

STIFEL

FROM SUCCESS TO SIGNIFICANCE

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Lessons From the First Half

The past 30 or more years in your field might be described as “Life I,” the first half of your adult life. During this period, you used your education, training, and experiences to start and develop your career. You made some mistakes, but the lessons learned helped you prosper and succeed. All of your efforts were directed at making this Life I productive, fulfilling, and rewarding. And, naturally, you get to a point when you’re ready to retire or let someone else take the lead. Unfortunately, this pattern of life was developed during an earlier time when most people didn’t live much past 65 or 70 years. So one worked until the designated “retirement age,” and then booked travel plans for his or her last few years. These days, you likely would have another 20 bonus years your forefathers couldn’t anticipate. So that’s it? You’ve made your mark in the business world or your profession, and that’s all you can expect? Shouldn’t there be something just as or more meaningful for your bonus years? After all, you’ve accumulated a wealth of knowledge, experience, and resources that could be most useful and productive, if you so choose.

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Potential For the Second Half

Another way to look at these bonus years is that they make up your second half – or “Life II.” As noted earlier, this Life II might last 20 or 25 years, or longer. This may be nearly as long as you spent in business – not an insignificant period. If the long, empty days described in “Is There Life After a Career” don't seem so appealing, what would?

While the business world is all about addressing human needs and desires in the commercial sense, there are tremendous human needs that are not being met by daily commerce. Needs in housing, education, hunger, arts, health, and more. You’ve likely come in contact with many of them or some of the organizations addressing these needs (the countless number of non-profits/charities). You may well be helping some in your own community now with time or donations. They do tremendous work with limited resources and help. And they all have room for more support and assistance.

Many ready to retire, then, are using this Life II to get involved with a cause or organization about which they care greatly – even passionately. They make donations of their time, their expertise, and their resources to further the efforts of these organizations or to create new entities meeting unmet needs. When these contributors see their efforts help change lives and make a real difference, they become rewarded in extremely unique and personal ways. They often begin to realize a sense of purpose, of meaning, that draws them even more closely to the cause and its goals. This experience may lead one to realizing real significance. Through this experience in Life II, many are evolving from success in business to significance in life.

How to Transition – Halftime

Some know just where and how they'd like to get involved with such an organization or cause. For them, the path from success to significance is quite clear. For the rest, it is probably more challenging to find. After all, for those who spent 24/7 thinking about their business, the opportunities to develop close connections with valued non-profits were likely limited.

Fortunately, there are several resources to help with such a transition. One resource, founded by successful businessman-turned-service leader Bob Buford – the Halftime Organization (www.halftime.org) – has developed many services and training programs to help those in a “halftime” period – a transition between Life I and Life II. This is a period of reassessing what is most important and meaningful, of considering ones' capacities for involvement, and for discovering where and how one's contributions may be best used in the service of others. It usually involves some trial and error, but what is learned by mistakes is most valuable in finding the right course. The goal here is to find the right place and way to make contributions that will produce personal rewards and growth. And maybe it will provide the reason to find the alarm clock and make use of the planning calendar again.

Finishing Well

After determining where your own passions are, what you have to contribute, and what impact you want to have, you'll have the opportunity to pursue your own road toward significance. Certainly, not all avenues will turn out to be the best fit, and new causes may become more valued than prior areas of involvement. But with commitment and an open mind/heart, rewarding areas should be discovered, and passions can be fulfilled.

The important point here is that meaningful contributions can be made for years to come. Life II can be filled – as much as you like – with rewarding efforts wherein the impact can be seen and shared. And in seeing how lives are changed for the better, it's not uncommon for contributors to look for new ways to get further involved, make bigger investments, and become active leaders attracting others to the cause. Before long, the calendar becomes useful again as new goals, plans, and activities take center stage in one's Life II. If followed through, this new involvement produces lifetime significance and the pathways for finishing well.

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