock bottom pricing, I save money.

(3) Create and maintain a spreadsheet to track your expenditures and make a budget.

- a. List all of your regular monthly expenses like mortgage, TV, electricity, food, gas, phone, dining out, water, credit cards, garbage, insurance, prescriptions, medical deductibles, gifts, etc. In addition, include a spot for extraordinary expenses, things that are significant but not incurred monthly.
- b. Track these for three to six months to get a baseline overview.
- c. Create a budget based on these expenditures.

- d. Compare the budget to your revenues to see if you are in the black.
- e. Make adjustments where you need to stay in the black.
- f. Stir and repeat.

Putting things in writing helps you better visualize the whole picture. Seeing where the money is going will help prioritize and make trade-offs based on what is most important.

*Ask me not what I have
But what I am.
~ Heinrich Heine*

Being frugal in retirement offers a way to stay on top of your expenses and balance your purchases. Being frugal can be fun as you find deals to one-up your neighbors and really get more for your money. Warning - being overly-frugal can make you into that spinster aunt who sat on five million dollars while re-gifting three-year-old See's Candies at Christmas time (true story and they tasted every bit of three years old!).

Anything taken to an extreme can negate the positive aspect originally intended. Saving is good – penny pinching not so much. Find the balance in your life and remember to do what is truly important to you. Retirement is your time to do what you want to do without overdoing it. Be sure that you do not forgo your dreams just to have a full bank account when you exit retirement.

Staying Healthy

*The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past,
not to worry about the future, not to anticipate the future,
but to live the present moment wisely and earnestly.*

~ Buddha

The best way for us to enjoy our retirement life and take advantage of the blessings each day presents is to be healthy. Waking up and feeling good ready to engage with people and places and things is what we all want. Although that is not asking too much when we are at a young and chipper twenty or thirty, as we age maintaining good health takes more effort and is never guaranteed. Generic aches and pains and maybe a little slowness in the morning is to be expected pretty much across the board – just something we have to learn to deal with.

Unfortunately, sometimes we are forced to deal with circumstances beyond our control. Old age infirmities run the gamut from arthritis to dementia, indiscriminately attacking both our physical and mental health. A friend who is an incredibly sharp, motivated, energetic individual has been coping with the gradual progression of Parkinson Disease for the past ten years. There is no cure as of yet and the future will require her dealing with this in varying degrees as the disease progresses. The spirit is willing but the body is starting to struggle.

*It is exercise alone that supports the spirits,
and keeps the mind in vigor.*

~ Cicero

We are not a generation that shirks a challenge. Having survived the years leading up to retirement and successfully dealt with everything from raising children to economic upheaval we will not roll over and take willingly what aging throws our way. We will fight and do whatever we can to delay health challenges dictated by time and advancing years.

Stay Healthy Physically

Good physical health in old age is a combination of genetics, exercise, and good fortune. Genetics we are born with for better or worse while good fortune is ours to appreciate and be thankful for but unfortunately not directly influence. Prevention should be the major focus – no smoking, maintain a healthy weight, avoid eating or doing what

you know is bad for you. And exercise is one area where we can proactively do something to positively impact our health.

The first thing, before starting any new exercise regimen is to get a physical exam. Your physician can do some tests to help determine where you are today – setting a baseline to work from – as well as identify any areas for concern that you either need to address immediately or that you both need to stay aware of. Once you get the okay to exercise you can set goals for where you want or need to go as well as what you can do to get there. And schedule regular checkups moving forward to help monitor your good health and progress.

Next, you should **find some exercise that you enjoy**. If you hate it you will not stick with it and sticking with it is critical. If there is nothing at all that you actually enjoy try to find something that at least you do not hate. If motivating yourself is challenging, fitness spas and clubs offer a multitude of classes throughout the day and evening. Options are many and you may decide to join in water exercise programs, spinning (stationary bike riding), yoga classes, stretching classes, and strength-building classes. Within the class setting there is a lot of energy, inspiration and a little friendly competition. And with a qualified trainer running the class you will receive some attention to your form as well as guidance to be sure you are doing the exercises correctly.

If the class setting is not your bag, **find someone to be your workout partner**. This person does not have to necessarily follow the same routines that you do and may have entirely different exercise goals. But having a partner keeps you at it. When you are not enthused about exercising, your partner is there to help give a little push, expecting you to do the same when they feel a little reluctant. And when you find yourself persuaded to go on that hour walk that fifteen minutes ago you were trying to get out of, you will thank your partner and feel good inside for having done your exercise duty.

The third important thing to staying healthy physically is to **stick to it**. Just like New Year resolutions that live a short life and quietly fade away, your exercise efforts and their benefits are at risk if you do not sustain them.

Regular exercise improves the efficiency of your body and allows you to burn fat at a faster rate. Get your machine humming along as best you can!

Exercising and living healthy are lifestyle choices. Quick fix diets may lead to short term results but once you quit often times you regain what you have lost, sometimes even more. As long as you are alive, exercise should be your friend and compatriot. Do not abandon your friend.

Another part of the equation is **maintaining a good diet**. Realize that your diet is a way of life not a short term proposition. Eating well is a fulltime commitment and is really just a matter of common sense. Avoid too much of anything – *moderation*. Know what is bad for you – too much fat, salt, cholesterol, and sugar. Know what is good for you – fruits, vegetables, and non-processed foods. Organic is a good way to go specifically regarding the “dirty dozen” – grapes, cherries, apples, peaches, nectarines, pears, potatoes, raspberries, strawberries, spinach, bell peppers and celery. These are subject to the most aggressive pesticide treatments so go organic if possible and if not, wash the heck out them before you eat. And realize that it is okay once in a while to indulge. You work hard and deserve a treat now and then – in moderation.

*The mind that is wise mourns less for what age takes away;
than what it leaves behind.*
~ William Wordsworth

Stay Healthy Mentally

Keeping your mind sharp is the other important aspect of staying healthy. Aging takes a natural toll on our mental acuity and although we cannot halt its advance we can take action to stay ahead of father time.

Avoid stress

Too much stress in our life causes all kinds of ill effects from loss of sleep to headaches to depression. The reasons to feel stressed are ever abundant even in retirement. We worry about having enough money to pay the bills, outliving our retirement savings, losing our independence, boredom with our retired life, the health of our spouse, problems our children may face, and just overall happiness.

The possibilities are endless and the helplessness we can feel is a significant cause of elevated stress levels. Here are a few tools to help deal with stress:

- *Start the day on a positive note* -before you even get out of bed. Take a few moments to be thankful that you are here and alive. Whatever else is going on in your life, whatever you may face during the day, right now you are breathing easy, thinking good thoughts, and still kicking.
- *Don't worry about the past which you cannot change* - do not worry about the future which is around a corner beyond which you cannot see. Live in the present

moment here and now. This is the time that you are given to experience living – focus on now and touch your life deeply.

- *SMILE* – it is difficult to be unhappy if you have a smile on your face – just try. And the act of “putting a smile on your face” is not really too demanding. All you have to do is flex the muscles near both ends of your mouth. Plus your happiness is often infectious and you can be a positive influence on friends and family. Opportunities to smile are all around you. Make the best of them.

*I wish I could show you when you are lonely or in darkness
the astonishing light of your own being.*
~ Hafiz of Persia

The Noble Eightfold Path may help you put things into perspective, center your thinking and fight against stress in your life. This is a summary compiled from “*The Heart of Buddha’s Teaching*” by Thich Nhat Hanh:

Right View – we each have our own unique *point of view*, evolving from a combination of our upbringing, our environment, teaching received along the way and everything that has gone into making us the individuals we are today. This point of view may distort or prevent a 100 percent accurate view of the world – we may not see the truth as it actually is. Plan to make a conscious effort throughout the day to see things as they really are. Realize that others have their own point of view which differs from yours. Focus on knowing something is right when it is right, wrong when it is wrong.

Right Thinking – ideally, your mind and body should be in harmony, in the same place at the same time. If you are walking down the street and your mind is on some distant thought, the two are not in harmony. Ask yourself “what am I doing?” This helps unite your mind and body in this present moment.

Right Mindfulness – this is a key step along the path, living in the present moment, the now that is real and that you can touch. We are so busy that we often forget what we are doing, missing the beauty of the world right in front of our faces. Try to realize that your anxieties come from an inability to live in the present moment. Don’t worry about things that are out of your control.

Throughout the day, plan to make a conscious effort to:

- Not worry about the past that you cannot change.
- Not worry about the future which is out of your reach.

- Live in and appreciate the present moment that is now.

Right Diligence – if you spend your time focusing on bad things – anger, doubt, fear, disappointment – you are watering these negatives and they will grow. It is better to water the positive things – love, peace, caring, sharing – so that they will grow and flourish in your life. Concentrate on doing the positive things that will help make you into the person that you are meant to be.

Right Action – it is important that you step up and do the right thing when it needs to be done. Take the action appropriate for the moment. And realize that sometimes doing nothing is in fact the right action.

Right Speech – what we say has a big impact on people around us. Keep in mind the following as simple, common-sense reminders through the day:

- Do not lie
- Do not exaggerate
- Do not say one thing to one person and then something else to another
- Do not say something that hurts someone, even if it is true.
- Listen

Right Concentration – within our busy mind, try to maintain evenness, not too high nor too low, not too excited nor too bored.

Right Livelihood – in your work and your retirement, be true to yourself, your beliefs, what is really important and what you are passionate about. Earn a living and live a life without causing suffering to others.

I do not think much of a man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday.
~ Abraham Lincoln

Lifetime learning

Continuing our education is a way for seniors to keep challenging ourselves mentally, to investigate new avenues along paths previously unexplored, and to stay engaged with the ever-changing world in which we live – and have some fun doing it! Going back to school after retirement is a different ball game than our first time around. Now, we want to go to class and we look forward to learning and we are not a pain in the side of teachers sending notes or talking during lectures – well at least not too much. And by interacting with younger students and faculty, some of that youthful exuberance tends to rub off on us and we are better for it.

Learning keeps us mentally engaged and our minds working. It is exercise for our brain and just like physical exercise we need to maintain our regimen to realize the maximum benefits. Local colleges and schools offer “over 60 programs” and a variety of ways for seniors to participate. In [**“Affordable Lifelong Learning for Seniors”**](#) I discuss some options that are available and affordable.

More physical exercise throughout your life can help reduce cognitive decline in later life according to Bloomberg Businessweek. The study also found a link between exercise in adolescence and fewer cases of senility in senior years. You can read the results at <http://www.businessweek.com/lifestyle/content/healthday/640683.html>

It's All About Attitude

*Do not anticipate trouble,
or worry about what may never happen.
Keep in the sunlight.
~ Benjamin Franklin*

Back when I was twenty six I joined my family at a Thanksgiving celebration in San Mateo where my mom's sister and family lived. Our families have always been close spending weekends and special events together since we were babies. After dinner I took my dad aside and told him I had noticed a lump under my left armpit while working out and asked him to check it. He had been a physician for thirty years so he took a look, felt around a bit, asked me some questions and said I should make an appointment to see a specialist. So I met with another doctor who said we should biopsy it to see what it was. I went in to surgery not overly concerned. Heck, what they gave me did not even knock me out for the operation so how serious could it be?

About a week later I got what I can only imagine to be the most difficult call my dad ever had to make when he told me I had cancer. He said some more about Hodgkin Disease and whatever else but all I heard was CANCER. I was twenty six, healthy as an ox, no symptoms of any kind, how the hell was this even possible? I hung up the phone and sat in stunned silence trying to get a grip on what I had just learned. That would take some time.

Over the next eight months, I became intimately familiar with and appreciative of Stanford Hospital. I started with an exploratory laporotomy where they removed my spleen and looked for the spread of the disease to determine the best course of treatment. Then I went through six months of radiation treatment and experienced its many side effects including losing twenty nine pounds, getting shingles, inability to make saliva so very difficult to swallow, nausea, extreme sunburn-like impact on my neck, and a host of others.

Six months later, I emerged and began the annual checkups to make sure I was clean of the disease. The good thing about Hodgkin Disease is that with the right treatment and without any sign of recurrence after ten years you are technically cured. I made it and just completed my 26th annual check-up – still cured.

*In the end these things matter most:
How well did you love?
How fully did you live?
How deeply did you learn to let go?
~ Buddha*

It was a long journey and the impact on me was far reaching. I wonder what kind of a person I would be today if I had not gone through this ordeal. Whether due to the disease or in spite of it I am who I am. But digging deeper, I am convinced the battle with cancer impacted me in a number of significant ways:

- **Optimistic outlook on life** – I have always been a positive person and generally happy. But after this experience I really appreciate every day and I am not just saying that. The sunrise, the sound of the wind in the trees, waves breaking on the beach, the cries of birds in the yard, the fresh smell after a rain, the taste of just-cooked-bread, a hug, a smile, a kiss. Would I appreciate them as much as I do now without my journey? Could I have instead chosen to be bitter and angry and let those bad feelings negatively influence my life? It's all about attitude...
- **No one to blame** – after the initial shock, I accepted the fact that it was no one's fault that this happened. This is just the way it was. No one wished this upon me and everyone was truly saddened. So I had to deal with it and I would deal with it. My family and friends were tremendously supportive along the way. But at the end of the day it was me in my bed dealing with my uncertainties and fears. Could I have looked for some unsuspecting scapegoat to vent upon, to release the frustration I was feeling? I could have but I did not. It's all about attitude...
- **Focus on what really matters** – I truly believe it when I say it is not about the money or the things, it is the people and the moments. I have learned don't need excessive material things to make my life complete but I do need those little things that make each day worthwhile. And I appreciate them. The little bad things that come along are not of consequence. My car got a scratch on it the other day – a little thing. The cat decided to make the front room his litter box – not a big thing but come on Julius! Why become upset? To what end? It's all about attitude...

I wanted to share my personal experience so you do not think the optimistic exuberance routinely expressed in my blog is not genuinely felt.

For each of us there may be events in the past that are a good reason for feeling angry, unhappy, fearful, or doubtful. And if you choose you can feel just that way. Who would fault you?

How much better to wake up each day with a smile, to look forward to getting out of bed and getting under way, to pursuing that passion that you have waited all your life for a chance to chase, to smell the flowers and to appreciate every moment. That is the kind of retirement that I wish for all of us. It's all about attitude.

*Let go of the past and go for the future.
Go confidently in the direction of your dreams.
Live the life you imagined.
~ Henry David Thoreau*

Writing [Retirement – Only the Beginning](#) has been an interesting journey. I can honestly say that I have learned a lot of valuable information along the way, information that I believe will help as I prepare for retirement in the hopefully-not-too-distant-future. And I plan to continue the journey and to share more posts with you.

I hope that the information discovered and shared can in some small way help you in your planning and preparation to retire. After all, how else to better fulfill the tantalizing promise of my blog's URL - LoveBeingRetired.com!

In closing, I want to share a few thoughts that I am composing for an upcoming blog. The title at least for now is "Accepting Aging". Here are some insights that I have learned about myself while building **LoveBeingRetired** and a little something to leave you with.

With age comes wisdom – friends and family may quickly point out that I have not nearly reached the pinnacle of my ultimate wisdom but I have been learning along the way. I have learned not to sweat the little things but instead to accept that not everything will go the way I want nor necessarily should it. I have learned the immeasurable value of my family who have been with me through numerous difficult times, supported me, loved me, and without whom I would not be the person I am today (or maybe even here today). I have learned that it is okay to cry because if you feel like crying there is a reason. I have learned that my wife is my best friend, my confidant, consciously blind to my faults, always there when I need her. I have learned that money does not make the moment nor buy happiness – that can only be found within you.

To our happy retirement – it is only the beginning...

About the Author

Dave Bernard is a California born and raised author and blogger with an extensive 30 year career in the Silicon Valley.

Although not yet retired, he focuses on identifying and understanding those most essential considerations we will each need to address if we hope to realize a fulfilling and meaningful retirement.

Dave has written more than 300 blogs for US News & World *On Retirement* and his personal blog *Retirement – Only the Beginning*.

Candid feedback and thousands of comments from readers has given him a unique glimpse into the realities and challenges that all retirees will ultimately face, inspiring his most recent work *I Want To Retire! - Essential Considerations for the Retiree to Be*.
(See complimentary chapter one below)

His other works include
Are you Just Existing and Calling it a Life?
Navigating the Retirement Jungle.

He has recently launched his first effort into fiction with *Tales From Technology Gone Wild*, a creepy collection of four short stories.

Dave lives in sunny California with his wife, two cats, and a passion for the San Jose Sharks hockey team.

He can be contacted directly at LoveBeingRetired@hotmail.com

COMPLIMENTARY CHAPTER ONE

I Want To Retire!

Essential Considerations for the Retiree to Be

By Dave Bernard

The biggest retirement surprise for me was how little time I have and how busy I seem to be every minute of every day. I don't know how I found the time to have a job! Also, that if I want to keep busy and occupied, I have to take the initiative and make plans and organize activities myself. Lastly, how scary it is to have to make major decisions by myself and to worry about what I will do as I get older and less able to be independent.

I want to retire! I am done with this career thing and more than ready to take a look at what life has to offer beyond work. It has been a good run but enough is enough and I need to get out while I am still young enough to enjoy my second act. I am ready to commence doing what I really want to do for as long as I choose to do it. I hope that retirement will be my moment to focus on what I am most passionate about, what inspires me, what excites me, what turns me on, and what makes me want to jump out of bed to start the day. It will also be my time to step back from the hectic and try my hand at a more peaceful relaxing existence. I am so ready to retire.

Many of us have likely entertained similar thoughts. And if you are middle age or beyond it is even possible your focus borders on the obsessive. Does the possibility of freedom to pursue your personal passions and pleasures tempt you to your very core? Do you find yourself expectantly hoping for that day when you will finally retire from the working world to your own personal nirvana? If you have been caught up in your career with its many demands over these many years, the dream of escaping to retirement may be the single most important thing that kept you going through the hard times.

The good news is if you can commit yourself to doing the ever important planning and preparation for the retirement life you want to live, there is no reason you – Mr. or Ms. Retiree to Be – should not be able to experience just that scenario. But if you want to arrive on schedule ready to roll, it is never too early to begin your preparations.

The ideal and very personal retirement life we ultimately live will be different for each of us. There is no cookie-cutter one-size-fits-all model guaranteed to lead us to and guide us through a fulfilling retirement. Each of us is driven by different motivations and our own distinct personal passions. A wide range of variables and life experiences have combined over the course of our lives to make us into the being that we are, for better or worse. And because of those variations we face the reality that though we may seek a common goal of living a happy retired life, the final definition of that happiness can differ from person to person. My retirement Shangri la may be nothing like the vision of your perfect post-work paradise. Likewise, what I need to do to realize my personal retirement bliss may be nowhere near what you require to achieve the same. There is no absolute right or wrong way to live retirement. In the end we need to each discover those essential ingredients that will make up our personal fulfilling retirement and plot a course to navigate successfully to its shore.

How many of us have given any meaningful thought to our pending retirement? Beyond some vague concept of a life after work we don't tend to overly concern ourselves with the details. Until recently, I had not honestly contemplated my exit from the working world beyond occasionally imagining myself sitting on a sunny beach, cocktail in hand while I listen to the calming waves, reveling in my new freedom and the knowledge that there was absolutely nothing I had to be doing. And isn't that the way many think of retirement? Don't we typically view our second act as more of an escape from rather than a journey to?

I think that many of us assume that somehow it will all work out only to discover we are wrong. You need to prepare for retirement just as you do any other major step in your life. Just like the reluctant retiree, we have to learn on the job if you will. I think it is important to be open to the possibilities rather than focusing on the limitations. You do have some choices if you keep your mind open.

For most of us the tremendous demands of daily life from bill paying to family raising, from problem solving to nest egg building suck up all our energy. It is not too surprising that the focus remains on here and now rather than what our future may hold. Yet if we let life continue to pass us by without taking the necessary steps to prepare, if we expect to just suddenly arrive in retirement where everything will take care of itself, we may find ourselves sadly mistaken.

How many of us can honestly say that we have taken steps to plan and prepare for retirement? What have we done to understand and address the many variables that will mix and match into that life we will realize beyond work? I would venture to say that most of us think of retirement as off in the distance, somewhere down the road, nothing to worry about right now. We are still young and have time – retirement is for old people. But have you looked in the mirror recently? The clock keeps ticking and before we know it we are looking back on more years than we foresee going forward. For those who will retire at age sixty five, retirement can extend twenty or thirty years. If we hope to fill those years with a meaningful and fulfilling life the sooner we start preparing ourselves the better. In my own case I realized that outside of regularly contributing to my 401k plan I had made no concrete preparation for retirement. I was just as guilty as anyone of not looking ahead. I was just as guilty of not preparing myself for the retiree I would be. And if I continued down this path, I risk potentially ending up in just as much trouble as others who follow a similar course.

My advice is to plan, plan, plan for everything, and then realize you have no idea what is going to happen and that is OK. Plans are meant to evolve, be discarded, and replaced with other plans. Your retirement will be like a blank canvas. You'll buy all the paints and brushes but will have no idea what it will look like until you start applying the paint.

Some years ago I found time to pause from my hectic life due to a change in employment status (otherwise known as no more job). In retrospect it turned out to be a blessing as I was afforded the opportunity to re-evaluate my life and examine the direction in which I was headed. At age fifty two I was no longer a young buck and retirement was no longer just a distant possibility but rather an ever-more-rapidly-approaching eventuality. Sixty five is a lot closer to fifty two than to twenty two. So, in addition to merely analyzing my career past, present and future I decided to take advantage of my momentary job pause and go one step further. Assuming that I would in fact retire at some point in the future, this hiatus was my opportunity to begin researching and learning what I could do to better prepare myself for retirement.

*What can I do between now and when I retire to make sure I experience a first rate, not to be outdone, every day a new inspiration, just plain awesome retirement life?
How can I improve my odds of finding that retired life just right for me?*

What are the most important areas I need to consider and prepare for?

What are the most common pitfalls to avoid?

What realities can I expect to encounter?

As good a place as any to start, I went to Google and did a search on “retirement”. You would be surprised – or maybe not so much – with the incredibly vast and quickly overwhelming number of websites and blogs and articles and studies you can find just searching for that single word (My search came up with 225,000,000 hits).

I discovered an incredible amount of attention given to financial preparation for retirement. Hundreds and thousands of blogs, magazines, articles, reviews, and news sites were dedicated to helping prepare financially for the retired life you eventually hope to live. Everything you could ever want to know about investing for retirement was covered and covered again...and again. Financial experts and investment magazines, stock brokers and fund managers, bloggers and authors all shared their views, predictions and recommendations. And with an epic aging baby boomer population, this is an incredibly important piece in the overall retirement planning puzzle. Without enough money you can only dream of living a fulfilling retirement. Despite all of this shared knowledge it is a sad current state of affairs with regards to financial preparedness for retirement. According to the Employee Benefit Research Institute 46 percent of all American workers have less than \$10,000 saved for retirement with 29 percent having less than \$1000 saved.(1)

It appears that most retirees to be still have a long way to go to achieve the financial security portion of their retirement planning. The good news is there is a plethora of valuable information at our fingertips we just need to wade through it. And since I am no expert in things financial I will defer to this knowledge base for specifics about planning for retirement from a financial perspective.

However, there was another area of planning for retirement that I did not find nearly so well addressed. I believe there is a flip side to the retirement coin equally as important to successful retirement preparedness as financial planning. Once I have the money I need to retire, what do I actually do with my new found freedom and bushels of available time? How do I stay engaged and active to really make the most of my second act? I read too many stories and have met too many people who are bored, frustrated, unfulfilled and depressed about living their retirement life. Rather than viewed as a new chapter and the beginning of new adventures to be, they find retirement to be a letdown, a sad ending to what was previously an active life.

I want to do all I can ahead of time to avoid such an occurrence in my life. I want to figure out what I need to do to eventually live as close as possible to that vision of my perfect retirement dream.

During retirement we get the opportunity to do what we want to do. But we'd darn well better figure out what it is we want to do. For if we don't, we run the danger of waking up in the morning and sort of drifting our way through the day...then the next day, then the next. Yep, it may well take some time to find our "true retired self," but it's important that we do it, for then our retirement becomes rewarding.

To better understand this lesser known but equally important side of the retirement coin, I immersed myself in the world of retirement writers, authors, bloggers, experts, and those as interested as me in figuring out the retirement game. I quickly found one of the best sources of creative thinking to be numerous bloggers sharing their first hand experiences as they personally struggled to navigate the retirement jungle. Their discussions of what worked and what did not work, their fears and how they were coping, their detailed accounts of how they faced the realities of getting older and their real experiences of living the life of a retiree helped to clarify for me what we would all have to deal with at some point. I started to get a better feeling for what was required and what was in store and even some hints on how to more effectively get to that desired retirement life.

To best compile and share the results of my on-going education, in 2010 I launched my blog [Retirement – Only the Beginning](#). The premise was and remains sharing information, insights, feedback and recommendations on how to best plan and prepare for a fulfilling retirement from a non-financial perspective. Just as we are coached to build our financial portfolio so, too, should we endeavor to build our non-financial portfolio consisting of guidelines and tools to live a worthwhile and inspired retired life.

We each need to learn how to effectively navigate the retirement jungle if we want to experience our own first class retirement life. Although one scenario of the perfect retirement may differ from another, there are some common threads. We may benefit from the experiences of others to help in our own journey. We can learn from other's mistakes so as to avoid repeating history. We can try to take steps now to prepare for tomorrow. It can be a mistake to take a seat along the sidelines and wait for retirement to happen.

But if we step up and take responsibility for our individual destiny, if we work at it and do the right things ahead of time, why should we not hope for an excellent retirement?

I Want To Retire! does not pretend to have answers for all of the complexities of preparing for a fulfilling and rewarding retirement. Rather, the focus is on bringing to light key areas to consider as you make your retirement plans. The reality is that we each will travel our own path to discover that retirement most ideal for our individual personality and situation. I can no more tell you how to experience yours than you can

tell me how to find mine. But there are common themes and some specific topics to address that may help each of us realize that perfect second act.

To assist in our journey I share some insightful, honest, often passionate and always candid thoughts expressed in the more than 2000 comments readers of my retirement blogs have shared over the years. These comments are from a mix of retirees to be as well as those currently living retired life. Some are happy with where they are, some are confused, some are angry and many are still searching for the best way to live a fulfilling retirement. But one and all call it like they see it, adding firsthand experience along with a dose of reality to the topics discussed. And all have either sought or are seeking answers to the same questions will we all need to ask.

I invite you to read through the chapters and ask yourself how the information contained can best apply to your efforts to prepare for your second act. Take your time to peruse and contemplate these most essential considerations for successful retirement preparation.

I believe that each of us has a unique fulfilling retirement waiting to be discovered. We are different people with our own set of passions, beliefs, wishes and needs. In the end realizing our individual potential will require different things of each of us. There is really no single set of guidelines to direct one and all.

But we can improve our odds of getting to where we want to be if we try to focus on some important areas of retirement planning. We cannot cover nor plan for every minute detail but if we identify and contemplate those most essential considerations we can be off to a good start. We all want to hit our retirement life out of the park but to do so we need to keep our eye on the ball.

As the tag line for my blog reads “Retirement - Only the Beginning.”

Shall we get started?

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