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by Ken Dychtwald

[New Retirement Rules: Caught Between the Dow and the Tao](#)

The current financial "reckoning" is causing large numbers of pre-retirees to seriously rethink their current and future lives. While these distressing times have caused many retirement dreams to shrink or even disappear altogether, they're also providing a much-needed social/financial/spiritual wake-up call.

There's an existential battle going on to create a better balance between the Dow and the Tao - between the material and the spiritual, work and play, spending and saving, now and tomorrow. Yes, these are tough times, but I think they are perceived to be so partly because we've had it pretty darn good for so long. Our grandparents and parents certainly endured tougher sledding than this. Nevertheless, dealing with today's problems is a challenge for all of us: to be hopeful when we've lost a lot of money and time; to be encouraging when friends and relatives need our help or have lost their jobs; to be positive when there's so much vitriol and negativity in the media.

Millions of us are now looking for new meaning in our lives, and there's a growing desire - along with the vitality and life experience - to make something of the next decades of our lives. There seem to be five new retirement rules that are emerging:

First, since hardly anyone can afford a 25+ year non-working retirement anymore, we should all expect to work a bit longer. And, it probably makes sense to consider the possibility that there could be a satisfying part or full-time "encore" career waiting around the bend - that might even be more enjoyable than the job you've held during your main career. Maturity doesn't have to be either all work or all play. Maybe in the new retirement, enabled by the rise of sabbaticals, job-sharing, retraining, flex-retirement and phased retirement - and even charitable non-paying work, you can craft a better balance between the two. Should continued work be viewed as a failure? Absolutely not! In fact, studies consistently show that the majority of people who step to the sidelines and withdraw from a contributing life go through a period of sadness and profound disorientation. In contrast, retired people who stay productive and engaged, who reinvent themselves, are statistically happier, healthier, and think of these as the best years of their lives.

Second, perhaps another helpful rule for the new retirement is that relationship planning is just as important as financial planning. You can have all the money in the world and a fancy house, but if there aren't people in your life whom you care about and who care about you, you'll be likely to have a miserable time. At the end of the day, it's not the things we own that nourish us, but rather the experiences and relationships we share. How do you create intimacies with family members who might live at a distance? How do you forge new friendships with people from different backgrounds or different generations? How do you better connect with your parents,

siblings, children and grandchildren? The art of creating nourishing relationships is something we all could be better at.

The third rule is to keep learning and growing. From my 35+ year experience in the fields of psychology and gerontology, I've become convinced that the number-one cause of premature aging is not atherosclerosis--hardening of the arteries--but "psycho-sclerosis," the hardening of the attitudes. Seeking to learn about new ideas, media and technologies, taking an interest in the lives and interests of younger people, continually stretching yourself, trying new things, and growing--that is what will keep you on the most satisfying and most youthful retirement path. For many, the fountain of youth is more likely to be found at the local community college than at the health spa.

Fourth, one clear message from the economic and demographic situation we're in is that it's time to buckle up and start living within our means. I can't even believe I'm saying this--I am so much a creature of this credit card era. It's become painfully obvious that not only have our leaders made some profound blunders, but we've botched things up too. Far too many of us have fantasized a style of life and a way of spending not matched by a high degree of discipline and responsibility regarding the making, saving, and use of money. This new era of increasing longevity and economic restructuring calls for wiser long term thinking and greater financial self-reliance among all of us.

Fifth, try to live the next chapter of your life with "purpose." Whoever said "he who dies with the most toys, wins" was wrong. When you give back of yourself, share what you know, when you help those who could benefit from you, you lose nothing. In fact, you gain. In the popular media, a great deal has been said about how to live longer (eat your veggies, get a good night's sleep, practice yoga etc.), yet there's been far too little discussion about what to do and who to be in retirement to feel a sense of purpose and contribution. We desperately need a new version of maturity in which older people are not pushed to the sidelines, but rather play a central role as mentors, teachers - elders. And, we could surely use some more "grown-ups" as role models. The longevity bonus we'll be receiving can provide a fantastic opportunity for volunteering, mentoring and philanthropreneuring - a time of not only leaving a legacy, but also living a legacy.

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