

## Does Retirement Mean Losing Your Identity?

from the American Counseling Association

If you're someone who is near the age of retirement, or who has recently retired from the workforce, you have undoubtedly been asked, "What are you going to do now?" We live in a culture that puts a great deal of value on "doing" and tends to identify people by their occupations.

Most of us have been taught to be busy, productive citizens and our lives often revolve around the thing we "do" for a living. Our occupation may help set who our friends are, the things we do for recreation and leisure, and where we have chosen to live.

But retirement can change much of that. We may no longer need to reside somewhere that was an easy commute when we were working. If many of our friendships were with co-workers, we may find that our interests quickly grow apart as they remain concerned with work issues that no longer affect us.

While retirement certainly brings more free time and the chance to make important and interesting decisions about the future, it can also be a frightening time for many people for those very same reasons. How will you fill up each day? Will you be bored? Will you need to find new friends?

Even your identity, both to others and to yourself, can be a problem. When you were working your identity was most likely tied to your job. You were a nurse, an accountant, an office manager or whatever job title you had earned. But once retired, the answer to that "What do you do?" question is either, "Well, I used to be..." or simply "Oh, I'm just retired," and neither answer may seem satisfying.

If retirement is approaching and you feel troubled by losing that work identity, now is the time to explore the life stage issues that will come with your new status. Planning for retirement should mean more than simply reviewing your financial status. It's a time to consider the changes that will come in regard to time, status, identity, personal relationships, family opportunities and so much more.

There are numerous books offering advice for meaningful retirement planning. For more personalized help, consider contacting a professional counselor. To help locate one, go online to the ACA website, <http://www.counseling.org/learn-about-counseling/what-is-counseling/find-a-counselor>. You'll find many listed who specialize in issues associated with retirement and can help you explore the joys retirement can bring.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)*

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