

A sense of personal value can help retirees keep going



I went from enjoying corporate success to finding significance in retirement.

Gerard Ee

For most of us, my wife and I, retirement, life is about enjoying a living and hospitable building, an adequate nest egg for the future. Assuming that we succeed in this part of life's journey, the big question is, what do we do from the day we retire?

The idea of not having to work another day may sound alluring to a person who has been clocking 14 hours or more a week at work. I felt that way as my own retirement approached.

When July 1, 2005 arrived, I retired from accounting firm Ernst & Young. After years of meeting high-pressure deadlines and having to submit weekly time summaries, the relief from work stress was short-lived. Time and the world around me seemed to move at a snail's pace. This despite my work at home while I was driving on their boards.

For the first 12 days, my routine was to ferry the children to and from school, read the newspapers and keep on reading.

Then, on July 15, I was called on to handle the financial matters at the National Kidney Foundation (NKF). I was appointed chairman of a new NKF board to reverse the contracting of the charity.

I was filled with anticipation as the centre received national attention. NKF was one of the largest charities in Singapore and its services were a lifeline for many people. At the same time, however, I felt a level of excitement.

I realised then that my work gave me a sense of personal value. And it came from creating value for others, whether individuals or organisations.

HOW I FOUND MY PASSION, IN CHARITY

I used to think of passion as the starting point. You do something because you are passionate about it. But I have seen that the converse also holds true: You develop a passion for something after you do it and become good at it.

Because I have held, and continue to hold, several roles in the social sector, people get the impression that it was passion which drove me along this path. In fact, I started volunteering when I was 10, not out of passion or any form of altruism, but because it seemed like a better alternative to studying.

What people saw was a young boy following in the footsteps of his father.

When my father passed away in 1994, I "naturally" inherited his legacy. As he was known for his philanthropic ways, people who would have turned to him for help turned to me instead. At that time, I felt compelled to accede to their requests.

Stepping NKF introduced me to the healthcare sector, allowing me to take on several roles, including chairing Chung General Hospital and currently chairing the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC).

Through these experiences, I discovered my passion for contributing to the community. It was also probably due to my father's influence, but the question I want to be able to answer at the end of my life is whether I have brought hope and joy to many people.

SEEKING SIGNIFICANCE

The experience of retiring varies for every individual, but the key to living a happy and fulfilling

retirement is to live with a clear sense of purpose or meaning.

Retirement does not mean that the world has to come to a stop. In fact, retirement is a new phase in our lives with unlimited options on how we want to spend our time meaningfully.

With the pervasiveness of social media and the fast pace of life, people are often too distracted to open doors and reflect on the lessons to be learnt. This should not be the case for a retiree.

For a start, it is good to remain socially engaged.

Try out different activities at your nearest community centre. Make sure as a Silver Guardian to befriend other seniors and facilitate programmes for them at active ageing centres. Put your government-funded SkillsFuture credits to good use by learning something new. The possibilities are endless if you keep an open mind.

Being involved with the community provides the social connections which helps with maintaining mental health. Keeping active also helps to maintain our physical health. Social interaction and activities will also

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keep our mind off the minor aches and pains which many of us experience increasingly as we age.

From my experience, writing a journal – personal, journalising – can also be beneficial. Journalising is the practice of recording our thoughts, emotions, experiences and reflections. When a big part of our lives is lived externally, journalising gives us the time and space to reflect.

THE DECADE AHEAD

In a few months, I will be turning 75. Medical health checks and health-related issues have extended longevity. Last year, Singapore was named a Blue Zone 2.0, where people live longer and lead healthier lives.

Life expectancy in Singapore has risen every year since 2008, including the years of COVID-19 from 2020 to 2022. In 2008, life expectancy was 64.5 years. It rose to 80 years in 2022, one of the highest worldwide. This gives me hope that I can continue contributing to society for another decade.

I will have to adjust my pace and perhaps seek out different ways of creating value. A possibility is to focus on mentoring, provide advisory assistance and take time to challenge my thoughts and experiences.

Like a good reliable vehicle, I will continue to chug along until the engine dies out. Realistically, however, my acceleration power is greatly reduced. So, instead of tackling off-road challenges, I will choose a gentler route and travel at slower speeds, but I will keep going.

We all need a reason to get out of bed each morning and have something to look forward to. The day we stop having a reason to get out of bed will be the day we do not get up at all.

Dr Gerard Ee is the chairman of the Agency for Integrated Care.

A NEW RETIREMENT
Retirees are talking to a resident in Jooe Road who have to 2022. The key to being a happy and fulfilling retirement is to live with a clear sense of purpose or meaning, says the writer. Retirement does not mean that the world has to come to a stop. In fact, retirement is a new phase in our lives with unlimited options on how we want to spend our time meaningfully. (7 JULY 2023)