

# 6 Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Un-Retire

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If you're thinking about working part-time in retirement, be sure to think these things through.

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Maybe you're contemplating closing the chapter of your life where you're employed full-time, but you don't want to stop working altogether. If so, the idea of "unretiring" — working part-time in retirement — may sound enticing.

But don't take the plunge without first asking yourself some essential questions, retirement experts advise.

"I think many people say, 'I'll figure it out' once I retire," said Kerry Hannon, author of "[In Control at 50+](https://www.mhprofessional.com/in-control-at-50-how-to-succeed-in-the-new-world-of-work-9781264266609-usa)" (<https://www.mhprofessional.com/in-control-at-50-how-to-succeed-in-the-new-world-of-work-9781264266609-usa>)" and a senior columnist at Yahoo Finance. "They're so busy wrapping up the chapter with their full-time job, they don't stop to think about the next chapter."

## Unretirement Is a Big Step

The [Retirement Saving & Spending Study](https://www.troweprice.com/personal-investing/resources/insights/unretiring-why-recent-retirees-want-to-go-back-to-work.html) (<https://www.troweprice.com/personal-investing/resources/insights/unretiring-why-recent-retirees-want-to-go-back-to-work.html>) from the financial services firm T. Rowe Price found that 20% of retired Americans are working these days. But many people "just step into" unretirement, said Judith Ward, the firm's thought leadership director. "They retire and say, 'OK, what am I going to do?'"

Calling unretirement "a serious undertaking," the "to Be Somebody" (<https://pickleballmediahq.com/>) podcast host Carl Landau said: "Anyone who doesn't think this is a big change in their life — they're fooling themselves. It's a *huge* change."

To help decide whether to unretire and how to do it, here are six key questions to answer.

### 1. Why do I want to unretire?

Another way to put this is the question often asked in acting class: "What's my motivation?" Hannon urged people in their 50s and 60s to "really do that soul-searching."

One answer may be financial, the reason given by half of unretirees in T. Rowe Price's study.

You may want to work part-time in retirement just to fend off boredom if you have no hobbies, travel plans or nearby friends or family.

If boredom is your motivating factor, said Teresa Amabile, a professor emerita at Harvard Business School and co-author of "[Retiring: Creating a Life That Works for You](https://www.routledge.com/Retiring-Creating-a-Life-That-Works-for-You/Amabile-Bailyn-Crary-Hall-Kram/p/book/9781032451503)" (<https://www.routledge.com/Retiring-Creating-a-Life-That-Works-for-You/Amabile-Bailyn-Crary-Hall-Kram/p/book/9781032451503>), "the job you look for in retirement "should provide a stimulating challenge and a regular schedule."

Another reason you may want to work in retirement, particularly in the same field you've been in, is because your identity is so tied to your career.

"That may be more reason for some people to want to continue doing some kind of work in retirement because they might find themselves lost without it," said Hannon.

Think, too, about how much you value the social interactions from working. "Some people don't realize



that when you're done with a job, the emails stop, the phone calls stop, people stop asking you for your opinion that was sought after for all those years," said Landau.

## Do What You Love, on Your Schedule

Cathy Buday, managing editor at EIX.org at the University of St. Thomas' Schulze School of Entrepreneurship, said you may find there's another motivating factor to keep working in retirement: work brings you joy.

"When you have work that you love, it energizes you," said Buday. Unretirement can offer an opportunity to continue doing the work you love — just when, where and how you want to do it.

"I wish I had unretired earlier," said Landau, who previously ran an events-management company. "I didn't realize the fatigue I was feeling. Until I actually got away from it, I hadn't realized it had taken a toll on me."

However, if you don't need extra income in retirement and can't think of any type of work you'd like to do, you might be better off retiring the traditional, relaxing way, rather than unretiring.

## 2. Am I healthy enough to work in retirement?

Your physical and cognitive health are vital determinants in whether you'll be able to keep working in retirement.

Said Ward: "If you think you want to work at a retail store, are you going to be able to stand for two to three hours at time?"

Amabile said knowing your physical and cognitive abilities is the caveat to any question you ask yourself about working in retirement.

## 3. How much extra money do I need in retirement?

The answer to that question could help you see whether unretiring could bring in enough money or whether you'd be better off working longer, full-time for higher earnings, if you can.

You'll want to run the numbers comparing your expected expenses in retirement with income you'll have from savings and investments, retirement plans and [Social Security](https://www.nextavenue.org/3-keys-to-claiming-social-security-wisely/) (https://www.nextavenue.org/3-keys-to-claiming-social-security-wisely/), depending on when you'll start claiming.

A financial advisor can help through software that shows your likelihood of running out of money at different ages.

"I'm a big believer in working in retirement as a safety net," said Hannon.

Working part-time in retirement can not only put money in your bank account, but it can also let you afford to continue saving *in* retirement and put off retirement-plan withdrawals.

"It helps that you don't have to start tapping into your [nest egg](https://www.nextavenue.org/surviving-retirement/) (https://www.nextavenue.org/surviving-retirement/)," said Ward.

The employment income can also allow you to delay claiming Social Security benefits, potentially increasing the size of those checks when they do come.

## How Social Security Fits In

Social Security increases benefits by 8% every year you postpone collecting them from your Full Retirement Age (around age 67 these days) until 70. Conversely, if you start claiming at 62 — the earliest age allowed — you could see a nearly 30% reduction in Social Security benefits compared to claiming at Full Retirement Age.

Keep in mind, though, that if you start claiming benefits before Full Retirement Age, Social Security will withhold \$1 for every \$2 you earn above a certain threshold (\$22,320 in 2024). You'll get that lost money back gradually after Full Retirement Age.

A combination of robust employment earnings and investment returns during retirement could also catapult you into a higher tax bracket than when you had a full-time job.

Should you determine that part-time work in retirement could be beneficial, Amabile advised: "Find the best-paying job you can where the work demands fit your current physical and cognitive abilities."

#### **4. Will I have enough time to work part-time in retirement?**

Be realistic about other responsibilities you'll have, such as caregiving, and the amount of time that will take.

But don't be churlish about granting yourself time for fun, friends and family.

The underlying question, said "[Revealing Your Next Season](https://mynextseason.com/product/revealing-your-next-season/)" co-author Leslie Braksick, is: How busy do you want to be in retirement?

You likely won't know *exactly* what your days will look like in retirement, but Landau recommended trying to figure out a rough schedule to see how work would fit in. "Don't get sucked into work in retirement that becomes a full-time job," he said.

He speaks from experience. When he first unretired, Landau recorded the podcast and wrote its newsletter weekly. "Then I realized one of my loves was playing [pickleball](https://www.nextavenue.org/pickleball-anyone/) and I was trying to fit that in," he recalled. "So, I reversed everything and changed from a weekly podcast and newsletter to monthly. Once I made that change, I felt I was on the right track."

#### **5. Is my partner on board with me working in retirement?**

If you're married or have a partner, experts say, make sure you discuss with that person your unretirement plans.

You may find they conflict with the vision your spouse or partner had for the next chapter in your lives.

#### **6. Will working in retirement help me find meaning and purpose?**

Many people find that the "un" in unretirement provides

them with a sense of meaning and purpose later in life. In fact, 40% of the unretirees T. Rowe Price surveyed said they're working for meaning and fulfillment.

"I think for many of us, this is a stage in life where you turn around and have that self-realization of 'What have I accomplished? What has my life on this earth meant and what kind of impact have I had?'" said Hannon.

If your primary reason for wanting to work in retirement is for meaning and purpose, said Amabile, "I would advise searching for a job that would allow you to live out an important value or give you a keen sense of accomplishment — regardless of the pay."

### **An Important Thing to Remember**

When deciding whether to work part-time in retirement, keep in mind that you can change your mind *during* retirement.

You could, for example, work for the first few years but not beyond that.

"There's no one telling you that you've made this decision and it's forever," said Hannon.