

Retirement Plans: Crucial Conversations

Overview: Co-authors Alan Spector and Keith Lawrence wrote *Your Retirement Quest: 10 Secrets for Creating and Living a Fulfilling Retirement* based on a decade of research and interviews with more than 200 retirees. In this article, Alan and Keith discuss the crucial conversations that people should have as they consider retirement.

Have you discussed your retirement plans with your spouse, partner, parents, children or friends? Your retirement will have an impact on them, and importantly, they will have a profound effect on your retirement. Yet, a surprisingly small percentage of us have had timely and helpful conversations that could be crucial to our future retirement success.

When most people think about the conversations they should be having when planning for retirement, they immediately think of their financial advisor. Although discussions with your advisor are an important element of overall retirement planning, they are not the only conversations you should have.

After interviewing hundreds of retirees, we continue to be surprised by how infrequently prospective retirees have discussed their plans with those closest to them. At one seminar, a man announced that the reason he had attended the event was he was considering retiring in the next few months, and he wanted to learn what he should be thinking about. The woman seated next to him glared and said to him, “You’ve got to be kidding. This is the first I’ve heard about it.” The woman turned out to be his wife.

You may think that is an extraordinary situation — it’s not. Yet, when we interview couples who have had a good start in retirement, we consistently learn they have been discussing their plans for some time — working through both the large decisions (e.g., where they will live, when they will retire) and the nitty-gritty details of daily routine (e.g., who will get the mail each day, how they will share the computer).

Here are some common situations you may have to deal with as you develop your retirement plans. Have you talked with those who will affect or be affected by these five issues?

Issue 1: Your spouse or partner has a life and plan of his or her own.

Are the two of you in agreement about the details of your plan, such as when you will retire, how you will manage your finances and how you will attend to day-to-day routines that will now be changing?

Issue 2: You may be caring for aging parents or expect to do so in the near future.

Have you taken this into account as you have developed your retirement life and financial plans? Have you discussed the implications with your parents?

Issue 3: You may be supporting your adult children.

Will they be returning to live at home? Will they need financial support? Are your adult children expecting you to be a regular or emergency babysitter for your grandchildren? Have you discussed your plans and theirs with them? Have you set expectations about what you will and will not do and what you can and cannot do?

Issue 4: Your relationship with your spouse or partner may not be on solid ground.

When you retire, this situation may be exacerbated as the two of you begin to spend much more time together. How will that work? Have you begun the crucial conversation to work out the relationship issues to prevent them from affecting your retirement happiness and that of your spouse/partner?

Issue 5: The transition to retirement can raise the question about where you will be living (staying where you are or moving to a new home).

Have you engaged your spouse or partner, your children and grandchildren, your parents or your friends in the conversation to help you make this decision?

Research and anecdotal information indicate that the quantity and the quality of our relationships significantly affect our longevity and quality of life. Therefore, nurturing your relationships is a critical element of living a fulfilling retirement. The following can get you started on making plans:

- **Begin retirement planning as early as possible.** Begin as many as 5–10 years before you plan to retire. If you've already passed that timeframe, start now.
- **Consider all the elements that will make your retirement life plan successful.** Most think of retirement planning as only achieving financial security, which is important, but it's not all about money.
- **Figure out who will be affected by and who will affect your retirement plans.** Decide which crucial conversations you should be having and begin reaching out to those individuals.

What better way to proceed than to involve those closest to you in your retirement planning. Our advice: Begin to have the crucial conversations now.

About This Article

A special word of thanks to authors Alan Spector and Keith Lawrence for sharing these insights with us. **Alan Spector** is the retired Director of Worldwide Quality Assurance for the Procter & Gamble Company, author of four books and a management/quality assurance consultant for companies and nonprofits. **Keith Lawrence** is the retired Director of Human Resources for the Procter & Gamble Company and Founder and President of Sustaining Success Solutions, consulting with major companies worldwide. They co-founded LifeScape Solutions™ to conduct retirement life planning seminars for prospective and current clients of financial advisors, experienced employees of companies and the faculty, staff and alumni of universities. For more about their book, *Your Retirement Quest*, go to www.YourRetirementQuest.com.

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