

Preparing For Retirement – Personal Issues: Part II Developing Your Personal Sense of Purpose

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“Now that you are retired, what do you think is the most important thing people can do to prepare for retirement? It is financial planning, right?” When I talk to happily retired people, they don’t say “having a good pension” or “having a financial plan” – although both are important. They say ***having a sense of purpose***.

A ‘sense of purpose’? Yes, when working those of us in community colleges had a clear sense of purpose. We knew we were doing important work, because the institutions where we worked help people change their lives. With very little conscious analysis on our part, we had a clear sense of purpose. But, what happens when we retire? We are the same people, but without work, what is our sense of purpose now?

You don’t need a job to have a sense of purpose, and you don’t have to be deeply engaged in some wonderful work. You do have to be conscious about *who you are* and *what you want to spend your time doing*.

Fortunately, it is not hard to get started becoming more intentional about both who we are and what we want to spend our time doing. It will take some time, but following the guide below will allow you to redefine who you want to be. (This approach is based upon Stephen Covey’s book “**7 Habits of Highly Effective People**”.)

Write each of these questions on top of a sheet of paper, and answer them.

- ✓ **Who am I?** Use nouns and adjectives to describe **all** of the roles that you fill that are at least fairly important to you, such as “teacher, daughter, poet, dad, car racer, computer operator, wife ...”
- ✓ **What do I do?** Use verbs to describe all of the things you do that are at least fairly important, such as “build, learn, cook, help, coach ...”)
- ✓ **How do I do these things?** (Use adverbs - reluctantly, with joy, stubbornly ...)
- ✓ **With whom do I do them?** Identify all of the significant people in your life.
- ✓ **What are my ten most important values?**

Let your answers sit for at least a few days. Taking a quiet half hour each day just thinking about these questions may offer additional ideas. After a week or so, come back to see if you wish to add or revise anything. You probably will.

Next, take this information and write a *one sentence statement* that describes your mission in life ***as you see it right now***. What is it that you are here to do? For example, one friend of mine wrote "*Working with people I like, I am a model parent and grandparent who is known as an advocate for those who need someone on their side.*" Another wrote, "*I make things better,*" while a third wrote "*As a loving husband and father, I am a person who brings people together.*"

Once you have a statement that you feel is a good first start you are done, is this enough? No? Add to it. Change things. Want to have your answers be different next year? Change a question or two above to add the words "want to" to each question. "*Who do you want to be*", or "*What do you want to do*", for example.

When you have your statement, print it several times and put it in several prominent places – on your mirror, over your desk, on the refrigerator. ***You must do this!*** You need to see your statement multiple times each day. When you are thinking what you want to do, remember who you are and make sure you are spending your time doing what you want to do.

For maximum effectiveness, each year – early January is a wonderful time – spend a day or two revisiting and revising your answers.

Retirement is a wonderful road trip, made better with a personal destination in mind! Happy sailing.