



Today's Retirees

By Stephanie Delmore, MA, LPC

In years past, it was quite common for people to finish high school or college, find a job and work at the same company until they retire. The world of work is very different today. Companies are bought and sold, mergers grow companies and sell-offs slash divisions. Downsizing is a common experience for many skilled and professional workers and many employees feel that they are often “looking over their back” waiting for the next series of cuts to happen. Employees need to be ready to tune up their skills to potentially transition into a different kind of work or work environment. One benefit to this culture change is the emphasis on lifelong learning.

Changing your thinking about lifelong learning can be a great benefit in retirement. Research has shown that our brains are programmed to “use it or lose it”, meaning that if that “grey matter” doesn’t get a workout now and then, we slowly lose function. Learning can take all kinds of forms: learning a new language or skill, trying out a new form of exercise your body has never done, or working a part-time job that is different from what you’ve done in the past. Another great way to use your brains is to teach others. Many retirees find that the skills they have developed in the workplace can be used to mentor new workers in the field or used in a variety of volunteer capacities.

Volunteering is a great way to give back to your community, maintain social connections during retirement, and use your social and occupational skills in a new and challenging environment. Perhaps you’ve worked in accounting or finance, where you could apply those skills in serving on the board of directors at a non-profit organization. Maybe you’ve worked in education and can use your skills to mentor new teachers or volunteer in a classroom in an underserved community. Have you ever thought about teaching at a technical college or in a Learning in Retirement program? Your experience and skills would be highly desired in those areas. As appealing as it may be to relax on the couch or the golf course post-retirement, many retirees feel somewhat lost after the initial novelty of retirement has worn off.

Retirees often state that continuing to maintain some structure and consistency in their day to day life helps them to feel grounded and content in retirement. For some workers, retirement can bring with it a period of confusion or depression as they work to redefine who they are. For many professionals, their sense of identity is so intertwined with their careers, that when the career has ended they struggle to define for themselves and the world who they are. In addition, it is often a shock to married couples to now spend so much of their time together, when for years one or both of them had worked outside the home. For some couples, both husband and wife are happy to have the newfound time to spend together, where in other cases they find that they each have a different level of a need for time together and time apart and this can create some friction in their relationship.

Many retirees find that engaging in psychotherapy as an individual or as a couple during the retirement transition can help in many ways. The therapist is a neutral third party who you can use to bounce ideas off of and the therapist can help the individual or couple define what this new stage of life can look and feel like. Change can be an intimidating process, but it also provides wonderful opportunities. For many retirees, this can be the time in their lives when they finally have the opportunity to socialize, travel, play golf or do all the things they had limited time to do while they were working and raising a family. Today's retirees are a new generation of vibrant individuals who are finding new opportunities for creating second careers, traveling the world or volunteering, to the benefit of themselves and their communities.

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