Five Keys to Authentic Retirement Happiness

The ability to enjoy our golden years is the same as the ability to be happy

People say things like, “When I retire, I am going to be happy,” or “When I don’t have to work anymore, I will be happy.” The truth is, if you don’t think you can be happy until you retire, you won’t be.

One of the most recognizable cartoon characters is Snoopy. So much so that I bet you knew someone from when you were young that had a bedroom that was filled with Snoopy. Snoopy dolls, Snoopy quotes and even Snoopy curtains. You might have even learned how to draw Snoopy on top of his doghouse and spent many hours in art class perfecting this skill – some still do.

Happiness is Snoopy

One of my favorite quotes were always the “happiness is” quotes relating to Snoopy and all the Peanuts characters: Happiness is a warm puppy. Happiness is cookies. Happiness is a sunny day.

What is happiness to you? Does it have to depend on what stage of life you are in and whether you are retired?

There are a number of studies about happiness in retirement. Many people who are getting ready to retire hope that this new phase of their lives results in happiness. In fact, a lot of retirement planning focuses on how to achieve happiness in the golden years.

But more often, if you are miserable now, you most likely will be miserable in retirement. Happiness does not just happen when you stop working.

Five Keys to Authentic Happiness

In studies conducted at the University of Pennsylvania, researchers found that there isn’t one element in the pursuit of happiness but five. They work together to contribute to an overall sense of peace and contentment.

At any age, including retirement age, the five keys to what lead researcher Martin Seligman called authentic happiness are:

Positive emotion. They are, for example, hope, enthusiasm and warmth. A large part of positive psychology, a field of study that seeks to understand happiness, is about enhancing these emotions.

Engagement. People who engage in activities they enjoy are happier. Retirement does help you in this area since it frees up your time to do things you like.

Relationships. Families, friends and healthy social contact are essential for happiness. You should work on bettering your relationships before retirement begins, because leaving your job sometimes means leaving long-time friends at work.

Meaning. Retirement is the time to look at the meaning of life. As you approach retirement, determine what you can do to feel fulfilled. Do not wait until you retire to figure this out.

Achievement. Those with a positive self-image are happier. If your job doesn’t give you a sense of achievement, try getting involved in other activities that do. Volunteer work? Sports? Quilting? This is even more important in retirement.

The ability to enjoy our golden years is the same ability to be happy at all the stages of our life.

So, what are the answers to your “happiness is?”

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