

What should I do with the rest of my life?

In the movie "About Schmidt," Warren Schmidt (Jack Nicholson) is unprepared for and depressed by his life after retirement. He has spent his entire life working at a job that could have been done by anybody, or nobody. Since he did not plan for retirement, he lives a life without purpose. The movie takes us on a journey with Warren to find himself. If Warren had only asked himself before his retirement: What should I do with my life?

Baby Boomers, whether they like it or not, are beginning to ponder life after the end of their careers. Unfortunately, with the current economic environment, some people are facing these issues early because of unexpected layoffs. As one vice president who was recently laid off after more than 30 years with a Des Moines organization said, "I wanted to do something different with my life, but I wasn't expecting the time to come so suddenly."

Leadership books emphasize that it is less important to know all of the answers than to ask the right questions. Our minister stated in a recent sermon, "Faith is not having all the right answers. Faith is asking the right questions and having an inquisitive faith" committed to spiritual inquiry and growth.

Pa Bronson, author of "What Should I Do With My Life: The True Story of People Who Answered the Ultimate Question" (Random House, January

2003), refers to "What should I do with my life?" as "the question." Bronson says "asking the question aspires to end the conflict between who you are and what you do," but that it takes courage. According to him, "the tougher the times, the more clarity you gain about the difference between what really matters and what you only pretend to care about." Bronson believes we can search



for work that is consistent with our belief systems, give meaning to our lives and help our communities by changing the question from "What will I do?" to "What will I become?"

After two years of listening to the stories of more than 900 people who have dared to be honest with themselves, Bronson concluded that four misconceptions have dominated working lives, career choices and ambitions for decades: make money first, then follow the dream; intelligent people are more successful and satisfied; "we are what we do"; and attitude is the biggest obstacle. These misconceptions pervade our society and are the root cause of growing unease with

life as they age.

In "Retiring Retirement" (Brace-Park Press, 2002), Elmer Burack and Marvin Burack point out that roughly 10,000 Baby Boomers are crossing over the mid-life age line daily and few have actually thought about how to thrive after 55 in a world where the life expectancy is into the late 80s. Therefore, they developed a new road map for longevity and quality living. They map out strategies that are proactive, engaging and re-energizing, while also emphasizing the need for continual learning.

This same theme was explored by Des Moines' own Jim Autry in his recent book "The Spirit of Retirement: Creating a Life of Meaning and Personal Growth" (Prima Publishing, 2002). Autry insists that retirement is an opportunity for people to "stop doing and concentrate on being." He concludes that retirement is a time for changing one's approach to life, reinvigorating friendships, serving the community, finding nature and expressing one's inner creativity.

What should I do with my life? Though teenagers may not be drawn to "About Schmidt," they should see the movie because it might get them to ask "the question" before it's too late. □

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