

Life after treasury: plan for it and enjoy it

Think carefully about what you want to do after you retire, after all it's what you have been working towards all your working life, advises Christopher Purser

Our editorial team thought it would be good to lighten up the summer edition with a few philosophical thoughts and practical hints from one who has lasted the course and drifted happily into the Third Age – that stage of peace and nirvana which is reached after 40 years on the corporate treadmill. Surely, it is a bit like being permanently on some remote, idyllic beach – where no doubt a number of you are reading this on your summer holidays?

So let's make a start. What is retirement like? How should you plan for it? Don't you get bored? Won't you miss your colleagues, the challenge of work and the buzz of the markets? Can you afford not to work?

The decision to retire is an inevitable but intensely personal thing, embracing health, family and home life, wealth, ambition, pension eligibility, tax, property and so on. Everyone has different priorities, so there can be no simple prescribed solution that fits all cases.

I'm writing this from the perspective of one who chose to opt out and stay out of London in 1976 to pursue a career in the Midlands – with no regrets. I hope this small case study is of some interest to you and helps some of you realise your ambitions for life after treasury – whether it be to retire in your 50s or keep working to 65 or later.

Plan for it, wind down gradually

Careful planning is a must. In my case, it was no great surprise that I retired at 60. It was obvious from the rules of the company pension scheme that there was little to be gained from working beyond that age. After all, what had I been working for if not to enjoy a few decades of the gentle life, choosing the agenda I wanted and not having to conform to corporate disciplines?

I believe you should start planning two or three years before the great day. Don't leave it until the last minute and

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expect to stop work on the significant birthday – that kind of sudden change is a known killer. Plan to keep busy and wind down gradually over a few years.

One of my favourite bank managers retired at 55 during one of the regular culls by the Big Four. He had worked for some 40 years at the bank but had made no plans for his retirement and regretted this. It took him less than six months to do the decorating, complete the jobs around the house and get the garden into shape. After that, he was bored witless and was soon back in the business world with a portfolio of non-executive directorships – a much happier man.

This case led me to do my own retirement planning and set up what turned



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out to be a portfolio career to ease the transition from a life of work to a life of leisure.

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It is important to mark the point of retirement with something special, too. It is one of life's milestones which needs celebration. My wife and I had a couple of fairly lavish parties and went off on a musical cruise on the Danube – 11 concerts in seven days – fantastic.

I have also discovered that you can stop buying shirts and suits well before retirement – you need far less posh gear for the relaxed life.

Keep in touch

Part of the retirement plan must be to keep some sort of contact with past colleagues. There is a place in most people's lives for reliving past times and enjoying the company of those erstwhile colleagues whose company you wish to enjoy. Past colleagues also form a strong network that can be helpful if you propose to carry on some kind of business activity in retirement.

The question of keeping up subscriptions to professional bodies is also important. Most will allow you to pay a reduced subscription as a retiree, which helps with the cashflow. The benefit of staying in touch lies in keeping up to date with best practice and developments in the market. I reckon it could be very easy to become a has-been in a fast-moving world like treasury within six months of leaving it. So, if you need to be up to date for professional purposes, keep in touch.

One of my portfolio activities is lecturing on treasury subjects at university business schools, so I need to keep abreast of changes in market practice. In the Association, we are fortunate to

have our regional groups and our CPD programme, which are a very good way of keeping up with changes.

How much will you take on?

In planning for retirement, getting the right balance between work and leisure is important. Life cannot be all leisure, you need some mental stimulus.

In my new portfolio career, I initially had seven different activities, all part-time, some of which paid well, some poorly and some that did not pay at all (but I did them because I liked the work). I have now, two years later, reduced these from seven to four, but have taken on the secretaryship of our village investment club.

Paid work gets taxed at your marginal rate, therefore you have to charge reasonable fees to make it worthwhile. Somehow, you see this much more clearly when you are sending out invoices and statements and waiting for slow payers to send you their cheque.

This is a good time to put something back into society.

I became a governor (and inevitably chairman of the finance committee) of a college of further education about 18 months before retirement. I have always believed in education, self-development and helping people to find and develop their talents to their best advantage.

Life is all about loading the odds in your favour, and self-education is a good way to do this. It is certainly a stimulating mental exercise to grapple with the funding of colleges – a world away from financing an engineering multinational.

Working from home

My wife and I had some lifestyle decisions to make. Should we work at all? What about our world travel ambitions? Where is the crossover point between extensive travel and our ability to pay for it? Where should we live? Would we be able to live together in the same house 24 hours a day, week in, week out? Would we be able to work together?

Fortunately, we have resolved all these questions happily. We both need to work some of the time to keep our brains active, and extra cash from some of the work certainly helps. We bought a new car and a timeshare out of the proceeds of our first year's work. We have also holidayed in US,

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Scotland, France, Bruges, the Canaries and done a six-week round the world trip (mostly Australia) in the past 12 months. Not a bad start. We reckon we will do our long haul travelling in the first 10 years of retirement – those Saga cruises and short breaks in Bognor can wait until later.

This portfolio career has led me to discover the New Work – working from home. It is a good thing to do in retirement, but I am not so sure it would work if I had to earn a living at it. It needs too much self-discipline.

I set up in business as a sole trader, consulting and training in treasury and investor relations management. My wife retired at about the same time and so provided a ready-made and highly competent secretariat and IT department at no extra cost to the business (I have to be careful how I phrase this).

We are fortunate enough to have a study large enough for us to set up a proper office, which has worked splendidly. The bulk of our work comes in and goes out on e-mail and we can attend to it wherever we are and when it suits us.

Memorably, we dialled up our e-mail messages while on holiday in Tasmania in March and reduced the backlog from 98 messages to eight in one half-hour session.

With spreadsheets and Powerpoint, we can now prepare a presentation at our leisure and e-mail it to the university. All I have to do is just turn up and give the lecture. It's a breeze. We also decided not to move house. We have spent 25 years getting our home the way we want it. Now we want to use it to the full and enjoy it.

Our friends and music are here. We can reach London, Bath, Leeds or Manchester in less than two hours. Having researched the charms of Hampshire, Dorset and Wiltshire, we found no reason to move.

Besides, the village social life is vibrant, and I enjoy my morning walk to the country store for fresh, warm crusty bread that takes me past the village pond (five cygnets just hatched). Breakfast is now leisurely, with *The Times* on our sunny terrace.

Our greatest question about retirement was whether we would be able to live together amicably. In 24 years of marriage, we have really only been together at weekends and on holidays. Now we have been thrown together 24 hours a day for seven days a week at leisure and at work.

I took the precaution of installing a large barn at the bottom of the garden to act as an additional garage and workshop. I threatened to install an armchair and TV in it in case I needed to sulk separately for any reason. But I'm glad to say we have found it great fun being together and I haven't had to sulk in the barn once.

Mind you, we were both out at work full-time for those 24 years. In our case, it is not as though hubby is suddenly at home all the time and invading his wife's territory in the kitchen or interrupting her coffee mornings. It also helps that my wife has her own special interests in retirement.

She goes to art classes three times a week, has developed her own style and sold her first painting – I sense a possible source of income here.

Plan carefully and enjoy it

Don't be frightened of impending retirement – plan for it and enjoy it. These are the good days you have been working towards all your life to enjoy. Plan to make the most of your new-found freedom and find the right balance between work and leisure.

A final word – when you retire, just don't let the editorial team of *The Treasurer* know where to find you. They think you have all the time in the world – and you see what happens. ■

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