

Crossing the Bridge into Retirement

It's fairly common for discussions of retirement planning to focus solely on the financial aspects of securing a comfortable retirement. But, few individuals may take the time to consider the *nonfinancial* issues of retirement. However, when retirees report being dissatisfied with their retirement, the disappointment is often focused on lifestyle changes and diminishing self-esteem created by a lack of direction and a loss of feeling productive.

One possible solution for dealing with these realities is to slowly *phase into* retirement. Many individuals who are about to retire enjoy the idea of continuing in some form of work, either consulting, job-sharing, acting as a mentor, or providing back-up management. Mentoring, in particular, enables an experienced professional, executive, or business owner to transfer his or her lifetime of learning and experience to a younger "up-and-coming" employee. Phased-in retirement provides an "anchor," and will give you the opportunity to explore other activities while maintaining a meaningful role.

An individual may find that separation from his or her job, profession, or business is more emotional than they ever expected. Experience suggests that it might take from two to five years for hard-working ex-business owners and executives to "decompress" from the heavy personal investment they had in their work activities.

Perspective is really the key to enjoying one's later years. While "retirement" suggests the end of your working life, a more positive viewpoint will make retirement the *beginning* of a new phase of life, a phase in which you can do all the things you never seemed to find the time for while you were working. Volunteer work can enhance your sense of making a contribution, and taking courses in areas of interest can challenge your intellectual curiosity.

During retirement, with more time available for contemplation, it is both appropriate and wise to look carefully at how you have been living, and to determine the importance of your various activities. Depending on individual circumstances, you may need to reorder your priorities. You may find that you just don't need to be doing some of the things that seemed so important when you were working.

If you view retirement as your opportunity for exploration and new challenges, you can make this transition an exciting and enjoyable process. Your horizons are limited only by the bounds of your imagination. You've earned this opportunity—enjoy the journey!

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