

Never Older. Only Better.

By Evelyn Preston



I've partied most of last summer celebrating a new decade birthday and I'm gifting myself peace of mind

by making some important changes: less "stuff," more exercise, organized files, updated finances.

I even "earned" money and time by installing a drought tolerant landscape. Younger seniors can also downsize the tangibles, upgrade the important and even enhance their working years by exploring untraditional avenues to change for personal and financial satisfaction at any age.

Question: *While many 55-65 year old seniors still work, I know nothing's guaranteed especially for this age group. What are some cost effective options to improve employment opportunities besides expensive, long-term graduate degrees?*

Answer: Older workers and entrepreneurs who want to strengthen their job skills or start their own businesses can benefit from lower cost, less time-consuming study for a specialized certificate in various fields. Due to the rapid changes in society, there's less stigma attached to not having a full blown advanced degree. Computer studies, pharmacy/medical field courses, business administration and education related programs, each with a specific emphasis, prove students have mastered knowledge and proficiency in a distinct area. Community colleges and smaller

schools like East Bay Touro University offer non-degree credentials approved by respected standard-setting organizations that often lead to a new or unique job path.

Question: *I'm no longer employed and am going crazy with the calls, letters and friends' pleas to give, give, give. On a smaller budget, I want to maximize the reach of my charity dollars. Besides closely scrutinizing myriad organizations or severely limiting amounts, is there another way to go?*

Answer: Many retirees donate time as well as money—double the satisfaction. Consider a Charitable Annuity as part of financial planning where one larger sum earns you a steady income stream during your lifetime and the initial amount invested reverts to the charity or institution upon death. It can be a tax-wise move as well. Check out universities along with well-known charities for possible higher returns, all based on age.

Like investment clubs, Kiplinger's Retirement Report suggests leveraging smaller donations via a giving circle, pooling money with friends or family to enhance the impact on charities. Local groups especially welcome funds for start-ups or struggling non-profits. 100 Women (now over 400 participants), allow small Bay Area organizations to "pitch" their causes for substantial funding with every dollar raised carefully meted out. Attend their yearly dinner in March (www.100women.org) to be amazed by the scope and effectiveness of working—and giving—as a group.

Question: *Yearly doctor checkups and flu shots, yes! What else should seniors (young or old) check regularly?*

Answer: Review your Trust (Will), and make sure it's completely funded! Check/change the beneficiaries of your IRAs, insurance, estate especially if family or lifestyle changes have occurred. Are your Health Directive and HIPAA (information release authorization) forms current? Update all health/prescription drug plans! When does your DMV license expire?

Be aware of credit card fees/rates, quarterly/yearly investment results and figure your total net worth at least once a year. Are old 401Ks still languishing with high fees at a former employer? Have you maximized retirement contributions to receive matching company dollars? Do you need to remind your children/heirs where to find House Deed, Insurance Policies, etc?

Past columns have suggested an updated medical form complete with doctors' info, medications, allergies and any unique specifics like hip/knee replacements, pacemakers, etc. in plain view (on the fridge?) for family or emergency personnel.

And how many of us have arranged for our inevitable end? All it took was one phone call for my husband to slip seamlessly from final hospice care to the stressless efficiency of a pre-arranged burial organization. Advance arrangements can lower costs and offer the ultimate peace of mind to you as well as your heirs.

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