

# 10 Tips To Prepare For A Great Life After Work

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## Practical advice from a man who speaks from experience

I sold my successful software business in 2007 and almost immediately began feeling a lack of purpose and direction.

Never one to sit out the dance, I sold my house, moved out of my beloved community, bought an oceangoing sailboat, and set sail along the east coast of America.

I found the immediate shift from being deeply invested in helping clients create new futures to looking for a fresh identity while living out on the ocean both exhilarating and deeply challenging (all described in my book, [Sailing the Mystery.](#))

Although I now have a whole new and exciting life four years later, in retrospect I wish I'd given greater thought to creating a more easeful transition.

To help provide a gentler glide path as you enter your after-work years, here are 10 tips I've incorporated into my life with the benefit of trial and error:

**1. Write a vision statement.** Use it as your overarching reference point in planning decisions. As you formulate a vision statement, look closely at what matters to you and answer these questions:

- What stimulates me intellectually, emotionally and spiritually?
- What activates my creativity?
- What nourishes my spirit?
- What makes me happy?
- What opens my heart?
- What gives me joy?
- What kind of legacy do I want to leave?
- What moves me into a place or state more expansive than myself?
- What old or new passions energize me?
- If I died tomorrow, what would I most regret not doing? Who would I most regret not becoming?

**2. Downsize.** Lighten your load in all things tangible, whether that's your house, your car or the vast array of things you've collected over the years. Downsizing feels truly liberating and will offer the added bonus of saving you money. In addition, the fewer the distractions you have, the more you'll be able to focus on what really matters.

In my house, the rule is: when something comes in, something of comparable size or greater needs to leave. I can honestly say I now have about half the possessions I did two decades ago.

**3. Make intelligent lifestyle choices.** The latest research tells us that the lifestyle choices we make regarding diet, exercise, stress reduction and developing a supportive social network affect the health of our DNA gene pool and, in turn, influence the quality and length of our lives.

Two lifestyle choices are now nonnegotiable for me: I swim two-thirds of a mile daily and nothing goes into my mouth unless it's fresh, organic, and (mostly) local. When I take care of my organism, it takes care of me.

**4. Learn to meditate and practice it regularly.** As doing decreases, being increases. Increasingly, as we age, our inner landscape is where the action is and meditation helps us activate those new capacities such as empathy, compassion, and long-term memory. Meditation is also your best bet for reducing stress and staying focused.

My morning routine includes a half-hour "sit" — which is one of the more "active" and beneficial things I do all day. When looked at from the standpoint of a potential return on investment, this is where the smart money goes.

**5. Experiment with alternative health options.** Choose what works for you from myriad modalities such as yoga, massage, Rolfing, Qigong, Tai Chi and energy work such as Reiki. I love them all. These practices keep me healthy and just feel so good.

**6. Make at least one new friend or deepen a relationship with an existing friend.** You'll need someone you can totally open up to in sharing your joys and fears. I've been amazed at how easy it is to start making friends once I start to reach out. The longing for connection, in my experience, seems universal.

**7. Identify volunteer opportunities and choose one or more.** They can be local or global, conceptual or tangible. It doesn't matter. What does matter is giving back and enriching the lives of others. Magic happens when we take the focus off ourselves.

I offer yoga and meditation classes free. Not accepting compensation always feels like a gift — to me.

**8. Establish a hobby.** Birding or learning a musical instrument comes to mind. When you find an activity that fully absorbs your attention, you'll feel more grounded in the moment.

As a birder, it always amazes me how delightfully lost I can get viewing our flying friends. The audio and visual focus I need to identify a bird 150 feet away helps keep my brain sharp.

**9. Join a men's or women's support group focused on helping each other through life's transitions.** If none are readily available, start one. I moved to Martha's Vineyard not only for the unsurpassed beauty of the island, but to gain access to the abundant intentional community there.

**10. Join a national organization that can help with your transition** Three worth considering: Sage-ing International: Wisdom and Spirit in Action; Life Planning Network and Positive Aging Conference (its next annual meeting will be in Sarasota, Fla. in February 2015). I belong to, and participate in, all three. They're forums for stimulating ideas and help me build my social network.

And here's a bonus tip if you have a partner: Both of you should read "The Couple's Retirement Puzzle: 10 Must-Have Conversations for Creating an Amazing New Life Together" by Dorian Mintzer and Roberta Taylor. You won't regret it.

*Ed Merck*, author of "Sailing the Mystery," is a former software entrepreneur and chief financial officer who retired at 63, set sail and began his journey into life's remaining chapters. He can be reached at [sailingthemystery.com](http://sailingthemystery.com).