

What's Your Retirement Role?



The obvious difference between working and retirement is that you no longer get up and go to work five days a week. Now you have to fill your own time and structure your own life. You may have worked for 30 or even 40 years. Your identity is tied up in your job, and you've gotten used to the routine, structure and maybe the social life. You had places to go, people to see and a schedule to keep. Perhaps you ran a department and had people reporting to you. Now nobody reports to you and nobody even cares whether you show up in the morning.

So after you retire you may feel disconnected, like you have no purpose in life and no focus. I had one friend who, for the first few months after he retired, had nothing more to do than go with his wife to the grocery store and follow her up and down the aisles – until one day she stopped, looked him in the eye and said, "This has got to stop."

Retirement is a new stage of life, and you need something to do, especially if you're retiring early. So what's the answer? Find a new role, a new identity and a different way to define yourself. Perhaps there's some activity you've always wanted to pursue, but never had the time. Or maybe you need to do some research to figure out a role you can take on that uses your expertise and talents and suits your interests. That way, when someone asks what you do in retirement, you can answer: I volunteer at the school, I'm writing my family history or I take care of my grandchildren.

Here are a few examples of retirement roles:

The Volunteer. Many people feel that retirement offers a chance to give back to their community. So talk to your friends, attend a meeting of your local service club or check out the Volunteer Match website to find out what needs exist and how you might fit in. You may find yourself helping seniors do their taxes, delivering meals on wheels or helping kids learn how to read, while also making connections in your community that you never had before.

The Sportsman. One friend of mine always liked to hike and camp, so when he retired he set a goal to hike the length of the Appalachian Trail. It took him three years, making three separate trips, but he finally did it. Another friend took up pickleball and now teaches lessons at her local YMCA. My brother-in-law is president of his senior golf league in Florida. It doesn't matter what your sport is or even how good you are. What matters is that you enjoy it and make some friends.

Grandparent. Spending time with grandchildren is often a major reason people retire. There's no better use of your time and talents than helping your children and getting to know your grandchildren. Doesn't it warm your heart to think that 50 or 70 years from now your grandchildren will recall special moments they shared with you, as they in turn share moments with their grandchildren?

Traveler. Some people make a bucket list of destinations, while others focus on one particular region. My sister is learning Spanish and has made three trips to Spain to walk the Camino de Santiago. Other people like Road Scholar or other cultural organizations. But you don't have to be rich to be a traveler. One friend who lives in upstate New York has made it her mission to discover the back roads of New England, exploring old factory towns and tracing old stone walls and graveyards, all within a couple of hundred miles of her house.

Craftsperson. I was at a party over Christmas and met an older man from Michigan. "What do you do?" I asked. "I'm a woodworker," he replied. He had just finished crafting an oak bed for his daughter, and now is starting work on a series of keepsake wooden boxes for his grandchildren, which he plans to give them as presents next Christmas. Other retirees make glassware or throw pottery or sew clothes, and may even sell their wares online or in a local store.

These are some ideas, but in the end, you define your own role in retirement. Ask yourself what you really like to do and what engages your interest. Retirement gives you the chance to try something new, no questions asked.

<http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/on-retirement/articles/2017-01-09/whats-your-retirement-role>