

By Rana Jewell

Is your RETIREMENT PLAN killing you?

The most commonly accepted retirement plan that I have observed is one whereby you work, work, work like a Trojan until you are 55 years and save, save, save so that when you reach this magical age (55), a miracle will happen – you will suddenly stop work and have enough time and money to do absolutely nothing and/or to do all the things you have ever wanted to do, eg travel Australia or the world, sing, dance, whatever your heart desires.

Is this you? Or are you younger with an even more aggressive wealth creation plan, perhaps preparing to retire at 30-something?

One very important and often overlooked question: is your health keeping up with your retirement, or wealth creation, plan? Are you blossoming as you age? Or each year, does your body become stiffer? Is your weight slowly creeping upwards? Are you gradually becoming more reliant on caffeine or drugs to keep you going?

In my own circle of family and friends, I have witnessed people with the abovementioned retirement plan that didn't quite work out the way it was hoped. Two members died at 60 and spent a lot of time between 55 and 60 in and out of hospitals, another person faced divorce, so the financial plan was suddenly half what was expected, and the list goes on.

Recently I was reading an article in the *Life Magazine of The Courier Mail* (28 April, 2001) about friends of Paul "Porky" Morgan, a well-known stockbroker who died

suddenly earlier this year at the age of 54 years. After the shock of their friend's death, they are realising that there must be more to life than work, clinching the next deal, and the pursuit of wealth. What has been your personal experience?

I'm not for one minute suggesting that we don't save for our retirement, but I am saying that if your health is not part of your financial plan then perhaps your savings may be spent on hospitals, rather than hobbies or travel.

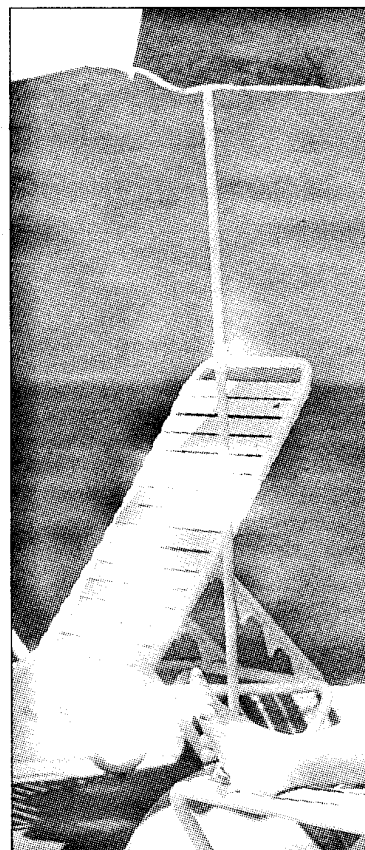
Is there another way? I know one person who had scoliosis, ie a spine with a distinct "S-bend" in it. She changed her lifestyle, took up yoga and is now free from almost all of her previous ailments.

She still earns money and is now a self-employed yoga teacher. Another person I know overcame cancer and now teaches well-ness courses to healthy people as well as to cancer clients.

Some would say: why retire? Why not slow down, smell the flowers, take more breaks or sabbaticals along the way, and discover new and creative ways to work and play? There are lots of 60-70+ year-old counsellors, practitioners and consultants, working in their unique areas of passion, and expertise.

I'm sure you've heard exercise trainers say, "If you don't use it, you lose it" – the same can be said for our brains. To keep stretching yourself and learning and growing as you age, whilst extremely challenging, often leads to an energised glow of youthfulness.

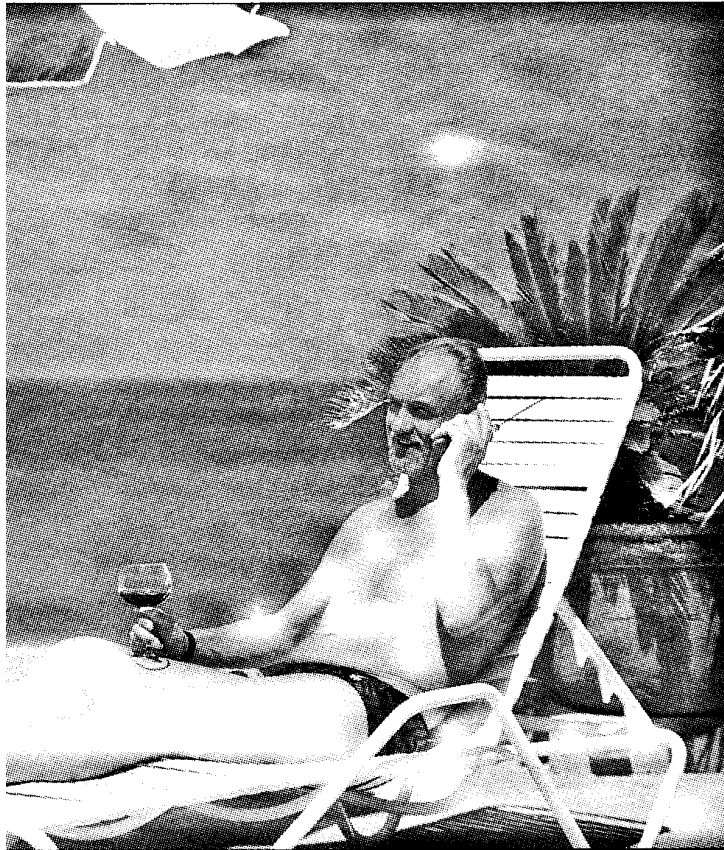
Others consider a new career every



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twenty years. Recently I attended a singing and dancing workshop, run by two 60+ women who have just completed rigorous retraining and forged a new career for themselves – it's fluid and open-ended, they can work as often or as little as they choose.

Instead of respectfully retiring quietly into the suburbs, they each chose to stretch and grow and move outside their cocoon of comfort – sometimes moving beyond what even they believed was possible for



themselves.

Now they teach men and women of all ages to stomp and dance and beat drums and sing and shout from the mountaintops. What inspiring role models!

For those of you who decide to stick with your current retirement, or wealth creation plan, consider the following:

- It's not so easy to just give up work and suddenly become magically happy. Have you ever seen anyone attempt to give up alcohol, narcotics, or cigarettes cold turkey? Work can be just as addictive as these substances, and going cold turkey may not turn out to be the fantasy that you have always imagined.
- If you've neglected your personal relationships with family and friends along the way, don't expect these to instantly improve simply because you are now all of a sudden "available" – it takes time for trust and intimacy to develop.
- What about self-esteem? If you've never been out of the paid workforce then you may not realise how much of your self-esteem actually comes from your usefulness at work and being paid for what you do – even if you don't particularly like your job. Again, it can take some time to

adjust to feeling a sense of self worth based on who you are and not what you do.

I believe that one of our main purposes in this life is to figure out what is unique and special about ourselves, and then to gift this to the world – whether we are parents or not, and whether we get paid for it or not.

When people are dying, it is often this purpose, and the quality of their personal relationships that matters most, not whether they spent more time at the office.

Is there one simple answer? Probably not – but it may be interesting to consider creating a finely tuned balance between work/ money and leisure. It would be a uniquely individual project requiring a partnership between your logic and intuition and the courage to swim against the tide, or unsettle the status quo if that is what your heart desires.

If you would like to speak to an accountant who understands these personal dilemmas and challenges, I would love to hear from you.

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