

A BOOK REVIEW

JAMES L DRUFFNER

CPA/PFS, CFP, CMA

THE NEW RETIREMENTALITY

BY

MITCH ANTHONY

In June 2018 I went to the AICPA Conference in Las Vegas. It's an intensive conference with hundreds of sessions on taxes, financial planning, and other fields of interest to CPAs.

I attended two sessions presented by Mitch Anthony. I've read many of his articles and, upon returning home, read *The New Retirementality*.

The book opens with a discussion of the history of retirement. For most of human history, people didn't retire. It wasn't natural for humans to simply stop working. But then came the industrial revolution, pensions, social security, and financial services companies (who saw profit in those retirement savings). Retirement became not just an option, but also an expectation, sometimes a requirement.

How do you feel when you see someone who is still working in his 70s? Or even 80s? Do you get a little judgmental? "That poor sap really screwed things up, didn't he?" Or maybe you just feel sorry for her. "There but for the grace of God....."

Why do we think that? Why do we think that retiring at 65 – or earlier – is the ideal and that there's something wrong with us if we keep working? If we are giving value to others and meaning to ourselves, why should that stop at 65? Isn't the expectation of retirement at 65 simply a form of ageism? How dare you decide when I am old! That's my decision to make.

Complicating the issues surrounding retirement is longevity. When retirement was new, most people died before or shortly after retiring. Now some people's years in retirement are almost as long as their years in the workplace.

Mitch calls for new thinking regarding retirement. Besides simply delaying retirement, he suggests staged or bridged retirements, cautioning against viewing retirement as a cliff to jump from and more an uncharted road to be explored.

He also has advice regarding what to do when you are retired, advice he calls the vitamin Cs of retirement: Stay Connected, Challenge yourself, be Curious, be Creative, be Charitable.

Mitch also refers to some sobering statistics. Mortality rates increase with a younger retirement age. For every extra year of early retirement, workers lose

about two months of life expectancy. And retirement causes short term memory loss. (But a positive attitude toward aging can add 7.5 years to your life!)

If that weren't enough, gray divorce spikes in the 18 months following the husband's retirement. "I married him for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, but not for lunch!" remarked one wife. Said another, "I've got twice the husband, half the space – and he's getting bigger!"

When I talk to my financial planning clients about retirement, they are usually quite clear about what they are retiring from. But the conversation slows dramatically (and awkwardly) when I ask them what they are retiring to. I can't tell them that they have enough money to retire if I don't know what they are buying.

Mitch doesn't ignore the issue of money in retirement, but he doesn't separate money from life. A retiree needs enough purpose to get up in the morning and enough money to sleep at night. Retirement is wonderful if you have two essentials: much to live for and much to live on. One cannot simply numbers-crunch one's way to emotional well-being and quality of life, but neither can one achieve these ends without crunching the numbers and making the necessary adjustments.

I hope I didn't give the impression that Mitch recommends working until we drop. He doesn't. He simply recommends that as we age, we find a better balance between work and play, between vocation and vacation. All play and no work makes Jack a really dull boy!

Instead, he asks us to view retirement not as an ending point on the map but as more of a launching point. He talks about moving from ROI (return on investment) to ROL (return on life), and moving from getting a paycheck to getting a playcheck. He also spends a lot of time discussing the meaning of happiness and how money should be used to enhance (not buy) happiness. But that's a long discussion to be left to another time.