

## **Five Things to Consider as You Prepare to Retire**

by Norma Schuh

Until recently, retirement from the work force or from managing a household (or whatever activities and obligations engaged you in earlier years) implied you were soon to be following a downward spiral. In previous generations, where longevity was far shorter than it is today, there was some truth to that supposition. With fewer years left after retiring, many did not have the opportunity to continue evolving that many enjoy today.

However, thanks to medical advances and other contributing factors, most of us have three decades more than our great-grandparents possessed—time to grow and thrive.

### **Out with the old, in with the new!**

An important first step is to embrace the new paradigm of “upward ascension,” or mounting a staircase, and eliminate from your psyche the old model of an arc, peaking in midlife and declining after. But, as swimmer Diana Nyad has stated so poignantly, every day of our life is epic. At age 64, after trying and “failing” four times, and against all odds (including sharks, jellyfish, and other ocean predators, hypothermia, nausea, whirling eddies, the unpredictable shifts of the Gulf Stream, an often total lack of visibility during the ink black nights, and more than 100 miles of open ocean), she realized the dream burning deep in her soul—to swim from Cuba to Key West, Florida. “There’s no doubt in my mind,” she said upon completing her goal, that “I am in the prime of my life today.”

### **Recognize that you are in transition.**

Despite the promise of fruition and fulfillment, retirement can still be a challenge. While an overwhelming busyness characterizes one’s days in our earlier years, upon retirement, life can seem to come to an abrupt halt. During our earlier years, the primary influence on our agenda, growth, and development comes from the outside environment: our children, profession, etc.

Life as we knew may no longer feel satisfying. However, we might feel that there is no clarity about what would be a better substitute—we are left suspended in a discomforting “netherland,” as author William Bridges states. But, if you consciously attend to reconfiguring your life within its exciting new parameters this, too, shall pass.

### **Rediscover, redefine, and renew your purpose and identity.**

Living intentionally, mindfully, and with purpose is what gives our existence meaning. We find meaning through creativity—what we give to the world; experience—what we take/learn from the world in terms of encounters; and attitude—how we react to a fate which cannot be changed. Having been consumed by responsibilities in one’s younger years, there is a temptation when we retire to feel that this new chapter should be all about leisure. While self-indulgence at this juncture is well deserved and appropriate, the inherent in an “all play and no work” lifestyle is stagnation. Without continued stimulation and development, it is possible to die at 65 and not get buried until we’re 95!

### **Live generously and generatively.**

Gray Panther founder Maggie Kuhn offers an alliterative formula for retirees, which not only promises to lend personal significance to one's own life, but also has the potential to impact future generations. With the wisdom of experience as one's guide and the gift of more discretionary time, retirees are invited to: Mentor—teach the young; Monitor—serve as watchdogs of public bodies; Mediate—help resolve conflict within their sphere of influence; Motivate—support initiatives for the betterment of others; and Mobilize—activate the powers-that-be for social change where there are inequities.

### **Be the captain of your ship!**

The moment we accept complete responsibility for ourselves, the universe seems to cooperate by helping us realize our dreams and goals. Conversely, believing we are powerless products of our pasts imprisons us and limits the gifts that are ours for the taking.

Change is inevitable, but growth is optional and possible at any age. A counselor friend of mine used to remind me that “nothing changes if nothing changes,” which is another way of saying “what you resist persists.”

Unless we take charge and figure out what might make life better, easier, and more satisfying, and then put in place the steps to make it happen, we'll be forever mired in our own sense of inadequacy. Becoming proficient at something of which we never believed ourselves capable is a sure-fire source of exhilaration!

A person fully alive with purpose, presence, potential, and gratitude is a powerful magnet for attracting energizing and life-giving connections with other people and experiences. Only one-third of our physical well-being is determined by genetics, leaving another two-thirds within our control. While unanticipated things may occur, challenging our preferred agendas, we each have the wherewithal to choose our reaction and renegotiate our plan, being grateful for the privilege of longevity with meaning, and the wisdom to know that life is not about waiting for the storm to pass but, rather, learning to dance in the rain.

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