

Work Daze: Putting the tire in retirement

by Bob_Goldman

You're not going to believe this, but there are people who actually look forward to the day when they won't have to go to work. That's right. Instead of cracking at the wake of dawn; brushing your teeth and flossing the dog; popping down a Pop-Tart and starting the agonizing commute to the workplace for a day of tedium and torture, these whackos actually imagine themselves spending Monday through Friday riding racing bikes, carving duck decoys, or watching the sunset on Pongo-Pongo from the comfort of a hammock.

It's called retirement, friend, and if you think you could actually be happy without your Blackberry, your laptop, your monthly sales goals, and your manager, you'd better start thinking about how you're going to accomplish it - because unless you've got a load of lira in your IRA and an even large bundle of bahts buried in the backyard, your chances of affording a fun, relaxing retirement are about one in 250.

I get that number from a new book, "Your Complete Retirement Planning Road Map," by Ed Slott. In his new book, Mr. Slott discusses more than 250 possible blunders that could scramble your retirement nest egg.

If I know you, the entire idea of retirement makes you nervous. As frustrating as your job can be, how will you ever fill those 10-hour days you currently spend sitting on your behind, behind your desk, pretending to look busy?

Using all that quality time for hobbies is one idea that many pre-retirees prefer. But even the most exciting hobbies, like basket weaving and fly-tying and tie-flying and building life-size replicas of Jessica Simpson out of toothpicks can become a bore when you have nothing else to do. And when your hobby is relaxing after a hard day's work, how will you justify logging all those couch hours when you have no work to relax from? (I suppose you'll simply have to explain that you're relaxing after a hard day of relaxing. If anyone can sell that, it's you.)

Travel is another popular concept for the retiree, as if the misery of hopping on a crowded, delayed, overheated airplane will be more fun if you actually pay for the ticket yourself. Of course, you can choose your own destination when you're not flying on business, but where in the world do you want to go? Europe is too expensive, Africa is too hot, Asia is too hectic, and South America is too buggy. Plus, you're an American and there are many folks out there who don't like you. And even if they do like you, they could rob you or kidnap you. You know what it's like to spend every day in a strange environment where everyone is out to get you. It's called work.

Author Slott's angle on retirement is strictly financial. He goes past the basic argument of how you are going to live to focus on how you're going to pay for how you're going to live. Most people consider their 401(k) plan at work as the primary financial engine that will power their sunset years. That's why we've been putting a percentage of our puny wages into these plans since we started working. For many of us, our companies

match these contributions, building an even bigger nest egg for our retirement future.

But check the financial pages. The eggs our companies have been nesting for us have mysteriously shrunk from ostrich to quail. Other companies have leaped into bankruptcy, forcing their employees to follow them. Even if the government does manage to keep your retirement funds secure, you do have to count on the stock market, which can be rather squirrely at times. (The news that South America is buggy could alone cause a 300 point drop.)

My recommendation? Skip the 401(k) and create your own retirement fund. Photos of the CEO playing naked Twister with the office manager would make an extremely secure retirement vehicle, guaranteed to pay off big time any time you need a cash infusion.

Or you could just keep doing what you are doing: avoid all work, and detour around all new assignments. By doing nothing and getting paid for it, you are basically having your retirement right now, when you're young and healthy, and can really enjoy the free time.

So good ahead! Start your retirement. When you turn 65 and quit, you can go out and get a real job.

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