



A story of retirement

For months Jeff, Bob and Ken had been sitting around after work discussing their impending retirements. All had put in over 30 years of work at the company and with the move towards downsizing, the three had decided to call it quits and retire.

Bob had big plans to go travelling with his wife. Together they had mapped out a schedule that covered most of Europe and half of Africa. Bob talked endlessly about the places he would go to and the things he would see. It was a big dream about to come true and his excitement about retiring was evident.

Ken was focusing on taking a break from work. He wanted to just sit back and enjoy his garden, get in a bit of fishing and contemplate his next move. He had some ideas already. Maybe a small home handyman business that would keep him busy out and about in the neighbourhood.

Jeff was depressed just thinking about retirement. It had sounded like a good thing when they all talked about it together, but the closer it got, the more Jeff worried. What would he do with his time? He didn't have Bob's retirement package so he wasn't able to go travelling and he didn't want to leave work just to go back into a business like Ken. What did a man do with himself when his alarm went off and there was nowhere to go?

One evening Jeff sat talking to Ken about his fears of spending the rest of his life bored and lonely. 'How do you do it mate?' asked Jeff. 'How do you know that leaving work will be a good thing? What if it turns out I made a big mistake?' Ken laughed. "It wasn't that hard. I found some info at work on retirement and read it! It said to ask myself some questions to help me think it through before I went ahead.' Ken told Jeff what the questions were.

- What do I think retirement might be like?
- What are going to be some of the changes to my life?
- What will I miss?
- What can I do to make these changes easier?

Jeff realised that he hadn't really thought about planning ahead for his retirement. He assumed he would have all the time in the world to do that, but not being prepared meant it was now more difficult to feel happy about his decision.

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Ken explained that some of the brochures described a 'honeymoon phase' which can happen when people first retire. 'Ending work is a relief and lots of new activities start up. Some people are so busy that they say they didn't know how they ever had the time to go to work.'

Jeff realised that this sounded like Bob with all his holiday planning. Jeff thought about the things he always said he would do once he retired.

- Join the organic gardening club.
- Take the train to Sydney for a holiday.
- Catch up with Julie and the kids.

'But then what?,' asked Jeff. 'What happens after the honeymoon phase?' Ken looked at him and shook his head. 'This is when reality hits. Once the honeymoon is over life kind of slows down and reality hits.'

Depression can hit some blokes when the jobs around the house run out. Could be worse if your health is also affected and you can't get around. Can be lonely too. But it's a normal part of the process. The key thing is to find out who you can talk to about this if it all gets too tough.' Now Jeff felt really worried. 'Yes but when does it get better?,' he urged Ken. 'Don't tell me that retirement is depression and misery for the rest of my life!' Ken laughed. 'Mate you worry too much! It's all about getting your act together and having a go at something new. You can't be moping around forever. You might find you even like doing something different and getting some new mates. I know heaps of places and I can give you their number. Places where you can hang out or get involved or just have a chat.'

Jeff started to breath and relax. 'It's all about settling into these new things, feeling good about life and keeping mind and body active? That bit sounds good to me. Reckon I might enjoy this retirement thing after all...' Ken smiled. 'Yep, but you know, nothing lasts forever and one day you might not be so active. You might get sick or just older and slower. It won't be retirement then but it will be your life all the same. And you should get as much out of it as you can.' Jeff sat back and reflected. Now he knew more about it, he felt sure he could handle it. 'Bring on retirement then!' he said to Ken with a smile.

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