To Pearl Shectman Roiter and Ann Robinson Hardy, who taught me how to enjoy the life I have
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I entered the workforce as a jerk, a soda jerk to be more specific. That was 45 years ago and I was 13 years old. Working three hours every Saturday morning at a local pharmacy for one dollar an hour changed my life. I was still a kid, but I was no longer a child. I had responsibilities, I met new friends, I was a member of the community and some girls thought it was cool. Most importantly, I could make my own decisions. After work I was paid my three dollars (cash, no taxes) and then I strode down the street to spend it all on racing slot cars. After two weeks of this extravagant freedom, my mom stepped in and took a 50 percent savings tax before I could spend it all. I was now truly learning what it was like to be an adult.

Our entry into adulthood is usually initiated by our entry into the adult world of work. We are less the child of our parents and more the person with a job. Our individual experiences may foster feelings of responsibility and effectiveness or discomfort and concern. Whatever the result, it is usually work that propels us into our adult lives.

Work, whether focused on a job or raising a family, also defines a good part of our adult lives by setting schedules and providing the basics of safety and shelter. It also impacts our relationships with family and friends, and our status in our world. If, like me, you are older than 55, work has probably been a major component of your life. You can then understand why moving beyond work, as in retiring, is a big deal. It’s worth taking some time to learn about this major transition in life and to learn from some people who are doing it and from experts who are
studying it. This book will add to your knowledge about life beyond work, and, as we know, knowledge is power.

There is a part of the book that looks at the benefit of realistic thinking and the role of healthy skepticism. The idea is not to believe everything you read, while also questioning both your new ideas and your long-held beliefs. As an example, I would suggest that you pass a skeptical thought my way: “Who is this author and why should I consider his ideas?”

Good question; thank you for asking. I did enter the world of work as a jerk but quickly grew past that to flunk out of college in my freshman year. I had a shaky entry into adulthood. This early crisis actually served me well, and after a year working as an architect’s assistant, I went back to college and did very well. I graduated and was quickly hired as a sixth-grade teacher. Let me say that this was not a good fit for me, although it helped me learn that I was interested in psychology. I returned to college and earned my doctorate in educational psychology and I have been a psychologist ever since.

I worked as a clinical psychologist for a time and then in 1980 began working as a business psychologist. As time progressed I found myself working with business people similar to me in age, helping them reach for and fulfill their goals. This group and I aged together, grew families and increased our experience and knowledge. I have happily spent the past 30 years understanding the realities of work for people of my age and sharing my perspective with my clients. Since 1996 I have worked as an executive coach with clients who are transitioning to a new role and want to be thoughtful about this transition. I had the enjoyable opportunity to co-author a book, Corporate MVPs (Wiley, 2004), with Margaret Butteriss. Margaret and I looked at what makes the most valuable people in business so valuable. We looked across businesses, for-profit and not-for-profit, large multi-national businesses and small local ones. We found that no matter the size of the business, nor their roles within it, MVPs shared common traits that made them exceptional people with whom to work.

At about that time I began receiving requests from business people I had known and worked with for years for advice on how to think about and plan their retirement. I must say that this came as a shock, as my coaching and consulting business has relied on the ongoing
relationships with people who had grown into the business’s leaders and decision-makers. The people taking their place were 45 to 50 years old and had their own favored group of consultants with whom they had worked for 10 years or more. My business model was changing, and I had to either change with it or be left behind.

And then my wife retired from her corporate job and the siren song of slowing down and possibly retiring myself filled my ears and my thoughts. “But I am not ready to retire,” “Can we afford it?” and “What would I do with my time?” became concerns.

In the fall of 2006 I was asked by two colleagues, Scott Randall and Frank Aubuchon, to work with them on a program they had devised for senior tenured faculty who were considering retirement. It would be sponsored by the faculty’s college or institution, 13 in all from the Boston area. Because this program was conducted outside of their institution, and it included about 10 other professors with similar thoughts, the participants were free to explore, question and dream about retirement without making any commitment to actually retire. As you may know, tenured professors do not have to retire and many do not. Their institutions find that this makes it difficult to build staffing plans and to offer tenure to younger professors.

The groups of professors were curious, energized and very creative. While our purpose was to stimulate their thinking about retirement, their institutions hoped that they would make actual plans to retire—which they did. Once they began thinking about it in real terms and with good information, their concerns diminished and their excitement grew. As an added benefit for me, I learned a great deal from these accomplished people about their thoughts on retirement and what helped them and what got in their way. One evening I was listening to the group’s discussion about an issue, and I realized that this was the next book I wanted to write. How do accomplished people retire? The answer to this question is the book that follows.

I have been working on this book project since 2006, and I have had great help along the way. My greatest collaborator and love continues to be my wife Jane. There are not enough words to describe what she means to me except to say “I love you.” My son Brian is a great discussant who is always presenting me with new ideas to consider, which is a proven way
to stay young. Brian, whom I love and respect, is a Buddhist monk living in India. His Buddhist name is Tenzin Gache.

I also want to thank my editor, Karen Milner, and her team at John Wiley & Sons Canada, for her sponsorship of this book project and their guidance throughout. They all helped improve this book and helped me make it relevant to readers in both the United States and Canada. Michael Erkelenz of Nine Design and Brenda Missen of MIA Communications provided great editorial support as I wrote each chapter, frequently confirming my sanity. It was comforting to talk with thoughtful people who understood. Tom Webber, Allyn St. Lifer, Steve and Martha Roiter, Bob Hardy, Paul and Ann Brown, Denise Barreira, Rick Thau and David Potel were very helpful as well.

Dr. Paul Barreira of Harvard University listened to my early, unformed ideas and was very helpful in confirming some ideas, challenging others and creating new ones. He also identified many of the people I eventually interviewed and experts that I read. Bill Hodgetts of Fidelity Investments was instrumental in introducing me to many of the financial people who are described in the book. Dr. Geoffrey Ginsburg of Duke University’s Institute for Genome Sciences & Policy, Center for Genomic Medicine, guided me through many of the medical concepts you will find in the book. All three men were more helpful than they might know.

I interviewed many people for this book whom you will learn about as you read. They told me what to write. There were others whose names I had been given but whom I did not have the opportunity to contact and interview. I consider this my loss, as I enjoyed every interview and know that every person I have talked with has contributed to what you will read. Finally, there were additional people with whom I spoke, formally or informally, who sparked ideas—people such as Jimmy the cab driver and Bill the executive who is about to retire and move out of my building. These chance encounters added life to the book. It is quite possible that I have not acknowledged all the people who contributed, but please know that you added to this book as well.

Whatever you gain from this book is due to those who have assisted me with this project. I am responsible for the rest.

*Bill Roiter*

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