

Doing it right

Top civil servant approaches retirement as poster boy for four important 'best practices,' says **GERALD BRAMM**



I speak to a lot of people who hit a few snags as they make the transition from the working world into retirement. In common with other major life changes it can be a source of anxiety and tension.

Occasionally, however, I meet someone who seems to be doing all the right things.

A couple of weeks ago I sat down for a coffee with John Fleming, an acquaintance who has recently removed himself from the daily grind. I had first met him about a year ago and I was anxious to hear how he was adapting to his new life. As he described how well things were going and how liberated he felt, I realized that Fleming could be a poster boy for getting the retirement equation right.

In my opinion, Fleming's story illustrates four "best practices" in a successful retirement. First, he started to work on his retirement game plan well in advance of the day he left his workplace. Second, he has established a portfolio of activities to keep active and engaged. Third, he has maintained his social network. And finally, he and his wife have successfully managed the pressures that a couple can experience when one partner retires.

First, the game plan, which he started to work on a number of years ago. John had a long and successful career in municipal and provincial government (top jobs with the City of London and Region of Halton, where he was chief operating officer), culminating as a deputy minister for the Ontario government, for the Ministry of Environment. Having spent his entire career in the civil service, he began to look for different ways to make a meaningful contribution.

Working with a career consultant, he looked at his skills and experiences and how these could be used to branch out in another direction. Importantly, he identified those things that gave him the greatest job satisfaction. The consultant outlined the alternatives that would match his strengths and personal drivers. One of the upshots of this process was that Fleming, anxious for new challenges, left his job with the government and spent four years as the president and CEO of the Arthritis Society.

The assessment that Fleming did has helped him put into place a portfolio of



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activities that keep him fully engaged as he transitions into retirement. He is a member of two boards – Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System (OMERS) and Halton Health Services. In connection with his board activity he has gone back to school to take the Chartered Director Program through McMaster University's DeGroote School of Business.

If that wasn't enough, he is getting a small consulting practice off the ground. In his spare moments his workshop provides him with a creative outlet. Oh ... did I mention that Fleming is actively involved in his church, keeps himself physically fit and is planning a number of trips with his wife?

Thirdly, Fleming has worked to maintain connections that he formed at different points in his career. For many of us these relationships tend to evaporate when we leave one workplace and move to another or ultimately retire. But through concerted effort, Fleming has stayed in touch with many of his former colleagues. An unexpected benefit is that now a number of these contacts are coming to him to take advantage of his vast experience.

Finally, Fleming and his wife Barbara have been able to successfully manage his transition out of the full-time workforce. According to Barbara, the secret has been a healthy respect for each other's time. As a retired nurse, she maintains her own interests, hobbies and friends. In her words, "John respects what was going on in my life and is happy to have those activities continue." And with a more flexible schedule, John is able to share in more jobs around the house such as cleaning and gardening.

Research that I've looked at suggests that retirement can be put pressure on even the most rock-solid relationship. A frequent expectation when one partner retires is that

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the other will simply drop what they're doing. With mutual respect, thoughtfulness and dialogue, John and Barbara Fleming

have avoided this problem and, in the process, strengthened their relationship.

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