

## **Glancing Back .... Looking Forwards ... A Retiree's Anxiety**

### **The Worries of A Retiree**

No party lasts forever. A working career is similar. Retirement inevitable comes. Every September, it's quite disconcerting to see some familiar faces and colleagues retire and leave. These are people you've grown accustomed to; people you see almost daily and have worked together and participated in numerous activities together. You may even see colleagues more often than your own family members (you leave home before they rise and return after some have gone to bed). Relationships are cyclical and move on from generation to generation.

For me, I was in the middle of my working career, regularly seeing new recruits entering the firm and senior colleagues retiring. I was able to witness the transition of time and the periods spent with people. It was apparent that those approaching retirement had considerable anxiety (even those who had prepared for this moment well). I hope this discussion will be an inspiration for retirees to be strong and successfully enter a new period in life.

### **Glancing Back ... At the Past**

Reaching retirement age would be considered having travelled long journey in life. One would have been through numerous experiences. Looking back, one would see many happy times, troubled times, problems and obstacles, love and disappointment, success and failure, rivalry, criticisms, etc. One would have experienced both a feeling of being loved by others as well as resented by some. It was like a major drama theatre. Whatever happened, it has past and you have survived those events to be standing here today. Use those lessons learned to relay and coach other younger successors who are travelling behind you.



### **Looking Forwards ... At the Future**

Anxiety regarding the future is common among new retirees, as life will change after one retires. For those who previously held senior work positions, they sometimes only formally retire but mentally refuse to acknowledge their leadership role has ended. They still demand a lot of respect and expect to be surrounded by others' attention. If that's the case, you're due for a big adjustment or be really disappointed.

One former minister, ranked general, explained that when he was a minister, he received a lot of attention and was often showered with gifts. Anything mentioned would

receive a favourable response as if there was a wishing well. However, when he retired, all of that vanished as well; it is almost as if you've been downgraded. It hurts and is a stark reminder that privileges are not long lasting. It's therefore not surprising why many who used to hold a senior position would try desperately to get back up there.

Careful planners will usually prepare themselves about what they will do after they retire. Those clinging to senior ranked positions may go into politics (so others can look up to them as before). Advisors and special lecturers are also viable choices. Others may choose to become social volunteers since 60 years of life experience are certainly valuable. Some may spend more time with religious activities to accumulate good merit for later on, as life isn't predictable. Yet others may see retirement as time to wind down and rest, spending time with grandchildren or family. Whatever one chooses to do will ultimately vary as we each have unique circumstances and preferences.

### **Live in the Present**

Being conscious of your present status and capabilities is helpful. If you are strong enough to continue working, enjoy staying busy, like to network and socialize, you could perhaps open a cafe near a university. Each morning, you'll be able to chat with customers. You may also sell snacks, maybe even give samples away. Lecturers and even foreign students may drop by and exchange interesting conversations with you. It is a job that can be fun. Why not also find time to travel or go out with friends. That's the way to live in the present. Voluntary teaching work for the community can also be enjoyable; allowing one to meet people and feel refreshed. Working with plants and trees, or a hobby collection could also be an enjoyable part-time activity.

I saw a TV program today which featured an 80 year old man who looked strong and lively. He was forward-looking and was a thoroughly modern person for his age. Each day, he would wake up around 6 a.m. and take the bus to the Victory Monument to buy a daily newspaper and a cup of beverage. He does that daily which takes about 2 hours. Interestingly, newspapers are available very near where he lives. But he explained that he enjoys riding the bus and looking out the window to watch people. It helps one realize that one's life keeps moving forwards as circumstances require. Each day is a different one. He said he likes to observe people on the streets, some are moving at a leisurely pace while others walk fast. Some dress funny. Some are in such a hurry, they're walking quickly and eating at the same time. Some even smile by themselves. All these people are like actors that happen to come into view for him to see and be entertained. It adds color. On the other hand, you'd miss all this if you spent all your time at home. It'll narrow your perspective and life becomes boring. On some days, he may visit museums to reflect on the past. It keeps his energy levels up to continue leading a vibrant life. We can all take charge of our lives, pick our activities and make our time worthwhile. We can take that initiative on our own; no need to wait for others to lead us.

### **Look After Your Own Feelings Too**

Few are able to shrug off all feelings of anxiety as retirement comes. While some people may feel relaxed not having to work the next day, many feel disconcerted not having anything to do. Some feel like going out just like before, only to discover that he/she doesn't know where to go (other people they know simply go to work). For other retirees, their relatives keep restraining them from going out; that causes low self-esteem and depression may set in. Even worse, some relatives don't treat them respectfully, now that they are retired and not working. It makes one wonder whether one is becoming a burden. This hurts your feelings, both directly and indirectly. It is therefore important to gauge your feelings and keep your spirits up; this helps you cope when people around you may not be that supportive.

- **Self esteem.** Seeing value in yourself is important. Ignore trivial things. Relatives may see that you are already strong and capable, hence do not give you as much attention as you thought they would. If you are able to help your sons/daughters and relatives, do so within your means. When they are happy, so will you.
- **Apply Buddhist principles in life.** Understand the rules of nature. Nothing is permanent; understand the 8 rules of natural life: fortune – loss; rank – demotion; happiness – sadness; praise – criticism. Buddhist principles offer good guidance during your retired life.
- **Mind over body.** Emotions benefit from being still and calm, whereas your body strengthens if it keeps moving. A calm mind helps you think clearly and helps achieve success. Find time to meditate and absorb Buddhist teachings. Learn how to let go and make life more pleasant.
- **Socialize with other retirees.** This can also be an enjoyable pastime to discuss common interests and activities or share old experiences. This induces happiness; pleasant moments also help promote longevity.



### **Keep Those Around You Happy**

Seniors in the house are often looked up to as a role model for family and relatives. By exhibiting good mental strength, you can help instil confidence in your younger relatives to help them weather through difficulty. They will cope with problems better. Relatives around you will be more happy overall. Sharing your wisdom and insights as their consultant when they are faced with challenges and providing sympathy and love are some of the greatest gifts you can provide to them.

### **Recommended Activities For Retirement**

Take a brief moment to reflect on yourself to see if there is anything you want to do, but haven't. List them out and consider whether they're possible. Will your age and physical condition allow? Can you afford the expenses? If it's possible, go ahead and do it. Don't wait. If it's an activity we can do for society, you will feel proud and have good self esteem. The following are example of activities:

- Write a book. If you've never done so, try it and explore your thoughts.
- Get an occupation you've always dreamt of doing. Many of us don't end up with a career in a field we like or hoped to do. Retirement provides us with an opportunity to try it.
- Meditate and practice Buddhist principles. That inner peace is ultimate happiness. It calms the mind.
- Find a hobby. Gardening can be satisfying, monitoring plants growth and see flowers bloom. Keeping a collection, reading books, travelling, knitting, or crafts are recommended too.

- Engaging in activities with those of similar age. Join a senior group or community that practices Chinese aerobics in the park. Flower arrangement, crafts, garments, meditation, travel, or volunteer work.
- Learn to use computers. Cyberspace is a rich resource of knowledge. Retirees will find that enjoyable and a good way to spend time if you are left at home.

### **Don't Neglect Your Physical Health**

Few retirees accept they are aging; it's unpleasant. It's certainly more uplifting to believe you're not that old. Your physical strength, however, will have different thoughts and degenerate with age. It's true that some retirees have a physical appearance that belies their age; many would think they're younger. But aging will inevitably catch up and age will show. While your outer appearance may seem young, body cells have been functioning for a long time and gradually degenerate. Hence, don't neglect your health and get regular checkups as a precaution.

### **Happiness ... Despair ... It's Part of Life**

Do accept that happiness and despair are all a normal part of life. Keeping your expectations in life realistic and maintaining an appropriate lifestyle would be sufficient to achieve happiness. Revered monk Luang Poh Cha once asked while presenting a 5-inch stick, "is this stick short or long?" to which I answered that it was just about right, neither short nor long. He then picked up two other sticks which were 4 inches and 7 inches in length and proceeded to put them next to the original stick. Then he repeated his question, "is this stick short or long?" The reply then became instantaneously different. The lesson served to show that humans tend to make comparisons. We subconsciously cannot grasp what is actually considered sufficient in life; this creates frustration. We may find ourselves desperately yearning for more, or less. However, being content with what you already possess could wipe off lots of frustrations and lead to considerable inner happiness.

### **Emotional Support is Most Important**

Everyone needs emotional support from those around them, including retirees facing changes in life. Their sons and daughters, or those around them, should help find activities for retirees to do. It will help them stay occupied and refrain from feeling lonely. Talk to them regularly to help them feel comfortable in this challenging time. Emotional support is very important as it is key in providing mental strength to overcome any obstacles we face.

Move forwards with confidence and emotional strength, while embracing the change you're facing will help you adjust well and achieve a happy life. Remember, whatever challenge you face, keep a positive outlook. You'll win for sure.

\*\*\*\* Before we part ... keep a lasting impression in your hearts, until we meet again. Love and genuine care bonds relationships.

\*\*\*\* When we do part ... whatever the circumstances, cherish our shared thoughts and close relationship.



Source: GotoKnow, by Pueng Ngan\_SDU