

Retirement Readiness Report

Helping older employees get ready to retire successfully

A free report for employers, unions, and pension funds, produced by RetirementWORKS®, Inc.

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Welcome to the sixteenth issue of the *Retirement Readiness Report*, offered as a free resource, to help you think about how your organization supports the transition into retirement.

We encourage you to contact us at any time if you have ideas, criticisms, or other comments about this publication, or wish to update your email address (or be added to or removed from the list).

If you missed issues #1 thru #15:

They're available at:

<http://www.retirementworks2.com/support.asp?id=newsletter>

Next month:

The worst financial advice your older employees get

Retirement issues specifically for men

Last month we wrote about retirement issues for women. This time it's the men's turn.

By definition, the men's situation is the flip side of the women's situation. Where one has a comparative advantage, the other is necessarily at a disadvantage. But since we want to focus mostly on the areas of disadvantage, so as to promote understanding and, ideally, motivation toward prevention and solutions, we do have some new things to emphasize this month.

As noted in January, most of the financial issues favor men. For a variety of reasons, they tend to have longer, steadier, and more lucrative careers, so they tend to end up with more money, and with better Social Security and pension benefits. They also are significantly less likely to find themselves in the difficult role of caregiver.

Yet men are, in other ways, often poorly suited to retirement, and many of them turn out to be bad at it. This is true for several inter-related reasons.

Perhaps the foremost reason is that men more than women tend to define themselves in terms of their jobs. Of course there are many exceptions to this, and to the other generalizations we are making here. But the tendencies are plain, even if the causes are sometimes open to debate.

Defining oneself by one's career is perhaps connected with the reality that men are more likely to work steadily for most of their years between 20 and 60 – as opposed to women, who even today are less likely than men to have careers outside the home, and for those who do, are more likely to have interruptions in their careers for child-bearing and child-rearing, or to pause or even terminate their careers to take care of a troubled child or a sick relative or for other reasons.

Men (in general) also seem to have a greater tendency to define themselves in terms of what they do, rather than, say, in terms of their relationships. We don't dare explore the psychological, sociological, or evolutionary causes for this, but the consequence is unpleasant: when men retire, they leave the thing that tends to give their lives definition. Without it, they can face an uncomfortable choice: to come up with a new definition (which is not easy), or to define themselves by what they once were but no longer are (which is not satisfying).

A second, related issue is that men tend not to have as wide and vital social networks as women do. Indeed, men often have most of their closest relationships with work colleagues. When they retire, these connections loosen, and most of them get completely severed. With fewer strong relationships outside of work, men are more likely to feel lonely and bored in retirement.

When men are married and their wives have been the primary homemakers, retirement also tends to generate a sudden shift

from a place (work) where the man was fully competent within his own domain, even if he was not the boss of it, to a place (home) where he is not accustomed to fitting in during weekdays, and where he does not even understand the normal routine, or might not find it to his liking when he learns more about it.

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This, of course, creates a problem for both spouses. The wife is understandably antsy, maybe even annoyed, having a new co-manager of *her* domain, but the husband is feeling like a displaced person, where even home does not really feel like home.

So there are a lot of new thoughts and feelings going through the “typical” male retiree's head, and unless he is unusually self-aware

and/or unusually communicative with others, he may not have much of a clue how to process all of this. His self-identity, his customary relationships, even his role at home have all been tossed into the air and allowed to land with a thud. We know it's not really fair to generalize, but just between the two of us, women tend to be better at dealing with difficult situations like this, if only because they are more willing to stop and ask for directions.

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So where women tend to need extra help dealing with the adversities that are often built into their financial situation in retirement, and are more likely to need to learn how to be effective caregivers without burning themselves out, men are more likely to need help understanding themselves, and adapting to (or better, creating) a whole new self-image.

As we noted last month, this is not meant to imply that women

and men should actually get separate kinds of education and counseling when they retire. Not all women are alike, and not all men are alike, and all of these gender-related issues do cross the boundaries often enough. And even where these stereotypes hold true, it is helpful for men and women to understand the issues that the other group is experiencing.

Still, programs for your older employees should take these issues into account, and not pretend that retirement throws the same challenges at everyone equally. As we noted last month, employee benefits may be unisex – but life is not!

Recommended Reading for Employees Getting Ready to Retire

Something to Live For: Finding Your Way in the Second Half of Life, by Richard J. Leider and David A. Shapiro.

\$15.95 (Berrett-Koehler, 2008)

Notice: We do not sell books, or have any financial stake in recommending them.

This book is not written just for men, but it directly addresses the issues we have described as particularly bedeviling men.

There are actually a lot of books out there – and more all the time – offering advice about finding a new purpose in the latter stages of life, but Richard Leider is widely considered to be the main guru of this message. He is the founding partner of the Inventure Group, and the author of several other books on this subject, with *Something to Live For* being the newest.

This book relies on ancient wisdom, modern research, and the personal experiences of the authors and people they have worked with, to explore the essential role that “purpose” plays in our lives. It not only gives meaning to our existence and to our daily activities, but invigorates us in ways that improve both our mental and our physical health. Meanwhile, having a sense of purpose inspires us to reach out to others, and do good things for them and for ourselves.

Where retirees find themselves losing a career that perhaps de-

finied them and that provided a central source of meaning and purpose in their lives, Leider and Shapiro help them diagnose the problem and to find new answers for it.

Their book is wise and inspirational. It will not provide specific answers to “what should your new purpose in life be?” – but it will help generate the motivation to pursue the right answer, and will open up new paths of thought that will increase the odds of getting there.

Featured Website

ROMEO

(Retired Old Men Eating Out)

<http://www.romeoclub.org/>

Uniquely for men (continuing this month’s theme), ROMEO clubs are a way to overcome another issue that tends to afflict older and retired men: establishing and maintaining relationships with their peers.

Men who want to do this (or can be persuaded to) do not necessarily need a web site to help them, but the ROMEO Club site

offers useful tips on one way to do it, and also can help locate an existing ROMEO Club nearby.

The primary purpose of these informal groups is not romance (the name is intended to be amusing), but sociability. Men simply get together, usually over dinner, to have a good time and to discuss whatever is on their minds.

More seriously, perhaps, part of the notion is for the older participants to help the newer ones get through the retirement transition

smoothly. Started by World War II veterans, the ROMEO clubs want to help pass on their accumulated wisdom to the younger generation of “old men.”

The ROMEO site itself is pretty simple. It explains the history of the concept, provides a lengthy list of existing groups by state, and offers a template for individual clubs to easily create their own web pages. Part of the purpose, too, is to facilitate the formation of new ROMEO groups.

There’s a page of news articles, and a blog, and while they do not accept commercial advertising, they have a store through which you can purchase random items with the “ROMEO” theme.

It’s a fun and perhaps useful idea for your older male employees.

Note that the ROMEO “movement” also has a Facebook page, where participants can communicate with one another more directly.

But enough about you and your needs. Now for a moment of...

...Shameless Self-Promotion!

The award-winning syndicated financial columnist Humberto Cruz recently wrote about **RetirementWorks II**, our software for retirees and near-retirees. Among other points of praise, he calls it “the most comprehensive retirement planning software for consumers I’ve tested.”

“The online program — <http://www.retirementworks2.com> — provides detailed information you can’t get from the free but superficial and potentially misleading retirement calculators on the Internet.”

As he goes on to note, the kind of detailed input that the software asks for “assures that a program is factoring in all relevant information before spewing out conclusions and recommendations,” and “the program does a superior job of framing questions in plain English.”

The complete article can be found on the Chicago *Tribune* website, at: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/yourmoney/sc-ym-0124-cruz-20100120.0.5325654.story>.

About RetirementWORKS[®], Inc.

We are the consumer subsidiary of Still River Retirement Planning Software, Inc., of Harvard, Mass., which has specialized in retirement plans and retirement planning since 1994.

Our philosophy is that retirement needs to be viewed from the retiree’s point of view, in all of its complexity. So we offer the most powerful and useful financial software available anywhere for retirees and near-retirees, and advice concerning non-financial aspects of retirement. But we do not sell any financial products or services other than software, and have no financial stake in any advice that is offered.

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