

Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I recently retired after 25 years in the restaurant business. It's really nice not to have to jump up ... in the shower and on the job. But, sometimes I feel guilty. I make lists and attempt to stay busy, but when I want to take a sofa day I must deal with lots of guilt about being lazy. I want to enjoy my retirement and I want to be a productive part of society. Mostly, I want peace of mind. Any ideas? Thanks for your help and your column.

-- Lola

Dear Lola,

Congratulations! It sounds like you've had a successful and very busy career. Don't you think you deserve a few sofa days?

If I were you, Lola, I'd ask myself why I feel like I don't deserve a comfortable retirement? Why can't I just be happy doing the things that interest me – including sometimes doing nothing more than just hanging out on the sofa?

We live in a chaotic, busy world with an emphasis on productivity to the exclusion of all else – like just being, thinking, hanging out, and relaxing. Too many of us base our self-worth on what we accomplish, rather than who we are as people.

Our culture is so bad at this “being” stuff that sometimes I think we should call our species human “doings” instead of human “beings.” Rushing from one thing to another, most of us are rarely mindful of the precious present. We should send ourselves postcards that say, “Having a wonderful time. Wish I were here.”

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could follow the counsel of the Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu when he said: “The Master gives himself up to whatever the moment brings.” Look at what your moments are bringing. Now you have time to relax, and also time to follow your heart and dreams.

In a recent column I wrote that guilt is like paying interest on a debt you never incurred. When you hear that inner voice telling you to get up and start cooking or waiting tables, close your eyes and say the word “Stop.” Then begin a dialogue with that inner voice, “Hey, I'm retired, remember? I've worked hard to be able to enjoy a day hanging out and watching movies.”

It sounds like you have a strict inner critic but you might remind this part of yourself that it is very hard to call someone lazy who jumped up for work for more than twenty-five years.

Be mindful of your list-making. Are you adding things to your list that are just plain fun, illuminating, or exciting, or is the whole list about being productive?

I'd hate to think that your whole retirement is going to consist of washing the car, picking up groceries, cleaning out the garage, and writing new chore lists. Chores are inevitable, but make sure that they're balanced by time to relax as well as other activities that enrich your life.

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Consider doing some volunteer work, become active in your church or community group, or take a class in a subject that has always intrigued you. Perhaps, when your life is rich with new experiences, meeting new people, and learning, you will be easier on yourself when you just want a day to hang out on the sofa.

You say in your letter that you want to both enjoy your retirement and be a productive member of society. I think it is very possible to do both – and to enjoy both.

Balance is a hard thing to achieve but all of us need time to relax as well as time to learn and contribute to others. It's been my experience that the happiest people are those who are able to achieve this equilibrium.

So, if you find yourself spending almost all your time on the sofa, it might be time to venture out. My good friend, Judy, has a big old cat named Lacey who just loves to sleep on her bed. Day or night, there's no other place she would rather be. Sometimes Judy just makes her go out to "experience life," she says.

Sometimes, Lacey just curls up on the pillow and hangs out, which must be the feline version of "taking a sofa day." Judy imposes a sort of balance that Lacey might not seek out on her own.

But you do now have the time, and the ability, to seek a new kind of balance for your life in retirement. And if you never allow yourself time for just hanging out, then your schedule is too full.

Go through your list and honestly reflect on what chores or activities are most important to you. Then cut the rest, or move them to another time.

Remember that, ultimately, peace of mind comes from within.

Recognize that you are a valuable human being – not because of what you do (or do not do) but because of who you are.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com, call 473-4004, or direct questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949

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