

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Handling Retirement And The Loss Of Identity

from the American Counseling Association

Recent studies report that about 78 million Americans of the Baby Boomer generation are at or near retirement age. While some may continue in their jobs for a few more years, for many retirement may be looming large and with it a number of questions.

Yes, many worries have to do with financial issues related to savings, Social Security and future health care concerns and costs.

The financial questions of retirement are certainly important, but there are also additional retirement issues that have to be faced. These include basic questions about being able to handle the psychological aspects of no longer being part of the work force.

We live in a society that places a great deal of value on "doing" things. We've been taught to be busy, productive citizens and, for many of us, our lives revolve around that thing we "do" for a living. We're usually known to others as a nurse, teacher, accountant, or whatever career we've been working in. Then, suddenly, one day we no longer hold that title but are simply "retired." We've lost that identity of being a "doer" and, unfortunately, many of us judge people who are not "doing" things as being of less value.

That's why someone who is facing retirement will often be asked, "What are you going to do?" It seems an innocent query but carries with it the implication that now that the defining job will be gone, what can possibly be of value in the person's life?

For someone approaching retirement, it's necessary to accept that he or she is heading into a new life stage with different meanings and a new status. It requires understanding that there are many changes to be faced and many questions, a lot more important than, "What are you going to do?" to be answered.

If retirement is near or recent, take the time to really evaluate how it's going to affect you, not just financially but in all aspects of your life.

Check out some of the many books, videos and websites now available with suggestions for better handling the challenges retirement can bring.

But if retirement seems like an overwhelming black hole in your future, consider making an appointment with a professional counselor who can help you with the issues you are facing. You can find one through the "Find A Counselor" tab on the American Counseling Association home page (www.counseling.org).

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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