



Different plans, passions bring retirement happiness

In an age when 60 is the new 40 and retirees are steering startups instead of golf carts, are we losing the art of retirement leisure?

Not long after he retired in May, Paul Hedquist remembers a neighbor asking when he planned to start volunteering.

She had seen him leaving the house for biking and camping trips, and the message he picked up was, "When are you going to do something important?"

"My response to her was that I had volunteered professionally for many years, and I need some time for me," said the 61-year-old former chief executive of Employee & Family Resources Inc., a Des Moines nonprofit human services agency.

Having studied retirement issues through a division of the agency for 50-plus people, Hedquist knew the woman was reflecting a body of research that shows having a plan and staying engaged is one of the most important factors in retirement.

"As a generation, we learned from our parents that an absence of planning can lead to bad outcomes, so this overemphasis isn't all bad," he said.

Still, for his own retirement, and probably temporarily, having some time adrift is important, said Hedquist, now living in Loveland, Colo.

"Part of me just wants to be rudderless for a while," he said, though it hasn't been easy. It still feels decadent to read a book all afternoon, for example.

That's a feeling to which [Robert Houston](#) can relate.

On the morning after he retired at 72 from a long retail career and a couple of stints at nonprofits, Houston reported to a volunteer job with Executive Service Corps of Chicago, which helps schools and other nonprofits develop talent and run their operations.

"Even before I retired, I went over and took the training so I could show up on Day One ready to go," he said of his transition a decade ago. "That's how nervous I was about having something to do."

As it turned out, he's found plenty of passions that have kept him engaged, and that sustained him through his significant health issues and those of his wife, Susan.

He's served on dozens of boards and been involved with political and social organizations, as well as dabbling in yoga, swimming and water aerobics.

The two men approached retirement differently, but common themes emerged:

Leisure needs passion: If you're golfing (or sewing or collecting stamps) out of habit or because you can't think of other ways to spend time, boredom and depression can set in quickly. Take time to explore what you're passionate about, which is what Hedquist said he's doing in this phase.

Diversify: Don't look for one leisure activity to take the place of your career. Houston also filled his life with political campaigns, other organizations and lots of socializing with family and friends.

Stand back: A bit like a newly minted college graduate who wants to travel Europe before looking for a job, Hedquist urges fellow retirees to take some time to really understand what the next phase should be.

"I hope people can stand back somewhat and take the opportunity to question what they're doing."