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My Heroes

“Retirementors” are individuals who refuse to accept society’s norm for when one is “old.”

By Mitch Anthony

After speaking at a client gathering in California recently, I was approached by a gentleman who looked to be in his early 50s. He ran a successful dental practice but was only showing up to work now and then because he was too busy with a number of other causes, including a real estate company and a benevolent association. He had also been the regent at a local college, the president of the International College of Dentists (and three other professional associations), the chairman of the board at a local bank—and more. If that weren’t enough, he had at some point returned to his childhood home in China to build a school, a modern water system and a temple.

Stunned by his productivity at such an age, I asked him how old he was.

“I’m 83,” he informed me, “and I think I have a lot of good years left.” He added, “I think many people have many more good years than they think—if they will stay with it.”

At 83, he had the complexion of a man in his 40s, the eloquence of a talk-show host, the perspicacity and acuity of a surgeon, the energy of a marketing exec and the unmistakable shine of a man who had not only made his own way in the world but also made his own finish line as well.

I walked away from that conversation with a new hero and a new role model for how I want to be in my 80s.

He is a “Retirementor” —and we need more like him for inspiration. At my Web site, www.newretirementality.com, we’re gathering retirementor stories for just this purpose: to inspire those who think differently to act differently, to be masters of their own destiny, to refuse to accept society’s norms for when the game is finished and to be enthusiastic, knowing that while aging continues, “being old” is something within their locus of control.

Buzz Rogers of Webster Rogers LLC shared the moving story of his 90-year-old father—a true retirementor who never allowed the idea of “old” to enter his vocabulary.

“He was a Marine fighter pilot instructor during WWII, won third place in the World Acrobatics Championships in 1953 and was a competitive water skier in the early 1960s. He has remained physically fit during his entire life. He had a stunt plane until his mid-70s, still played the sax until his late 80s, water skied until 89, goes to his office five days a week and still goes to the gym three days a week. He has the most refreshing and positive outlook on life.”

Rogers just recently finished building a house on Emerald Lake near Florence, S.C., with a garage apartment for his father. “When he asked why we were putting in an elevator, I told him, ‘In case you need it someday.’ He replied, ‘The day I need an elevator, I am outta here.’”

(Go to the Web site www.emeraldskieski.com to see four generations of Rogerses skiing together.)

Chances are that you know someone like this as well, and you should share stories like this with your clients. Talk about people you have met who are flourishing in their so-called “retirement” years. Ask your clients the question, “What will you do to challenge yourself in your retirement stage of life?” You just might end up being the one individual who asks the question that will be critical to your clients’ retirement success, and by sharing these stories, you will form an inspirational bond with your clients as well as an advisory relationship.

Just the other day, I had a conversation about age with my dentist and he mentioned that ever since he turned 60, people felt obliged to ask him about his retirement plans. He said, “I’ve always told myself that the day I wake up and don’t look forward to coming to work is the day I’ll retire. And I gotta tell you,

Mitch, I'm just having too much fun."

Our world needs dentists and doctors and engineers and teachers and artists and such who are filled with passion and exuberance for what they do. Why should they be penalized for having some extra experience? Why should they leave for good if they are still having fun? Age has little to do with it. It's about competence and enjoyment—and if those two pieces are in place, then age is irrelevant.

I have an unusual and privileged vantage point on this issue as I travel throughout the country inspiring people to make their own rules and decisions. I tell them to think twice before they lay their talents on the campfire and move from aging to "saging." After I'm done speaking, the very people I am talking about often walk up to introduce themselves and their amazing stories. These bright, articulate, purposeful individuals are grateful to still be productive and connected. They not only possess secrets for living long, but for living well.

I love to spend time at the local gym shooting baskets, and one day I fell into a conversation with another man about how much we enjoyed staying active in basketball. I said I hoped to be able to shoot baskets when I was 80. He was 70, and he said, "I'll tell you the key. It's very simple—don't ever quit. I've watched a lot of people use little pains as excuses, and so when they try to take it up later, it's too hard. They never should've allowed themselves to stop completely."

I looked more closely at him as I was leaving the gym that day. He looked limber, much younger than his age and fluid in his motion, and I knew he was right. There will be no extended time completely out of the game for me. No time to think up excuses. I enjoy it all too much.

If you want to inspire your clients, think about sharing this column with them. Also, think about who the retirementors are among your clientele and have them share their stories with other clients approaching retirement.

©2010 Mitch Anthony. All rights reserved. Mitch is the president of the Financial Life Planning Institute and Advisor Insights Inc. He is an industry leader in training advisors on building life-centered relationships.