

Retirement Readiness Report

Helping older employees get ready to retire successfully

A free report for employers, unions, and pension funds, produced by RetirementWORKS®, Inc.

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Welcome to the twenty-fourth issue of the *Retirement Readiness Report*, offered as a free resource, to help you think about how your organization supports the transition into retirement.

We encourage you to contact us at any time if you have ideas, criticisms, or other comments about this publication, or wish to update your email address (or be added to or removed from the list).

If you missed issues #1 thru #23:

They're available at:

<http://www.retirementworks2.com/support.asp?id=newsletter>

Next month:

Health issues for retirees

Is spirituality an appropriate issue for discussion in a retirement readiness program?

Absolutely! But we have to be clear about what we mean by “spirituality,” and set some limits on what’s appropriate.

So first, “spirituality” is not the same thing as “religion.” Depending on the geographic and socio-economic status of your employees, the majority may indeed express their spirituality through the worship, doctrines, and even social activities provided by organized religion. But some people (and in some localities even a majority) no longer associate with any particular denomination – or perhaps they never did.

These folks still may consider themselves to be spiritual, even highly spiritual, believing in a higher power, engaging in prayer, meditation, and ritual, and quite possibly participating in spiritual activities in concert with other like-minded souls.

Meanwhile, even explicitly, adamantly *non*-spiritual people usually have a set of beliefs about the meaning of life and death, a core set of ethical standards, and sometimes a sensitivity to experiences that others would call spiritual. Though these individuals – and they now represent a significant minority of the population – usually reject the term “spiritual,” they do usually care about many of the same underlying concerns, and have a stance they take with regard to those concerns.

Obviously, such beliefs, principles, values, and activities – whether labelled “religious,” “spiritual,” “non-spiritual,” or something else – often matter a great deal to those who adopt them. But if you are providing education and advice on retirement readiness to your employees, these issues should matter to you as well – even if mostly indirectly.

Why? Because to the extent that your employees, as individuals, take such matters to heart, these issues are fundamental to virtually every other decision that they make.

Their beliefs, principles, and values will end up determining, in many cases, how they want to live their lives in retirement, what their priorities are – how they treat (or fail to treat) their physical and mental health, how they want to relate to their spouses and other family members and the rest of the world around them, how they want to structure their time, how they adapt to aging and illness and death, and yes, even what they want to do with their money and how much money they need to do it.

Since retirement is a time when people's lives change from top to bottom, pretty much every aspect of life is in play, including decisions that go to the core of who we are as individuals, and what our lives mean, or should mean, to us, and those around us.

You can no more expect people to address these issues without explicitly calling on their deepest beliefs and values than you can expect them to make financial decisions without taking into account their pension plan or Social Security.

Of course, people who take their

spiritual beliefs (or non-spiritual philosophies of life) the most seriously can be very adamant about their feelings, and so the focus should not be on criticizing beliefs, or getting people to change them. Discussing specific religious beliefs in a group can sometimes go well, but it can also start arguments – which are not necessary.

“A retirement readiness program is the perfect time to bring these issues up – not to promote disputes, but to help employees reflect on what is really important to them.”

It's easy enough, in fact, to avoid any hard feelings by emphasizing that the purpose of raising these issues is not to evaluate them or argue about them. Instead, the aim is to get people to think about *their own* beliefs and attitudes on “spiritual” topics, in two respects:

1. To see if they can articulate, at least to themselves, their own beliefs about what life is or should be about – in general, with respect to the

realities of aging, and in connection with approaching a new stage in life called “retirement” where they may find new possibilities to be the person they believe they truly should be.

2. To help them understand – though not necessarily to say out loud – whether they are really committed to the beliefs they profess or the attitudes they claim.

This second point is the real nub of the issue. Probably only a minority – typically a small minority – can both clearly articulate what they think is truly important in life, and have made these ideas and feelings central to how they live, and how they make decisions about their daily lives.

The problem is not, for the most part, that people have “wrong” beliefs – which is why *what* they believe is not the key issue.

The problem is more often that even when they can describe teachings that they subscribe to, and that they may be very attached to, the roots of these beliefs are strong, but shallow.

They often do not reach to the core of who the person is, and therefore they do not actually guide the person's daily life or, often, the big decisions that need to be made at critical times, like retirement.

On the contrary, many people in the second half of life feel a certain emptiness in this regard, an emptiness that is magnified by retirement. They know, or at least sense, that their spiritual core is weak, or even absent. They are dismayed that they are in their 50s or 60s, and still don't know what life is all about, or are questioning what they thought they knew about it.

Although not everyone has a problem in this regard, just as not everyone has a problem with money or family or health, these problems are surprisingly prevalent – “surprisingly,” because we usually avoid even talking about them, so we just don't know.

But a retirement readiness program is the perfect time to bring these issues up – not to promote discussion or dispute, but to help employees reflect on what really is important to them, before they

settle into making other decisions that will set the tone for the rest of their lives.

Recommended Reading for Employees Getting Ready to Retire

The Five Stages of the Soul, by Harry R. Moody.

\$15.00 (Anchor Books, 1997)

Notice: We do not sell books, or have any financial stake in recommending them.

If you want to recommend a book to employees who wish to explore their own spirituality, there are thousands to choose among. *The Five Stages of the Soul* should be high on the list, though.

We say this, first and foremost, because of what this book is *not*: it is not proselytizing for any particular religion, or arguing for a certain set of beliefs. Although the author, Dr. Moody, himself comes from a Lutheran background, he draws inspiration and examples from all faiths, including some that are not widely known. He also draws many lessons from stories and legends, and from the lives of contemporary people,

some famous, but mostly random folks he has met through his own work, people whose circumstances are similar to our own, and whose spiritual development therefore might mirror, or inspire, our own.

Harry Moody's day job, by the way, is directing the Brookdale Center on Aging, at Hunter College, so his point of view is very much aligned with the situation and the concerns of employees at an age where retirement is fast approaching.

His approach to spirituality is easy to recommend, because it has to do with the *process*, *not the content*, of fostering that side of who we are.

The five stages he discusses are:

- The Call – that moment, or those series of moments, when we sense that our normal routine is not enough, and that life holds something deeper.
- The Search – when we strive to identify what the missing element is.
- The Struggle – where we

try, and repeatedly fail, to break free from some of who and what we have been, and become someone or something new.

- The Breakthrough – when we suddenly find ourselves over the hurdle, and achieve the new level of spiritual growth we were struggling for.
- The Return – when we fully re-engage with our previous daily lives, but with a new depth and understanding.

Only determinedly non-spiritual people are likely to gain nothing from this book, and no one need fear that it will undermine their current religious/spiritual beliefs.

Featured Website

Spiritual Belief System

Selector Quiz

<http://www.selectsmart.com/RELIGION>

Although annoyingly cluttered with ads, this 20-question quiz from SelectSmart is surprisingly adept at categorizing someone's religious, spiritual, philosophical, and ethical beliefs, or lack

thereof. What might be of particular interest to employees who are searching for a new spiritual or religious connection is that the quiz then shows how one's beliefs match up with 27 different religious or non-religious belief systems.

If people see something that seems intriguing and appropriate to them, the SelectSmart site provides links that further describe the belief systems (usually religions) that might be of interest, and then refers them to sources that offer more details.

Those who already know they fit within one of the following realms of belief can also try out the more detailed quizzes on this same site:

- “The Christian Denomination Selector,” at <http://www.selectsmart.com/FREE/select.php?client=christiandenom>, (compares your beliefs with 24 Christian denominations).
- “The Judaism Sect Selector” (<http://selectsmart.com/FREE/select.php?client=judaism>

[selector](#)) matches you against 8 Jewish groupings.

- “The Taoist School Selector” (http://www.selectsmart.com/FREE/select.php?client=taoist_school) to locate yourself among 9 Taoist schools.
- “The Pagan Path Selector” (<http://www.selectsmart.com/FREE/select.php?client=paganreligion>) to match you with 8 such alternatives

About RetirementWORKS[®], Inc.

We are the consumer subsidiary of Still River Retirement Planning Software, Inc., of Harvard, Mass., which has specialized in retirement plans and retirement planning since 1994.

Our philosophy is that retirement needs to be viewed from the retiree's point of view, in all of its complexity. So we offer the most powerful and useful financial software available anywhere for retirees and near-retirees, and advice concerning non-financial aspects of retirement. But we do not sell any financial products or services other than software, and have no financial stake in any advice that is offered.

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