

Who Needs Retirement! Three Thoughts On An Engaged Life After Age 50

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Retirement isn't what I expected. Granted, I haven't really retired in the sense that we have come to know that word, but I wonder how many people today actually do. For me retirement has always been about the third chapter of life where I have created my own definition of retirement. It goes like this...

When I retire, I will still work. But I will only work at things I love to do, when I want to do them and getting paid will be less important than those two criteria.

It is now nine months since I've started down the path of my "first retirement" and I've realized that I'm not yet at a point in my transition where I'm living to my own definition above. While there are a number of factors to this status the key one is that I haven't yet created the opportunity for myself to engage my purpose sufficiently to let go of my current chapter.

It has also hit me that my current situation isn't unique. I've heard variations on this theme from many people I know who are of similar age. The theme is about feeling confident in how we've defined our future state and even more importantly, being comfortable that we have addressed those things that are standing in the way of the future becoming our current state. Some of these "blocks on our road" are pretty easy to spot, while others are not always as obvious.

I have recently uncovered one of these secondary obstacles for myself as I work to build my coaching practice – it is a solitary pursuit and I've realized I'm much happier working as part of a team. As a result I began looking for a team to join. Through some networking I found one and my energy level for business development changed immediately. The company is Challenge Factory and the thing I noticed is how well aligned we are. Challenge Factory is focused on a single issue: the impact of an aging

workforce on individuals and organizations. That had always been the focus of my emerging coaching practice – helping “50 something” high-achieving professionals find vitality in their lives and careers, including their own “first retirement”.

A part of what I love about my coaching practice is that I’m my own ideal client! As I discover things for myself, it gives me much greater knowledge that supports my work with others in similar circumstances. As I approach the day where I release my historical career, it has become very important for me to set up the next chapter of life. Here are three thoughts that have come clear to me as I’ve done some research on how to be most fulfilled going forward.

Finding Your Sweet Spot

As we head into the years traditionally known as retirement years, our focus on what will feel rewarding begins to change. Some of us will embark on something close to what our parents called retirement ... no further working and pursuit of hobbies and other pursuits such as hobbies and philanthropic endeavors. Others of us will still choose to work, but we will have different expectations, often much less dependent on earnings and more on fulfillment. Challenge Factory refers to this latter as understanding one’s SweetSpot ... the place where our passions and talents meet the needs of the market in a way that allows us to make a meaningful impact. When we find our SweetSpot, we’re much more likely to consider new models for our work, where can continue to feel meaningfully engaged but perhaps in a way that also allows others to grow into new challenges.



Engaging Across Generations

We are a part of what has been the largest generational cohort in history. In the workplace we are now second, behind what is referred to as the millennial or “Gen Y” generation. In between, often in middle management roles is “Gen X”. Imagine as we now begin to move out of our leadership positions and we begin to engage in new ways and roles. It will be very important for us to engage the strengths of each group as a single team rather than to attempt to manage through the differences of each generation. We will be valued for our experience and wisdom, and may need to learn to release control of situations in favour of sharing those valued items. What we must do is to eliminate any semblance of “ageism” whether directed at the younger or older members of the team.



Staying Young

I'm not one to write book reports. However, the book *Younger Next Year* by Chris Cowley and Henry Lodge is worthy of some discussion. All of our efforts to have a meaningful next chapter will go for naught unless we have our physical health. There are a myriad of books about fitness out there but I've never come across one that so plainly and so clearly makes a case for it takes to have a healthy and enjoyable existence well into our later years. There is a statement for which I can't remember the exact words but the message essentially is this: if we don't get on board with serious exercise we may still make it to age 85, but the odds are we won't like it when we get there! The book tackles some serious bio-chemistry in language that is easy to understand and even more convincing. What we learn is that the only antidote for the decay of aging is exercise, especially when we support that program with eating well, finding something you care about and having committed connections with others. It was so plain for me that there seems to be no other rational choice than to commit to serious exercise six days a week.



These three thoughts paint an interesting picture for the 50+ segment of our life. What if we make it happen? We figure out what we love to do and find a way to do it. We learn that one of our greatest pleasures and contributions we can make is to engage with other generations to share our experience. And we get serious about being fit so that we will have the health and energy to live a fulfilling life well into our eighties. I'm liking it! What about you?