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# Seven Keys to a Happy Retirement



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## **Before exiting your full-time career, laying serious groundwork is essential.**

Nicolas, a busy senior executive, really enjoyed working in the construction industry. He knew his company had a mandatory retirement age, but he didn't give it much thought. He figured that retirement would give him more time to perfect his golf game and travel with his wife.

On the day he retired, he was delighted to see how his colleagues had gone out of their way to celebrate his achievements. Immediately after, he embarked with his wife on a long, wonderful cruise in Southeast Asia.

Unfortunately, Nicolas's upbeat mood didn't last upon his return. Playing golf didn't provide the same satisfaction as making deals in the office. Deep down, he missed being at work. After a while, his former colleagues didn't seem so interested in catching up to talk shop. Watching the news and reading the newspapers grew tedious. As his wife was busy with her own pursuits, Nicolas felt quite lonely.

Soon, Nicolas spent most of his days feeling either morose or angry. Then one morning, he killed himself. What happened? Could his suicide have been prevented?

## **Retirement isn't always a bed of roses**

Of course, many people love retirement. Suddenly, the world is their oyster, especially if they have accumulated enough wealth. Had Nicolas taken the time to plan his retirement, he might have discovered countless ways to spend his time and energy meaningfully.

As Nicolas's case illustrates, retirement isn't without its challenges. Work provides structure, purpose and meaning. Without it, we can become lost and sense a deep void. It can also become harder to maintain social connections. In addition, some retirees have financial worries. What's more, age-related physical decline can arouse feelings of anxiety and heighten **deep-seated concerns about death**.

Given all these worries, it should not come as a surprise that retirement can strongly impact mental health. Various studies have shown that early retirement can cause a **decline** in memory and other **brain functions**. In all, retiring completely when we are still physically and mentally fit requires careful consideration.

Had Nicolas disengaged from work gradually, he could have explored his passions, skills and interests. He could have pursued a mix of part-time jobs, freelance work or consulting to continue using his talents. With his financial security, he could have enjoyed work-life balance.

For those in good mental and physical health, retirement need not lead to loss or **withdrawal**. Instead, it can be an opportunity to explore new interests and identities. As we live longer, there is no need to stick to one career. A portfolio approach, involving multiple roles, offers benefits like flexibility, variety, diverse income streams and the chance to pursue personal passions. With this in mind, here are a few suggestions:

**1. Strengthen relationships:** Be more present with family and friends. Retirement can allow you to strengthen your relationships with family and friends, as well as create cherished memories with children, grandchildren and other loved ones.

**2. Pursue hobbies:** Pursue fun activities that you neglected during your working years. Whether it's painting, gardening, cooking, writing or playing a musical instrument, you can stay mentally active by focusing on the things you've always loved to do. Physical fitness should also become a priority. You can join fitness classes, walk, swim or explore other sports.

**3. Travel:** Retirement opens up opportunities to explore the world. You now have the time to visit far-flung places and encounter different cultures.

**4. Volunteer:** Many retirees find fulfillment by giving back to society through volunteering for charitable organisations, schools, hospitals or causes they care about. You can serve as a mentor or coach to the younger generation. You can also make a positive impact on the world through direct philanthropy.

**5. Lifelong learning:** You may also pursue new educational avenues. Universities, colleges and online learning platforms now offer classes or workshops on countless subjects. Other learning paths may be more emotional or spiritual in nature, such as meditation, yoga or faith-based gatherings.

**6. Part-time work or entrepreneurship:** If you wish to continue working, consider part-time or freelance options, including in the field of teaching. You could also **become a non-executive director** of companies interested in your expertise. Or, could retirement be when you finally start that small business you've always dreamt of?

**7. Join clubs:** Engage in social activities by joining an association. Whether it's a book club, a hiking group or an interest-based community, it can lead to new friendships.

Deciding on your next step should involve a reflection on what brings you joy, satisfaction and fulfillment. When retirement approaches, craft a plan that aligns with your values, desires and those of your significant other. Explore your inner world to identify the activities that energise you and bring meaning to your life.

Simultaneously, nurture strong social relationships with family and friends as those are vital for mental health. By laying this groundwork, you can enjoy the fruits of your labour while continuing to lead a **purposeful and rewarding life**.

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