



IN SIGHT

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RETHINKING RETIREMENT

At what age do you plan to retire? How do you envision your life after retirement? How will you spend your time? Will you engage in some form of paid or unpaid work? These are important questions to ask ourselves, especially if we are baby-boomers. Many of us have a stereotypical view of retirement: we will continue to work full time until about age 65 and then retire to a life of leisure. However, dramatic improvements in health and longevity, as well as the cost of retirement, are challenging these expectations.

INCREASING LONGEVITY

At the start of the 21st century, the life expectancy of Americans is 20 years longer than it was even 50 years ago.

- In 1900 the average life expectancy for a newborn baby was roughly 47 years. Now it is 74 for males and 81 for females.
- Today the average healthy 65-year-old man can expect to live until age 81 and the average 65-year-old woman until age 84.
- A woman who reaches age 50 today – and remains free of cancer and heart disease – can expect to see her 92nd birthday.
- Researchers James Corey, U.C. Davis, and James Vaugel, Duke University, suggest, “Given good health practices, the current life expectancy of 75 to 80 years may rise to 90 and 100 years in the foreseeable future.”

The extra 20 or 30 years of life we have gained have been added to the middle of life when we are still functioning at a high level, not to the end when we are experiencing dramatic declines. Some in the adult development field refer to this period as a second adulthood or a second period of midlife.

THE ECONOMICS OF RETIREMENT

In 1900 Americans lived 1.2 years in retirement; in 1997 they average 17. As our life expectancies approach 80 years, more of us will live 20 years or more with only our retirement income. But will that income be enough?

Byron Oliver, head of Cigna’s retirement plan division, says that only 10 percent of baby boomers expect to work after age 65, yet only 25 percent will have saved enough money to retire. In fact, boomers are saving only *one-third* of what they will need to keep a standard of living comparable to their parents.

BEYOND RETIREMENT

Many lawyers who are beginning to contemplate retirement are still functioning at a high professional level. Some have grown bored handling matters they no longer find challenging or interesting. Some seek a slower-paced, less stressful life. Some want to get off the compensation-formula, billable-hour treadmill. Some can take advantage of attractive retirement packages. For many of these lawyers, however, their profession makes up a significant part of their identity and sense of self. Regardless of why retirement is beginning to look attractive, it will be critical for them to retire *to* something, not just *from* something. Without a plan, the transition will be difficult.

Futurists predict that most people over 65 will continue to work outside the home in one way or another – not only because they want to feel a sense of purpose or self-worth, but because they will have to be prepared to support themselves much longer than they had anticipated. Lawyers will not be an exception.

As you approach retirement, it will be important to engage in a process of self-assessment to determine what you want to do during those years. For more information about job and career self-assessment, please call the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program,

503-226-1057.

Mike Long

OAAP Program Attorney

Sources: *Don't Stop The Career Clock*, Helen Harkness; *The Longevity Factor*, Lydia Bronte.