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So You Think You Want to Retire!

Are you planning to retire to something or from something?

Most people see retiring as an event. You wake up one morning and decide that is it; I am going at the end of this year. It is time to live my life. I have had enough of this constant change, writing reports, following someone else's vision. It is time to enjoy life.

However, is retiring that easy? How do you really know when you are ready to leave your career behind and start a new life? Is it when you finally get a transfer to a school you do not want or because you are fed up with the politics of the job? Is it when you realize that you are at the top of your game as an administrator and have done everything you wanted to do so now is the right time to depart? Is it simply because you feel burned out and there are no other opportunities for you in your board?

There is no right answer to when a person should retire. It is a very personal decision based on each individual's circumstances. In CPCO's January 2009 census survey almost 31 per cent of respondents indicated they did not know when they would retire. Factors that would influence their departure date included such criteria as financial status, health, job satisfaction, children's status and post-retirement job opportunities.

There are many good books on retirement planning, written by Canadians for Canadians. All the authors agree that you need to start your retirement planning up to ten years before your retirement date. However, if you have less time than that before your 85 factor, it is never too late to begin.

Your Identity

For the last 25 to 30 years or more, when asked what you do for a living, you have responded with "I am a teacher" then, "I am a vice-principal" and finally, "I am a principal." When you retire you can say, "I am a retired principal" for a few years, but then what? Work has always defined who we are and given value to how we see ourselves. One of our tasks in retirement is to re-define ourselves and that means doing some planning.

Preparing for Retirement

Retirement is the next stage in your life journey. This journey can last as long as 30 years or more, depending on your age at the time of your retirement and of course your health. Remember the visioning exercises you do with your staff and the goals you set for the year? Well, in order to have a successful retirement, the experts say you need to have a vision for your

retirement and set goals with timelines. If you have a spouse, you need to take into consideration his/her vision and goals. Your plans need to be in sync to be successful. Communicating wants and needs will be a very important part of developing that shared vision.

Once you have a vision of what you want your retirement to look like, set goals. This is your *bucket list* of the top 50 or 100 things you want to do before you die. Set the goals in three-year increments, keeping in mind your health and any commitments you may still have to fulfill. This is your timeline for retirement. It will have to be reviewed from time-to-time depending on your circumstances and health. You may decide to travel to exotic places or join a golf club, now that you actually will have time to play on a regular basis. The sky is the limit, however health and finances may play a part in what you do and when.

Finances

When considering retirement, finances are usually the number one priority. Fortunately, Ontario educators have been paying into the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP) since the first day they started teaching. The Pension Calculator on the OTPP website will help you determine what your pension will be at the time of your retirement. This calculator allows you to input up to four different scenarios and calculates both your gross and net monthly incomes. If you have not accessed this pension resource, take some time to do so. The website is www.otpp.com/wps/wcm/connect/otpp_en/home. You may want to keep it in your *Favorites* for easy access.

Other sources of income may include investments, Registered Retirement Saving Plans, tax-free bank account and/or home equity. If you have a financial planner, consider discussing your options with him/her as well. There may be tax implications depending on your circumstances or goals for which your advisor can provide some suggestions on how to proceed.

The next step in determining your financial health is understanding your expenses. Do you still have large debts such as a home mortgage or a car loan? Will you need a new car early into your retirement? Look at your monthly living expenses and include everything. How might that change after retirement? You know that you will not be buying the same type of clothes you did as a school administrator. Stopping for a morning coffee en route to school can add up to a considerable amount. Just think of the savings as you sip your morning coffee in the comfort of your own kitchen. Will you still subscribe to the same magazines? Premiums for long-term disability insurance and association fees, both locally and provincially will be a thing of the past. However, you may wish to consider membership with the Retired Teachers of Ontario (RTO) or the Ontario Teachers Insurance Plan (OTIP) to access benefits you normally received through your board, such as health and dental plans. You may also wish to consider an associate membership with CPCO.

There may be other financial obligations to consider. Do you have children who are still dependent on you for support because they are in school or have a disability? Are there elderly parents who are relying on your financial help in their old age? Is it expected that you will help your children with a down payment to purchase their first homes?

Once you are clear on your financial situation, revisit your vision and goals to determine if you will be financially secure enough to do what you want to do in retirement. What alternatives are there to make that retirement plan work?

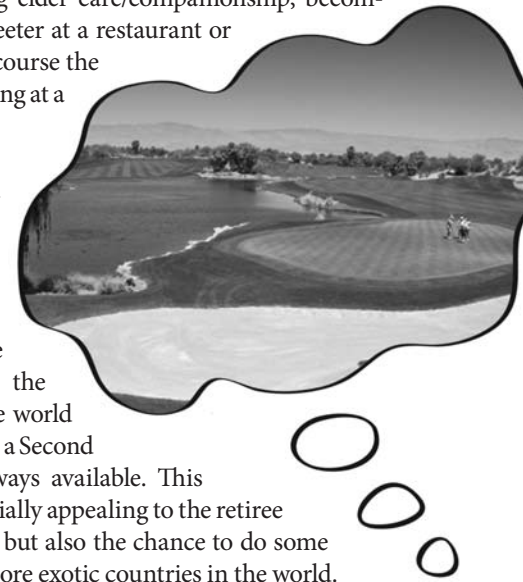
Work in Retirement

Retirement means different things to different people. While most people long for the day they can retire from their current jobs, they do not necessarily want to stop working. The current group of retirees is the boomer generation. They have a strong work ethic and many cannot see themselves not working. Work has always defined them. In retirement though, they will have more control over what kind of work they do. Principals have a wide variety of skills that can be transferred into many different fields of work. There are opportunities for contract jobs that allow for a greater work-life balance than was possible as a school administrator.

Retirees have options. Perhaps you have always wanted to start your own business. This may be the time to indulge in that dream to put your skills and talents to use. There are many resources available to entrepreneurs starting out on their own. Do some research in your local area to determine what services are lacking in your community that you might be able to fill. Providing services to retiring boomers is opening up a completely new area of possibilities for the newly retired business-minded person.

For some, owning their own business is too risky a venture to undertake at this stage in their lives, but they would still like to earn some additional income. Consider: working for a travel agency, a fitness or wellness centre; providing elder care/companionship; becoming a sales person or a greeter at a restaurant or department store; and of course the dream job for some, working at a golf course.

If you would like to spend a few more years in education, there are many opportunities available in foreign countries as principals of private schools. English is still the dominant language in the world and positions as English as a Second Language teacher are always available. This type of job would be especially appealing to the retiree looking for extra income, but also the chance to do some traveling in some of the more exotic countries in the world.



Volunteer Work

Not everyone is looking for paid work after retirement. Many would like to do the volunteer work they never seemed to have time for when trying to balance a career with raising a family. Many organizations in every community rely on volunteers to help them with their projects and services. Retirees need to decide which organization best matches the skills and talents they have to offer. The nice thing about being retired is you decide when and how much of your time you are going to devote to volunteering.

It is also possible to combine volunteer work with travelling to other countries. There are many projects in third world countries that could use the skills of school administrators. The organizations that carry out this work vary as to what they provide for their volunteers and what expenses the volunteers must assume themselves. Research the organizations to find one that meets your goals and expectations. Talk to people who have volunteered for these projects to learn about the pros and cons. Make an informed decision on where you volunteer your time and resources.

Downsizing, Relocating or Staying Put

The experts will tell you not to make any drastic changes in your residence in the first two years of retirement. Decisions made in haste or on the spur-of-the-moment may prove to be disastrous in the long run. Know thyself! How important is it to remain in your current home and neighbourhood? Financially can you

afford to stay in the house? Does it meet your current needs? Some retirees decide to downsize because the house is too big, there are too many floors to manoeuvre weary bones or the yard is too much work. Others decide they want to re-locate to another area of the province to be closer to family or because housing and the cost-of-living is cheaper allowing their pensions to go further. Some downsize because they intend to spend part of the year in a warmer climate making a smaller home more practical.



Joining clubs, attending theatre, doing volunteer work or going on trips can provide opportunities to meet new people and develop new relationships. Another avenue is joining chat groups on the internet but this should be exercised with some degree of caution. Providing personal information to new friends online could have serious consequences for the unsuspecting.

Your Will

Do you have an up-to-date will? Does it reflect your current financial situation and your wishes for how your estate will be disposed of when you die? Is the executor of your will still the person best suited to carry out your wishes or for that matter is that individual still available to take on the task should it be required? Have you named someone to be your power of attorney for your property and/or personal care should you become incapacitated? Do you have a living will? Does your family know your wishes should you be injured or suffer a serious illness that leaves you brain dead? Sounds morbid but by communicating your wishes to your family you can relieve them of a great deal of stress and upset at an already very emotional time.

Next Steps

It is never too late to start planning. Do your research. There are many sites on the internet that can help you prepare for this exciting stage of your life journey. RTO has associate memberships for educators not yet retired. With membership comes the ability to access their private members website and a variety of resources they have on preparing to retire and what to do when you are retired. OTIP and RTO also run workshops on retirement. Take advantage of one in your area to get you motivated to plan.

As mentioned earlier in the article, there are many books on retirement planning to read. The list below comes from my research.

Redefining Retirement New Realities for Boomer Women by Dr. Margaret Hovanec and Elizabeth Shilton, published by Second Story Press is an excellent resource for women. It is full of practical suggestions on all areas discussed in this article and it is easy to read. As well, they provide numerous websites that contain a wealth of information on a wide variety of topics.

Don't Just Retire-Live it, Love it! by Richard Atkinson, published by Retire Right Publications is a personal planning guide. If you are not into workshops, this book is definitely for you.

Master Your Retirement by Douglas V. Nelson, published by Knowledge Bureau Inc. has excellent chapter summaries that include lists of things to know, to ask, to do and to decide.

The New Retirement by Sherry Cooper, published by the Penguin Group looks at retirement as an exciting new journey about living well, achieving monetary security and attaining personal goals.

A few will decide that they want to make a permanent move to a warmer climate. Just think no more snow to shovel and no snowstorms to cancel plans. Retirees thinking of making a move such as this need to make sure they do their research. Different countries have different rules about foreigners buying property. Other considerations are taxes and health benefits. If you are keeping your Canadian citizenship, how much time needs to be spent in Canada? What if you die, how will this property affect your estate? Before moving permanently, consider renting in the desired location for a year to make sure it really meets your needs and expectations.

Health

How successful you are in fulfilling your retirement vision will depend in some regard on how well you age and your degree of wellness. It is never too late to initiate a healthier life-style. In retirement, there is more time to shop for groceries and to prepare healthier meals. There is even time to sit down and eat your meals at regular intervals at a more leisurely pace than you were used to when working. Canada's Food Guide is still the best resource to gauge how healthy your food consumption habits are. If you have not already given up smoking, now might just be the time to do so. Reduce your alcoholic intake as well. Although we hear about the benefits of consuming red wine, one should not partake in more than one glass a day. One serving of wine is 5 ounces regardless of the size of the wine glass!

A proper diet is only part of the healthy living equation. Exercise is another important ingredient in the formula to successful aging. In retirement, we can make more time to exercise and to try a variety of different types of exercises such as strength training, flexibility and balance training, and endurance training. Find organized sports leagues in your community that cater to senior citizens or get a group of friends together and organize your own volleyball, baseball or hockey league. Join a running club and start training to run a half-marathon. In the winter, take up ice-skating again or cross-country skiing.

Relationships

One of the greatest fears of retired people is that they will be lonely in retirement because they no longer have their colleagues from work to share experiences and socialize. Even in retirement, relationships continue to change in our lives. Family and friends move away and some die. Some friendships based on work may fizzle out. Our interests change causing us to gravitate to people with similar passions. In some instances, we have a chance to re-connect with childhood friends who have returned to the neighbourhood.