



EVERYTHING RETIREMENT
LIVING LIFE BEGINS NOW

6 Paths to Retirement

How to harness the power of positive ageing



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“There is an increasing shift in how people think about aging. From a deficit approach that focused on what we lost as we aged, we are shifting to a positive model that acknowledges that older people can make positive contributions to society, and that with aging – surprise! – comes happiness.”

– Professor Emerita Dr. Nancy K. Schlossberg
Author: Too Young to Be Old: Love, Learn, Work and Play as You Age



Too Young to Be Old: Love, Learn, Work & Play as You Age

Back in 2017 Nancy K. Schlossberg (EdD) published a book in association with the American Psychological Association entitled [Too Young to Be Old: Love, Learn, Work and Play as You Age](#). The core question that the book posed was "How do I age well?"

Ms. Schlossberg took a penetrating look at the basic issues that accompany growing older – health, finances, relationships, and finding new ways to spend one's time creatively – in an attempt to help boomers in particular to develop a plan to age with composure and confidence.

A psychologist by training, Ms. Schlossberg looked at aging through the lens of positive psychology. Based on extensive personal interviews, together with research-based insights derived from psychological theory, the book probed such issues as:

- ✓ resolving your love – hate relationship with ageing
- ✓ dealing with ageism
- ✓ embracing change
- ✓ diversifying your coping skills
- ✓ creating your retirement fantasy
- ✓ coping with health challenges
- ✓ understanding your family transitions
- ✓ handling intimacy and romance

Ms. Schlossberg's conclusion was both erudite and practical. At the time it was published her work caused considerably more than just a ripple of interest among both professional psychologists and the older adult general public. It was greeted with applause.

Part of the book's magic was that, back in 2017 and continuing to this day, it is so revealingly and entertainingly self-referential. In identifying the 6 major paths retirees can potentially follow, the book enables its readers to identify themselves by the type of path they chose – like looking in a mirror.

Not all paths run in a straight line and some retirees – due to changed circumstances or a change of heart – modify paths as they go along. But, one way or another they – us – end up following one of them. This E-Book is for what Ms. Schlossberg imaginatively defined as: Continuers, Adventurers, Easy Gliders, Involved Spectators, Searchers and Retreaters. Which one are you?





Transitions Through Life Some background on Nancy K. Schlossberg & her work

[Transitions Through Life](#) is the Internet home of Professor Emerita Dr. Nancy K. Schlossberg. As a professor of counseling, she has studied life transitions of all kinds. Nancy's mission is to help people cope creatively with the ups and downs of life.

She writes self-help books on navigating transitions, lectures at speaking engagements and conferences worldwide, and runs workshops on managing change. Her website offers community groups and individuals information, materials and workshops on life transitions.

According to Ms. Schlossberg, new retirees resemble recent college graduates. On their own after several years of following the discipline of college life, they have to find a new path to follow. Now in her nineties, Ms. Schlossberg retired over 20 years ago. Initially feeling somewhat at sea, she decided to turn her professional field – transitions and counseling – into a continuing career.

After searching, she decided to write about retiring, adjusting to a new lifestyle and making the most of this next phase. She began interviewing retirees about the avenues they took to where they are today.

A prolific writer and public speaker, Ms. Schlossberg is a student of – among many issues relating to retirement – the personal psychology of the retirement process and the retiree types she has so creatively defined.





6 Paths to Retirement: Psychographic Profiles

PROFILE 1: THE CONTINUER

Continuers modify their activities while proceeding along a similar path. They deploy their existing skills and interests, but modify them to fit changed retirement circumstances.

Ms. Schlossberg is the classic example of a continuer. She is a retired professor who no longer teaches but writes articles and speaks publicly on issues related to her former field.

A retired teacher, who self-identifies as a continuer observed: “I continue writing and speaking but no longer teach or work for an organization. As my daughter said, ‘The only thing retired about you is your paycheck.’”

Continuers maintain their former identity but in a modified way. Mort, a retired museum director profiled in the book, occasionally curates an art show. Larry, a retired roofer, will help out his old firm in an emergency.

Continuers stay connected to their former work and their former identities while developing new work-related initiatives on evolving fronts.





PROFILE 2: THE ADVENTURER

Adventurers see retirement as an opportunity to pursue an unrealized dream. This type of retiree ventures into the unknown, taking on a new job or activity they've never done before.

Adventurers view retirement as an opportunity to make daring changes in their lives and try new things. Adventurers will often take regrets they have about things they wish they'd done during their working lives and funnel them into a new plan.

A woman Ms. Schlossberg interviewed was a homemaker – the chief executive officer of a small family business, as she describes women who stay home to help raise a family – and in the middle of transitioning to retirement because her children were grown and had moved out.

The woman loved art museums, so she applied to become a docent – defined as a person who acts as a guide, typically on a voluntary basis, in a museum, art gallery, or zoo – and now performs work she finds absorbing, fulfilling and fun.



PROFILE 3: THE EASY GLIDER

Easy Gliders enjoy unscheduled time and letting each day unfold. Easy Gliders don't have a fixed schedule, and they're perfectly comfortable not having one. Easy Gliders have worked all their lives and have decided that retirement is the time to relax. They take each day as it comes.

Ms. Schlossberg references Sam, a retired bank teller, who now plays golf and poker and babysits for his grandchildren. **For some, the joy of having no agenda and no pressure makes for a relaxed and rewarding life.** One man told her he was going to "sloth," as in do nothing and see where life takes him.

"An Easy Glider is a person who has no agenda, who just wakes up in the morning and asks 'what should I do?' and lets each day emerge," Ms. Schlossberg observes.

The Easy Glider lifestyle doesn't work for everyone. Some people may feel stir crazy if they don't have a new routine or purpose in retirement. But for others, especially those who worked in physically demanding jobs, it's a way to enjoy each day in retirement with relief.





PROFILE 4: THE INVOLVED SPECTATOR

Involved Spectators are retirees who care deeply about their previous work. They are no longer players, but they receive satisfaction from staying involved – though at a controlled distance.

This is the type of person who wants to continue to be immersed in their former professional field, although not to the extent necessary to make a full-time job of it.

Ms. Schlossberg quotes the examples of a retired museum director who goes to art exhibits all the time, a retired political consultant who is still very involved in political events, like voter registration, and the former political strategist who remains a news junkie.

“They’re really involved, not as workers but as spectators,” observed Ms. Schlossberg, who also references a retired political lobbyist is no longer physically able to walk the halls of Congress, but still follows the news and stays on top of current events.



PROFILE 5: THE SEARCHER

The Searcher is someone who explores new options through trial and error. Searchers might talk to people in fields they're interested in and volunteer for different projects. If they don't like one avenue, they'll try something else.

Searchers are retirees who are looking for their niche. At some point, any one of us may be a searcher. We might retire, then adventure down a new path, and then when that has played out, we might search again – typically more than once.



Ms. Schlossberg invites us to think of all the times you have asked yourself, “What’s next?” Searchers try out new activities during this trial-and-error period.

Searchers are the most prone to change paths as their retirement proceeds. In that respect, Searchers and Adventurers are similar, but not the same. Searchers keep looking.



I had no idea I would be a Searcher again, and then to find at my age a new variation of a theme. Everybody is going to be a Searcher.

– Ms. Scholssberg

A Searcher might end up becoming an Easy Glider, an Involved Spectator or an Adventurer.

Almost everyone is a Searcher at some point in their retirement, because they're figuring out their next move. Someone may be a searcher as soon as they retire, or years after they initially retired, like Ms. Schlossberg did.

She was a Continuer – writing book after book – but then realized she'd had enough of that. “I had no idea I would be a Searcher again, and then to find at my age a new variation of a theme,” she said, then added: “Everybody is going to be a Searcher.”

⁵ <https://dandoiron.com/live-centre-stage>





PROFILE 6: THE RETREATER

A Retreater will take time out to think or perhaps disengage from life. This is the only potentially negative retirement personality type. According to Ms. Schlossberg there are two types of Retreters:

1. The one who is depressed in retirement because he or she has no purpose.
2. The one who is “retreating” until he or she can determine next steps.

While some might only be taking a temporary sabbatical from activities while they reassess their goals, there’s a danger of fading away as a couch potato.

Ms. Schlossberg admits that when she was first conducting interviews with retirees, **she considered this to be the most negative transition.** Ms. Schlossberg writes that after conducting a retirement workshop, an attendee said:

“When people used to ask me what I was doing now that I am retired, I said flippily, ‘I am not dead yet.’ Now I will say: ‘I am a Continuer.’”

Don’t become a Retreater.



Conclusion: The Importance of Positive Ageing

Too Young to Be Old is a story about transitions and how to handle them. It's a story about ageing and its possibilities. It's a story about living longer and living well. Most important, it's a story based on fact, on hard-earned research.

We all know that life expectancy is expanding and that Canada is home to increasing numbers of older and ageing people than ever. All the more reason to anticipate the challenges these transitions pose. Some transitions, Ms. Schlossberg acknowledges, “such as the death of a spouse, may be forced on us. Others, such as moving from a house to an apartment or relocating to be closer to grandchildren, may be our choice.”

Ms. Schlossberg's views reflect what she refers to as “an increasing shift in how people think about aging. From a deficit approach that focused on what we lost as we aged, we are shifting to a positive model that acknowledges that older people can make positive contributions to society, and that with aging – surprise! – comes happiness.”

She, in common with many others with a professional interest in the study of adult development, call this new model positive ageing.

As Ms. Schlossberg writes: “We cannot control our lives to avoid the downs. **What we can control is the way we deal with the ups and downs of life;** in other words, the resilience with which we manage change, and the strategies we have in place to cope. And we can pay attention to the guidelines and strategies offered in this book, which will help promote positive aging.”

Ms. Schlossberg acknowledges that her own experience of ageing echoes that of the legendary feminist author Betty Friedan, who described her evolution while writing [The Fountain of Age](#): “When I started this book,” Friedan said, “it was about them. Now it's about me.”



We are shifting to a positive model that acknowledges that older people can make positive contributions to society.

– Ms Schlossberg



Final Thoughts & Further Reading

George E. Vaillant, who directed the [Harvard Study of Adult Development](#) concluded that successful, positive aging depends on attitude and outlook.

For example, Vaillant observed that President Franklin D. Roosevelt “suffered illnesses that would have merited a 100% disability from the Veterans Administration. Clearly, [attitude and] subjective health are as important to aging as objective physical health.” He wrote that “**whether we live to a vigorous old age lies not so much in our stars or our genes as in ourselves.**”

It may be tempting to dismiss this example because President Roosevelt was an exceptional person with significant resources. But there is plenty of other validation for this premise.

Disabled persons who maintained positive beliefs are more likely to make a recovery, according to a study by Yale epidemiology and psychology professor [Becca Levy](#).

In fact, happiness is now a legitimate avenue for academic study. Martin Seligman, the founder of the [positive psychology](#) movement, suggested that we all have an emotional happiness baseline to which we inevitably return.

According to Sonja Lyubomirsky, author of [The How of Happiness](#), one’s happiness level is determined by three things: 50% of happiness comes from one’s emotional baseline, 10% from one’s life circumstances, and 40% from “intentional activity.”



The subtitle of a 2013 report by the Harvard Medical School says it all: [Positive Psychology: Harnessing the Power of Happiness, Mindfulness, and Inner Strength](#). The report concluded that “a sunny outlook might protect the heart and brain.”





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