



**Golden Boomers:
Creating a Second Midlife for Meaning and Money**

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Chapter 2

LIFE AFTER CORPORATE AMERICA

by anonymous

It's hard to forget the first day you were fired. Over a span of seven plus years, I had worked my way up the corporate ladder from intern to senior vice president at a prominent Wall Street brokerage firm and thought I was actually building a career. The firm had been under investigation for nearly two years without any indictments or formal charges and the employees were beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel. In fact, just two weeks prior, the treasurer had assured us all was well, the Feds were satisfied and we could go back to work without concern. Then the hammer fell. This same treasurer announced the firm was filing for bankruptcy and all employees were fired immediately.

My wife had just quit working to raise our first son, we had just taken out a mortgage on a small two bedroom, one bathroom home, and our livelihood had just vanished. Due to the bankruptcy, I received no severance pay, no profit sharing, no options, and no outplacement services. Amazingly though, during the two weeks between the treasurer's announcements, nearly fifty senior partners and board members were astute enough to somehow sell their restricted stock before the bankruptcy announcement. I apparently had missed that memo. Welcome to Wall Street. This story or something similar has happened to millions of people and has become commonplace in today's global marketplace. However, that doesn't make the pain go away or give you the confidence to keep moving beyond the internal explosion that just occurred to you, your spouse, and your family. We are in this lifeboat together. Today, my lifestyle, emotional health, and general outlook have turned decidedly more positive thanks to learning some critical lessons about the world and myself. Here are my so-called "pearls of wisdom":

- You must conquer your fears.
- Your worth is not what you do, but who you are.
- Take time to truly understand yourself.
- Disconnect from what the world expects you to do and do what you want.
- Experience in life accounts for more than you think in the marketplace.
- Unlock your creativity and work the gray matter.
- Conquer your fears

The third strike and you are out, aptly encapsulates my career. My third job loss sent me into a tailspin of irrational thinking and ultimately into depression. During the lowest emotional periods, I would awaken in the middle of the night, my heart pounding in my ears, and envision living under a bridge. Financially, I was no where near being homeless, but try telling that to yourself when fear has gripped your entire being. Whatever is holding you back, from being the person you can be, must be confronted and vanquished from your life. This is absolutely essential to all the other steps taking place. For me, it was confronting the fear and intimidation that corporate America uses to control you. Management will allow you to climb the ladder of success, but not without taking their pound of flesh. Finally, after years of manipulating my ethical standards, I had had enough. I had the courage to quit, to let my feet do the talking, and to embrace a new life on my terms. I have subsequently resigned from my last two jobs, all for the right reasons – and I no longer fear the unknown.

Your worth is not what you do, but who you are

My ego and self-worth were so wrapped up in my image as a senior vice president, that I lost sight of who I was as an individual. Corporate America is frightfully devious, controlling you through fear and intimidation, until you are molded into the compliant “yes” person they desire for all employees. Remember who you were as a kid, an adolescent, a teenager, a spouse, and a friend. This is the real you, not what life has done to you. Focus on the positive attributes that originally made you that special person before you worked for thirty years and retired.

Take time to understand yourself

I submit that each time you tell a *white lie*, fudge the quarterly income statement, or swallow your tongue when an injustice has occurred, a small portion of your self-image dies forever. Why is it that we will work 60-80 hours a week, but won't take one hour for self-reflection? Our society is built on production but not necessarily wisdom. As a boomer, wouldn't it be nice to finally take the time needed to calm your soul? When is the last time you asked your spouse or a friend to detail the attributes and qualities that are your DNA? Take some time to begin a journal, not your memoirs, just a simple means of writing down your thoughts and feelings about yourself and everyday events. It helps because most people never express themselves through the written word, plus it counts as alone time. The real time it takes to contemplate your life. I don't meditate but I envy people who do because it's their time. Give yourself the chance to understand what makes you tick. Disconnect from what the world expects of you and do what you want.

Lets face it. All of us are bundles of expectations. What our parents expect, what our bosses expect, our friends, neighbors, our dog, spouse, kids, and the list goes on. There is absolutely nothing wrong with expectations until you realize that you are living your entire life based on everyone but yourself. For me, materialism was expected. I worked in a career where people made money and bought toys and that's who you were. You buy the big house, the country club membership, the clothes, the vacations, all for whom?

After I quit one particular job, I remember my peers, co-workers, friends, and even my own parents questioning my decision to leave my job. They thought I was crazy. Was it their life I was changing? Did they have to deal with the stress and problems I faced each day? But here lies the real issue. When you are living for everyone but yourself, then your creativity slowly ebbs away. In my case, not only did my creativity diminish, but also my joy of living because I felt like a provider but nothing else. Once your zeal for life is extinguished, you can guess what happens next.

Lastly, this is not a selfish step, in fact, just the opposite. By maintaining, nurturing, and developing your creativity, wit, and natural talents, you will be a better spouse, grandparent, friend, and parent.

Experience in life counts more than you think in the marketplace. You must have 21st century skills for this new marketplace. *You don't Tweet, you're kidding me. Out with the old and in with the new.* Which dinosaurs do you remember when you were growing up? If you have had any of these experiences along with the natural pangs of anxiety, you are not alone. By definition, if you are twenty or eighty, because the workplace and world change, what we know today is obsolete tomorrow. So if you are agonizing over these issues, don't, because they are a bunch of lies. My last employer had a reimbursement program for graduate work; my kids were doing homework each night on their own, so, after thirty years, I decided to go back to school. What I learned was invaluable, however, it wasn't the books, the professors, or the classes that taught me my most important lesson. It was my classmates who were generally twenty to forty years younger. What I realized was that thirty years of work had prepared me for the real world, for real business issues and problems, and for the ability to succeed or fail on my own. I assure you, that was priceless. Could I run Windows Excel like my classmates? No. But had any of them successfully changed jobs and even careers five times? When our class project required that a leader interact daily with the president of a local company, did any of the young *go-getters* take the responsibility and chance to raise their hand and volunteer for the job? No. I had been doing this my entire career, it was second nature to me, but to them, it was frightening. Wow. Quite the revelation, maybe I

am old enough to have the recipe for dirt, but I was still relevant. Never underestimate all of the skills you have acquired over a career of work, even if it isn't building a website.

Unlock your creativity and work the gray matter For me, leaving corporate life was necessary to confront my fears and allow the time necessary for me to transition and grow. I took several months to think through what was interesting and satisfying to me and ultimately opened my own business. I'm not saying this should be your choice, but it gave me the control over my lifestyle and the control over the way my business would be structured. Here are some final steps I used to help me to refine my goals:

Seek out people and use informational interviews to explore a topic that interests you. This is invaluable. Let go of your ego and take a job that is beneath your skill level in order to see what makes the business tick. I took a job working for ten percent of what I used to make in order to learn about the industry. I loved the work. It was so easy compared to what I used to do, that I ended up staying for almost four years with three promotions. Finally, if you view the world as an explorer and not a passenger, you use each experience, whether positive or negative, as a way to reach your goal and not internalize this as a failure or negative.

About anonymous author

I was raised in the greater metropolitan area of New York City, where I ate, hustled, and lived twenty-five years, before I realized that the farthest west I had ever been, in the U.S., was New Jersey. This sad, but not uncommon, occurrence led me to Dallas, Texas where I have been married for twenty-three years to a woman from East Texas, raised two sons to the best of our ability, and have worked in the financial industry for twenty-five years. My educational background is a double undergraduate business major of finance and marketing, and a recently completed MBA in finance with a minor in financial services. The financial services minor led me to my current occupation as a Registered Investment Adviser for individuals and small businesses. Along with my business, I actively day-trade investments, and aspire to teach at the collegiate level in my spare time. My financial career literally began a block from Wall Street, where I was weaned on the early trading desks of major financial firms and three martini lunches. I worked my way up to senior vice president of sales, where my job for twenty years was to act as intermediary between my firm and large corporate and governmental entities. I worked eighty-hour weeks, entertained customers to keep them happy, and literally sold billions of dollars of bonds/financial instruments over my career. Capitalism at its finest.