

TRADE UP: MOVING FROM JUST MAKING MONEY TO MAKING A DIFFERENCE

by Dean Niewolny

The whole notion of retirement as we know it is undergoing a fundamental change because of a near-perfect storm. For one thing, most of us are knowledge workers now, and work is less taxing on us physically. There was a time when a 55-year-old worker was broken down and tired and, perhaps rightfully so, ready to stop working. In fact, only a hundred or so years ago the average life span of a man in this country was about 55 years, with women living slightly longer.

Today, medical science has enabled people to live much longer. As a result, a 55-year-old man or woman probably has another 30 years of life, plenty of energy and mental acuity, and all of their wisdom and relationships.

The bottom line? This individual will probably want to do something significant with those bonus years, and for many who have achieved great success and climbed one mountain after another throughout their lives, working on their golf game or traveling endlessly is not going to suffice. They are going to need more, and they are going to have to figure out what that *more* is for them.

Perhaps I am describing you or one of your team. Either way, there's a price to pay for not addressing this issue and finding answers that work. For leaders, there is the growing brain and relationship drain on their organizations. Every day, thousands of Baby Boomers retire, taking all of their talent, experience, and wisdom with them. They have spent years being good at

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something. People know and respect them and take their calls. They are a huge asset to the organizations they serve and lead.

Maybe you are one of these valuable individuals who is staring into the abyss of retirement and wondering what you are going to do.

I have good news. There is a plan B.

Halftime

In the mid-1990s, Bob Buford penned a groundbreaking book called *Halftime: Changing Your Game Plan from Success to Significance*. It was the first time that anyone had talked about and identified the phenomenon called *halftime*. Buford and his mentor, Peter Drucker, known as the “father of modern management,” had been working through Buford’s own situation when one day the light bulbs went on for both of them.

Buford’s mother was the first female television station owner in the United States and had built a very nice business in Tyler, Texas. Then, one day, she was tragically killed in a hotel fire. Suddenly, Buford was thrust into the role of business owner, and he felt lost. He sat down and wrote a letter to Peter Drucker asking if Drucker would be willing to consult with him as he figured out how to build and grow the TV business he had inherited. Drucker agreed; eventually that consulting relationship became a great friendship, and the two spent a lot of time discussing business, but also personal and societal issues.

Buford eventually built his business into a thriving cable empire. But then one day, he sold it. “I didn’t have a job to go to anymore,” he says. “I was lost

without a mission and something to do. I had always had it.” His own situation and his reaction to it piqued his curiosity. How many others were going through this exact same transition? How can one move from a successful career to whatever is next and finish well?

At the core of the issue was this: Like most knowledge workers he had reached retirement age with all of his faculties, good health, and a head full of knowledge and wisdom gleaned from decades of high-level, high-quality work. On top of that, all of his relationships were intact. People would take his calls. How valuable is all of that in determining what’s next?

And, there had to be a *what’s next*. He and a whole generation of capable and successful individuals were not going to go quietly into that good night. They wanted to do more, and the dilemma was, as Drucker said, “We are all over-prepared for Life I and under-prepared for Life II. There is no university for your second half.” Buford set out to fix that problem, and launched the Halftime Institute in 1998. Since that time, hundreds of halftimers have come to the Institute, been matched with coaches who help guide them, and have found a significant second half of real joy and satisfaction.

Here are five things you can do that will go a long way toward figuring out what’s next for you.

Know Your Strengths

For decades, Steve Smith (not his real name) was a top player in finance. He knew that he was entering halftime, and, in a way, he dreaded it. “I thought I had to renounce life as I knew it,” he confessed in a group discussion with other halftimers at the Institute. His misguided version of halftime meant discarding everything from Life I, including the things he did well.

Steve was making the mistake a lot of us make when we think about Life II. Instead of celebrating his strengths, he thought he had to somehow jettison them. Halftime for him would mean selling his possessions and shuttering his top-drawer skills with money and people—basically everything he was hardwired to do. In halftime-speak, he turned his back on his strengths, which *is* a depressing idea, no doubt.

So depressing, in fact, that his story quickly moved to the top of our list of illustrations about the importance of self-knowledge. Lack of self-knowledge clouds and impedes the process. Having self-knowledge brings clarity. The fog lifts.

When you don't know how to begin your next stage of life, but you do know your personal makeup, start there. There are a lot of terrific assessment tools, but I would recommend one in particular: the CliftonStrengths assessment. It is an accurate assessment that gives you your top five strengths. Every new halftimer arrives at the Halftime Institute with a list of his or her top five strengths, because every new halftimer has just completed the power-packed CliftonStrengths exam in *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, a slender book by Tom Rath, which we've mailed to them in advance. The book tells you what the CliftonStrengths assessment means to you.

Bob Buford built many a solid decision on Peter Drucker's advice to operate from "islands of health and strength." All the evidence says that we are better when we hone our strengths instead of shoring up our weaknesses. We should pour our energy and resources into what stirs up results—and multiply those effects. You don't ignore your weaknesses, you manage them. But you lead with your top five.

Seems obvious, doesn't it? And yet for some halftimers, the basic counsel to know their strong suits and play to them can be shaky first steps on the road from paycheck dependency to personal freedom. If you're beginning a halftime journey, stop here. Do not pass Go. Do not collect \$200. Buy a copy of *StrengthsFinder 2.0* and complete the online quiz. See if knowing your dominant traits doesn't throw a klieg light onto your patterns of thinking, your feelings and behavior, and why you do those things you do.

By the way, the strengths that surfaced in the test for Steve Smith were obvious to everyone but him. During the Halftime Institute, Steve's speaking skills shone. When he didn't have the floor, he had us in the palm of his hand, relating easily to people one-on-one.

He was a natural salesman. He also acutely understood the financial markets.

After some effort from the Halftime staff, at the end of two days Steve gave himself permission to return to the brand of work he loved—fusing his financial skills and personal acumen to help men and women navigate money and life. Last I heard, he was back at a major firm, flourishing, serving 1500 clients. Like 60 percent of the individuals who come through the Halftime Institute, Steve went back to work in his previous field, albeit with a different attitude and focus.

Know Your Passion

Where is your passion? If you don't already know the answer to that question, then finding it might be as easy as a week of reading *USA Today*.

You heard right: *USA Today*. We send passion-challenged Halftimers to America's newspaper, Monday through the weekend edition, with orders to note what makes them (1) cry, (2) laugh, and (3) feel anger. (Just as important, they note where they do not react.) As Halftimers scan and read, they jot down feelings and responses. Patterns emerge, questions surface, and the right questions unpack power.

I remember reading an article about Habitat for Humanity, builder of homes for the homeless, and admitting to myself that my desire to help the homeless ends at a construction site. Nothing about craftsmanship interests me. Nothing about hammers, levels, studs, or anything in a toolbox jibes with my strengths and gifts—all pertinent data. Another time I listened as a small group of former abuse victims described their childhood traumas. Tears ran down my cheeks. And yet, not once did I sense that fighting child abuse was my personal calling. Do either of those stories—Habitat for Humanity or hearing the abuse victims—make me unfeeling? No. They suggest that I'm wired to battle elsewhere.

State Your Mission

In your short, sweet-spot statement of purpose, your strengths and passions come together in one answer to three questions.

Clarity sweeps out confusion.

1. *Gifts.* What are my strengths?
2. *Group.* What group do I want to serve?
3. *Goals.* What outcome do I wish to see?

On the front end, mission statement drafts are usually wordy and unwieldy. Not to worry. You're getting ideas down, so say everything you need to say. Once it's all down, look for repetition and extra words. Consider where you can condense ideas. Stay at it until, in fifty words or fewer, you can state your strengths, your target mission group, and your desired outcome. Besides making your mission easier to memorize and bring to mind at a moment's notice, brevity forces clarity. And clarity sweeps out confusion.

A national legal writing expert tells attorneys until they can state their case in 75 words or fewer, they don't know it. And getting to those 75 words (or fewer) may take a day or more.

The 17th century philosopher Blaise Pascal is credited with saying, "If I'd had more time, I'd have written a shorter letter."

It's all true. Brevity takes time. And until you can state your mission, you can't reach it.

Find a Coach

Just think about it: Every great athlete has a coach. For example, great golfers have swing coaches, and here's why: blind spots. You can't fix what you can't see,

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and it takes someone else looking at us, being honest and telling us how to fix what's not working. And you have to be humble enough to accept their advice and counsel.

Another aspect of having a coach is this: What do we do with the unvarnished truth when we hear it? It requires action from us, or else we will continue heading in the wrong direction and probably waste a lot of valuable time and resources. This action is going to take work and dedication. You have to stay with it for it to work.

One year at our leadership team meeting, on a floor right below the Halftime offices, our full-time coaches stole away for an ad hoc conversation. Their talk quickly narrowed to the topic of dropouts. Popping up and down at a big table in a small room, the four coaches turned the room's whiteboard to a rainbow of colors, all focused on one mystery: *Why do some halftimers reach their goals while others drift away?* What makes some persevere and some disappear?

Why would type A men and women—high achievers, non-quitters, goal-oriented marketplace mavens—give up on anything, particularly on their dreams for significance?

We couldn't trace the problem back to schedules, or the state of their marriage, or any other obvious issue. We talked about finances. Too much money or too little? Did any of it matter in regard to whether halftimers got to the finish line and figured out what's next? Nope. No consistent factors in income or finances were a reason to give up.

Still, a good number of halftimers wound up ghosting their programs. There had to be an indicator. And then, suddenly, the clouds parted and there it was. Interestingly, it was a two-parter.

Part one was timing: Halftimers who abandoned their dreams did it in months five through eight of their program. Why months five through eight? In the halftime first-year journey, those are the months when dreams of a new season of life hit a patch of hard work, risk, sacrifice, and inconvenience. Egos take bruises. For a long time you've been king of the hill. Now

Begin with the end in mind.

you're trying new things and eating some humble pie. Instead of strategy, tactics, and execution, you're in a world of trial, risk, and some dead ends.

Part two was coaching: Of all the people who saw their dreams through to completion, nearly every single one had stayed with a coach. Of the people who had left, all had left coaching.

Start Now

Perhaps the most important piece of advice I could give you would be to start your plan B *now*. If you or any of those great people you lead are feeling what I call *smoldering discontent*, then you are definitely in halftime.

There is no time like the present. Get started. Begin with the end in mind. Find a great coach who has your best interest at heart and no other agenda.

If you do all of these things, I'll promise you this: Your second half will be your best years yet.



Dean Niewolny is chief executive officer of the Halftime Institute. Before that, he spent 23 years in executive roles with three of Wall Street's largest financial firms. In 2010, he left his marketplace career to help others who, like him, wanted to expand their own first half success and skills into passion and purpose for meeting human needs and having an impact. His first book, Trade Up: How to Move from Just Making Money to Making a Difference.