

A Taste of Retirement

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Vision Your Future



We are all living with the conditions of a pandemic virus. How are you doing so far?

The Corona virus pandemic has caused people to enter a time that is kind of like retirement. You are no longer expected to get up and go to work each day. Tuesday looks a lot Saturday. You spend a lot of time at home and with your family. What you fill your day with is based on what you initiate. Some people see this as a “temporary (hopefully) retirement.”

For some people, this is a time to be free from daily demands, opportunities to spend more time with family, and create adventures in how you spend your time. You can improve your woodworking, artistic or music skills, catch up on those books and movies you’ve always been interested in, and take wonderful walks in the woods or trails near where you live. Some people see this as an opportunity to plan, prepare and vision life in your “Next Stage.” You may also enjoy avoiding the commuting to work and facing uncertain traffic. You enjoy the freedom, openness, and reduced stress.

In contrast, there are others who are highly stressed about this time. They see each day being as unstructured, empty, and limited. There is little to do and little to look forward to. While it is nice to be with your family, you miss going to the office or workplace and being with coworkers. You are frustrated by the few places that you can go and enjoy without the extra protection to stay safe. You miss the challenges of everyday tasks, the deadlines that get your adrenaline going, and the engagement with others on a common cause. While you may be spending hours on Zoom calls, reading or preparing reports, there are many distractions at home and many things that need your attention. It is a different kind of stress.

For most of us, these times are little of both experiences. This means there are times which provide great satisfaction and you can enjoy the ability to control your day, and there are times when you feel restless and a bit caged up by the restraints of living safely in a pandemic reality. The question (and the challenge) is how to use this time in a way that, when this is all over, you can look back and say that you made something of this opportunity of time. When you are able to return to a new normal of life,

somehow you will be better than before, and you can create your life environment to be better than before. How can you use this pandemic time as an opportunity to understand what is important in your life and to recalibrate how you live so that, as Henry David Thoreau once said:

“Life isn’t about finding yourself, it’s about creating yourself. So, live the live you’ve imagined.”

In the research I performed for my book, *Next Stage* (Balboa Press, 2019), I discovered that there are many fascinating studies on what brings happiness. One of the most interesting was the MIDUS Study on Longevity at the University of Wisconsin (www.MIDUS.wisc.edu). From their research on the attitudes and behaviors of individuals over many years, they found that those who are the happiest have several important attributes in common. The ones that resonated most with me are that people who are the happiest:

1. Have a sense of purpose, movement, growing and learning quality about their life.
2. Are no longer looking to others for approval; they have a self-acceptance and know themselves and know their unique abilities.
3. Have and maintain strong relationships with others.

During this pandemic shutdown time, it would be an excellent time to review the things that provide you with the greatest sense of meaning, utilize your unique abilities, and create opportunities for connections with others. Now that you have more “free time,” whether by choice or not, why not utilize this time to do some thinking about and for yourself. If not now, when?

In my book, I address five critical questions people entering or experiencing that time often referred to as “retirement.” People who are entering this stage of life are significantly reshaping the traditions and beliefs about retirement. I refer to this time within the context of a lifetime of ten stages as the Reinventing Adulthood Stage of life. For this is the time when one is no longer driven by career goals and aspirations, and the children are likely more focused on their own lives rather than yours. And these individuals are likely to have twenty or thirty years of open, evolving and “to be determined” life ahead. They are “reinventing” their life. This pandemic period has sort of created a forced retirement for many, or at least an experience that feels a lot like what one believes is retirement.

Based on my research, individuals in this stage of life usually need to address five areas of concern:

1. What are you going to do with your time (i.e., your sense of purpose)?
2. Will you have enough money (i.e., financial security)?
3. Who will you live with (i.e., changing nature of relationships)?
4. How do you stay healthy (i.e., healthy habits)?
5. Who are you going to be (i.e., identity and lifestyle)?

By understanding and resolving these questions, you create the roadmap for gaining the most value from this time of your life. The next stage, which I call the Consolidation Stage, is when you simply will not be able to get around like you did before and your life will be smaller and simpler. Therefore, what do you need to do in this stage, this Reinventing Stage of life, to complete what needs completing, let go of the things that no longer matter, repair what needs repairing, and resolve the questions or concerns that are outstanding? This process defines the process for moving yourself forward in this unique and critically important stage of life.

Where do you start; how do you discover these for yourself? One of the most important findings from my research and interviews of people for this book was the fact that the answers to these (and other) questions are within you. You have the power and ability to understand where you want to go. I also learned that happiness come from pursuing those things that are meaningful to you, but meaning does not come from pursuing those things that make you happy.

Let's start by looking backwards and then we'll look forwards. Take a moment and identify those times when you were "in your element," you were fully engaged and energized by what you were doing. This could have been a time when you were in high school or college; it could have been a project at work or you did with friends that was memorable; it could have been something you did last week when you lost track of time. Identify four or five, or more of these such events. After you have done this, review them. What are the themes that are in common with several of them? There could be more than one theme, but each theme should include multiple experiences. Some example themes may be:

- Achievement
- Leadership
- Expressing creativity
- Solving complex problems
- Making the world a better place.

Look at these themes. These are the factors that foster your own internal motivation and sense of meaning. These are the sources for your energy. These are the factors that provide you a sense of purpose. These belong to and are unique to you. Your sense of purpose does not need to be captured in a single sentence unless this mission or vision statement emerges from within you.

Next, as you look at these experiences, what abilities did they require of you to be successful and lead to a positive outcome? Did they bring out your talents to build relationships with others, communicate complex information in simple messages, demonstrate your persistence and dynamic determinations to see things through, or whatever? What skills, abilities and talents did you use that made the difference to you, the situation and to others?

There are many resources available to help you learn your strengths, unique abilities, and key talents. If you need help with this task, seek these services and use their tools to better understand you and what you bring to each situation. I describe several of them in my book. Once you have found these, connect them with the very special moments in your life. What do you see?

Now, look forward. Imagine a time when you can do the things you love doing that uses your unique abilities. What is on this list — this want list, this opportunity list, this bucket list? Look forward to the things you want to do and where and how you can make them happen. The answer to these questions is

beyond the scope of this paper, but they are in front of you. It may take a little extra work to explore and research these opportunities, but now you have a focus to what you are looking for. You need not settle for only what others offer you or what you think they want you to do. In fact, with this new found discovery, you have the responsibility to yourself to make them happen. (Note: Think of the word “responsibility” as the contraction of two concepts — “Response” and “Ability”).

We cannot always understand or control the forces that shape the world in which we live. This pandemic, for example, has placed the entire world in a very threatening, disruptive and challenging time. Our responsibility is to respond effectively to this for our own world; that world in which we can exert some level of influence and impact. And, for you, this may be the right time to rethink your life’s glide path and direction, consider what is important and meaningful to you, and then to move forward toward this vision for yourself. While you may have responsibilities that will limit your flexibility and freedom, your challenge is to accept, respond and adjust your life so that you can continue to move in the direction you have now discovered.

In closing, let us remember a quote from Mark Twain:

“Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So, throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.”