

**Your Magical Retirement Plan — Ensure That You Have a Retirement Plan!**  
**- By Ernie J. Zelinski**

Your retirement plan and my retirement plan should have something important in common and it is not what you may think it is.

So what's your retirement plan look like? If you are like most people contemplating retirement, you may have given some thought to the financial aspects of retirement planning but absolutely no consideration to the personal aspects.

In the course of a lifetime people pick up the knowledge and skills to build careers, raise their families, and accumulate material possessions. But not much of that prepares them for life in retirement. How do they handle leisure time? How do they keep their minds in tiptop shape? How do they adjust to a life without structure and purpose?

According to a survey conducted by AIG SunAmerica, the people most likely to enjoy retirement are those who have made retirement plans. Put another way, your magical retirement plan is to have a retirement plan. This is borne out by the fact that 78 percent of people who prepare for retirement both financially and psychologically view it as "a whole new life" or a "continuation of life as it was."

Clearly, a life which is empty of purpose until 65 will not suddenly become filled on retirement. If you are still in the workforce and contemplating retirement, you should be thinking long and hard about the retirement plans you should be making. This entails contemplating the problems that may arise when you no longer have the routine, structure, and purpose of working life to rely on.

It's important to spend many pre-retirement days on your retirement plan and thinking about what you want to do when you walk out of your workplace for the last time. All too often, people put off things too long. If you don't learn how to live happily before you retire, it's very difficult to teach you how to live happily afterwards.

When happy and successful retirees are asked what advice they would offer to a person just entering retirement, most will respond with a variation of: When it comes to retirement planning, spend as much — or considerably more — time thinking about how you will utilize your days and months as you do contemplating your finances. As one retiree told a newspaper reporter, "Retirement could well represent 25 percent or more of your whole life. Why leave it to chance? A retirement plan is key."

Although virtually everyone needs a modest amount of money for essentials and a few luxuries from time to time, people who spend all their time and energy on building a huge nest egg often forget how to live happily in their working lives. They compromise their health, they neglect their friends, and they don't develop interests outside of work.

Once they retire they realize that no amount of money can buy excellent health, great friends, or the ability to enjoy leisure activities. Sadly, they wind up even less happy in retirement than they were in their working lives.

We all know that we have to prepare financially. But we have to prepare psychologically and socially as well. Ironically, too much emphasis on saving for retirement can make us forget what it takes to enjoy retirement. Being satisfied with life as a whole in your working life is your best way to prepare for retirement.

**The following activities will help you to enjoy your work life and prepare you for retirement at the same time:**

**Retirement Planning Tips:**

1. Establish a good work/life balance many years before you retire and zealously maintain it — refrain from working on weekends.
2. Maintain optimum health while you are working.
3. Be open to learning new things at work and in your personal life.
4. Have a major life purpose other than your work so that you have a purpose when you take early retirement.
5. Develop close friendships removed from your workplace. Maintain — i.e. don't neglect — your true friends so that they are still around when you retire.
6. Learn how to handle freedom. A good way is to become self-employed for at least a year or two before retirement.
7. Accept that money will buy style and comfort, but it won't buy you happiness.
8. Spend a lot of time alone while learning how to enjoy solitude.
9. Indulge in regular strenuous exercise so that you will be physically fit and able to enjoy retirement activities.
10. Take all your paid vacation time so that you learn how to be more leisurely.
11. Travel a lot. People who don't get to enjoy travel before retirement seldom develop a liking for it after retirement.
12. Don't allow your identity to be tied to your job.
13. Find many ways to connect with the world.
14. Take an unexpected day off work, and ensure that you loaf it all away to experience what it's like to be a member of the leisure class.
15. Take a pre-retirement course that deals with the personal issues and not only the financial issues.

**Above all, don't put off being happy until you retire. People who have tried this realize that they have waited too long. The ability to be happy before you retire — regardless of your financial circumstances — is the key to having a happy retirement. In short, whether it's your retirement plan or my retirement plan, it should entail having a well-balanced life before retirement.**

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